Fostering the capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence* through the principles and practice of formative assessment

Past Travel and Future Direction
A Formative Evaluation of the Highland Journey

Part 1: The Participants' Perspective

An evaluation carried out by:

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on behalf of the

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...if we are going to be looking at a new curriculum, