



Inter-school collaboration: a literature review

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Executive summary

NFER at Queen's has been invited to explore the possibility that collaboration between schools in Northern Ireland, in the context of post-primary review, might be used to promote interconnections between the denominational education sectors as part of a contribution to improving community relations. Hence, it was proposed that NFER undertake a review of literature on school collaboration in order to gain information on the different ways in which schools work in partnership. The review sought to illustrate the various models and approaches implemented by schools and to highlight strategies that have been particularly effective.

Different types of inter-school collaboration

- Inter-school collaboration takes many forms and the terminology used varies, making classification of different types difficult. Even so, this did not prevent discussion within the literature of the characteristics of effective collaborations.
- One approach to trying to classify different types of collaboration has been to produce a hierarchical typology of forms, based on the extent and depth of the collaborative relationship. Examination of these proposed typologies led to the distillation of the three principal dimensions of organisation, penetration and joint investment/vision. The type of questions that need to be considered when assessing the extent of partnership working are therefore: Are there organisational structures specifically set up to support the collaborative working? How deeply into the fabric of the school does partnership working penetrate? Are the schools' aims and interests bound together and is the perception within the schools that they are on a common journey? Does it have structural and resource sharing implications?
- The majority of collaborations examined within the literature involved between two and eight institutions. The findings suggest that the inclusion of large numbers of schools can limit the extent and nature of collaboration and militate against whole-school involvement. Collaborations bringing together schools of different cultures tended to be on a one-to-one

basis, facilitating whole-school involvement and more personal contact between staff and pupils.

Main drivers and aims of collaboration

- Government agendas and local authority requirements were often noted to be key drivers for inter-school collaboration. A wide range of national government initiatives have given rise to collaboration since this has been an expected element within them, but there were also examples of more locally instigated and even school initiated projects of this nature.
- Linked to this, the availability of funding for the operation of inter-school collaboration (often from government or local authority sources) was also a crucial factor in driving collaboration.
- Aside from outside influences, within the literature, the energy and commitment of the participants themselves was also reported to provide the impetus for collaboration. The commitment of key personnel, such as headteachers and the senior management team (SMT), was thought to be influential in giving the collaboration a high profile within the school.
- Collaborations were also sometimes driven by the need to overcome or counter challenging circumstances. Examples ranged from the establishment of rural consortia to address the challenges facing small schools to the promotion of international twinning to meet the need for sustainable development.
- The main aims of collaboration, as well as raising attainment and improving school standards, were the sharing of professional expertise amongst teachers, the enrichment of learning opportunities for students and the breaking down of barriers between schools and between individuals. The latter suggests the relevance of inter-school collaboration in the context of Northern Ireland.
- The rationales for collaborative working gave rise to a typology of collaboration and to collaborations categorised as ‘culturally based’, where schools of differing cultures are brought together, being identified as of particular importance to the question of collaboration between inter-denominational schools in Northern Ireland.

Managing collaborations

- The collaborations described within the literature were funded in a variety of ways: through government funding, local authority funding and funding from other voluntary organisations. Many schools also made their own contributions, with one view proposed within the literature being ‘you only value what you pay for’.
- The collaborations examined had been initiated in a variety of ways, by local authorities approaching schools, by schools consulting with the local authority or sometimes by external parties. Some sources suggested that schools needed to be approached sensitively and given an opportunity to discuss the potential difficulties in the first instance. They were often built on top of existing informal arrangements.
- The majority of collaborations involved the creation of new roles or structures for their management. At one end of the spectrum, formal federations often required the integration of management and governance, with overarching governing bodies or governance groups and ‘executive’ headteachers with cross-federation responsibilities. At the other end were collaborations in which one or two representatives from each organisation had a basic liaison and organisational role.
- In some cases, headteachers or senior managers were seen to be the key personnel in managing and driving schools partnerships. In others, the individuals holding the most formal ‘roles’ were not always the ones driving the collaboration, for example, specifically appointed collaboration coordinators often played a key role in facilitating day-to-day operations.

Collaborative activities

- The literature highlighted various forms of collaborative activity that involved sharing practice, or offered the potential to share practice. Professional development and information sharing appeared to be central activities in most collaborations and a wide range of joint activities and projects were also evident.
- Many schools worked together on joint planning and school development activities focused around a range of subjects and there were instances of

staff being shared in a variety of ways, for example, through staff exchange visits/observations, the sharing of Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) and staff being loaned to the partner school.

- There were several ways that schools collaborated by sharing facilities or equipment, for example, by sharing curriculum facilities (e.g. shared sports facilities), through the creation of joint facilities (e.g. the establishment of a drop-in centre used by pupils from both schools) and the joint purchasing of equipment (e.g. IT equipment).
- There was evidence within the literature of schools in culture-based collaborations sharing facilities to mutual benefit, most notably in Independent/State School Partnerships (ISSPs), where the sharing of curriculum facilities (particularly, sports, arts and ICT facilities) was one of the most commonly cited forms of contact between the two sectors.
- Examples of schools creating joint facilities included two instances of schools of different faith backgrounds working to create a community meeting or drop-in facility, which they used together.
- Pupil sharing or exchange occurred in two main ways: where pupils accessed courses on offer in partner schools to ensure that they receive a broader choice of options and where pupils in one school made a specific contribution to the partner school. The latter was a particular feature of culture-based collaborations, for example, Muslim students running a course on their faith for a Catholic school.

The role of outside agents in supporting collaborative working

- In some forms of inter-school collaboration, particularly those instigated via government initiatives, local authorities appeared to have a key role in supporting partnerships. In contrast, local authorities were rarely reported to be involved in the development and maintenance of culture-based collaborations, such as inter-faith and multi-cultural twinning.
- The local authority role varied, not only between different types of collaboration but also within collaborations located under the same umbrella (e.g. amongst different Beacon Schools partnerships).

- The local authority took on varied roles: providing support and advice; establishing or initiating collaborations; as a conduit for information exchange; providing funding and resources; brokering collaborations; facilitating collaborations; and providing leadership and management.
- A number of issues were raised about local authority involvement, including the importance of getting the right balance between the local authority taking a lead and allowing schools to take ownership of the collaboration. The need to ensure that local authority staff have the skills to support collaborative working effectively was also raised.
- In the literature reviewed, a range of other external bodies appear to have been involved in a support capacity for inter-school collaboration. These organisations included the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), local employers and businesses and Higher Education (HE) institutions. They tended to take on similar roles to local authorities and were involved in initiation of collaboration, facilitating or brokering collaboration and providing funding and expertise.
- Charities, religious groups and international organisations were said to play a role in some collaborations, particularly in supporting culture-based collaborations, such as inter-faith twinning and international twinning, as well as ISSPs. They sometimes provided oversight and funding for these projects.

The gains of inter-school collaboration

- The main gains for schools taking part in inter-school collaboration were: economic advantages (e.g. sharing of resources, accessing new funding streams and economies of scale); school improvement and raised standards, including improvements in pupil attainment (e.g. from an enhanced curriculum and development of teacher expertise); the forging of closer relationships between participating schools and from this outcome, a greater awareness and understanding of other schools. It was said that bringing schools together can break down barriers so that they can work together in a mutually beneficial way.

- There were several ways in which school staff were thought to benefit from collaboration. These included opportunities to exchange ideas and good practice, and expanded avenues for training and professional development, which in turn refined their teaching expertise. Staff no longer suffered from a sense of professional isolation, instead, they had outlets to share and voice any concerns with a larger number of colleagues. Within an enriched support network it follows that gains in the areas of staff confidence, motivation and morale were also evident.
- Pupils were the third main group of beneficiaries referenced. Most often, they were said to enjoy an enhanced educational experience (e.g. better choice of subjects, access to specialist teaching and opportunities for out-of-school excursions) and improved attainment. Socially, they were felt to benefit from interacting with pupils from other schools. Where these pupils came from different backgrounds (e.g. faiths and cultures) there was also the possibility of increasing awareness and understanding of different lifestyles. Where partnerships existed between primary and secondary schools, increased contact was said to make the transition much easier for students moving onto secondary school.

Factors influencing inter-school collaboration

The factors influencing collaborative working were grouped under four main themes: relationships between schools; partnership processes/protocols; staff qualities/skills; and support for collaboration.

- **Relationships between schools:** One of the primary factors influencing collaborative working was the existing relationship between schools. A prior history of cooperation between schools was said to facilitate working together, whilst a history of competitiveness, culture differences and a lack of equality between partners could hinder it.
- **Partnership processes/protocols:** The literature indicated that it was important for the collaborating schools to develop shared aims and values since a failure to do so could lead to collaborative activities not being prioritised or difficulties in balancing school and partnerships needs and, potentially, loss of school autonomy. Effective leadership of the partnership and support from senior management was also influential, as were the

need to involve all staff/stakeholders and to develop effective lines of communication.

- **Staff qualities/skills:** The commitment and involvement of all staff/stakeholders was considered an important factor in facilitating progress within collaborations and the need for staff involved in collaborations to have the necessary skills to work collaboratively together was also cited as an influential.
- **Support for the collaboration:** The availability of adequate support for the partnership was also considered important as collaborations require skilful internal facilitation and external support. Having the funding and resources (including staff time) to implement collaboration was considered vital. Where funding ceases and where school staff find it a challenge to find the time for partnership activities, the sustainability of collaborations was questioned.

Effective practice in collaborative working

Analysis of the literature highlighted many strategies for effective collaborative working and they were grouped under the following areas for discussion: inter-school relationships; managing collaborations; staff/personnel issues; and supporting collaborative activity. The strategies identified are summarised in Table 9.1 at the end of Chapter 9. Some of the key strategies are highlighted here.

- **Inter-school relationships:** The findings indicated that it is good practice to create a climate of openness and trust within the collaboration and to build in specific time for the development of good relations between partners. Time needs to be spent on resolving issues resulting from competitiveness, inequality and cultural differences and building a sense of shared and common purpose. This should involve a two-way dialogue and opportunities for those involved to have face-to-face contact.
- **Managing collaborations:** Leadership needs to be firmly located within the partnership, with a focus on distributed leadership to avoid domination by one key player. It is important that staff from participating schools take ownership of the partnership. All staff/stakeholders need to be involved, shared aims need to be negotiated and they need to be flexible enough to

accommodate each school's needs. One-to-one school collaboration may be more effective for addressing cultural differences as this facilitates whole-school involvement and personal contact. There need to be a range of communication channels. Monitoring and evaluation can be an important motivating factor as this ensures that participants know the value of collaboration and what can be achieved.

- **Staff/personnel issues:** Specific strategies need to be employed to maintain staff commitment and this can include planning some quick gains so that they can see the value of collaboration. Dedicated time for collaboration should be built into the timetable rather than this work being conducted over and above normal commitments. Professional development relating to the skills for collaboration needs to be built in.
- **Supporting collaborative activity:** A component of good practice highlighted was to ensure sufficient internal and external support for the collaboration, as well as sufficient funding and resources. The appointment of a dedicated coordinator who can facilitate the collaboration can be helpful. Local authorities can play a key role in supporting collaborative ventures but they need to ensure that they take on a facilitation rather than a lead role and avoid imposing collaborative working on schools. They can also play a role in facilitating the sharing of effective practice between schools. The government can ensure collaborative working by making a key requirement of schools and it can also be helpful for them to provide guidance to support collaborative working between schools.

Concluding comments

The review highlighted the dearth of good empirical evidence relating to inter-school collaboration. Evaluations/research that have been conducted have tended to be focused on evaluations of particular initiatives rather than the processes involved in inter-school collaboration *per se*. The lack of literature relating to inter-faith school collaboration was also identified. Scope for further research in these areas was highlighted.

Various types of inter-school collaboration were examined. Many commonalities were noted, for example, in the facilitating factors associated with collaborative working and the benefits that are to be gained for schools, their

staff and their students. The distinction of collaborations bringing together schools with different cultures is a useful one in the context of the work in Northern Ireland. The findings highlight issues pertinent to these circumstances.

An intended outcome of collaborative working was to assist the process of breaking down barriers between schools and individuals of different cultures and to help develop community cohesion. This would suggest that collaboration may be an effective strategy to help promote interconnections between the denominational education sectors in Northern Ireland.

Many benefits of inter-school collaboration were identified, for the whole school, their staff and their students. The breaking down of barriers, dispelling of misconceptions and promotion of mutual understanding between schools and individuals was a key outcome, further supporting its potential value in the context of Northern Ireland.

Analysis of the literature also identified some of the difficulties associated with inter-school collaboration, particularly where there are inequalities, competitiveness and cultural differences between schools. However, effective practices can be put in place to counteract such difficulties. Time devoted to building positive relationships between partners, resolving issues raised by cultural clashes and promoting mutual understanding would seem essential.

1 Introduction

NFER at Queen's has been invited to explore the possibility that collaboration between schools in Northern Ireland, in the context of post-primary review, might be used to promote interconnections between the denominational education sectors as part of a contribution to improving community relations. Hence, it was proposed that NFER undertake a review of literature on school collaboration in order to gain information on the different ways in which schools work in partnership. The review sought to illustrate the various models and approaches implemented by schools and to highlight strategies that have been particularly effective.

Within this chapter, the following are detailed:

- background
- aims/focus of the review
- methodology
- overview of the literature sources
- structure of the report.

1.1 Background

There is a current focus in Northern Ireland on increasing collaboration between schools under the 'Entitled to Succeed' programme (DENI, 2007b). This includes an entitlement that by September 2009 all pupils have access to at least 24 courses at key stage 4, and 27 courses post-16, and schools are expected to collaborate to achieve this. Currently, the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI) are inviting schools to participate in a School Collaboration Programme, which supports collaborative activities (DENI, 2007a). They are also piloting Specialist Schools (see Appendix 2 for description) with a view to extending the concept, with part of the role of a Specialist School being collaboration with other schools to pass on their good practice and specialist curricular strengths (DENI, 2007b).

Within the UK there has been a long-standing focus on partnership working and inter-school collaboration. In 2000, the Department for Education

and Skills (DfES) noted that it would like to see local authorities working with groups of schools, selected on a geographical or other basis, to devolve responsibility for the school improvement functions of monitoring and challenging in relation to all schools within the group. There was therefore recognition of the strategic role local authorities could play within inter-school collaboration at this time. Their role was seen as one of coordination and provision of support to ensure school partnerships met their improvement aims.

The notion of partnership has been an integral part of most major initiatives introduced by the UK government in recent years. School partnerships and networks have been encouraged via a range of government policies and initiatives (see list in Appendix 1). Specialist and Beacon Schools, for example, have a particular remit to share their effective practice with partner schools in their area in order to help schools raise standards and student performance (see details in Appendix 2). Excellence in Cities (EiC), Education Action Zones (EAZs) and New Deal for Communities are some of the other initiatives that have a partnership approach integral to their improvement strategies and bring different types of schools, as well as partners in other sectors, together in new ways. In 2003, the DfES issued ‘Models for Working Together’ to set out the circumstances in which pump priming support would be available to applicants for funding inter-school collaborations.

In 2005, the government promoted Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs) as a way of rationalising existing partnerships and the Secretary of State indicated that cooperation was necessary for the delivery of comprehensive education for all pupils (DfES, 2005a). This report stated that confident schools want to collaborate with others in the community to drive a shared agenda for improving standards, to share resources and good practice, to ensure high quality provision for all young people and underpin community cohesion.

In addition, in 2005, following the working group on 14–19 reform, the government introduced a White Paper proposing radical reform of the system of 14–19 education. This has also driven the development of greater collaboration between schools. This reform included the widening of the curriculum and the range of opportunities on offer to students so that they are much more tailored to the talents and aspirations of young people, as

well as greater flexibility about what and where to study and when to take qualifications (DfES, 2005b).

Inter-school partnerships, however, can take many different forms and serve many different purposes. Whilst some are linked to government initiatives, others are more locally based, with some groups of schools forming themselves into local ‘families’ or ‘clusters’ of schools for sharing and joint development purposes. Some are more formal, such as federations, with the power to federate taking effect from September 2003 through section 24 of the Education Act 2002. A glossary of terms/different nomenclature is provided in Appendix 2. This literature review explores different types of partnerships in these many and varied forms.

1.2 Aims/focus of the review

The main purpose of the review was to explore collaboration between schools and to provide evidence about the type(s) of networks or partnerships that appear to be operating most effectively. In meeting this aim, the objectives for the research were to:

- identify collaborative working between schools
- detail how schools share facilities and practice
- assess how sharing facilities and practice promotes collaboration
- consider the role of outside agents, such as government, local authorities and other organisations in supporting collaborative working
- explore the factors or conditions that drive collaborative practice
- explore those collaborations that can be recognised as good practice
- identify key factors in collaboration that are recognised as good practice.

The following research questions were used to guide the review:

- What examples of collaboration between schools can be identified?
- Where and how do they operate?
- What are the intended outcomes?
- What have been the drivers that have led to collaborative practice?

- What has been the nature and extent of collaboration between schools?
- Which organisations have provided support for collaborative working in schools and in what way?
- What evidence is there of gains arising from collaboration?
- What does the evidence tell us about the effectiveness of different approach to collaborative working?
- Are there particular recommendations for best practice in collaborative working between schools?

Given the wide range of collaborations that exist between schools, the review sought to include a variety of types and to extract the key issues relating to collaborations generally. In view of the impending introduction of Specialist Schools into Northern Ireland, it was important to include both Specialist Schools and Beacon Schools in the review. In addition, the focus for Northern Ireland on interconnections between education sectors of different denominations and the impact on community relations, made it important to pick up on any existing literature where schools from different cultures were brought together. It therefore had to include collaborations involving schools of different faiths, multi-cultural and international twinning, as well as Independent/State School Partnerships (ISSPs). This was attempted despite the lack of more formal research and evaluation in these areas.

1.3 Methodology

This section outlines the methodology and includes:

- how the database searches were conducted
- how the most relevant pieces of literature were selected
- how the evidence was analysed.

Database searches

Sources were identified from a range of educational databases. Details of the range of databases searched and the key words used are provided in the search strategy in Appendix 3. The search parameters were as follows:

- studies carried out in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland since January 1997
- studies carried out in other countries since January 1997, providing that they were readily available and written in English
- research studies (published articles, reports and conference papers)
- descriptive accounts of collaborative working between schools
- selected opinion pieces were included for any of the research questions, if particularly relevant in contextualising the research evidence.

Identification of the most relevant sources

A three-step selection process was applied to the identified literature in order to help pinpoint the most relevant sources and findings.

- First, the references and abstracts identified from the database search results were explored for their pertinence to the review. The main criterion at this stage was a focus on the processes of inter-school collaboration. The full sources of items for possible inclusion were then requested from the library or downloaded from the internet.
- Second, the full sources were considered for their relevance to the review. Information and findings from these publications were briefly summarised onto an Excel spreadsheet against a number of relevant headings (e.g. type of collaboration; factors that facilitate; benefits).
- Third, the most relevant sources were identified using the main criteria (leading to 39 sources being included) and these were summarised more fully into an agreed template (see Appendix 4).

The main criteria for inclusion in the review were that sources contained information pertinent to the research questions: types of collaboration; main drivers and aims of collaboration; the role of local authorities and government in inter-school collaboration; factors which facilitate or inhibit collaboration; the benefits and challenges associated with collaboration. In addition, whether sources conformed to search parameters, their pertinence/relevance and research quality were taken into account.

Analysing the evidence

Despite all the focus on inter-school collaboration (as discussed in the background section 1.1), the initial searches for the literature review provided surprisingly little rigorous empirical evidence on the different models of inter-school collaboration and their effectiveness. Initial scanning also showed a dearth of literature focused on inter-faith collaborations, although some bringing together schools of different cultures together was evident (e.g. independent/local authority schools; multi-cultural schools etc).

Initial searches identified 591 sources as relevant to the literature review. However, when research abstracts were examined, it was evident they included types of collaboration other than inter-school collaboration (e.g. collaborations between HE institution and schools) and these sources were therefore eliminated. In addition, the focus of some of the sources was on aspects other than the processes involved in collaborative working (e.g. using research-based practice in schools) and these were also eliminated. As a result of this selection process (based on initial abstract information) 77 sources were identified for closer examination and application of the key review criteria.

Detailed examination of these sources led to the final selection of 39 pieces of literature, fitting the required criteria. These sources were then summarised more fully into an agreed template, thereby capturing information relevant to the review (see Appendix 4). The summary template utilised allowed researchers to review the evidence in terms of: the appropriateness of the analysis that was reported, any author interpretations, any biases/caveats to be aware of and any corroboration or triangulation of sources. Once the templates had been completed for each source, a coding system was developed and applied to each of the summaries. This process enabled the research team to account for the range of evidence, to locate the evidence in context and to draw out key themes across the different sources. A detailed summary of the literature in terms of the types of collaboration, the research methods covered, the dates of sources and their location is provided in Appendix 5.

1.4 Structure of the report

Findings from the review are presented under the following chapter headings:

- different types of inter-school collaboration
- main drivers and aims of inter-school collaboration
- managing collaborations
- collaborative activities
- the role of outside agents in supporting collaborative working
- the gains of inter-school collaboration
- factors influencing inter-school collaboration
- effective practice in collaborative working
- concluding comments.

2 Different types of inter-school collaboration

This section will examine the different types of collaboration represented in the literature. First, there is some discussion about the classification of the different forms of collaboration, before moving on to discuss the range of initiatives and projects stimulating collaborative working, the number of schools involved and the extent and depth of the collaborative partnerships formed.

2.1 Classification of different types of collaboration

Definitional issues have been addressed in several papers in the reviewed literature and authors have taken a variety of approaches to this. Difficulties in classifying collaborations are referred to by a number of authors, with one going so far as to state that: ‘Collaboration largely resists study because it is so complex and varied in nature ... the collaborations are so varied as to make categorisation nearly impossible’ (Hanford *et al.*, 1997, p 40–41). Some attempts have been made, however, to classify collaborations according to their extent and depth (see section 3.3).

Despite this difficulty regarding classification, Leonard and Leonard (2001) state that: ‘Definitional ambiguity has failed to constrain discussion of the forms of successful collaboration’ and, nonetheless, a number of researchers (including those quoted above) have attempted to define forms of collaboration. The vocabulary employed to describe different approaches to schools working collaboratively within this body of literature is varied. A range of terms are used almost interchangeably to describe working relationships between schools, including:

- clusters
- collaboratives
- collegiates
- confederations

- consortia
- federations
- networks
- partnerships
- school ‘families’
- twinned schools.

Whilst schools might form associations of a transient and superficial nature, the minimum definition of collaborative working assumed within this review encompasses elements of: shared resources, benefits, risks and practice. Within this definition fall a very wide range of types of collaboration, including statutory and non-statutory, formal and informal partnerships. Many of the partnerships and networks described have been set up as part of wider, named initiatives, and, in some cases, these determine or limit the extent and nature of collaborative activities and relationships. Others have been developed through local initiatives in response to local needs.

2.2 The extent and depth of collaboration

One approach to trying to classify different types of collaboration has been to produce a hierarchical typology of forms, based on the extent and depth of the collaborative relationship. Using this approach, Hanford *et al.* (1997) refers to earlier research describing a four-level typology of different stages of engagement and commitment (Himmelman, A., 1992, cited in Hanford *et al.*, 1997). This was originally produced with reference to multi-sector collaborations, but was felt by the authors to be equally applicable to inter-school collaborations. The four levels of engagement are paraphrased below:

- **Networking:** Exchanging information for mutual benefit. This form is most informal and most easily adopted. It often reflects an initial level of trust and commitment among organisations.
- **Coordination:** Exchanging information and altering activities for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose. This requires more organisational involvement, and coordination of internal and inter-organisational systems. All parties share in decision making.

- **Cooperation:** Exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose. This requires more organisational commitments and may involve legal arrangements. Shared resources can include knowledge, staffing, physical property and finances.
- **Collaboration:** Exchanging information, altering activities, sharing resources and enhancing the capacity of another for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose. The willingness to enhance the capacity of another organisation requires sharing risks, responsibilities, and rewards, all of which can increase the potential of collaboration beyond other forms of organisational activity.

Similarly, Shinnars (2001) describes a three-level typology, delineated using a framework produced by Mattessich and Monsey (1992) in an earlier study of independent/state school collaborations. The three levels of collaboration in their model are:

- **Cooperation:** An informal relationship that exists without any commonly defined mission, structure or planning effort. Information shared as needed and authority retained by each organisation so there is virtually no risk. Resources are separate, as are rewards.
- **Coordination:** This involves more formal relationships and understanding of compatible missions; some planning and division of roles is required and communication channels are established; authority still rests with individual organisations but there is some increased risk. Resources available to participants and rewards mutually acknowledged.
- **Collaboration:** This involves more durable and pervasive relationships. Collaborations bring previously separate organisations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission. Such relationships require comprehensive planning and well defined communication channels. Authority is determined by the collaborative structure. The risk is much greater because each contributes its own resources and reputation. Resources are pooled or jointly secured and the products are shared.

An alternative approach to classifying the extent and depth of collaboration has been to identify a range of variables on which collaborative relationships might differ and to examine individual collaborations in terms of these.

Woods *et al.* (2006: 59) identify seven such dimensions:

- **Degree of strategic vision:** The extent to which the collaborative group had or developed a coherent articulation of its being on a collective journey which aspires to a move beyond temporary collaborative arrangements.
- **Degree of group/area identity:** The extent to which the collaborative group had or developed personal and institutional identification with a group of schools and the area that they collectively serve.
- **Creation of an infrastructure:** The extent to which the collaborative group forged an enduring organisational structure of collaboration.
- **Significant professional collaborative activity:** the extent to which the collaborative group generated shared professional development and mutual institutional support.
- **Penetration below senior management level:** the extent to which the collaborative activities involved and engaged teachers and other staff.
- **Strategic innovation:** the extent to which the collaborative group generated change which sought significant transformation of processes, provision and organisation.
- **Normalisation of collaboration as part of the schools' culture:** the extent to which schools and staff working together in the collaborative group became 'the way we do things'.

This approach has greater potential for capturing the diverse range of collaborative relationships, appreciating that a partnership may be 'deep' on some dimensions whilst being 'shallow' on others.

Overall, three principal dimensions could be said to underlie all of these classification systems, each dimension ranging from low risk/low benefit potential to high risk/high benefit potential:

- **Organisation:** How far do organisational structures support the collaborative working?
- **Penetration:** How deeply into the fabric of the school does the collaboration penetrate?
- **Joint investment:** To what extent do partner organisations share a vision and aspirations for the collaboration?

Each of these dimensions encompasses a range of different constituent variables, and these are further described below.

Dimension one: organisation

This refers to the organisational aspects of the partnership and whether there are organisational structures specifically set up to support the collaborative working. This can be examined by asking the following types of questions.

- **Does the partnership have any formal, legal or statutory status?** Hard federations, which are legally constituted and generally involve formal, written agreements between schools, provide the most extreme examples.
- **Is governance or management of the schools shared?** Hard federations, for example, generally have a shared governing body and, in some cases, a shared headteacher.
- **What degree of organisational infrastructure supports the collaboration?** This could include partnership-related roles, decision-making panels, working groups, scheduled contacts and meetings, and channels of communication (for discussion of these see Chapter 4).
- **Do the schools have a common budget for collaborative activities?** External funding will often stipulate how monies are to be allocated to institutions and utilised. In instances where schools contribute their own funds, a variety of arrangements may be applied: including: equal finance from all involved; contributions according to size or ability to pay; ad hoc arrangements by which schools pay their own costs (See section 4.1 for more details on funding arrangements).
- **Do the schools share any staff?** In the examples examined, shared staff included staff employed solely to coordinate the work of the collaboration, teaching or support staff working across partner schools and temporary project workers, such as visiting artists.

Presented below is an example which illustrates some of the organisational aspects of collaborative working.

Box 2.1 Organisation

The Diversity Pathfinder Initiative (Woods *et al.*, 2006)

This source provides a description of a case study composed of ten secondary and special schools established within a large city local authority as one of the Diversity Pathfinders projects (see Appendix 2). The formation of the collegiate was built upon links already established, for example, through the EiC network. The collegiate is run by a board made up of the headteachers of all the schools involved, a local authority advisor and the local authority's former chief education officer as an honorary member. The collegiate also funds a full-time coordinator, with administrative support, whose role is to ensure that the strategy and operational decisions of the board are implemented. Staff and curriculum development have been key elements of the collegiate's focus in its early phase and curriculum working groups have been developed which meet regularly. Another element has been the identification of lead departments to develop collegiate-wide curriculum improvements. The collegiate also employs Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) who work across the collegiate. The Collegiate receives funding from the DfES through the Diversity Pathfinders project, with additional funding provided by the LSC. Schools in the collegiate also contributed 0.5 per cent of their funding. Other funds have been secured by bidding to funding bodies including private charitable funding for ASTs, and funding from the Gatsby Foundation for a network sharing good practice in special educational needs (SEN) teaching.

Dimension two: penetration

This refers to how deeply into the fabric of the school the partnership working penetrates, for example, whether it involves the whole school or one particular section or aspect of the school, as well as considering its longevity.

- **How many people within the school community are involved?** Some collaborations involved only a small number of staff (e.g. Halbert and Kaser, 2002) whilst others involved the governing body, large numbers of teaching and support staff, pupils, and, on occasions, parents (e.g. DfES, 2007e).

- **Do the activities cover a broad curricular base?** A number of collaborations were described which had an impact across a wide range of curriculum areas. In some cases, a series of projects related to specific curriculum areas, such as the ISSP workshops described by Sharp *et al.* (2002). In others, a single theme or project was adapted for a cross-curricular approach (DfES, 2007e).
- **What is the expected longevity of collaboration?** In most of the cases described in the reviewed literature the intention was for school collaborations to persist in the long term. Future ambitions were often for the growth and development of partnership working, either through expanding the number of schools involved or through increasing and developing the range of partnership activities. In some cases, however, schools had come together to carry out a single discrete project, without the intention of forming a lasting connection (e.g. Diversity and Dialogue, 2007). In other cases, collaborations were designed to meet short-term needs. For example, a case of a school federation was described which was devised in response to the failure of one school to appoint a new headteacher. When a headteacher was appointed the federation disbanded (Thorpe and Williams, 2002).

Box 2.2 Penetration

International twinning (DfES, 2007e)

This case study describes whole-school involvement in an international twinning project. A partnership set up between two primary schools in London and Ghana has had multiple effects within the London school, involving a large proportion of staff and pupils, as well as some parents. The partnership was established after a London-resident Ghanaian woman approached the school and offered to broker a link with the school in her home town. The international link has focused on the development of a parallel vegetable growing project. Initially, a group of 30 pupils participated in the project, but now the whole school contributes and the links have inspired activities in a wide range of curriculum areas. In particular, the project has helped develop teaching related to citizenship and understanding of development and trade

issues, sustainability (through pupils' involvement in composting food waste), food production and agriculture, and climate. The activity itself has developed pupils' teamwork skills and enhanced their confidence. Whilst the activities have involved a high proportion of staff and pupils in the school, parents are also increasingly becoming involved in the project and home–school links are being developed.

Dimension three: joint investment/vision

This refers to the extent to which schools' aims and interests are bound together and the perception of participating schools that they are on a common journey.

- **Is there a strategic vision?** Several sources suggest that shared vision requires a climate of mutuality and reciprocity, and that relationships in which one party is identified as the expert and the other as the novice should be avoided (e.g. Ribchester and Edwards, 1998; Burns, 2003; Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). There is some evidence that such relationships are indeed uncomfortable and/or unsatisfactory for those schools involved, (e.g. Rudd *et al.*, 2004a) refers to partnerships that begin according to this model becoming gradually more egalitarian over time. Similarly, government initiatives that promote a non-egalitarian model (e.g. Beacon Schools) have been largely replaced by initiatives focusing on diversity and recognising that all schools have much to offer their peers.
- **Is there loss of independence?** The closest and deepest forms of collaboration involve the loss of autonomy for individual schools to a great degree. Indeed, the discomfort experienced by schools through sharing and supporting one another is a frequent refrain within this body of literature (e.g. Ribchester and Edwards, 1998; Arnold, 2006). Some partnerships, in particular hard federations, result in schools being bound into joint decisions, whilst, in others, schools fully retain their independence.
- **Is there shared responsibility and accountability for all outcomes?** A degree of shared responsibility for all outcomes has been postulated as an essential ingredient of true collaboration by several authors, although cases of partnerships in which schools were willing to be held accountable

for the outcomes in their partner schools were few. In an extensive study covering school partnerships of a variety of types, one author expresses the view that collaborations espousing this type of communality provide exceptional opportunities: ‘The most successful examples of collaboration in this report began and have been sustained in a spirit of common resolve and sensitivity to the needs of others. Some partnerships have gone beyond the notion of shared curricula and shared resources and have argued for common accountability in terms of both of inspection and performance data.’ (Arnold, 2006, p 38). At the same time, the development of such a shared vision and pathway is acknowledged to be difficult due to both a climate of competition and mistrust between schools and legislation which determines that schools must be treated as individual entities for purposes of inspection and evaluation through performance data.

- **Is there shared decision making?** In some cases, school partnerships were strongly mediated from outside, for example, by the organisation funding or driving the collaboration. This was the case with some inter-cultural partnerships where decision making was largely out of the hands of the schools (Diversity and Dialogue, 2007).

Box 2.3 *Joint investment/vision*

Federations, collegiates and partnerships (Arnold, 2006)

Building on a history of working in networks, some schools in Birmingham used the Diversity Pathfinder Initiative as an opportunity to set up collegiate academies. The collegiates are characterised by a corporate set of aims and interests, and by investment of time and resources by individual schools. The aim of the collegiates is to raise standards of teaching and learning through greater access to professional development activities, and by widening the offer to pupils. The schools have: shared practice and resources; increased the range of courses at age 14+; extended e-learning opportunities; and employed ASTs to work across the collegiate. All individual schools in the collegiates are committed to contributing 0.5 per cent of their budget to the collegiate. The collegiates have been successful in achieving their aims. One example was the Oaks Collegiate, where one of the schools was struggling, and

so the others offered collective support, e.g. loaning teachers, use of ASTs, matching curriculum offer to the needs of individual students. The outcomes for the school, especially in terms of attainment improvement were described as ‘remarkable’ (p. 18).

2.3 Number of schools

Of the 39 sources reviewed, 20 made reference to the number of schools taking part in specific collaborations. Collaborations involving between two and 75 schools were described, although the majority comprised between two and eight institutions.

The number of schools involved in the collaboration was linked to both the type and the extent of collaboration. The largest clusters of schools were most likely to focus on the sharing of good practice and joint professional development arrangements, i.e. they were likely to be expertise-based collaborations (see typology in section 3.3). For example, the largest grouping referred to was a 75-school cluster in Canada. In this cluster, collaborative activity was primarily confined to professional development, dissemination activities and the production of teaching materials, and it involved only a small number of staff in each institution (Halbert and Kaser, 2002). Partnerships involving just two schools were most often ISSPs and local or international twinning projects (e.g. Ofsted, 2005; Sharp *et al.*, 2002; DfES, 2007e). Thus, culture-based collaborations tended most often to operate on a one-to-one basis, where involvement of the whole school and more personal contact between staff and pupils was more likely. The findings therefore suggest that the inclusion of large numbers of schools can limit the extent and nature of collaboration and militate against whole-school involvement.

Key points

- Inter-school collaboration takes many forms and the terminology used varies, making classification of different types difficult. Even so, this did

not prevent discussion within the literature of the characteristics of effective collaborations.

- One approach to trying to classify different types of collaboration has been to produce a hierarchical typology of forms, based on the extent and depth of the collaborative relationship. Examination of these proposed typologies led to the distillation of the three principal dimensions of organisation, penetration and joint investment/vision. The type of questions that need to be considered when assessing the extent of partnership working are therefore: Are there organisational structures specifically set up to support the collaborative working? How deeply into the fabric of the school does partnership working penetrate? Are the schools' aims and interests bound together and is the perception within the schools that they are on a common journey? Does it have structural and resource sharing ramifications?
- The majority of collaborations examined within the literature involved between two and eight institutions. The findings suggest that the inclusion of large numbers of schools can limit the extent and nature of collaboration and militate against whole-school involvement. Collaborations bringing schools together of different cultures tended to be on a one-to-one basis, facilitating whole-school involvement and more personal contact between staff and pupils.

3 Main drivers and aims of inter-school collaboration

This section focuses on the different motivations for inter-school collaboration, both the factors which drive collaboration, i.e. what or who initiates it in the first place and the aims of collaborative practice, i.e. what such collaboration sets out to achieve. Finally, it presents a typology of inter-school collaborations which is used throughout the report where relevant.

3.1 Main drivers of inter-school collaboration

Thirty-three out of the 39 sources identified factors that were considered to be drivers for inter-school collaboration. Analysis of the literature revealed five primary drivers for collaborative working between schools:

- government initiatives/agendas
- local authority requirements
- funding
- the commitment of participants
- countering challenging circumstances.

Main drivers: government initiatives/agendas

About a quarter of the collaborations examined were reported to have been instigated via government initiatives or were linked to government agendas in some way. Specific government initiatives involving an expectation of inter-school collaboration included, for example, the Beacon Schools Scheme (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a); the Diversity Pathfinders Initiative (Woods *et al.*, 2006) and the Specialist Schools Scheme (Aiston *et al.*, 2002). Confederations and clusters were reported to have been established in response to 'Every Child Matters' and the need to develop a single Children and Young People's Plan (Arnold, 2006; Farrar *et al.*, 2005) and ISSPs were also referred to as being part of 'a government agenda' (Smith *et al.*, 2003). Other collaborations had been instigated in response to the publication of government reports. For example, collegiates (see Appendix 2 for definition) had, in

part, been introduced as a response to the Tomlinson Report, which was thought to favour collegiate working (Morris, n.d.) and diversity and faith twinning had been instigated in response to an Ofsted report commenting that citizenship teachers lacked strong subject knowledge and teaching resources (Diversity and Dialogue, 2007). Other sources referred to government expectations with regard to inter-school collaboration. Collegiates, for example, were said to have been introduced by local authorities in response to the government expectation that they directly support schools ‘to enquire, reflect and research’. Collaborations were thought to act as a key vehicle for this.

Box 3.1 **Government driven collaboration**

Independent and local authority schools (Smith *et al.*, 2003)

The White Paper ‘Excellence in schools’ (GB. Parliament. HoC, 1997) outlined the government’s vision of an integrated education service and, in particular, focused on fostering greater links between independent and local authority maintained schools. It was hoped that the existence of a set of reciprocal arrangements between schools within each sector might provide opportunities for them to access and utilise each other’s individual strengths and resources, resulting in mutually beneficial outcomes. The government introduced a number of measures to facilitate and advocate partnership working between independent and local authority schools. An advisory group with a specific remit of facilitating links between both sectors and their associated funding was introduced in 1997. This allowed schools to apply for grants to enable them to collaborate on projects. The report of the advisory group outlined a number of recommendations that were intended to facilitate and extend partnership working between the two sectors. The findings indicated that the scheme had been well received and had fostered numerous links between both sectors. In 1999, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) published a case-studies booklet aimed at providing schools with descriptions of first-hand experiences of these partnerships.

Main drivers: local authority requirements

A similar number of the collaborations examined (about a quarter) were reported to have been local authority driven. For example, the introduction of collegiates was said to have been instigated as a result of the need for the local authority to develop a 14–19 strategy. Collaboration was seen as the main mechanism for achieving this (Morris, 2007). Similarly, the development of clusters of small rural schools had been instigated by rural counties in Wales because it was perceived to be a way of keeping schools above a certain size and therefore making them more economically viable (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998; Thorpe and Williams, 2002). Some of the literature analysed also illustrated how the interplay between government and local authority factors may be influential in determining the development of inter-school collaboration (e.g. Thorpe and Williams, 2002).

Box 3.2 **Local authority driven collaboration**

Small rural school clusters (Thorpe and Williams, 2002)

This paper describes how, in certain rural counties of Wales at the time, the future of primary education was being reassessed and attempts were being made to rationalise and reorganise primary education with a particular focus on small schools. One of the other driving forces behind this was said to be the Audit Commission, whose report *Trading Places* highlighted issues of surplus capacity, school size and cost. Local education authorities in turn needed to respond to district audits through their school organisation plans in which they assess the need to add or remove school places. A number of options were reported to be under consideration, but the federation of schools under one headteacher was seen as a way forward for keeping schools above a certain minimum size and avoiding school closures.

Excellence clusters (McMeeking *et al.*, 2004)

Excellence clusters are described in the glossary in Appendix 2. Within some clusters, the local authority had been an important facilitator in successful collaborative working. One headteacher, who chaired a

cluster, said that the local authority had been ‘a crucial spur to development’ as they had acted as facilitators whilst devolving the decision making to the schools in the cluster. Another cluster reiterated this view, suggesting that the local authority had been the driving force behind the cluster, and that the collaboration would have been a challenge without their support.

Main drivers: funding

The availability of funding for the operation of inter-school collaboration was considered to be another primary driver. Many of the government initiatives promoting collaboration described above, for example, were linked to grants/additional funding for collaboration. The ‘take off capacity’ of Diversity Pathfinders, for example, was reported to have depended on funding availability (Woods *et al.*, 2006). In other instances, funding from the local authority was also reported to have been instrumental in driving collaboration. Finance from the local authority, for example, was reported to have supported cluster activity amongst small rural schools, and to have supported the setting up of collegiate academies (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998; Rutherford and Jackson, 2006). Funding was considered to be a key element of success and its absence was felt to restrict the scope of collaborative endeavours (see also section 8.4). In one instance, the funding of collegiates had been used to equalise funding between schools (see example Morris, 2007).

Box 3.3 Funding

Collegiates (Morris, 2007)

Whilst discussing the development of collegiates, Morris reports that there had been significant discontent among high schools about additionality, especially that funded by Excellence in Cities (EiC) and the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG), with some schools, sometimes quite arbitrarily, receiving significant additional funding whilst neighbouring schools received little or none. He states that, when developing colle-

giates, the importance of redressing some of these inequalities was realised early on, especially as it was always envisaged that up to half of the long-term costs would be borne by the collegiate schools. Schools with specialist status or EiC funding were therefore asked for a greater contribution to the collegiates, whilst non-EiC schools were only asked to contribute once they became specialist.

Main drivers: the commitment of participants

Aside from outside influences, there was also a view, within the literature, that collaboration was driven by the energy and commitment of the participants themselves. This was particularly evident in Networked Learning Communities (NLCs), where it was stated that networks were driven by the desire of individuals to understand their own and others' practices and to 'contribute to a common pool of professional knowledge' (McGregor *et al.*, 2006). However, it was also evident in other types of collaboration, where the process was reported to be driven by the vision of headteachers or individual teachers, for example, in public/private and independent/state school partnerships (Hanford *et al.*, 1997; Turner, 2005), as well as collegiates, where they had been driven by the appointment of specific personnel to key headships (Morris, 2007). Also, senior management team involvement was said to be important in giving the impetus and the status necessary for Excellence Clusters to become established in schools (McMeeking *et al.*, 2004).

Box 3.4 **The commitment of participants**

Independent and state school partnerships (Turner, 2005)

Turner reports that there was unanimity amongst collaboration participants in stressing the need for a clear commitment from the headteacher and the management team of the school. The project had to be regarded as a priority, for example: 'You must have the heads backing ... from a management point of view you need to make it a priority and build in the support necessary.' There was also a view that the headteacher must ensure that this commitment and support is met with an equally positive

approach from staff. Headteachers stressed the need to ensure that the project was fully supported within the staff team and advocated that they had to be convinced that the partnership was for the benefit of the school. Virtually all interviewees in this study emphasised the need for commitment to the project and a desire to see it through to its conclusion.

Collegiates (Morris 2007)

According to Morris, the key driver for the development of collegiates was the changing profile of the headteachers in the area. A number of new headteachers had been recently appointed who, while intensely ambitious for their own schools, were far more open to the opportunities that collaborative activity might afford their schools. Morris reports that this seemingly minor factor turned out to be very important since a number of new headteachers established their position among other headteachers through the energy and enthusiasm they brought to the collegiate project.

Main drivers: countering challenging circumstances

Another primary driver was reported to be the need to address school or local authority weaknesses or to address the needs of schools in challenging circumstances. For example, a primary driver in the development of small rural school clusters had been the need to counter the challenges facing small schools and to overcome isolation and size issues (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998). Similarly, small school federations were reported to be instigated in response to the need to address the issues of surplus capacity, school size and cost affecting small rural schools and therefore a way of avoiding merger or closure. (Thorpe and Williams, 2002). Another factor concerned schools facing financial difficulties, where collaboration, particularly the sharing of resources, had been driven by the need to reduce expenditure (Rees, 1996). In addition, international twinning was said to help meet the need for sustainable development (DfES, 2007f).

Box 3.5 *Countering challenging circumstances*

Collegiates (Morris, 2007)

Morris notes that collegiates were instigated by a lack of progress within the local authority in standards at key stage 4, despite the fact that standards at key stage 3 were rising. He states that, for both 2003 and 2004, 53 per cent of 16 year olds did not gain five or more GCSE A*–C grades and, in 2003, this group numbered 2250 pupils. He emphasised that this factor, above all others, was the initial driver for the collegiates project.

International twinning (DfES, 2007f)

This source describes the partnership of a school in the UK with a school in Malawi, which is used as a case study for a variety of different activities in different subjects within the curriculum. A curriculum project is described, for example, where year 7–9 pupils spent time looking at the right to education in a global context. They discussed the similarities and differences between life in Malawi and the UK and Article 26 of the UN Universal Declaration for Human Rights, which states that everyone has a right to education. This was described as an effective example of education for sustainable development because it addresses the concepts of interdependence, quality of life, diversity and the needs and rights of future generations. It focuses on the social aspects of education for sustainable development and helps pupils understand the concept in broader terms.

Other drivers

In addition, a number of other factors were also considered to have driven inter-school collaborations, although less frequently cited than the primary drivers discussed above:

- **Existing partnerships or a previous history of partnership working:** Where there was successful inter-school cooperation already in place this was sometimes reported to have been influential in instigating further collaboration, for example, in establishing collegiate academies, the local

authority had been influenced by the long-term success of a partnership of Catholic schools (Rutherford and Jackson, 2006).

- **Outside body/individual influence:** In some instances, the establishment of collaboration had been influenced by outside agents, for example, the organisational structure provided by the Network Learning Group for NLCs (Hill, 2004). International twinning between two schools had been instigated by the approach of a Ghanaian woman living in London (DfES, 2007e) and diversity/faith twinning had been instigated by ‘Save the Children research’ suggesting that young people had a desire to learn about other faiths (Diversity and Dialogue, 2007).
- **Judged successful/status:** In some cases, the success or status of schools had been instrumental in driving collaboration, for example, where schools had received Beacon status, there had been a demand for help and collaboration with these schools (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). Similarly, Leading Edge schools were said to be at the cutting edge of innovation and collaboration and had been selected to act as lever to transform secondary education (Burns, 2003).
- **Ability to be proactive/innovative:** Sometimes collaboration provided the opportunity for individuals to be innovative or proactive in addressing issues and this was considered a driver, for example, the unique possibilities of developing a global perspective and the opportunity to have direct contact with another culture reported in international twinning (DfES, 2007a).
- **Address local/target group needs:** Collaborations were sometimes set up in response to having to address local or specific target group needs, for example, an education partnership established to address underachievement and declining employment (Arnold, 2006). Networks of schools were sometimes initiated as a result of the desire to address the needs of a particular target group of pupils, e.g. those at risk, ethnic minority children or those with SEN (Bell *et al.*, 2006).

3.2 Aims of inter-school collaboration

All but one of the 39 sources identified the aims, or intended outcomes, of collaborative working between schools. A wide variety of aims was identified. Examination of the sources revealed five key aims:

- sharing good practice/professional expertise
- raising achievement/attainment
- school improvement/raising standards
- breaking down barriers
- enriching learning opportunities.

These aims map closely on to the gains or outcomes of collaborative activity described in Chapter 7, where detailed illustrations are provided. Overall, this suggests that many collaborations achieved their aims.

Key aims: sharing good practice/professional expertise

The most commonly identified aim for inter-school collaboration was that of sharing professional expertise and good practice. This was particularly linked with collaborations stemming from government initiatives, such as the Beacon Schools Scheme, Specialist Schools and Diversity Pathfinders, as well as Networked Learning Communities (NLCs) and Collegiate Academies (see Appendix 2 for details of these initiatives). Beacon Schools were reported to provide an opportunity for staff to gain another dimension to their professional lives (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a) whilst Diversity Pathfinders were said to develop collaborative working so that schools' individual strengths and specialist expertise benefited each other (Woods *et al.*, 2006). Collaboration was considered a way of reducing professional isolation by providing the opportunity for teachers to share knowledge, ideas and experiences, to share best practice for their mutual benefit and to enhance their professional skills.

Key aims: raising achievement/attainment

Raising achievement or attainment was also one of the most commonly identified intended outcomes of collaboration. One of the main aims of

Excellence clusters, for example, was to tackle problems of underachievement and social exclusion (McMeeking *et al.*, 2004) and the main goal of federations was said to be that of raising achievement (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). Other more local collaborations were focused on raising the attainment of specific groups of learners, for example, one collegiate was focused on improving the achievement of 16 year olds and one independent/state school partnership was focused on raising the confidence and aspirations of under-achieving girls (Morris, 2007; DfES, 2007b).

Key aims: enriching learning opportunities

The enrichment of learning opportunities for students was often cited as an intended outcome of inter-school collaboration. This was achieved through access to a wide range of courses and access to different types of provision, thereby widening the curriculum and expanding the choice available to students. This was thought to increase educational opportunities so that they could be more tailored to individual needs and preferences, leading to greater personalisation of provision. One of the aims of special school partnerships, for example, was said to be to expand the range of experiences for pupils (Arnold, 2006) and one of the key aims of clusters of small rural schools was to counter the challenges of curriculum delivery in small schools (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998).

Key aims: school improvement/raising standards

The aim of school improvement or raising standards also featured in many of the sources examined. It was often stated that the aim of collaboration was to raise the quality of teaching and learning so that all pupils benefited or to address school weaknesses. One of the main aims of the Leading Edge Partnerships, for example, was to achieve sustainable improvement over time (Burns, 2003) and one of the aims of a network of enquiry was to create school communities committed to improving the quality of student learning (Halbert and Kaser, 2002). In addition, one of the stated aims of the Beacon Schools Scheme was to give schools a chance to maintain their high performance and ‘to keep it vibrant and alive’ (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a).

Key aims: breaking down barriers

Breaking down barriers between sectors or cultures was another common intended outcome of collaboration, particularly in collaborations between SEN/non-SEN schools; independent/state schools; public/private schools; primary/secondary sectors and schools of different cultures and faiths. Collaborations of this nature aimed to bring schools closer together and to increase understanding between schools and pupils. Collaborations between faith and multi-cultural schools, for example, were focused on enhancing community cohesion, to give pupils understanding of different types of religion/cultures and to change public perceptions of relations between different faiths and cultures (e.g. DfES, 2007c; Diversity and Dialogue, 2007). Similarly, public/private school partnerships were reported to try to destroy the existing myths between sectors and to build stronger community bonds between the partnering institutions (Sharpe *et al.* 2002; Shinnars, 2001).

Other aims

Other aims that were also identified, but not as frequently cited as the primary aims identified above, were:

- **Sharing facilities/resources:** The aim of collaboration with Specialist Schools included sharing facilities as well as expertise, whilst one local education partnership aimed to achieve better value from core resources by sharing them (Aiston *et al.*, 2002; Arnold, 2006).
- **Economic/financial:** One of the primary aims of a rural consortium was to capitalise on the benefit of economies of scale, e.g. the lack of capacity for vocational courses (DfES, 2007d). One of the main aims of small school primary federations was to address surplus capacity, size and cost (Thorpe and Williams, 2002).
- **Instigating change/reform:** The aim of some collaborations was to promote change, for example, by making schools the agents of change, as in the Leading Edge Partnerships, the development of learning networks that promote system-wide change and by building capacity for change, as in NLCs (Burns, 2003; Farrar *et al.*, 2005; Hill, 2004).

- **School–community engagement:** Some federations and other local partnerships aimed to build closer links with the community and other agencies/extended services outside of schools (Arnold, 2006).
- **Inclusion:** Local partnerships were sometimes focused on inclusion, for example, the aim of Excellence clusters being to tackle social exclusion, as well as underachievement (McMeeking *et al.*, 2004).
- **Collaborative planning/systems/approaches:** In some partnerships one of the aims was to develop collaborative approaches, such as the collective planning of the curriculum and cooperative approaches to management and practice (Arnold, 2006; Kerr *et al.*, 2003).
- **Reducing isolation:** Special school partnerships were reported to try to reduce the isolation felt by staff in small, challenging schools and a rural consortium aimed to overcome the isolation of small rural schools (Arnold, 2006; DfES, 2007d).
- **Innovation:** In NCLs, in particular, creativity and innovation was part of the remit, but this was also evident in other types of collaboration, which aimed to foster development and spread of innovative ideas, developing new educational approaches and materials, and creating new initiatives (Hill, 2004; Rudd *et al.*, 2004b)
- **Teacher recruitment and retention:** One of the aims of some collaborations, particularly local federations and partnerships, was to improve teacher recruitment and retention by sharing good practice, whilst a stated aim of NLCs was also to improve status of teaching profession (Arnold, 2006; Hill, 2004).

3.3 A typology of inter-school collaborations

It was possible to develop a typology of inter-school collaborations based on the aims of and the overarching rationale for collaboration. This will be applied throughout the remainder of the analysis carried out within this study. However, two points need to be made. First, that it is difficult to know from the written text, in reality, to what extent the collaborations examined closely mapped on to this typology. Second, that most collaborations have been classified according to what appeared to be their main rationale (but the categories are not mutually exclusive). It is also important to note, because

of the limited numbers of sources involved, emerging patterns only can be highlighted.

- **Expertise-based collaborations:** Where schools are brought together as a result of their differing levels of expertise with the aim being for the school with specific expertise to pass this on to the other school, although in reality this may be found to be of more mutual benefit (e.g. Specialist Schools, Beacon Schools, Diversity Pathfinders).
- **Cultural-based collaborations:** Where schools are brought together because they are culturally different and an important part of the aim is to break down barriers associated with these different cultures (e.g. independent-state school partnerships; inter-faith and multi-cultural collaborations; international twinning).
- **Geographically-based collaborations:** Where schools serving a particular area are brought together with a focus on serving the needs of the area/community they serve (e.g. some federations, collegiates and school clusters).
- **Commonality-based collaborations:** Where schools are brought together because of their similar characteristics or similar circumstances and the focus is on sharing to address common problems or challenges (e.g. small rural primary school clusters/consortia).
- **Creativity/innovation-based collaborations:** Where schools are brought together for the purposes of more than sharing expertise, where there is also a focus on innovation and developing new strategies/practices (e.g. NLCs).

This typology is used where relevant throughout the report. It was thought particularly useful to delineate culture-based collaborations in order to examine the possibility that there might be particular challenges, facilitators and outcomes associated with this type of collaboration. Where possible, therefore, factors pertinent to ‘culturally-based collaborations’ in particular have been singled out for comment since these are likely to be of particular relevance and interest in the context of Northern Ireland and to have implications for bringing schools of different denominations together.

Key points

- Government agendas and local authority requirements were often noted to be key drivers for inter-school collaboration. A wide range of national government initiatives have given rise to collaboration since this has been an expected element within them, but there were also examples of more locally instigated and even school initiated projects of this nature.
- Linked to this, the availability of funding for the operation of inter-school collaboration (often from government or local authority sources) was also a crucial factor in driving collaboration.
- Aside from outside influences, within the literature, the energy and commitment of the participants themselves was also reported to provide the impetus for collaboration. The commitment of key personnel, such as headteachers and the senior management team, was thought to be influential in giving the collaboration a high profile within the school.
- Collaborations were also sometimes driven by the need to overcome or counter challenging circumstances. Examples ranged from the establishment of rural consortia to address the challenges facing small schools to the promotion of international twinning to meet the need for sustainable development.
- The main aims of collaboration, as well as raising attainment and improving school standards, were the sharing of professional expertise amongst teachers, the enrichment of learning opportunities for students and the breaking down of barriers between schools and between individuals. The latter suggesting the relevance of inter-school collaboration in the context of Northern Ireland.
- The rationale for collaborations gave rise to a typology of collaboration and to collaborations categorised as ‘culturally based’, where schools of differing cultures are brought together, being identified as of particular importance to the question of collaboration between inter-denominational schools in Northern Ireland.

4 Managing collaborations

This chapter focuses on the operation of collaborations and the processes involved. The collaborative processes discussed include provision of funding, initiation and day-to-day management and governance.

4.1 Funding

Funding for collaborative ventures came from a wide range of sources. In cases where collaborations were set up as part of a national initiative, funding was often provided. In some cases, this was specifically for the development of collaborative relationships (e.g. the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG)), whilst in others, it was more general funding which allowed schools to use their discretion as to how much should be channelled into collaborative work (such as Specialist Schools funding). Schools also accessed funds by making bids to organisations, including the DfES through the ISSP fund (Ofsted, 2005), their own local authority (Rutherford and Jackson, 2006), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (DfES, 2007d), and organisations in the voluntary sector (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003; Rutherford and Jackson, 2006).

Many schools also made their own contributions and there was a view that 'you only value what you pay for' (Morris, 2007). Approaches to this generally incorporated arrangements taking into account schools' relative ability to pay. For example, schools in receipt of specialist or EiC funding being expected to pay more towards the development of collegiates (Morris, 2007). In some cases of small scale collaborations, schools met their own individual costs and no joint financial arrangements were made (DfES, 2007g).

4.2 Setting up the collaboration: initial approaches

Within this body of literature there was a great deal of variation in the way in which collaborations had been initiated. In some cases, where the local authority was the driving force behind the collaboration, headteachers had

been approached by the local authority and invited to participate (e.g. Arnold, 2006; Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). Many of the most successful ISSPs were reported to have been initiated by local authority officers (Ofsted, 2005). In one report, the author described the importance of the way in which such local authority approaches to schools were made:

The next step seemed self-evident: to call a meeting of interested parties. Nothing could have been worse because schools needed to be persuaded to partially suspend competition and embrace collaboration ... As an alternative I arranged 25 hour-long conversations with each head individually, in their own schools. These conversations gave the opportunity to discuss collegiate principles and practice in detail, identifying potentially difficult issues ... This strategy was extremely successful.

(Morris, 2007, p. 5).

In other cases, the initiative to collaborate was taken by headteachers and often they would then inform or consult with the local authority. A study of the federations programme found that this was the most common way for federations to be initiated (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). Often, federations were built on existing collaborations or consortia between schools and this model of building formal partnerships on top of existing informal arrangements was also reported in the development of Education Action Zone (EAZ) partnerships (Powell *et al.*, 2004).

In a number of cases other bodies and individuals were described as initiating partnerships. These included organisations such as the Youth Sports Trust (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005) and the Citizenship Foundation (Diversity and Dialogue, 2007), as well as individuals, including a Ghanaian woman who brokered links between an English school and one in her country of origin (DfES, 2007e).

4.3 Management and governance arrangements

The majority of collaborations involved the creation of new roles or structures for their management. At one end of the spectrum, formal federations often required the integration of management and governance, with overarching governing bodies or governance groups and ‘executive’ headteachers with cross-federation responsibilities (Arnold, 2006). At the other end, were collaborations in which one or two representatives from each organisation would have a basic liaison and organisational role (e.g. Halbert and Kaser, 2002; Hanford *et al.*, 1997). Such management required was usually shared between the collaborating institutions, although in some cases, the role gradually fell to one or other partner (Smith *et al.*, 2003).

Thorpe and Williams (2002) describe six primary school federations in Wales each of which shares a headteacher. In four of these, the federation was chosen as a permanent solution to problems associated with small school size, whilst in the remaining two the federation was temporary and linked to the inability to fill a headteacher post in one of the schools. A situation where federated schools share a headteacher may be chosen by schools as a desirable development, or it may be seen as a contingency, preferable to school closures or consolidation (Rees, 1996). More commonly, federated schools maintain distributed leadership involving individual headteachers, although, in many cases, one headteacher within the group is invested with an ‘executive’ federation role (Arnold, 2006).

An evaluation of the federations programmes reported that dichotomous classification of federations into ‘hard’ and ‘soft’, based on whether the federation shared a single governing body or not, did not reflect the diverse range of different forms that a federation could take. Instead, a continuum of federations was found with varying degrees of changes to governance. Whilst some case-study federations had a single governing body and others had entirely separate governance arrangements, others had a range of intermediate governing arrangements, for example representation from each board of governors on a ‘Strategic Management Board’, spanning the federation. (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005).

The majority of partnerships had some regular meetings of coordinators, managers or other school representatives, for management of the collabora-

tion. The frequency of these was most often between monthly and termly (e.g. Arnold, 2006; Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2002), although some partnerships held meetings more regularly than this (e.g. DfES, 2007d).

In order to address joint development aims, school partnerships sometimes formed joint task groups or work teams (e.g. Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003; Morris, 2007). For example, in the collegiates set up in one area, three task groups were established: a management task group made up of headteachers and principals, which set the direction for each collegiate, agreed funding and recruited collegiate staff; a curriculum task group made up of curriculum deputies which set a common timetable and agreed courses and entry criteria; and an e-learning task group which operated across all collegiates to develop an e-learning strategy (Morris, 2007).

In some cases, headteachers or senior managers were seen to be the key personnel in managing and driving schools partnerships (e.g. Woods *et al.*, 2006). In others, the individuals holding the most formal ‘roles’ were not always the ones driving the collaboration, for example, specifically appointed collaboration coordinators often played a key role:

Heads of the schools in each collegiate meet as a ‘collegiate management board’ to provide overall direction. But arguably it is the school based coordinators, collegiate based coordinators and the ASTs who drive and facilitate the day-to-day operation of the Collegiate Academies
(Rutherford and Jackson, 2006, p 440).

Key points

- The collaborations described within the literature were funded in a variety of ways: through government funding, local authority funding and funding from other voluntary organisations. Many schools also made their own contributions, with one view proposed within the literature being ‘you only value what you pay for’.
- The collaborations examined had been initiated in a variety of ways, by local authorities approaching schools, by schools consulting with the local authority or sometimes by external parties. Some sources suggested that schools needed to be approached sensitively and given an opportunity to

discuss the potential difficulties in the first instance. They were often built on top of existing informal arrangements.

- The majority of collaborations involved the creation of new roles or structures for their management. At one end of the spectrum, formal federations often required the integration of management and governance, with overarching governing bodies or governance groups and ‘executive’ headteachers with cross-federation responsibilities. At the other end, were collaborations in which one or two representatives from each organisation had a basic liaison and organisational role.
- In some cases, headteachers or senior managers were seen to be the key personnel in managing and driving schools partnerships. In others, the individuals holding the most formal ‘roles’ were not always the ones driving the collaboration, for example, specifically appointed collaboration coordinators often played a key role in facilitating day-to-day operations.

5 Collaborative activities

One aim of the research was to look at what the literature said about the collaborative activities schools were involved in, particularly related to sharing practice and facilities, and to see how they promoted collaboration. In general, the literature does not discuss how the activities led to further collaboration, but some references do suggest that collaborative activities promote further collaboration. For example, there is a discussion below about how such activities lead to closer relationships between schools, and therefore facilitate further collaborative activity (see section 7.1), and Rudd *et al.* (2004b) found that schools involved in collaborations generally had found them worthwhile, and wanted to see the partnerships continue and develop.

An extremely wide range of collaborative activities was described within this body of literature. Collaborative activities were classified under the broad themes of:

- sharing practice
- sharing facilities/equipment
- sharing pupils.

5.1 Sharing practice

The literature identified several collaborative activities that facilitated the sharing of practice between schools, or offered the potential to do so:

- professional development
- sharing information
- provision of advice/support
- joint planning/school development
- sharing staff
- joint activities/projects.

Professional development

Professional development is a central activity in school collaborations, and one that offers opportunities to share practice between schools. There were often termly or annual events, such as partnership days, conferences or workshops, to consolidate the work that had been carried out over the year and to share practice (Halbert and Kaser, 2002; Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2002). A review of school networks including at least three schools reported significant use of training ‘events’ including conferences, symposia and other formal meetings within school networks. Seven of the 19 studies in this review referred to these (Bell *et al.*, 2006). In an analysis of partnership working taking place under a range of different programmes, projects and local initiatives, professional development was found to be a strong feature of many partnerships and notably fostered informal or practitioner-led forms of professional development (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). Collaborations provided schools and teachers with a forum for professional discussions and reflection; and this aspect of collaborative work was greatly valued by teachers (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2002).

Sharing information

The sharing of information, including practice-related learning, was another important feature of school collaborations. In particular, schools shared research data or evidence, and examples of good practice. A number of collaborations maintained publications in the form of an intranet or newsletter for the dissemination of information about the collaboration or the sharing of practice (Woods *et al.*, 2006). E-mail and the postal service were particularly frequently used in cases of international twinning projects, sometimes to complement staff visits to partner schools. In one local authority schools cluster, formed as part of the Diversity Pathfinder Initiative, forums for information sharing included weekly cluster leader meetings designed for dissemination purposes, and a ‘good practice’ website (Woods *et al.*, 2006). Another school cluster involving a secondary school and its feeder primaries prioritised improving the flow of information regarding pupils transferring between schools (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003).

Provision of advice/support

Mutual forms of support between staff at different schools were mentioned in several studies, and appear to be valued highly by teachers. On occasions, the support involved sharing practice in response to issues faced by other schools. For example, the West Sussex Specialist School network provided a forum for contact between Specialist Schools. The support offered through the network was welcomed by the schools, particularly the opportunity to discuss challenges with other schools with the same specialism (Aiston *et al.*, 2002). Similarly, providing an opportunity for discussion and sharing of concerns with colleagues was reported to be a welcome aspect of partnership working for teachers, leading to reduced teacher isolation (Rudd *et al.*, 2004b).

Joint planning/school development

Many collaborating schools worked together on school development or strategic planning, which involved the sharing of practice. This work could cover a very wide range of development priorities, although many involved a focus on one or more of the following themes:

- **Raising attainment:** Especially for pupils at risk of disengagement and underachievement (e.g. Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003; DfES, 2007b; Morris, 2007).
- **Pupil transition:** For example, one case study of a partnership between an independent school and a state secondary school reported a focus on transition from key stage 4 to 5. This was a priority for both schools, and they were able to run joint activities for year 10 pupils, including visits to local universities, and to pool staff knowledge about the university admissions applications process. (Smith *et al.*, 2003).
- **Curriculum development:** An example of this is the Network of Performance schools: collaboration between 34 schools in Canada dedicated to improving pupils' learning. Each school in this large network has responsibility for a developing a specific curriculum area and disseminating their work to the other schools through regular dissemination meetings (Halbert and Kaser, 2002).
- **Production of joint resources:** The West Kent Learning Federation is a 'soft' federation which has worked on the development of online materials for pupils to help with learning and revision (Arnold, 2006).

- **Developing responses to new developments in education:** Projects of this type included a group of Essex schools working together on developments linked to Every Child Matters (Farrar *et al.*, 2005).

Sharing staff

Sharing staff was another way identified within the literature in which schools collaborate and share practice informally or formally. Schools engaged in sharing staff did so in a variety of ways:

- **Staff exchange visits/observations:** These were often a feature of school collaborations and involved staff visiting one another's schools to observe practice and engage in discussion. These can have a professional development aim, for example, within NLCs (Powell *et al.*, 2004), or alternatively, a cultural exchange aim, for example, when teachers have visited partner schools overseas. (DfES, 2007e). This might therefore be a useful strategy in the development of collaborations between schools with differing cultures. Such 'personal' contact was the most common means of sharing information or practice in a study of Beacon Schools partnerships (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a) and face-to-face contact between staff was reported to be particularly appreciated by teachers involved in partnerships.
- **Sharing of Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs):** This was one of the most commonly cited ways in which schools shared staff. For example, each of six Collegiate Academies within Birmingham local authority has employed ASTs in mathematics, science and technology. These work across all the schools in a single academy (Arnold, 2006). A similar deployment of shared ASTs was reported in one of the Diversity Pathfinder Initiative local authorities (Woods *et al.*, 2006). Rudd *et al.* (2004b) discussed how ASTs deployed in different schools had shared practice as they advised and coached teachers from the schools they were working in.
- **Staff loaned to the partner school:** Sometimes staff from one school may work temporarily in another. In the case of one Leading Edge Partnership lead school, the school's own AST was loaned to partner schools. This was perceived to offer a professional development opportunity to the AST, allowing them to experience diverse learning cultures (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). Loaning arrangements were also seen with regard to other

staff. For example, one technology college with Beacon status loaned an ICT technician and PE teachers to partner primary schools. It also sent its chaplain to carry out work on spirituality with partner secondary schools and placed one of its deputy heads in a partner school when the head-teacher of that school was long-term sick. (DfES, 2007c). A variation on this is where a school employs staff specifically to work in its partner schools. For example, the employment of a primary French teacher by a language college to work within its partner primary schools (Aiston *et al.*, 2002).

Within the literature, **joint employment of external specialists** by collaborating schools was also noted, although this may be less relevant for sharing practice than other forms of staff sharing described above. One Kent project, focusing on cultural diversity in the creative arts, for example, arranged arts workshops with an African theme for gifted and talented pupils. These were run by professional artists (e.g. a Ghanaian drummer) appointed by both schools (Ofsted, 2005).

Joint activities/projects

Another way of collaborating which offered opportunities to share practice was engaging in joint activities. A wide range of different joint activities and projects were found across the literature. Many of these were linked to curriculum areas, particularly citizenship projects, sports events, and arts projects and performances (e.g. Woods *et al.*, 2006; Rees, 1996; DfES, 2007c; Turner, 2005). Examples of more innovative projects include:

- Three state secondary schools and an independent school in a borough of London with high levels of deprivation have collaborated to develop a programme designed to raise the confidence and self-esteem of able but underachieving girls. The girls were invited to eight Saturday workshops focusing on academic subjects and critical thinking and taught by teachers from the independent school (DfES, 2007b).
- The North West Essex rural consortium, which was designed to overcome the 'rural barrier' of schools in geographic isolation jointly arranged careers conferences for sixth formers (DfES, 2007d).

- Not all such joint projects involved direct contact between pupils. For example, a twinning project linking schools in Ghana and the UK was based around the growing of fruit and vegetables in gardens attached to the two schools. Although teachers have visited one another's schools, contact between pupils has been at a distance (DfES, 2007e).

Also perhaps of interest, but maybe of less relevance with regard to sharing practice, was a partnership between a Muslim and Catholic secondary school focused on joint charity fundraising activities. A one-day café was planned and organised by groups of pupils and staff from both schools working together. The money raised was shared between Catholic and Islamic overseas development charities. The schools intend to continue the partnership and are looking for another joint fundraising opportunity (DfES, 2007c).

5.2 Sharing facilities

There were examples amongst the literature of schools sharing facilities for mutual benefit. These included examples of culture-based collaborations. They shared facilities in a variety of ways:

- sharing curriculum facilities
- the creation of joint facilities
- joint purchases of equipment.

Sharing curriculum facilities

The sharing of curriculum facilities between schools was evident within the literature. A survey of independent/state school collaboration, for example, found that the sharing of curriculum facilities (particularly, sports, arts and ICT facilities) was one of the most commonly cited forms of contact between schools in the two sectors. Most frequently, this involved state school partners making use of independent school facilities, although the reverse was also reported. State schools were often able to reciprocate through sharing of their practice (Smith *et al.*, 2003). One example from a local authority was where an independent school had created a nature trail which they encouraged local maintained schools to use, and where an independent school had wanted to observe good practice in literacy, and the local

authority had arranged for them to do this at a local maintained school (Smith *et al.*, 2003). Rudd *et al* (2004b) found other examples of sharing resources in partnerships, including getting access to a composer-in-residence, new pupil learning materials and arts materials at a specialist school.

The creation of joint facilities

The creation of joint facilities was reported to have occurred within culture-based collaborations, particularly those bringing schools of different faiths together. Two instances, for example, of schools of different faith backgrounds working to create a community meeting/drop-in facility are described within the literature (DfES, 2007c). As previously mentioned, one of the instances was a Muslim school and a Catholic school working together to run a café to raise funds for the Afghanistan Appeal. A group of staff and students met several times to plan the project, and then they jointly leased some premises and served meals to local women. Following the collaboration, the pupils have continued to meet to develop other joint activities. The aim is for pupils to deliver a religious education module on their faith to pupils in the other school.

Joint purchases of equipment

The joint purchasing of equipment was another aspect of ‘sharing facilities’ noted within the sources examined. The North West Essex rural consortium, which was designed to overcome the ‘rural barrier’ of schools in geographic isolation, focused on the development of ICT capacity to allow better collaboration (DfES, 2007d). One strand of this project was to jointly purchase laptop computers for use by 40 pupils across the consortium who would otherwise have no access to computing facilities, and consequently were felt to be at risk of underperforming at key stage 4. A consortium intranet is also being developed which will facilitate communication between schools, but also provide those with laptops with access to e-learning opportunities. In this case, the equipment was shared between the schools according to need, but in other joint purchase collaborations schools have entered into rotation or time-sharing arrangements, e.g. sharing specialist audio-visual equipment or subscriptions to database services (Rees, 1996).

5.3 Sharing pupils

Pupil sharing or exchange occurred in two main ways:

- pupils accessing courses on offer in partner schools
- pupils in one school making a specific contribution to the partner school.

Accessing courses in partner schools

One feature of some school networks has been to allow pupils to access courses run or hosted by schools other than their own. This has been prompted in situations where small schools lack capacity to offer a full range of courses or where local conditions call for a very broad vocational curriculum (often as a result of the requirement of the 14–19 curriculum reform). For example, Morris (2007) describes the ‘Kirklees Learning Passport’, a modularised curriculum offer which will allow pupils in schools in Kirklees collegiates to access courses at institutions across their collegiate (this scheme was in development at the time the author was writing).

Making a contribution to a partner school

Another form of pupil exchange was where pupils were involved in making a specific contribution to partner schools, and this was a particular feature of culture-based collaborations. One project, partly funded by the ISSP programme, and directed by the University of Surrey, has seen sixth form students from state and independent schools working together to provide teaching assistance in primary school classrooms under the guidance of an undergraduate ‘manager mentor’ (Sharp *et al.*, 2002). Similarly, in an inter-faith partnership between Muslim and Catholic secondary schools, pupils contributed to religious education modules in the partner schools running workshops entitled ‘Being a Muslim Today’ and ‘Being a Catholic Today’. Pupils from schools of different faith backgrounds also shared playtimes and assemblies (DfES, 2007c).

Key points

- The literature highlighted various forms of collaborative activity that involved sharing practice, or offered the potential to share practice. Professional development and information sharing appeared to be central activities in most collaborations and a wide range of joint activities and projects were also evident.
- Many schools worked together on joint planning and school development activities focused around a range of subjects and there were instances of staff being shared in a variety of ways, for example, through staff exchange visits/observations, the sharing of Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) and staff being loaned to the partner school.
- There were several ways that schools collaborated by sharing facilities or equipment, for example, by sharing curriculum facilities (e.g. shared sports facilities), through the creation of joint facilities (e.g. the establishment of a drop-in centre used by pupils from both schools) and the joint purchasing of equipment (e.g. IT equipment).
- There was evidence within the literature of schools in culture-based collaborations sharing facilities to mutual benefit, most notably in Independent/State School Partnerships (ISSPs), where the sharing of curriculum facilities (particularly, sports, arts and ICT facilities) was one of the most commonly cited forms of contact between the two sectors.
- Examples of schools creating joint facilities included two instances of schools of different faith backgrounds working to create a community meeting or drop-in facility, which they used together.
- Pupil sharing or exchange occurred in two main ways: where pupils accessed courses on offer in partner schools to ensure that they receive a broader choice of options and where pupils in one school made a specific contribution to the partner school. The latter was a particular feature of culture-based collaborations, for example, Muslim students running a course on their faith for a Catholic school.

6 The role of outside agents in supporting inter-school collaboration

This section considers the support provided by external agents in the establishment and maintenance of inter-school collaborations. It includes the roles of local authorities, government and other external organisations.

6.1 The role of local authorities

Thirteen out of the 39 sources identified some form of local authority support as being provided for inter-school collaboration. This section discusses the types of inter-school collaboration local authorities were involved in, the extent of local authority involvement, the varied roles that they took and the issues associated with their involvement.

Types of collaboration local authorities were involved in

Analysis of the literature suggested that local authorities tended not to be involved, or to be less heavily involved, in certain types of collaborations. In particular, this included culturally-based collaborations, such as faith/multi-cultural and international collaborations, and ISSPs (although also NLCs). They appeared to play more of a role in local federations/collegiates and school clusters and in collaborations supported by government initiatives, such as Beacon/Specialist/Leading Edge schools and Diversity Pathfinders. It was often noted that, where they did have a role, this could range from a key role in both initiation and maintenance of collaborative working to a lower key support/facilitation role. It was evident from the literature that, even when collaborations had been set up under the umbrella of the same initiative (e.g. Excellence clusters), the level/extent of support from the local authority varied from one local authority to another.

The extent of local authority involvement

With regard to the extent of local authority, some models are described within the literature. Williams and Thorpe (1998) described three models of local authority support for the collaboration between small rural schools:

- **Schools freely operating within a local authority framework:** This is where patterns of collaboration vary in the extent they are supported and encouraged and the use of the collaboration by the schools. Schools are organised in groups depending on the secondary school catchment area.
- **Highly structured and centrally organised collaboration:** This type of collaboration depends to a large extent on local authority guidance and provision for In-Service Education and Training (INSET), through the advisory team. Groups of schools are based on catchment areas, with a management team of headteachers and an overall coordinator. Schools opt into the system through a service level agreement (SLA), where, for a set price, they purchase a package of services. Needs are identified initially as a school and then priorities are set on a catchment group basis. Group coordinators meet with advisors to agree on a menu.
- **Collaboration within a developmental framework:** This is where leadership for professional development consists of a small team led by the professional development officer. A variety of forms of collaboration amongst schools is encouraged. INSET coordinators are identified for each cluster and the local authority provides training centrally for these clusters. A central coordinator's budget pays for training and meetings and for the coordinator to manage the INSET activities. Schools release a proportion of their funding to form the coordinator's budget. The framework is designed by the INSET team for development and has key features: monitoring and evaluation; development of a model for collaborative INSET practice; effective dissemination of good practice and provision.

Similarly, Rudd *et al.* (2004a), when examining Beacon Schools, developed a typology of local authority roles based on the extent of their involvement:

- **No involvement:** Where the local authority was reported to have no ongoing involvement in relation to the collaboration under investigation.

- **Moderate involvement:** This was also described as ‘light touch facilitating’ and usually took three forms: the local authority sending a representative to meetings between schools, the local authority acting as a ‘conduit of information’ and the local authority operating as a broker between schools.
- **Increasing involvement:** This tended to be more strategic and was exemplified in a variety of ways: actively brokering and supporting contacts between schools; setting up and attending regular meetings between schools; funding conferences or training events; identifying and building upon successful models for sharing good practice.

Box 6.1 *The extent of local authority involvement*

Beacon Schools (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a)

The authors note that local authorities have a key role to play in Beacon Schools in bringing schools (and other partners) together for their mutual benefit. This is described as being part of their management responsibility for the local school system and their school improvement remit.

Moderate local authority involvement

Within this study, a headteacher described how the local authority had always sent a representative to the meetings and how their link inspector had got involved. The local authority had also acted as broker. The local authority literacy consultants were noted to mention the Beacon work when they go into other schools and some schools had contacted the Beacon School as a result. The local authority also reported about Beacon Schools in their newsletter and in their annual continuing professional development (CPD) course booklet.

Moderate to increasing involvement

In this local authority, the headteacher reported that the local authority had understood the spirit of Beacon School work and they were supportive in every way (other than financially). The local authority held termly meetings for Beacon and Specialist Schools for the exchange

ideas. They were also planning to start a website. The advisory staff, who were reported to be very helpful, joined the projects as equals and as learners alongside others.

Increasing involvement

One headteacher described how the links with the local authority had always been strong and that they have a strong cooperative group of Beacon Schools. The headteachers meet regularly, plan collaboratively and are supported by the local authority, which has recently appointed a senior advisor as Beacon School coordinator. When quite a lot of schools got Beacon status they established the Beacon cluster with local authority involvement in the form of a senior advisor. When the schools meet, they put together a summary sheet so that the local authority representative can go away and suggest other schools contact them. In addition, in another area, a headteacher reported how the Beacon School met each term with the local authority senior school improvement advisor to share good practice.

Having discussed the extent of involvement, the next section outlines the different local authority roles described within the literature.

The varied roles of local authorities

Examination of the literature within this study suggested that local authority involvement in inter-school collaboration took a variety of forms, with the most common roles being:

- providing support and advice
- establishing or initiating collaboration
- a conduit for information exchange
- providing resources and funding
- brokering collaboration
- facilitating collaboration
- providing leadership or management.

- **Providing support and advice:** It was noted, for example, that Specialist School collaborations received good support from the advisory service within the local authority (Aiston *et al.*, 2002) and that, in many collaborations, the local authority was a source of experience and expertise (Arnold, 2006).
- **Establishing or initiating collaboration:** In collegiates and school clusters, for example, the local authority was said to have played a significant role in shaping the early thinking and the framework for collaboration (Farrar *et al.*, 2005). The establishment of Collegiate Academies by the local authority was said to be influenced by the long-term success of other partnerships they had initiated (Rutherford and Jackson, 2006).
- **A conduit for information exchange:** Within the Diversity Pathfinder Initiative, one local authority was reported to have set up and maintained an effective practice network database (Woods *et al.*, 2006). Within the Beacon Schools Scheme, local authorities were said to be identifying and building on models for sharing good practice (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). In one independent/local authority school collaboration, the local authority published a newsletter each term (Smith *et al.*, 2003).
- **Providing resources and funding:** In some Beacon Schools, local authorities funded conferences and training (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). In one instance of international twinning a grant was received from the local authority (DfES, 2007e).
- **Brokering collaboration:** Many different types of collaboration were said to be brokered by local authorities (Arnold, 2006). In federations the local authority was said to play a key role in seeking the support of the successful school (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005).
- **Facilitating collaboration:** This was demonstrated in a variety of ways. In collegiates one local authority ran surgery sessions for pairs of clusters to clarify their project focus and to draw upon network to network learning (Farrar *et al.*, 2005). In independent/state school partnerships one local authority hosted meetings each term for the headteachers involved (Smith *et al.*, 2003).
- **Providing leadership or management:** In federations, the local authority was typically involved in a leadership capacity (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005), whilst in Excellence clusters, local authority personnel act as cluster coor-

dinators or directors so that they have a strategic overview (McMeeking *et al.*, 2004).

Other local authority roles, each noted in a few cases, included the monitoring and evaluation of collaborations, taking part as an active partner as part of collaborations and making inter-local authority links about collaboration.

Issues associated with local authority involvement

Williams and Thorpe (1998) state that the local authority can have a powerful influence over inter-school collaboration and, in some instances (e.g. collegiates and Diversity Pathfinders), strong support from the local authority was thought to be more likely to give the partnership credibility or a higher profile (Morris, 2006; Woods *et al.*, 2006). Conversely, a general lack of support from the local authority was felt to hinder collaborative activities (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998; Rudd *et al.*, 2004a).

The nature of local authority support was thought to be key. One headteacher of a school involved in an ISSP commented, for example, that the role of the local authority was ‘huge, absolutely huge. It just wouldn’t work without the involvement of the LEA and its officers’. However, there was a view that the local authority could be an enabler or a barrier depending on how this process was handled (Burns, 2003). It was considered important to get the right balance between taking the lead and allowing schools to take ownership of the collaboration and for the local authority not to impose a model on schools (Farrar *et al.*, 2005). When driven by those involved, this was thought to be a powerful motivator and maintaining factor (Thorpe and Williams, 2002). Local authority support was said to be more effective when the local authority had a specific member of staff with responsibility for working with the collaboration and the lack of such a role was thought to hinder collaborative activity (Williams and Thorpe, 1998; Smith *et al.*, 2003).

Examination of the literature also raised issues regarding the resources that local authorities are able to provide and the skills required to successfully facilitate collaboration between schools. Ribchester and Edwards, in 1998, when discussing clusters of small rural schools, stated that local authorities recognise that fewer resources may lead to sporadic commitment from schools to collaboration. However, they go on to talk about the limited

money available centrally over which local authorities have control and the rationalisation of support services. The particular skills required for effective facilitation of collaborations were also discussed within the literature. The need for local authority personnel to have professional development in this respect was noted. Morris (2007) talks about the LEARNING project, which was set up by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in response to growth in all sorts of school networks. This focuses on training local authority personnel in the skills required for effectively supporting inter-school collaborations, such as facilitation, brokering, mediation etc., and provides local authorities with opportunities to test their plans for collaboration against the experience of others.

6.2 The role of government

From analysis of the 39 sources, government support was evident in 11 cases. However, their involvement in inter-school collaboration (aside from provision of government funding in some instances) appeared to be somewhat limited.

In the majority of cases, government support was associated with collaborations which were linked to key government initiatives, for example, the Beacon Schools Scheme and ISSPs (Ofsted, 2005; Rudd *et al.*, 2004a), or linked to key government agendas, for example, local collegiates were identified as a key vehicle for personalised learning (Morris, 2007). As such, these collaborations were usually financed through government funding and, in some instances, the government also provided a structure and guidance for their operation. There was, however, also an example of a federation where the DfES had been instrumental in seeking the support of successful schools (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005) and, in two instances, NLCs were reported to have grown out of government-instigated EAZs (Powell *et al.*, 2004).

6.3 Support from other outside bodies

Twenty of the 39 sources referred to other outside bodies which had been instrumental in supporting inter-school collaboration in some way. The most common of these included the following organisations:

- **NCSL:** The NCSL was the most frequently cited external organisation, other than local authorities, providing support for inter-school collaboration (e.g. Hill, 2004). The NCSL has driven and supported the growth of networks and has provided professional development for local authorities to support networks. This external expertise is considered an important element in initiating and sustaining networks. Their involvement extends to the provision of regional facilitators who organise sessions, coordinate communications, distribute newsletters, complete research and circulate materials. They fund teachers' time to plan and attend meetings.
- **Local employers and businesses:** Local employers and businesses were reported to be supporting collaboration by providing funding, expertise and facilitation. This was evident in ISSPs, Diversity Pathfinders and a rural consortium (Ofsted, 2005; DfES, 2007d; Woods *et al.*, 2006).
- **Learning and Skills Council (LSC):** The LSC took on the role of broker between schools and was the principal funder of collaboration in some instances, e.g. collegiates, rural consortium and Leading Edge Partnerships (Burns, 2003; Morris, 2007; DfES, 2007d).
- **University/HE institutions:** HE institutions took a role in providing expertise to collaborations. For example, within networks, teacher educators from a university were reported to stimulate and structure interchange and action research (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2002). They were evident as a form of support in Leading Edge Partnerships and Diversity Pathfinders, as well as networks (Burns, 2003; Woods *et al.*, 2006)

In addition, charities, such as Oxfam, Save the Children, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Citizenship Foundation, religious groups, such as Christian and Muslim, and international organisations, such as the Global Curriculum Project and Student Partnerships Worldwide, sometimes provided oversight and funding for collaborative projects, particularly those that were culture based. They were cited as supporting ISSPs, as well as diversity/faith twinning and international twinning (DfES, 2007a; Diversity and Dialogue, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2003)

The main forms of external support from agents other than local authorities and the government, in summary, included:

- **Funding:** Outside agencies sometimes provided grants for teachers' time or money for resources, e.g. cameras for pupils in Malawi (DfES, 2007f), as well as assisting with access to funding.
- **Expertise/professional development:** In international twinning, the WWF provided an opportunity to initiate institutional change and enabled staff to be trained in sustainable development (DfES, 2007a).
- **Facilitation, support and brokerage:** This was provided by the NCSL for networks and by businesses and local enterprises for ISSPs. A brokerage role was also undertaken in Leading Edge Partnerships by HE institutions, FE colleges or the LSC, as well as local authorities.
- **Initiation of collaboration:** In some instances, external organisations had been responsible for the instigation of collaborations. For example, the NCSL initiated networks (McGregor *et al.*, 2006) and an advisory group of international charities and faith groups had a role in the conception of projects focused on diversity/faith twinning (Diversity and Dialogue, 2007).

Key points

- In some forms of inter-school collaboration, particularly those instigated via government initiatives, local authorities appeared to have a key role in supporting partnerships. In contrast, local authorities were rarely reported to be involved in the development and maintenance of culture-based collaborations, such as inter-faith and multi-cultural twinning.
- The local authority role varied, not only between different types of collaboration but also within collaborations located under the same umbrella (e.g. amongst different Beacon School partnerships).
- The local authority took on varied roles: providing support and advice; establishing or initiating collaborations; as a conduit for information exchange; providing funding and resources; brokering collaborations; facilitating collaborations; and providing leadership and management.
- A number of issues were raised about local authority involvement. Not least, the importance of getting the right balance between the local authority taking a lead and allowing schools to take ownership of the collaboration, and the need to ensure that local authority staff have the skills to support collaborative working effectively.

- A range of other external bodies appear to have been involved in a support capacity for inter-school collaboration. These organisations included the NCSL, the LSC, local employers and businesses and HE institutions. They tended to take on similar roles to local authorities and were involved in initiation of collaboration, facilitating or brokering collaboration and providing funding and expertise.
- In the literature reviewed, charities, religious groups and international organisations were said to play a role in some collaborations, particularly in supporting culture-based collaborations, such as inter-faith twinning and international twinning, as well as ISSPs. They sometimes provided oversight and funding for these projects.

7 Gains of inter-school collaboration

This section focuses on the benefits or gains of inter-school collaboration for schools, school staff and their pupils. All of the sources, bar three, identified gains that arose from inter-school collaboration (one of the three sources focused on a collaboration still at the very early stages of development). The benefits have been grouped together under common themes and Table 7.1 at the end of the chapter provides a detailed summary of all the benefits featured in the literature. As noted previously in Chapter 3, the gains link closely with the intended outcomes of collaboration, suggesting that, in many instances, their overall aims are achieved.

7.1 Benefits for schools

Before describing the various benefits associated with inter-school collaboration, two sources made the general point that schools are able to achieve a lot more working together, than they can working in isolation. A combined effort was deemed to produce better outcomes than relying on the efforts (and resources) of a single school. For example, one source, examining different types of collaboration, concluded:

From the evidence in the review it is difficult to see how some of these goals could have been achieved without networks and it is apparent that schools cannot tackle intractable issues such as social exclusion effectively in isolation

(Bell *et al.*, 2006, p. 6).

Similarly, another source, focusing on public/private partnerships, noted that:

Schools can pool resources to achieve things that they could never achieve alone ... [This makes it] a potential agent of change that should not be ignored ...

(Hanford *et al.*, 1997, p. 10)

Collaboration helps bring schools together to strengthen their efforts and in doing so, empowers schools that otherwise would be struggling to achieve

their aspirations. In addition to the general principle of a combined effort being more effective, the literature highlighted several specific advantages for schools taking part in collaborative activity. These fell into the key themes of:

- economic advantages
- school improvement/raising standards
- closer relationships between schools
- greater awareness and understanding between schools
- organisational improvements.

Economic advantages

Most frequently, sources described ways in which inter-school collaboration made economic sense. Often this related to a pooling of resources whereby schools would join forces and in doing so, gain access to a greater range of staff, facilities and services. This was particularly relevant to small schools who could sometimes struggle to offer a comprehensive education package, because of their limited finances. Similarly, some sources referred to the economies of scales achieved by grouping together. In this way, it was possible to make savings on costs, such as school administration (Rees, 1996). Joint purchasing was also seen as helpful as it enabled the sharing, rather than the duplication of equipment, which could be expensive if schools had to buy their own (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). Sources also noted that groups of schools were able to draw on funding streams that they would not normally be eligible for, therefore boosting their financial capacity (Bell *et al.*, 2006).

Box 7.1 Economic advantages

Federations (Thorpe and Williams, 2002)

In a federation of Welsh schools the pooling together of resources (both staff and financial) meant that the children enjoyed a much richer and varied curriculum. For example, sufficient funding had been released to hire suitable premises for PE and games and, by bringing the children together, there were now viable numbers for team sports.

School improvement/raising standards

School improvement, or raising standards was often one of the main aims and one of the main outcomes of collaboration, and this is linked to increased pupil attainment discussed under pupil gains in section 7.3. A key aim of Specialist Schools, for example, as highlighted by a local authority advisor, was to achieve higher standards within the Specialist Schools themselves, as well as higher standards in their partner schools (Aiston *et al.*, 2002). Many sources also claimed that pupil attainment levels had risen as a consequence of collaborative activity. For example, an analysis of exam GCSE results found that these had improved at a faster rate in Collegiate Academies than the average results for the rest of the city (Rutherford and Jackson, 2006). The factors behind these improvements, however, were not usually discussed in the literature. In one instance (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005), an increase in pupil performance was linked to a number of other collaborative outcomes, e.g. curriculum reform, sharing of good practice, and professional development opportunities.

Box 7.2 School improvement/raising standards

Specialist Schools (Aiston *et al.*, 2002)

Specialist Schools which had provided specialist teaching in their feeder primary schools felt that this had helped raise standards of pupil performance in their own schools. They had benefited from having year 7 pupils with a higher level of academic achievement and a more consistent level of knowledge. For example, one language college had provided each of their feeder primary schools with a specialist French teacher so that pupils entering the school in year 7 now had a better understanding of French and are all at a more standardised level. As a result, the pupils progressed quicker and the school had now been able to introduce pupils to a second language in year 7.

Different types of collaboration (Rudd *et al.*, 2004b)

A study looked at how schools in 12 local authority case-study areas had worked together to foster the development and spread of innovative ideas and to share best practice. Schools were asked specifically

about the impact on pupil performance and some were able to identify particular pieces of collaborative work that had led to an increase in standards. For example, primary schools had worked together to provide literacy projects which were leading to improvements in speaking and writing. According to one headteacher, 'Partnership teaching is the single most important thing in improving performance.' Transition partnerships were also described by a number of teachers as a way of overcoming the dip in performance, as children adjust to a new regime in secondary school. Similarly, sports partnerships with Specialist Schools had led to measurable improvements in performance in sport.

Closer relationships between schools

Several sources noted that, through collaboration, much closer links had been fostered between participating schools. The experience had helped schools develop a culture of communication and trust whereby they were able to work well together with a shared sense of purpose. Two further sources commented on the mutual support enjoyed by collaborating schools, in particular, the input of other staff and headteachers. The bonds formed between schools can ultimately lead to improvements in performance as indicated in the example below. In some cases, the experience was said to lay the foundations for future partnership work and to extending the collaborative arrangements to other schools (McMeeking *et al.*, 2004 and see example below).

Box 7.3 *Closer relationships between schools*

ISSP (Sharp *et al.*, 2002)

An ISSP brought together two secondary schools, initially to work on two projects focusing on literacy and art. The literacy strand involved sixth formers from one school acting as mentors for year 7 pupils at the other. The art strand brought together 20 GCSE students (ten from each school) for three-dimensional artwork under the direction of a visiting professional artist. Further links (in sport and drama) have subse-

quently been developed and the partnership secured extra funding, enabling it to add more partners. Outside of this ISSP scheme, one school has extended its partnership activities to make links with other schools in the areas of initial teaching training and a community service programme for students.

Greater awareness and understanding between schools

Perhaps stemming from the closer relationship noted above, it was purported that collaborative working can also break down the barriers that may exist between different types of schools. Working together on joint projects can broaden perspectives and challenge the preconceptions of staff and pupils. Further still, by adopting a shared aspiration, schools are likely to become less competitive and more collaborative. Such impacts were reported in relation to inter-faith collaborations and where independent and state schools were brought together (Hanford *et al.*, 1997., Ofsted, 2005., DfES, 2007c).

Box 7.4 *Greater awareness and understanding of other schools*

ISSPs (Turner, 2005)

Reflecting on ISSPs, headteachers felt that there were some misconceptions, mainly based upon limited knowledge of each other: ‘I knew very little about independent education. You hear many stories of elitism and so on but we went into the school and saw children very similar to our own and they were hard working but they have the same problems as our own.’ Having recognised these commonalities, it was possible to consider the mutual benefits that could be derived by joining forces and tackling issues together: ‘In many cases, imagined barriers ... have now been breached and now people are looking in a holistic sense to saying “how can we actually do our job best in terms of empowering ... our children, regardless of sector?”. They are saying, “Why don’t we share things for the mutual gain of our children?”’

Organisational improvements

The literature pointed to a number of different organisational benefits arising from collaborative activity. For example, some sources reported improvements to the management of schools, achieved through the sharing of best practice. Other sources highlighted that planning was now a collective process, drawing on the ideas of other schools, therefore making it more effective (Arnold, 2006). There were also references to schools adopting new practices and improvements to data management systems. In all these cases, the benefits derived from having access to a widened network of professional knowledge which can provide support, advice, inform and help develop organisational practices.

Box 7.5 *Organisational improvement*

Excellence clusters (McMeeking *et al.*, 2004)

Reporting on the impacts of Excellence clusters, McMeeking *et al.*, 2004 noted that some headteachers referred to changes that cluster working had made to the internal cultures of schools. For example, a primary headteacher said that she was now meeting with colleagues (within the school) on a regular basis. Experience of working collaboratively with other schools had underlined the need to apply the same approach to internal school dynamics. Hence the school was moving away from a competitive culture to one which was much more team based and collaborative. The teacher described this as a return to the way schools worked ‘in the old days’.

In addition to the five main benefit themes, there were also mentions of improved partnerships between schools, the local authority and the community as a result of collaborative work.

7.2 Benefits for staff

This second section focuses on the benefits of inter-school collaboration specifically for the staff within the school. The main themes were:

- exchange of ideas and good practice
- training and professional development
- overcoming professional isolation
- staff confidence, motivation and morale.

Exchange of ideas and good practice

Undoubtedly, the most prevalent benefit for staff involved in inter-school collaboration was the chance to learn from others through the exchange of ideas. This was evident in over half of the sources reviewed. Bringing together professionals from different schools, and therefore different circumstances, was felt to encourage the transmission of knowledge and sometimes good practice. As well as facilitating the transfer of ideas, another important benefit is that inter-school collaboration might encourage schools to reflect upon their established practices and to discuss and explore professional issues together. Seeing something tried and tested in one school can provide the stimulus for introducing similar approaches in your own working environment. Thus, inter-school dialogue was also said to encourage innovation and creativity.

Box 7.6 *Exchange of ideas and good practice*

Beacon Schools (Rudd *et al.*, 2004b)

Following a five-year evaluation of the Beacons Schools Initiative the authors found that the sharing of expertise had been a major factor in the schools' development. One Beacon headteacher described how effective the initiative had been for him and his school team: 'It has been a real privilege to be invited into other schools and to learn so much, to have that more global view of education has been absolutely fantastic.' Many of the evaluation interviewees felt it was the increased contact that stimulated school improvement: 'We're sharing good ideas with others and soaking up what goes on there too.' This particular interviewee felt that there was more vibrancy and energy in the school than before and this was due to the initiative breaking down the barriers and driving a 'force of collaboration'.

Training and professional development

In addition to the possibility of exchanging ideas informally, sources also reported improvements to professional development, both in terms of access and quality. For example, small schools could join forces to deliver INSET training, thereby make it more effective and efficient (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998). Similarly, by expanding the pool of expertise, they are likely to gain access to a wider range of professional development avenues. In terms of long-term career opportunities, one source noted that teachers who are part of a federation will have more choice in terms of career pathways (Arnold, 2006). It is not surprising, therefore, given outcomes such as enhanced professional development and a sharing of ideas, that collaboration was said to result in higher levels of teaching expertise. Specifically noted, were skills in teaching and learning, leadership and particular curriculum areas.

Box 7.7 *Training and professional development*

Specialist Schools (Aiston *et al.*, 2002)

One of the main aims of the Specialist Schools was the sharing of ideas and dissemination of good practice. According to one headteacher, in the investigation of a number of case studies, the network aims to encourage dialogue between Specialist Schools and to make sure that the expertise in Specialist Schools is shared as widely as possible with other schools in the county. Comments emphasised that these school partnerships are a two-way process and that the Specialist Schools also benefited from partner schools. Teachers in Specialist Schools felt that they had benefited considerably in terms of professional development. The partnerships with other schools had created opportunities for them (for example, lesson observation in other schools) which had not necessarily been available to them before. These new opportunities encouraged teachers to share ideas with teachers in other schools, reflect on their own teaching practice and develop new teaching strategies. It was considered important, particularly for schools with a stable teaching force, to see what other teachers are doing and to get new teaching ideas from other schools.

Overcoming professional isolation

Putting schools in touch with one another and fostering closer working relationships was said by several sources to tackle the issue of professional isolation. Staff were felt to benefit from being part of an extended professional community, with greater opportunities for problem sharing and peer support.

Box 7.8 *Overcoming professional isolation*

Networked Learning Communities (Powell *et al.*, 2004)

An evaluation of NLCs revealed that, for a large number of teachers, the collaborative experience had given them a wide network of support which reduced their professional isolation. One teacher, for example, noted the value of meeting with staff at another school who had similar experiences to her own. This view was shared by a second interviewee who explained, ‘The good thing for me is moving in wider circles than being stuck in your own classroom – meeting other staff, talking and sharing. It’s stepping outside of the linear. Usually, we haven’t got time to step back and reflect.’

Staff confidence, motivation and morale

With an augmented support network, increased access to professional development and growing expertise, it follows that another major collaborative outcome for staff relates to their general sense of well-being. Five sources noted increases in staff confidence and the same number referred to improvements in staff motivation and morale.

Box 7.9 *Staff confidence, motivation and morale*

Different types of collaboration (Rudd *et al.*, 2004b)

In a review of partnership activity across 12 local authorities it was found that enhanced teacher confidence was a major outcome of collaboration.

For example, two new qualified teachers reported impact in this area. One, who was working in a partnership based on the arts, admitted that she had not felt confident teaching the arts when she first came to the school but had since gained from interacting with others: ‘There are five of us teachers to bounce ideas off each other.’ Meanwhile, visits to other schools enabled teachers to compare their ways of working with their peers, to share concerns and to realise their own worth, as one remarked, ‘It is nice to see that other teachers face the same difficulties.’

7.3 Benefits for pupils

This section focuses on the benefits of inter-school collaboration for the students. Four main categories of benefit emerged from the review:

- enhanced educational experiences
- increased pupil attainment
- interaction with pupils from other schools
- improved transition to secondary school.

It should be noted that, in addition to the above, the literature also mentioned gains in the area of pupil attainment and a few sources also reported better engagement in learning amongst pupils, which may contribute to an increase in overall pupil performance. These gains were detailed earlier in section 7.1.

Enhanced educational experiences

The most commonly cited gain for pupils was that their educational experiences were enhanced through the collaboration of schools. Very often, this related to an extension of the curriculum or opportunities to undertake activities that they would not normally have access to. For example, by combining classes, there would be viable numbers for out-of-school excursions (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998). Moreover, contact with teachers from other schools injected a new level of expertise into specific areas, such as dance and music, thereby enriching the pupils’ experiences of these subjects

(Ofsted, 2005). Collaborations on an international level were often noted as adding greater variety and interest into the curriculum, e.g. in ICT pupils produced a website on Malawi and in food technology they examined the diets of their overseas counterparts (DfES, 2007f). There were also references to a greater personalisation of the curriculum for students, that by drawing on a wider range of resources and staff expertise, they were more likely to receive a curriculum which was closely suited to their individual needs (see below). Vulnerable, disaffected or excluded pupils in particular were cited as benefiting from a widened network of resources and access to specialist provision (Bell *et al.*, 2006).

Box 7.10 *Enhancing educational experiences*

Rural consortium (DfES, 2007d)

Schools in the rural area of North West Essex formed a consortium in order to build professional links between teachers and develop ICT capacity between institutions. It was recognised that, within each consortium school, there were students who were underperforming. One reason was seen as a lack of IT in their homes. Funding was sought to purchase internet linked laptops for 40 students across the consortium. The schools appointed an IT specialist to help in the creation of an intranet and for sourcing e-learning materials. By joining forces the participating schools were better able to meet the needs of their students.

Local school partnerships (DfES, 2005)

The Central Gateshead sixth form (cg6) is a collaborative venture between three schools and Gateshead College. By building on the strengths of each partner, cg6 has offered students a broader range of subjects, including 20 new AS and A level courses and a greater variety of opportunities for work-related learning. By sharing staff and resources, the consortium has also provided opportunities for post-16 learning in a wider range of locations, including some at the two 11–16 schools which has encouraged reluctant students to stay on at 16, by making available a base in a familiar environment.

Increased pupil attainment

The outcome of raised pupil attainment has already been touched on in the section 7.1 on school gains. There were also examples within the literature of gains in attainment for specific groups of pupils where these tended to be the focus of collaborations, for example, pupils with SEN or low attainers. The rationale behind gains in pupil attainment was not detailed, but it was suggested it might be linked to improved pupil attitudes to learning that were also noted to be a benefit of collaboration, although not as frequently mentioned as other pupil gains. Indeed, four other sources reported that attitudes to learning had improved as a result of collaborative ventures and it may be this greater engagement with the learning, which culminates in higher attainment levels.

Box 7.11 *Pupil attainment*

ISSPs (DfES, 2007b)

The Urban Scholars Intervention programme was a joint initiative between three state schools and an independent school. The programme involved eight Saturday workshops focusing on developing students' critical thinking and performance in academic subjects. After the workshops, teachers noted improvements in aspiration and confidence as well as performance and attitude, especially in disaffected pupils. The scheme was reported to be worthwhile, not just in terms of increased attainment, but in the way it had transformed students' attitudes to learning.

Interaction with pupils from other schools

Inevitably, where two schools or a group of schools are drawn together there is likely to be a merging of cultures, faiths, backgrounds and experiences. Second in the list of pupil gains, therefore, was the opportunity for pupils to encounter and work with young people from different backgrounds. Meeting pupils from a different economic, ethnic or religious group was said to heighten knowledge and understanding of alternative lifestyles and beliefs.

For example, a group of schools came together to design and shoot a campaign video (Diversity and Dialogue, 2007). Prior to the project it was noted that students rarely travelled out of their immediate community and did not mix with students who lived in very close proximity, but were at different schools. Hence, they had few opportunities to meet with other young people and learn about their lives. The project therefore promoted teamwork and also provided a chance to consider wider global issues that affected them as young people, regardless of background or faith. One participant appeared to enjoy the collaborative ethos: 'It's been well good to work with other schools and meet different people. I think there should be more projects like this' (student). Meanwhile, knowledge gained through an international twinning initiative had facilitated the development of 'global citizens' amongst participating pupils (DfES, 2007a).

Box 7.12 *Interaction with pupils from other schools*

Multicultural twinning (DfES, 2007b)

A Roman Catholic primary school participates with a neighbouring community school where pupils are all Muslim. The two schools share assemblies, playtime once a week, coffee facilities for parents, a combined artist in residence programme, a transition programme and drama/art/PE activities. A combined drama performance brought parents together from both schools and the parents travelled by bus to the theatre. Without these links it was said that the Muslim pupils would not have the opportunity to interact with children of other faiths.

Improved transition to secondary school

Where secondary schools worked together with their feeder primaries, the younger children are likely to be brought into closer contact with the secondary school environment and way of life. Thus, some sources contended that the transition to secondary school was made much easier for these particular pupils.

Box 7.13 Improved transition to secondary school

Specialist Schools (Aiston *et al.*, 2002)

In an evaluation of partnerships between Specialist and non-specialist schools, one headteacher reported that joint activities with partner schools give primary pupils ‘insights into secondary school life’ and helped prepare them for the secondary school regime and higher levels of study. These partnerships also mean that pupils were familiar with the secondary school and some of the teachers. This was said to give them a sense of continuity and helped make the transition smoother.

Key points

- The main gains for schools taking part in inter-school collaboration were: economic advantages (e.g. sharing of resources, accessing new funding streams and economies of scale); school improvement and raised standards, including improvements in pupil attainment (e.g. from an enhanced curriculum and development of teacher expertise); the forging of closer relationships between participating schools and from this outcome, a greater awareness and understanding of other schools. It was said that bringing schools together can break down barriers so that they can work together in a mutually beneficial way.
- There were several ways in which school staff were thought to benefit from collaboration. These included opportunities to exchange ideas and good practice, and expanded avenues for training and professional development, which in turn refined their teaching expertise. Staff no longer suffered from a sense of professional isolation, instead, they had outlets to share and voice any concerns with a larger number of colleagues. Within an enriched support network it follows that gains in the areas of staff confidence, motivation and morale were also evident.
- Pupils were the third main group beneficiaries referenced. Most often, they were said to enjoy an enhanced educational experience (e.g. better choice of subjects, access to specialist teaching and opportunities for out-of-school excursions) and improved attainment. Socially, they were felt to

benefit from interacting with pupils from other schools. Where these pupils came from different backgrounds (e.g. faiths and cultures) there was also the possibility of increasing awareness and understanding of different lifestyles. Where partnerships existed between primary and secondary schools, increased contact was said to make the transition much easier for students moving onto secondary school.

Table 7.1 The benefits associated with inter-school collaboration: a summary

| Benefits for schools | |
|--|---|
| Economic advantages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to a wider pool of resources (staff, facilities and financial) • Access to new funding streams • Economies of scale and cost effectiveness (bringing classes together for excursions or trips, joint purchasing of equipment and services) |
| School improvement and raised standards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sharing of good practice and increased professional development for teachers fuels improvements in pupil attainment • Schools come together to offer a wider range of subjects or specialised teaching for specific groups resulting in the development of a curriculum which more closely responds to the needs of pupils |
| Closer relationships between schools and greater awareness of other schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to mutual support from heads and other teachers • Development of communication, mutual trust and commitment between schools participating in partnerships • Experience of collaboration lays the foundations for working with other schools in the future • Challenging misconceptions of other sectors and breaking down barriers • Recognising the commonalities that exist between schools • Understanding that different schools can work together for mutual benefit – cooperation rather than competition |
| Organisational improvements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to how schools are managed (by learning from other schools) • Opportunities to plan events, curriculum and projects collectively • Introduction of new practices (acquired from partnership schools) |
| Development of other relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved partnerships with the local authority • Increased community liaison |

Table 7.1 The benefits associated with inter-school collaboration: a summary *contd*

Benefits for school staff

| | |
|--|---|
| Exchange of ideas and good practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative working facilitates a transmission of knowledge, skills and good practice • Opportunities for reflection and discussion • Contact with other teachers and schools fosters creativity and innovation |
| Training and professional development opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widened opportunities for professional development (e.g. joint INSET sessions between schools) • Access to expertise and specialist knowledge (from a wider pool of staff) • An expansion of career pathways for teachers involved with a network of schools • Opportunities to learn informally through contact with an extended community of teachers and schools • Development of teaching expertise |
| Overcoming professional isolation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased dialogue and contact with other teachers reduces isolation and creates a culture of mutual support |
| Staff confidence, motivation and morale | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of teaching expertise, access to a support network and increased opportunities for professional development have knock-on effects for staff confidence, motivation and morale |

Benefits for school pupils

| | |
|--|--|
| Enhanced educational experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of the curriculum • Opportunities for out-of-school excursions (e.g. viable groups when classes combined) • Access to more personalised learning (e.g. support from specialist teachers) |
| Increased pupil attainment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved performance of individual students, particularly where the focus of collaboration, e.g. pupils with SEN, low attainers • Increasing engagement and improved attitudes to learning amongst pupils due to opportunities created from inter-school collaboration (more subject choices, support for disaffected students) |
| Interactions with pupils from other schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased contact with pupils from other schools • Experiencing other cultures through shared activities and learning • Greater awareness and understanding of pupils from different backgrounds, cultures and faiths |
| Improved transition to secondary school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships across phases familiarise children with the secondary school environment, thereby easing their transition |

8 Factors influencing collaboration

This section focuses on those factors that influence collaboration by facilitating or inhibiting it. Thirty-two of the 39 sources identified such factors. The factors have been grouped under the following headings:

- relationships between schools
- partnership processes/protocols
- staff qualities/skills
- support for the collaboration.

Table 8.1 at the end of the chapter provides a detailed summary of the factors discussed in the literature and their associated challenges.

8.1 Relationships between schools

There were several influencing factors that related to the relationship between the schools involved in collaboration:

- existing inter-school relationships
- values and culture
- equality between partners.

Existing inter-school relationships

It is evident from the literature that a history of collaboration between schools facilitates effective collaboration. Working relationships and linkages, as well as a culture of collaborating with other schools, are already in place to aid joint working (e.g. Lindsay *et al.*, 2005; Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). Lindsay *et al.* carried out an evaluation of the Federations Programme, asking the chairs of governors, headteachers and heads of year in a federation of schools to complete a questionnaire. They found that the facilitating factor mentioned most frequently by each of the three groups surveyed was having existing networks and links between federating schools that existed prior to the federation. This meant that trust and good working relationships were already present, and these had strongly aided the formation of federations.

However, a culture of competition between schools inhibits collaboration as there is a clear tension between competing and collaborating. The encouragement to collaborate sometimes sits uneasily with other government initiatives which appear to promote autonomy and competition (e.g. Arnold, 2006; Bell *et al.*, 2006; McMeeking *et al.*, 2004). The literature suggests that this competition is due to education reforms and an accountability framework that focuses on individual school performance, as well as increased competition for pupils (Woods *et al.*, 2006; Morris, 2007). In this climate, collaboration is inhibited as schools want to keep ideas to themselves to ensure they have a competitive edge and are focused solely on their own performance (e.g. Aiston *et al.*, 2002; Ribchester and Edwards, 1998).

Values and culture

Shared values and culture between collaborating schools facilitated collaboration, according to several sources (Burns, 2003; Thorpe and Williams, 2002). Where there were differences in values, in terms of educational philosophy, ethos or cultural norms, the literature suggested that schools could have difficulty working together (McMeeking *et al.*, 2004; Ribchester and Edwards, 1998; Shinnars, 2001; Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2002). However, Veugelers and Zijlstra (2002) write that, although differences in values can cause serious problems in partnerships, over time schools learn more from those other schools who do differ a lot from them. There were also suggestions that relationships could start on a negative footing (e.g. mistrust, misconception) and be overcome by the collaborative working over time (e.g. Turner, 2005; Powell *et al.*, 2004).

The literature also highlighted the fact that negative attitudes towards collaboration amongst staff can inhibit collaborations and that this is particularly the case for long-standing or jaded staff (e.g. Sharp *et al.*, 2002). This was evident particularly in some culture-based collaborations where negative stereotypes of other schools in the partnership were reported to inhibit collaboration, for example, between independent and state schools (Ofsted, 2005). This could be an issue schools need to overcome in inter-faith collaborations. One source that was focused on federations also cited staff resistance and fear as a barrier to collaborating, especially when staff feel their school might be amalgamated with another (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005).

Equality between partners

The literature suggested that equal relationships between schools, in terms of decision making, leadership, contribution to the collaboration, and benefit gained from it, helped facilitate collaborations (e.g. Aiston *et al.*, 2002; Arnold, 2006). In some collaborations, relationships between partners were initially unequal in nature, for example, where a successful school was linked to one deemed to be ‘failing’, or where a school was perceived to have a specific area of expertise. As Burns (2003) comments, collaborations will not succeed when good practice is done to one school by another, and all schools, even those classed as ‘failing’, have something to offer others. There were initial fears over the ‘Beacon School’ label and concern about the potential distancing effect of being seen as an ‘expert’ school (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). There was a concern from some schools that the collaborations were not equal and that there was a one-way transmission of learning from the Beacon Schools to other schools. One particular headteacher commented that ‘You’re sometimes almost apologising for being a Beacon School. Setting up one school as an expert is not the best way to go about it.’ For this particular interviewee, the main ethos of developing a collegiate and collaborative approach to raising standards in schools was tainted initially through awarding one school the ‘expert title’. Ribchester and Edwards (1998) state that it is difficult to achieve parity of input and mutual benefit. Where partnerships include schools at different ends of the performance spectrum, there is a danger of a dependency culture developing (Burns, 2003).

8.2 Partnership processes/protocols

There were several areas relating to the operation of the partnership itself and the manner in which it is conducted that influenced collaborations:

- having shared aims
- leadership
- involvement of all staff/stakeholders
- communication channels.

Having shared aims

The literature suggested that having shared aims facilitates the success of a collaboration (e.g. Aiston *et al.*, 2002; Burns, 2003; DfES, 2005; Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). It is important that partnership aims are clear and understood and owned by all involved and that evaluation is built into the collaboration to ensure that aims are being achieved (Bell *et al.*, 2006; Hanford *et al.*, 1997; Kerr *et al.*, 2003). Several sources suggested that collaboration is inhibited if there is a mismatch between the collective aims of a group of schools and the aims of the individual schools within the group, as this can mean that collaborative activity is not prioritised, and/or other activities/priorities detract from it (e.g. Bell *et al.*, 2006; Smith *et al.*, 2003; Rutherford and Jackson, 2006). It was felt there was a danger of the partnership detracting from the school's own vision and that trying to balance the needs of the individual school and the partnership can lead to loss of school autonomy (e.g. Ribchester and Edwards, 1998). Schlechty and Whitford (1998), in Shinnars (2001), state that difficulties with overcoming self-interest and arriving at mutuality amongst partners can present real challenges.

Leadership

Good quality, strong leadership is central to the success of collaborations, according to the literature (e.g. Arnold, 2006; Lindsay *et al.*, 2005; Williams and Thorpe, 1998). In particular, the literature suggests that it is important that headteachers are supportive and have vision for the collaboration, that there is effective management of activities (e.g. communication, organisational issues, evaluation) and that the leadership is within the partnership and not external to it (Ofsted, 2005; Woods *et al.*, 2006). Morris (2007), describing collegiate partnerships in one local authority, commented that the appointment of new leaders to providers within the partnership added energy and enthusiasm to the partnership as the incoming staff were committed to collaborative activity.

Involvement of all staff/stakeholders

The literature suggested that involvement of stakeholders in a school is a facilitating factor in collaborations. It is important to have staff at all levels

participating in collaborations and for those not directly involved to be kept informed (Burns, 2003; Hill, 2004; Ofsted, 2005). Collaborations are more successful when staff are involved in this way and when they know what is happening and have some input into the collaboration through consultation or involvement in decision making (Williams and Thorpe, 1998; Thorpe and Williams, 2002; Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). The literature also made clear that the involvement of other stakeholders, such as parents, businesses, community organisations and governors, also facilitated collaboration (Bell *et al.*, 2006; Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). Parental involvement was a particular success factor in collaborations centred on vulnerable, SEN or minority young people and the involvement of school governors was associated with collaborations having impact (Bell *et al.*, 2006; Ofsted, 2005). School governors played a supportive role in the context of collaborations, which aided collaborative activity, whilst the lack of such support inhibited collaborations (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005).

Communication channels

Linked to involvement of all staff and other stakeholders is the issue of communication. According to Hanford *et al.* (1997) and Lindsay *et al.* (2005), effective communication is a key facilitating factor for collaborations and the lack of it can be disastrous, so it is important that participants are able to communicate effectively with partners. The literature suggested that it was difficult to effectively communicate partnership issues and decisions to all those involved (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). Whilst regular meetings were thought to provide a useful structure for communication, it was noted that it could be hard to schedule regular meetings that all partners could attend because of other commitments (e.g. Smith *et al.*, 2003). Having a shared vocabulary between schools also facilitated collaborative activity (Burns, 2003; McGregor *et al.*, 2006; Williams and Thorpe, 1998; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003).

8.3 Staff qualities/skills

Two influential factors, although affected by partnership processes, were more inherent within staff and therefore have been grouped together under staff qualities/skills. They include staff commitment to the collaboration and staff knowledge and skills.

Commitment to the collaboration

The literature made clear that it is important that school staff are committed to the collaboration, to what it is aiming to achieve, and that this commitment needs to extend across the whole staff team, including both teachers and the school leadership (e.g. DfES, 2007a; Hill, 2004; Shinnars, 2001). The literature also highlights that it is important for staff to see the value in collaborating, that schools in the partnership are all equally committed to it and that the key individuals driving the collaboration remain involved (e.g. Powell *et al.*, 2004; Ribchester and Edwards, 1998; Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2002). Commitment was also one of the main drivers initiating collaborations (see section 3.1).

Staff skills and knowledge

The literature emphasised that inter-school collaboration is a demanding venture, and that a wide range of knowledge and skills are required which teachers do not necessarily have as they are often used to working alone (Leonard and Leonard, 2001). The authors note that collaboration is persistently absent in the work of teachers, and that given the necessary skills required to collaborate effectively, it is no surprise that school-to-school collaborations are seen as challenging. Teachers do not naturally have the requisite skills, they need to be developed. The authors suggest that teachers need opportunities to develop skills around consensus building, decision making, problem solving and conflict resolution. In order for collaborations to be successful, teachers need such skills in order to be able to work together to share ideas, arrive at a consensus, and move forward together in partnership. One source suggested that a lack of professional development directed towards the necessary skills inhibits collaboration (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003).

8.4 Support for the collaboration

Finally, there were two factors relating to supporting the collaboration that were particularly influential: funding and resources; and the availability of both internal and external support.

Availability of internal and external support

The literature highlighted the fact that support for collaborations is an important facilitating factor, as they need skilful internal facilitation and external support (e.g. Farrar *et al.*, 2005; Woods *et al.*, 2006; Williams and Thorpe, 1998). Both internal and external support was considered important. Issues were raised about the support available to collaborative partnerships. In particular, this related to the role of the local authority. Whilst it was considered necessary for local authorities to maintain a balance between intervention and support, this was sometimes reported to be difficult to maintain (Aiston *et al.*, 2002). The role of the local authority in inter-school collaboration is discussed in more depth in section 5.1, where examples are provided. In some instances, there was reported to be a lack of awareness in the local authority of links initiated by schools themselves (Smith *et al.*, 2003). In others, it was reported to be difficult for collaborative projects (for example, under the umbrella of ‘Diversity and Dialogue’) to find out about one another and for there to be little information and support available for those setting up new initiatives (Diversity and Dialogue, 2007).

Funding and resources

Having funding for the collaboration helped facilitate collaborations, according to the literature, as schools could pay for cover, buy necessary materials and pay for out-of-hours/extra work where necessary (e.g. Hanford *et al.*, 1997; Lindsay *et al.*, 2005; Rudd *et al.*, 2004b; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003). The literature called into question the sustainability of valuable projects and partnerships where funding is withdrawn (Ofsted, 2005; Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). There were examples given where continued collaboration was anticipated at the end of the funding period, but the loss of funding for release time for teachers was felt to mean that further developments would be more difficult to sustain (Powell *et al.*, 2004).

Future sustainability was not just about funding, but also about the commitment of staff and the availability of support (Morris, 2007). A lack of time for teachers to participate was a factor that hindered collaboration, and working in a collaborative way was reported to require an outlay of time for discussions and meetings and therefore entailed extended time commitments

and workloads for staff. Increased time pressures on heads and senior managers could lead to staff shortages in management (e.g. Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). According to Ribchester and Edwards (1998), the most significant practical difficulty in cluster groups was the additional workload for teachers, particularly those that take on a cluster coordinating role. According to one headteacher, ‘The bureaucratic demands imposed on individual school management make all the extra meetings a total nightmare.’

Some sources also suggested that the distance between schools is important if pupils and teachers are moving between schools, as more distance equates to greater time and cost for travel, making it more problematic to work collaboratively (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005; Thorpe and Williams, 2002; Ribchester and Edwards, 1998; Woods *et al.*, 2006).

Key points

The factors influencing collaborative working were grouped under four main themes: relationships between schools; partnership processes/protocols; staff qualities/skills; and support for collaboration (see Table 8.1).

- **Relationships between schools:** One of the primary factors influencing collaborative working was the existing relationship between schools. A prior history of cooperation between schools was said to facilitate working together, whilst a history of competitiveness, culture differences and a lack of equality between partners could hinder it.
- **Partnership processes/protocols:** The literature indicated that it was important for the collaborating schools to develop shared aims and values since a failure to do so could lead to collaborative activities not being prioritised or difficulties in balancing school and partnerships needs and, potentially, loss of school autonomy. Effective leadership of the partnership and support from senior management was also influential, as were the needs to involve all staff/stakeholders and to develop effective lines of communication.
- **Staff qualities/skills:** The commitment and involvement of all staff/stakeholders was considered an important factor in facilitating progress within collaborations and the need for staff involved in collaborations to have the

necessary skills to work collaboratively together was also cited as an influential.

- **Support for the collaboration:** The availability of adequate support for the partnership was also considered important as collaborations require skilful internal facilitation and external support. Having the funding and resources (including staff time) to implement collaboration was considered vital. Where funding ceases and where school staff find it a challenge to find the time for partnership activities, the sustainability of collaborations was questioned.

Table 8.1 The factors influencing collaboration: a summary

| | |
|--|---|
| Relationships between schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing inter-school relationships • Values and culture • Equality between partners |
| Partnership processes/protocols | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having shared aims • Leadership • Involvement of all staff/stakeholders • Communication channels |
| Staff qualities/skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to the collaboration • Staff skills and knowledge |
| Support for the collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of internal and external support • Funding and resources |

9 Effective collaborative working

Having discussed the factors influencing collaborative working, this chapter discusses the strategies that need to be put in place to address negative influences and to ensure that collaborative working is successful. It draws together areas of best practice identified within the literature (29 of the 39 sources identified elements of good practice) and recommendations which follow on from the findings detailed in previous chapters. The areas of good practice have been grouped under the following headings:

- inter-school relationships
- managing collaborations
- staff/personnel issues
- supporting collaborative activity.

9.1 Inter-school relationships

There were four main areas relating to good practice in inter-school relationships:

- ensuring equality between partners
- overcoming competitiveness
- counteracting culture differences
- strategies for building positive relationships.

Ensuring equality between partners

Often partnerships formed displayed elements of inequality, for example, those established through the Beacon Schools and Specialist Schools. However, it was reported that fears did not materialise due to the development of genuine, mutual partnerships and there was evidence that partnerships became more equal over time (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). This was considered to be due to the determination of school staff, who worked hard and put strategies in place to ensure a two-way agenda and to ensure that the partnership moved towards equality over time, and that there was a dialogue and a com-

mon agenda between partners. According to Ribchester and Edwards (1998), successful school clusters consist of equally committed schools, all contributing and benefiting to a similar degree, but this is hard to achieve and cooperation can be undermined if schools become greater ‘providers’ and others greater ‘receivers’. Groups therefore need active support from all headteachers and staff for them to be successful.

Overcoming competitiveness

The literature suggests that, where possible, collaborations should not be between schools that compete with each other and that, where there are issues of competitiveness, they need to be handled carefully (Burns, 2003; Veugeliers and Zijlstra, 2002). Morris (2007) suggests that a way to overcome competitive attitudes is to meet with school management teams separately to discuss principles and practice of the collaboration in detail prior to a meeting of all the headteachers together. Woods *et al.* (2006) also suggest that, for collaboration to be widespread, appropriate incentives need to be introduced to counterbalance those that encourage schools to be inwardly focused. It is necessary to spend time on resolving competition issues, developing trust and building a shared purpose and vision (Kerr *et al.*, 2003). It was suggested that relationships built on trust are vital in creating a strong network structure, but these do not happen by accident. Opportunities must be provided for face-to-face encounters and forms of communication, which are also important for building trust, need to be given due consideration (Kerr *et al.*, 2003; Turner, 2005). Several sources suggested that good relationships between participating staff, characterised by trust, openness, honesty, a supportive and positive approach, a sense of camaraderie and a resulting feeling of security about the collaboration, facilitate collaboration and can overcome a history of competition (e.g. Lindsay *et al.*, 2005; McGregor *et al.*, 2006; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003).

Example: overcoming competitiveness

Public/private school partnerships (Shinners *et al.*, 2001)

The patterns of behaviour amongst members of partnerships influenced whether collaborative activities were a success, especially when they

prevented tension from arising. For example, one school recognised that there is competition and envy between public and private schools, and therefore sought to develop common goals across all school partners, and to create an environment where schools worked together towards those goals and were not able to ignore each other.

Small primary school clusters (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998)

The authors state that if all schools in a cluster are not supportive of the partnership, it can have a negative effect. They quote one headteacher who states that governor willingness is vital because, if they feel competitive towards partner schools, the clustering will struggle and possibly fail. Parents too were reported to be very loyal to their schools and anxious for them to succeed. There need to be strategies to ensure that all stakeholders in an individual school see the value of collaboration and therefore support it.

Counteracting culture differences

The literature suggests that differences in culture can be overcome, as with competitiveness, by spending time on developing trust and positive relationships between staff, as well as building a shared purpose and vision (e.g. Kerr *et al.*, 2003; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003; McGregor *et al.*, 2006). In a rural consortium, for example, it was considered necessary to overcome initial suspicion between schools and to find the necessary time to develop the consortium in the initial stages (DfES, 2007d). It was also suggested that one of the most effective characteristics in overcoming tensions relating to different values/culture is a desire amongst partners to break down pre-existing stereotypes between the different schools (Shinners, 2001). The literature also suggests that it is good practice to put in place measures to help pupils deal with those from different backgrounds and schools. For example, Ofsted (2005) suggest training for pupil mentors in issues relating to dealing with those from different backgrounds. Diversity and Dialogue (2007), focusing on multi-faith collaborations, lists a number of ideas from young people about how to improve relationships between them. They state that inter-faith initiatives should allow young people to join without highlighting

differences in identity and that visits to places of worship should be promoted to increase understanding of different cultures and faiths. They advocate greater promotion of good projects (especially in the media) and the encouragement of informal discussions between different groups.

Example: counteracting culture differences

ISSPs (Turner, 2005)

Initially, within ISSPs, there were reported to be some misconceptions between schools, mainly based on limited knowledge of each other. According to one headteacher, 'I knew very little about independent education or independent schools. You hear many stories of elitism and so on but we went into the school and saw children very similar to our own and they were hard working but they had the same problems as our own. They had the whole range of academic ability and it was clear they could benefit from the expertise of my staff and we could benefit from the expertise of their staff. We could work for the benefit of each other's children.' Those involved in the partnerships came to recognise that the differences between the schools were not so great as to prevent good partnerships from being developed, with initial misconceptions often being very quickly dispelled.

Public/private school partnerships (Shinners *et al.*, 2001)

Breaking down stereotypes and weakening the formulaic thinking that partners had about each other were described as positive responses to the cultural difference challenge. The authors state that collaborations must recognise the conditions that can restrict success and that culture clash, turf protection and a lack of understanding of the other partner's environment and its needs can destroy a partnership. They quote other authors who state that attention must be paid to practical matters that can govern institutional life, such as time allocation and personnel turnover, as well as reward considerations and political pressures upon working members (e.g. Trubowitz, 1998). They go on to state that, having taken significant cultural differences into account, partners must seek to understand how they affect institutional life.

Strategies for building positive relationships

The literature suggests that it is good practice to develop positive relationships (i.e. those characterised by trust, openness, honesty, respect etc.) between staff across partner schools (Arnold, 2006; Leonard and Leonard, 2001; Woods *et al.*, 2006). Veugelers and Zijlstra (2002) state that it is important that this process engenders a climate where staff want to openly discuss their practice, not just promote their ideas. However, the development of such relationships takes time and the literature indicates that it is good practice to build time for relationship development into the project (e.g. Rudd *et al.*, 2004a; DfES, 2007d). Arnold (2006) writes that it is important to pilot projects to engender trust and embed the idea of collaboration, as well as to learn from setbacks and not to be discouraged by them. Similarly, Burns (2003) writes that collaborations should start small and then grow, and that it is good practice to plan early successes as they help to get people on board and positive.

9.2 Managing collaborations

There were six main areas of good practice which needed to be established within the partnership:

- leadership/management
- negotiations
- organisation
- staff/stakeholder involvement
- communication
- monitoring and evaluation.

Leadership/management

The literature suggests that good leadership practice means a leadership that is strong operationally and strategically and one that is located within the partnership (Rudd *et al.*, 2004b; Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2002; Woods *et al.*, 2006). Leaders should be committed to the collaborative activity and dele-

gates to others, allowing them to take the collaboration forward (Arnold, 2006; McGregor *et al.*, 2006). Hanford *et al.* (1997) state that it is important to have the right size of leadership team as too many leaders can obfuscate communication, but one sole strong leader can overpower and make the collaboration too reliant on one individual. This was reiterated within other sources where the need for distributed leadership was stressed (e.g. Arnold). It is important that leadership comes from within the partnership rather than from external sources as it is vital to give schools and staff ownership of the partnerships in order to ensure that they are valued and continue (e.g. Diversity and Dialogue, 2007).

It was usual for management of collaborations to be shared between institutions. However, whilst there were descriptions of governance arrangements within the literature ranging from the more formal to more informal types (as noted in section 4.3), there was little within the literature comparing different governance arrangements or any data to suggest that one might be more effective than another. This would therefore indicate that ‘leadership’ per se is a more crucial issue in the effectiveness of inter-school collaborations. It can also be helpful to appoint someone in a coordinating role over the collaboration; this is discussed more fully in section 9.4 where internal support for the collaboration is discussed.

Example: effective leadership

Federations, collegiates and partnerships (Arnold, 2006)

In Birmingham, a number of federations have been established which bring together a school in need of external help and one that is deemed successful, ideally a Leading Edge school. Each federation has an executive headteacher, ‘but the emphasis is on distributive leadership and an agreed contract which sets out terms and conditions, roles and responsibilities, a timeframe, an exit strategy, and how these will operate and who will be accountable.’ (p.14). The collaborations have not been without obstacles, but the federations have proved successful in what they set out to achieve.

Negotiations

The literature suggests that it is good practice to develop clear aims for the collaboration, ones that are discussed and agreed by all partners (e.g. Arnold, 2006; Bell *et al.*, 2006; Rudd *et al.*, 2004b; DfES, 2007b; Woods *et al.*, 2006). Flexibility and negotiation are important so that aims/activities are appropriate to each school's context (e.g. Hanford *et al.*, 1997; Morris, 2007; Woods *et al.*, 2006). Additionally, the literature highlights that it is good practice to have a measure of flexibility in the aims so that activities can be tailored to the individual needs and context of participating schools (Powell *et al.*, 2004; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003). Bell *et al.*, (2006) state that the more successful collaborations tend to have narrower and more specific aims.

Example: negotiating and agreeing shared aims

Shinners (2001)

Shinners states that, in any type of collaboration, partners must first know why they want to collaborate and they must know what they want for themselves and how collaboration will help them achieve it. Axelrod (1984) in Shinners (2001) asserts that self-interest is too powerful a motivation to overlook. Planning must therefore include helping groups find individual gains while helping others work in their self-interest or else the collaboration will be short lived.

Small primary school clusters (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998)

The authors state that there is an innate tension within the development and operation of any cluster: the sharing of resources and expertise against maintaining school autonomy and identity. If all the contributory schools are not sure of the value of clustering, this tension can be fatal. Teachers must have a positive attitude towards collaboration and other stakeholders, such as parents and governors, need to be equally supportive, particularly within the context of greater delegation of resources and decision-making power to schools. They need to be convinced of the value of teachers cooperating and children mixing with those of other schools and to be assured that collaboration is not an indication of a weakness in 'their' school.

Organisation

According to the literature, it is good practice for the structure of the collaboration to be fit for purpose and to include a variety of schools (e.g. in size, demographics, location etc.) as this brings benefits (Burns, 2003); Halbert and Kaser, 2002). The findings discussed in section 2.3 suggest that the inclusion of large numbers of schools can limit the extent and nature of collaboration and militate against whole-school involvement. When bringing together schools of different cultures this is likely to be more effective on a one-to-one basis, since this was reported to facilitate whole-school involvement and more personal contact between staff and pupils.

It is also good practice to build on successful structures used elsewhere (e.g. in Beacon partnerships), rather than trying to ‘reinvent the wheel’ (Farrar *et al.*, 2005; Powell *et al.*, 2004; Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). Some sources suggest that it is good practice to allow an element of freedom and autonomy to participating staff, so that the collaborations can grow organically where there are natural inclinations to work together (Arnold, 2006; Rudd *et al.*, 2004b; Williams and Thorpe, 1998).

Staff/stakeholder involvement

As noted previously in Chapter 8, it is important to have staff at all levels and other school partners (e.g. governors and parents) involved in any collaborative venture and for those not directly involved to be kept informed about what is happening. Some sources of literature indicated that having the commitment of the headteacher and the senior management team was crucial in gaining the commitment of others (see example below). In addition, the literature suggests that it is good practice for partnerships to be designed with equality and mutuality in mind. This can be achieved by devolving funding and involvement in decision making amongst all partners, ensuring that all those involved input into the collaboration and also benefit (e.g. Rudd *et al.*, 2004a; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003; Sharp *et al.*, 2002). It was also noted that the terminology used is important since this reinforces this equality, as terms like ‘Beacon School’ can be divisive and not in the spirit of collaboration (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a; Sharp *et al.*, 2002). Involving all staff is also reliant on having effective communication channels (as discussed below).

Example: involving staff and other stakeholders

Independent/state school partnerships (Ofsted, 2005)

The authors found that the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders had benefits for partnerships. Where headteachers are involved and fully committed to a collaboration, they are almost always successful. This is partly because the headteacher is able to secure the support and involvement of other school staff on both the administrative and teaching sides of a school. They also found that where governors are involved, it provides support to school staff, and also sends out positive messages to parents and pupils, arguably helping to secure their support and involvement. The close involvement of senior school managers is also important to a partnership's development, and where their involvement lessened, partnerships were found to be vulnerable.

Communication

The importance of effective communication was noted previously when discussing influencing factors. It is important to have different channels for communication that are appropriate to the various stakeholders to ensure that they are all kept informed and involved (Hanford *et al.*, 1997; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003). It is important to facilitate an effective flow of information between schools and staff (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003). The literature suggests that an emphasis should be placed on face-to-face contact between peers where possible, as this was felt to be an effective way of communicating (Bell *et al.*, 2006; Rudd *et al.*, 2004b; Rudd *et al.*, 2004a)

Having a shared vocabulary between schools also facilitated collaborative activity and this could be engendered by joint training (Burns, 2003; McGregor *et al.*, 2006; Williams and Thorpe, 1998). There were examples in the literature where training was in place to address communication-related issues (e.g. Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003)

Example: effective communication channels

School families (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003)

Wohlstetter *et al.* examined the operation of ‘school families’ in Los Angeles, which were networks of schools aiming to improve schools. Two of their case-study networks provided joint training in group processes, management skills and meeting facilitation. They found that this enabled those networks to spend more time diagnosing problems and finding solutions than the other case-study networks, as staff had improved their ability to communicate. The joint training also enabled teachers to learn together and develop a shared vocabulary and perspective on issues, which also enhanced communication and therefore collaboration between schools.

Monitoring and evaluation

A system and time for monitoring and evaluation of collaborative activity and its progress needs to be put in place. Some sources suggest that it is good practice for partnerships to evaluate these aims so that those involved can observe progress and see the value of partnership activity (Burns, 2003; Ofsted, 2005). Farrar *et al.* (2005) state that building more sophisticated non-standards-related impact measures into evaluations is good practice (e.g. to measure social cohesion, social justice, well-being).

Analysis of the typologies of collaboration based on the extent and depth of collaboration suggested within the literature (see section 2.2) highlighted three key dimensions as indicators of the extent of collaboration: organisation, penetration and joint investment/vision. It is proposed that questions based on these dimensions could be used as a checklist (see Appendix 6) with which to assess the extent of collaboration for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

9.3 Staff/personnel issues

There were several elements of good practice relating to staff/personnel issues:

- commitment
- time
- skills.

Commitment

It was previously noted that engendering commitment amongst the whole staff team and maintaining this for the length of the project was an important factor in facilitating collaboration. The literature suggests that it is good practice to get all stakeholders (e.g. staff, governors, parents) aware of, and involved in the collaboration (Arnold, 2006; Bell *et al.*, 2006; Rudd *et al.*, 2004b). Partners should have the recognition that real systemic change takes time and take account of this time in their planning (Burns, 2003). As part of this, it is good practice to put in place strategies to create and maintain the commitment of the staff teams in all the collaborating schools (Burns, 2003; Turner, 2005). The literature suggests that this is best achieved by ensuring that staff see the value in the collaborative activity (Leonard and Leonard, 2001; Powell *et al.*, 2004) and ensuring that there are clear incentives for schools and staff to collaborate (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003). Findings also suggest that the appointment or establishment of key personnel who can drive the collaboration forward and motivate others in this endeavour can be important.

Example: commitment to the collaboration

Federations (Thorpe and Williams, 2002)

Thorpe and Williams (2002) looked at six federations involving small schools in Wales and drew out the importance of commitment to the federation as a facilitating factor. Four of the federations they examined were stable, supported within the school and seen as a way to gain educational benefits. However, two of the federations were

created as an expedient to overcome short-term issues and eventually reverted back to individual schools. In one, the governors saw the move to federate as necessary, rather than a planned, effective strategy for the future and were wary about the federation. This, according to the headteacher, is the main reason why they reverted to an individual school: ‘There was potential there. Had certain steps been taken to plan prior to the federation I think we would have come closer to a partnership – but as it stood you didn’t feel it was a partnership – it was pure necessity.’

Time

There was a view that dedicated time needed to be built into the timetable for collaboration to be effective. Burns (2003), examining Leading Edge Partnerships, found that teachers’ view was that ‘cover kills collaboration’ and that dedicated time for the collaboration should be built into a school timetable, rather than being at the expense of existing staff commitments. Therefore, collaboration needs to be funded so that collaborative activity is not an additional burden on top of the regular workload of staff. The time needed by headteachers and senior managers was particularly noted to require effective time management skills (e.g. Lindsay *et al.*, 2005). It is also important to have built in time for planning, since it is important that the development of the partnership and its activities are planned for effectively to allow early identification of potential problems (e.g. timetabling, availability of staff, management) (Turner, 2005).

In addition, it was also suggested that, if the cluster is well organised, it can help reduce headteachers’ and teachers’ workloads (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998). The literature also suggested that it was good practice to minimise travel time (and costs), for both teachers and students, as well as the disruption to school routine and teaching and learning, particularly when large distances are sometimes involved (e.g. Ribchester and Edwards, 1998; Thorpe and Williams, 2002).

Skills

The literature suggests that collaborative activities should include professional development around issues of collaboration for those involved and that successful collaborations tend to provide training in group processes, management skills and facilitating meetings (Burns, 2003; Leonard and Leonard, 2001; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003). Joint training and practice development was seen as particularly valuable as it ensured that collaborating staff had a shared language and understanding (e.g. McGregor *et al.*, 2006). Wohlstetter *et al.*, (2003) also suggest that there should be a specific team responsible for professional development decisions. Other sources suggested the need for coaching in presentation skills and how to share in a non-threatening way (Leonard and Leonard, 2001; McGregor *et al.*, 2006). There were also said to be cultural issues and staff need to learn how to be flexible (Rudd *et al.*, 2004b). Therefore professional development opportunities need to be provided to ensure staff develop appropriate skills.

9.4 Supporting collaborative activity

There were several elements of good practice relating to practical issues:

- funding
- internal support
- local authority support
- government support.

Funding

It is good practice to ensure there is enough funding for the collaboration to pay for staff time and resources (Arnold, 2006; DfES, 2007b; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003). Funding was considered essential, for example, in the development of Diversity Pathfinders (Woods *et al.*, 2006). There was also evidence from within this study that cost-effective, sustainable collaboration requires a focusing or targeting of funds on a limited number of schools rather than dispersing a given amount of resource over a large number of schools.

Woods *et al.* (2006) suggest that, if funds are concentrated in this way, greater possibilities are created for what they call ‘leverage and synergy’, the capacity to sustain, enhance and make best use of funding. One of their key recommendations is that concentration of funding brings better outcomes than the wide dispersal of equivalent resources. In addition, there was a view within the literature that schools should contribute themselves to the funding of the collaboration, as according to one source in particular, this can be important in instilling a sense of value and ownership of the partnership.

Internal support

It is good practice to ensure adequate internal and external support for the collaboration (Arnold, 2006; Bell *et al.*, 2006). Internally, there is a need for administrative support for collaborative activities and the literature suggests that it is good practice to have a permanent coordinator or a key member of staff with defined responsibilities within the partnership to help facilitate collaboration (e.g. McMeeking *et al.*, 2004; Ofsted, 2005; Rutherford and Jackson, 2006). The coordinator is able to broker relationships and act as a catalyst more effectively when there was equality between participating schools (Kerr *et al.*, 2003). It is also important for participating teachers to be supported by their school leadership, and for their collaborative work to be seen as beneficial (Leonard and Leonard, 2001). Williams and Thorpe (1998) state that, whilst collaborative activities are facilitated when there is a coordinator in place, it is even more effective when that coordinator is supported by a management team drawn from the schools involved.

Local authority support

Having external support (e.g. from the local authority, consultants, Specialist Schools Network) was also considered important (e.g. Aiston *et al.*, 2002; Lindsay *et al.*, 2005; Woods *et al.*, 2006). Burns (2003) writes that it is useful to make use of existing networks (e.g. EiC, faith schools) when developing collaborations. The local authority was the most mentioned source of external support and they have been shown to take on a number of different supportive roles (see section 6.1). Whilst they can broker collaborations between schools, at the same time, it is important for them to recognise that imposing collaboration on schools may not be successful because

schools need an element of choice and autonomy (Arnold, 2006; Rudd *et al.*, 2004a; Farrar *et al.*, 2005). It is helpful if they can identify a named individual responsible for coordinating collaborative activity and ensure that local authority staff have the time and the required skills to support the schools (Arnold, 2006; Smith *et al.*, 2003). It was also suggested that they might establish an advice service for schools regarding collaboration, provide case studies of collaboration within the authority and use the experience of head-teachers who have been involved with such activity to help those new to collaboration (Arnold, 2006).

Government support

The findings indicate that the government can be a key factor in driving collaboration by making it a necessary requirement of initiatives. There were other, more specific, recommendations given within the literature for the government to help facilitate good practice in collaborations. It was suggested that the government could promote the benefits of collaboration, provide guidance to support collaboration between schools and publicise the funding available to facilitate school collaboration (Aiston *et al.*, 2002; Smith *et al.*, 2003; Ribchester and Edwards, 1998). The production of a national database of school strengths and needs was proposed, which the government could use to broker collaborations between schools (Rudd *et al.*, 2004a). In addition, it was suggested that the government could ensure there is no duplication of regional/local authority advisory or support roles (Aiston *et al.*, 2002).

Key points

Analysis of the literature highlighted many strategies for effective collaborative working and they were grouped under the following areas for discussion: inter-school relationships; managing collaborations; staff/personnel issues; and supporting collaborative activity. The strategies identified are summarised in Table 9.1 at the end of this chapter. Some of the key strategies are highlighted here.

- **Inter-school relationships:** The findings indicated that it is good practice to create a climate of openness and trust within the collaboration and to

build in specific time for the development of good relations between partners. Time needs to be spent on resolving issues resulting from competitiveness, inequality and cultural differences and building a sense of shared and common purpose. This should involve a two-way dialogue and opportunities for those involved to have face-to-face contact.

- **Managing collaborations:** Leadership needs to be firmly located within the partnership, with a focus on distributed leadership to avoid domination by one key player. It is important that staff from participating schools take ownership of the partnership. All staff/stakeholders need to be involved, shared aims need to be negotiated and they need to be flexible enough to accommodate each school's needs. One-to-one school collaboration may be more effective for addressing cultural differences as this facilitates whole-school involvement and personal contact. There need to be a range of communication channels. Monitoring and evaluation can be an important motivating factor as this ensures that participants know the value of collaboration and what can be achieved.
- **Staff/personnel issues:** Specific strategies need to be employed to maintain staff commitment and this can include planning some quick gains so that they can see the value of collaboration. Dedicated time for collaboration should be built into the timetable rather than this work being conducted over and above normal commitments. Professional development relating to the skills for collaboration needs to be built in.
- **Supporting collaborative activity:** A component of good practice highlighted was to ensure sufficient internal and external support for the collaboration, as well as sufficient funding and resources. The appointment of a coordinator who can facilitate the collaboration can be helpful. Local authorities can play a key role in supporting collaborative ventures but they need to ensure that they take on a facilitation rather than a lead role and avoid imposing collaborative working on schools. They can also play a role in facilitating the sharing of effective practice between schools. The government can ensure collaborative working by making it a key requirement of schools and it can also be helpful for them to provide guidance to support collaborative working between schools.

Table 9.1 Effective practice strategies: a summary

| Effective practice strategies | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Inter-school relationships | |
| Ensuring equality between partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on genuine mutual partnership• Two-way dialogue and common agenda• Active support from headteachers and all staff |
| Overcoming competitiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual meetings with schools initially• Incentives to encourage schools not to be inwardly focused• Spend time on resolving competition issues and developing trust• Build a shared and common purpose• Provide opportunities for face-to-face contact• Effective forms of communication• Strategies for building positive relationships |
| Counteracting cultural differences | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spend time on resolving issues and developing trust• Build a shared and common purpose• Measures to help pupils deal with those from different backgrounds• Promote understanding of different cultures• Provide opportunities for informal networking between different groups• Promote understanding of partners' environment |
| Building positive relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotion of a climate of openness and honesty• Built in time for relationship development• Pilot projects to engender trust and embed the idea of collaboration• Learn from setbacks and not be discouraged by them• Focus on positive gains of collaboration• Plan early successes to help get people on board |
| Managing collaborations | |
| Leadership/management | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong operationally and strategically• Located within the partnership• Leaders should be committed to collaborative activity• Leaders should delegate to others• Right sized leadership team |

Table 9.1 Effective practice strategies: a summary *cont'd*

| Effective practice strategies | |
|---|--|
| Managing collaborations <i>cont'd</i> | |
| Leadership/management <i>cont'd</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aim for distributed leadership and avoid having one strong leader • School and staff ownership of partnership • Management shared between the partner institutions |
| Negotiation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of clear aims/clarity of purpose • Aims agreed and discussed by all involved • Flexible so activities tailored to each school's needs and context • Narrow and specific aims |
| Organisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational structure fit for purpose • Inclusion of a variety of schools (size, type etc.) • Limit size of collaboration e.g. between two and eight schools • One-to-one school collaboration more effective for addressing culture issues as it facilitates whole-school involvement and personal contact • Build on existing successful structures • Element of freedom and autonomy to staff • Allow collaborations to grow organically |
| Staff/stakeholders involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment of headteacher and SMT • Design of partnerships with equality/mutuality in mind • Devolved funding and involvement in decision making • Avoid use of divisive terminology (e.g. Beacon School) • Effective communication channels • Appointment of key personnel to drive the collaboration and motivate others |
| Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of appropriate communication channels to suit partners • Effective flow of information • Emphasis on face-to-face contact • Develop a shared vocabulary through joint training • Training to address communication related issues |
| Monitoring and evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a monitoring system • Providing the time for monitoring and evaluation |

Table 9.1 Effective practice strategies: a summary *contd*

| Effective practice strategies | |
|---|--|
| Managing collaborations <i>cont'd</i> | |
| Monitoring and evaluation <i>cont'd</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built in non-standards related impact measures • Use of 'extent of collaboration' indicators/checklist |
| Staff/personnel issues | |
| Commitment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition that real systemic change takes time • Specific strategies to create and maintain commitment • Ensure staff see the value in collaboration • Plan for quick successes to demonstrate value of collaboration • Clear incentives to collaborate • Prior planning of collaboration as a strategy |
| Time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated time for collaborative work built into timetable • Funded so not an additional burden on top of existing workload • Effective time management by senior staff • Built in time for planning (especially prior to starting) • Early identification of problems (e.g. staff time, commitment) • Good organisation • Minimise travel time and disruption to school routine |
| Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built in professional development around collaboration issues • Training in group processes, facilitation and management skills • Joint training and practice development • Specific team responsible for professional development decisions • Coaching in presentation skills and how to share • Staff need to learn how to be flexible |
| Supporting collaborative activity | |
| Funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient funding for staff time and resources • Focusing or targeting funds on a limited number of schools • School contribution to the funding of collaboration can instil a sense of ownership and value for the collaboration |
| Internal support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative support for collaborative activities • Coordinator or key member of staff with defined responsibilities |

Table 9.1 Effective practice strategies: a summary *cont'd*

| Effective practice strategies | |
|--|--|
| Supporting collaborative activity <i>cont'd</i> | |
| Internal support <i>cont'd</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support from SMT• Collaborative work seen as valuable• Management team drawn from the schools involved |
| Local authority support | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make use of existing networks of external support• Facilitation role rather than a lead role and avoid imposition of collaboration• Named individual with responsibility for coordinating collaboration• Ensure local authority staff have time and skills to support schools• Establishment of a collaboration advisory service for schools• Provision of case studies of collaboration• Use of experienced headteachers for those new to collaboration |
| Government support | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure collaboration through making it a requirement of initiatives• Promotion of the benefits of collaboration• Provision of guidance to support collaboration between schools• Publicise funding available to facilitate collaboration• Production of national database of school strengths and needs• Brokering collaborations between schools• Ensure no duplication of local authority/regional advisory/support roles |

10 Concluding comments

The review highlighted the dearth of good empirical evidence relating to inter-school collaboration. Evaluations/research that has been conducted has tended to be focused on evaluations of particular initiatives rather than the processes involved in inter-school collaboration *per se*. The lack of literature relating to inter-faith school collaboration was also identified. Scope for further research in these areas was highlighted.

Various types of inter-school collaboration were examined. Many commonalities were noted, for example, in the facilitating factors associated with collaborative working and the benefits that are to be gained for schools, their staff and their students. The distinction of collaborations bringing together schools with different cultures is a useful one in the context of the work in Northern Ireland. The findings highlight issues pertinent to these circumstances.

An intended outcome of collaborative working was to assist the process of breaking down barriers between schools and individuals of different cultures and to help develop community cohesion. This would suggest that collaboration may be an effective strategy to help promote interconnections between the denominational education sectors in Northern Ireland.

Many benefits of inter-school collaboration were identified, for the whole school, their staff and their students. The breaking down of barriers, dispelling of misconceptions and promotion of mutual understanding between schools and individuals was a key outcome, further supporting its potential value in the context of Northern Ireland.

Analysis of the literature also identified some of the difficulties associated with inter-school collaboration, particularly where there are inequalities, competitiveness and cultural differences between schools. However, effective practices can be put in place to counteract such difficulties. Time devoted to building positive relationships between partners, resolving issues raised by cultural clashes and promoting mutual understanding would seem essential.

Appendix 1 – Government initiatives promoting inter-school collaboration

- Beacon Schools Scheme
- Diversity Pathfinder Initiative
- Education Action Zones (EAZs)
- Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs)
- Excellence clusters/Excellence in Cities (EiC)
- Extended schools
- 14–19 agenda
- 14–19 Learning Partnerships
- Independent/State School Partnerships (ISSPs)
- International twinning
- Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG)
- Leading Edge Partnership Programme (LEPP)
- Networked Learning Communities (NLCs)
- New Deal for Communities
- Primary Strategy Learning Networks
- Specialist Schools Scheme
- Training schools

Appendix 2 – Glossary of initiatives/terms

Academies

Academies are a new type of school. They bring a distinctive approach to school leadership drawing on the skills of sponsors and other supporters. They give principals and staff new opportunities to develop educational strategies to raise standards and contribute to diversity in areas of disadvantage. Academies are all-ability schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups working in highly innovative partnerships with central government and local education partners. The DfES meet the capital and running cost for the academy in full. The academies programme aims to challenge the culture of educational underattainment and to deliver real improvements in standards. Most academies are located in areas of disadvantage. They either replace one or more existing schools facing challenging circumstances or are established where there is a need for additional school places. See www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/what_are_academies/?version=1.

Beacon Schools programme

The Beacon Schools programme was established in 1998 and all types and phases of state maintained schools were included. It identified high performing schools across England and was designed to build partnerships between these schools and represent examples of successful practice, with a view to sharing and spreading that effective practice to other schools to raise standards in pupil attainment. The Beacon Schools programme as a central government funded programme was phased out by August 2005. It has been replaced by the Leading Edge Partnership programme (secondary level) and the Primary Strategy Learning Networks (primary level). For further details see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/beaconschools.

Collegiate Academies

A collegiate academy is the term used to describe a group of schools that work together to bring benefits to their pupils and staff. For example, students from across the collegiate may come together to learn where this brings benefits, and staff may share professional development. The collegiate does not have a single board of governors like a federation, but has its strategy and direction set by a management board composed of the headteachers of the individual schools. Collegiate academies also tend to have one or more coordinators and administrative support, and they facilitate the partnership working.

Diversity Pathfinders Project

Encouraging secondary schools to celebrate their diversity by playing to their curriculum strengths and sharing the benefits with other schools through collaboration is the focus of six Diversity Pathfinder projects set up in 2001. In June of 2001, local education authorities (LEAs) which were already actively developing plans for greater school diversity were invited to submit proposals to be part of a project expected to demonstrate how the benefits of diversity in secondary education could be maximised to improve standards of teaching and learning across the whole system. Six LEAs were selected and began implementing their plans in January 2002. See www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schooldiversity/planningdiversity/?version=1.

Education Action Zones (EAZs)

Education action zones were a key strand of the Excellence in Cities initiative, envisaged as a means of developing approaches to school improvement that needed to be implemented at a level broader than that of individual schools. An EAZ typically included between 15 and 25 schools, and worked in partnership with stakeholders such as businesses, parents, local authorities and local communities. They aimed to broadly raise standards in line with their own improvement targets and to generate innovation from which other schools outside the EAZ could learn. They were funded by the DfES as well as by raising money from private sector partners.

Education Improvement partnerships (EIPs)

The concept of EIPs was introduced by the government in 2005 and was ‘designed to give some unity and sharper purpose to the idea of collaboration in the education service’ (Foreword). It aimed to stimulate the expansion of high quality collaboration, the rationalisation of partnership activity, where appropriate, and the devolution of responsibilities and resources from local authorities to groups of schools and other partners. These are replacing Excellence in Cities partnerships (see below), with the aim of raising attainment, increasing tailored provision for pupils and delivering extended services. They operate on an inclusive, geographical basis with all schools in an area invited to participate.

Excellence in Cities (EiC)/Excellence Clusters

The EiC programme was launched in 1999 to raise standards and promote inclusion in inner cities and other urban areas. Typically, groups of schools working together would include one or two secondary schools and their feeder primary schools. Following changes to the funding of EiC partnerships in 2006 they are now being encouraged to convert into Education Improvement partnerships (see above). Excellence Clusters are designed to bring the benefits of Excellence in Cities (EiC) to small pockets of deprivation. Some 397 secondary schools and over 280 primary schools are involved in Excellence Clusters. Like EiC, the clusters focus on some of the most deprived areas of the country, using a structured programme designed to raise standards. Clusters benefit from extra resources to provide the three core strands of the EiC programme: extended opportunities for gifted and talented pupils; access to full time learning mentors for pupils who need them; learning support units (LSUs) to tackle disruption. A fourth strand of funding is available to target particular local issues, as identified by the schools in each cluster. Each Cluster receives a minimum of £650k per year from the DCSF. The exact funding level is based upon pupil numbers, free school meals (FSM) data and GCSE/KS2 test results. This funding will be reviewed in the Comprehensive Spending Review. See www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/e/excellenceclusters.

Federations

The term ‘federation’ has a wide currency, and is often used loosely to describe many different types of collaborative groups, partnerships and clusters, even through to mergers and the creation of new schools. The DfES defines federations in two ways. First, the definition as invoked in the 2002 Education Act which allows for the creation of a single governing body or a joint governing body committee across two or more schools from September 2003 onwards. Second, as a group of schools with a formal (i.e. written) agreement to work together to raise standards, promote inclusion, find new ways of approaching teaching and learning and build capacity between schools in a coherent manner. This will be brought about in part through structural changes in leadership and management, in many instances through making use of the joint governance arrangements invoked in the 2002 Education Act. These are seen as ‘hard’ federations as they sit at the hard end of a whole spectrum of collaborative arrangements. It is recognised that strong levels of trust and confidence are needed in order for schools to want the formal and binding commitments that federation implies. See www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/federations/what_are_federations/?version=1.

14–19 Learning partnerships

Learning partnerships were developed in 1999 to promote collaboration across local learning providers (involving schools, further education, work-based learning and adult and community learning). They are voluntary, non-statutory groupings, promoting collaboration across sectors and maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration.

Independent/State School Partnerships (ISSPs)

The Independent/State School Partnerships Grant Scheme, or Building Bridges as it has come to be known, was set up to encourage collaborative working between independent and maintained schools, to widen educational opportunities and share best practice and expertise. In November 1997, the Minister for School Standards set up the Independent/State School Partnerships Grants Scheme stating that the independent sector was an integral and valuable part of the national education system. The scheme began with a budget of £500,000, half of which was government funding and half donated

by an educational philanthropist and founder of The Sutton Trust. There was a massive response to the scheme with around 300 applications for funding. In view of this, the government provided a further £100,000 bringing the total budget to £600,000. Proposed partnerships including a minimum of one state and one independent school, can apply for funding (normally between £5000 and £50,000) with funds allocated on the basis of projects that promise to be innovative, good value for money and based on established good practice. See www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/buildingbridges.

Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) programme

The Leadership Incentive Grant programme was designed to provide support to schools in areas of high deprivation, and those facing other challenging circumstances to strengthen leadership at all levels through collaboration. Grants are in the region of £130,000 per school, with ten per cent of this going towards partnership activities.

Leading Edge Partnership Programme (LEPP)

This has replaced the Beacon Schools partnership programme, providing funding distributed via a lead school for use across their partnership in order to work on locally determined learning priorities. The LEPP for secondary schools builds on the success and knowledge about collaborative practice gained from the Beacon Schools programme. It supports groups of secondary schools, including special schools, to work together to tackle some of the most intractable barriers to raising standards. There is a particular focus on providing support to schools that may be struggling to raise standards, and partnering to address issues of underachievement amongst pupils from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and from particular ethnic minority groups. Schools within these partnerships are committed to working collaboratively to design, develop, test and share innovative ideas to raise standards of teaching and learning where improvement is most urgently needed. See www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/leadingedge.

Networked learning communities programme

Founded by the National college for School leadership, this programme, which ran from 2002–2006, aimed to support networked learning in schools. This can be described as individuals coming together from different environ-

ments to engage in development activity informed by the public knowledge base, their own experience and co-constructing new knowledge together.

Primary Strategy Learning Networks

The DfES Primary Strategy Learning networks aim to give all primary teachers the opportunity to work within a group of schools. They have replaced some of the networks formed as part of the Beacon Schools programme following the end of this scheme. Funding (£5000 per year or £7000 in the case of mathematics projects) is provided for groups of primary schools to focus curriculum improvement and raising standards in mathematics and literacy.

Specialist Schools

Specialist Schools are an important part of the government's plans to raise standards in secondary education. The Specialist Schools Programme (SSP) helps schools, in partnership with private sector sponsors and supported by additional government funding, to establish distinctive identities through their chosen specialisms and achieve their targets to raise standards. Specialist Schools have a special focus on those subjects relating to their chosen specialism but must also meet the National Curriculum requirements and deliver a broad and balanced education to all pupils. Any maintained secondary school in England can apply for specialist status in one of ten specialisms: arts, business & enterprise, engineering, humanities, languages, mathematics & computing, music, science, sports and technology. Schools can also combine any two specialisms. Special schools can apply for an SEN specialism in one of the four areas of the SEN code of practice. See www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/specialistschools/what_are/?version=1.

Appendix 3 – Search strategy

Sources were identified from a range of educational databases, including:

- the NFER Library’s own internal bibliographical databases
- the current educational research in the UK database (CERUK)
- AEI (Australian Education Index)
- BEI (British Education Index)
- CBCA Fulltext Education (Canadian Business and Current Affairs)
- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center).

In addition internet searches of relevant subject gateways and websites (e.g. DfES, DENI, NCSL) were also conducted. Search terms were developed for all databases by using controlled vocabulary pertinent to each database from the relevant thesauri (where these were available). In addition to searching databases on relevant key words and phrases (e.g. school partnership, school network, school cluster, school collaboration), searches were also undertaken on key initiatives that were known to embrace some consideration of partnership working within particular policy contexts (e.g. Beacon Schools, Specialist Schools and Excellence in Cities). These key words were matched to the databases under consideration, and were employed so as to cover all combinations. Where no thesauri were available, or the controlled vocabulary included no appropriate key words, free-text searching was undertaken. The key words used in the searches, together with a brief description of each of the databases searched, are outlined below. Throughout, (ft) has been used to denote that free-text search terms were used.

British Education Index (BEI)

BEI provides bibliographic references to 350 British and selected European English-language periodicals in the field of education and training, plus developing coverage of national report and conference literature.

#1 Educational Cooperation

#2 Cooperative Programmes

#3 #1 OR #2

- #4 School WITH (Collaborati\$ OR Partnership\$ OR Cooperate\$ OR Cluster\$ OR Consorti\$ OR Network\$ OR Federation\$) (ft)
- #5 Collegiate\$
- #6 #4 OR #5
- #7 #3 AND #6
- #8 Education Action Zone\$ (ft)
- #9 Excellence in Cities (ft)
- #10 Beacon (ft)
- #11 Pathfinder\$ (ft)
- #12 Extended school\$ (ft)
- #13 Specialist school\$ (ft)
- #14 Full service (ft)
- #15 Inter-faith Relations
- #16 Religio\$ (ft)
- #17 Collaborati\$ OR Cooperati\$ OR Partnership\$ (ft)
- #18 #16 AND #17

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC is sponsored by the United States Department of Education and is the largest education database in the world. It indexes over 725 periodicals and currently contains more than 7,000,000 records. Coverage includes research documents, journal articles, technical reports, program descriptions and evaluations and curricula material.

- #1 School collaborati\$ (ft)
- #2 School partnership\$ (ft)
- #3 School cluster\$ (ft)
- #4 School consorti\$ (ft)
- #5 School network\$ (ft)
- #6 School cooperati\$ (ft)

- #7 #1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5 OR #6
- #8 Elementary Education
- #9 Secondary Education
- #10 Elementary Secondary Education
- #11 #7 OR #8 OR #9
- #12 #7 AND #11
- #13 School Business Relationship
- #14 Education Work Relationship
- #15 School Community Programs
- #16 School Community Relationship
- #17 College School Cooperation
- #18 #13 OR #14 OR #15 OR #16 OR #17
- #19 #18 NOT #7
- #20 Inter-faith Relations
- #21 Religio\$ (ft)
- #22 Collaborati\$ OR Cooperati\$ OR Partnership\$ (ft)
- #23 #21 AND #22

Australian Education Index (AEI)

AEI is produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research. It is an index to materials at all levels of education and related fields. Source documents include journal articles, monographs, research reports, theses, conference papers, legislation, parliamentary debates and newspaper articles.

- #1 Interschool Communication
- #2 School collaborati\$ (ft)
- #3 School partnership\$ (ft)
- #4 School cluster\$ (ft)
- #5 School consorti\$ (ft)
- #6 School network\$ (ft)

Current Educational Research in the United Kingdom (CERUK)

CERUK is a database of current and recently completed research in education and related disciplines. It covers a wide range of studies including commissioned research and PhD theses, across all phases of education from early years to adults.

- #1 Clusters
- #2 Networks
- #3 Networked Learning Communities
- #4 Schools Cooperation
- #5 #1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4
- #6 Partnerships
- #7 #6 NOT #5

Canadian Business and Current Affairs (CBCA)

CBCA provides indexing and full text access to the principal educational literature publications in Canada, covering all significant reports of government departments, faculties of education, teachers' associations, large school boards and educational organisations. Over 150 educational periodicals, plus educational articles in over 700 general journals and newspapers are indexed.

- #1 Educational Partnerships AND Schools
- #2 School collaboration (ft)
- #3 Clusters (ft)
- #4 School clusters (ft)
- #5 Consortium OR Consortia (ft)
- #6 School network OR School networks (ft)
- #7 School networking (ft)
- #8 School cooperation (ft)

Websites searched

www.dfes.gov.uk – Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk – DfES Standards site

www.learning.wales.gov.uk – Welsh Assembly Government

www.deni.gov.uk – Department of Education, Northern Ireland

www.scotland.gov.uk – Scottish Executive

www.determinedtosucceed.co.uk – Determined to Succeed strategy

www.teachernet.gov.uk – TeacherNet

www.schoolsnetwork.org.uk – Specialist Schools and Academies Trust

www.ncsl.org.uk – National College for School Leadership

networkedlearning.ncsl.org.uk – Networked Learning Communities programme

Appendix 4 – Literature summary template

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Title: | |
| Author(s): | |
| Date: | |
| REVIEW OF SOURCE | |
| Purpose/focus of literature | |
| Type of collaboration e.g. no. of schools etc. | |
| Description of collaboration and its operation/processes | |
| Aims/purpose/intended outcomes (why collaborate) | |
| Conditions/factors which drive collaboration | |
| Conditions/factors which facilitate collaboration (during) | |
| Recommendations/key factors for best practice | |
| Conditions/factors which inhibit collaboration | |
| Challenges/concerns | |
| Role of LA/government/other organisations in supporting collaboration | |
| Evidence of gains/benefits arising from collaboration | |
| DESCRIPTION OF SOURCE | |
| Sector | |
| Country/area | |
| Participants | |
| Method(s) | |
| When data collected and duration | |
| Source/document type | |
| Key references | |
| Reviewer's comments | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the reported analysis adequate and correct? • Are the author's interpretation supported by the evidence? • Are there any biases/caveats raised or to be aware of? • Is there corroboration or triangulation of sources? | |
| Relevance to review (high, medium or low) | |
| Date of review: | Reviewed by: |

Appendix 5 – Literature sample information

This appendix gives information about the literature that was reviewed in terms of the types of collaboration sources focused on, the methods they used to draw their conclusions, the dates of the sources, and the locations of the partnerships being studied.

Types of collaboration

The 39 pieces of literature were focused on the following:

- **Networks/networking** (8): e.g. network of inquiry; network learning communities; EAZ to NLC
- **Public/private or independent/LEA school partnerships** (7): including ISSP scheme
- **Partnership initiatives** (6): specifically focusing on Specialist Schools (1); Leading Edge Partnerships (1); Beacon Schools (1); Education Improvement Partnerships (1); Excellence clusters (1); Diversity pathfinders (1))
- **Faith/multi-cultural schools** (3)
- **Small rural schools** (3): e.g. rural consortium
- **International twinning** (3)
- **Collaboration in general** (3): e.g. sharing resources
- **Different types of collaboration** (2)
- **Collegiates/collegiate academies** (2)
- **Federations** (2): e.g. small primary schools in Wales.

Methods

These 39 sources included the following types of literature:

- **Case study/case studies plus literature** (16)

- **Research study** (8): with methods including survey; interviews; documentary evidence; report of larger study throughout US; visits to schools
- **Evaluation** (7)
- **Literature review/systematic review** (3)
- **Individual perceptions/discussion** (3)
- **Descriptive** (2)

Dates

These 39 sources fell into the following date categories:

- 2005–07 (18)
- 2000–2004 (16)
- pre-2000 (3)
- unknown (2).

Location

These 39 sources were from the following countries:

- **England** (17) West Sussex; Kirklees; EAZs; Birmingham; NW Essex; east London
- **Rural areas of England and Wales** (9)
- **Wales** (2)
- **Canada** (2)
- **US** (3)
- **English speaking countries/international** (2)
- **Netherlands** (1)
- **Ghana/Nepal/Malawi** (3).

Appendix 6 – Extent of collaboration: checklist

| Dimension | Questions |
|-------------------------|--|
| Organisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the partnership have any formal, legal or statutory status?• Is governance or management of the schools shared?• What degree of organisational infrastructure supports the collaboration?• Do the schools have a common budget for collaborative activities?• Do the schools share any staff? |
| Penetration | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How many people within the school community are involved?• Do the activities cover a broad curricular base?• What is the expected longevity of collaboration? |
| Joint investment/vision | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there a strategic vision?• Is there loss of independence?• Is there shared responsibility and accountability for all outcomes?• Is there shared decision making? |

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Inter-school collaboration: a literature review

Could collaboration between schools in Northern Ireland be used to promote interconnections between denominational education sectors as part of a contribution to improving community relations?

The National Foundation for Educational Research reviewed the literature on school collaboration in order to gain information on the different ways in which schools work in partnership. The review illustrates the various models and approaches used by schools and highlights particularly effective strategies. The report covers:

- different types of inter-school collaboration
- main drivers and aims of collaboration
- managing collaborations
- collaborative activities
- the role of outside agents in supporting collaborative working
- the gains of inter-school collaboration
- factors influencing inter-school collaboration
- effective practice in collaborative working.

This report is essential reading for all those working towards improving community relations in Northern Ireland, particularly with regard to education.

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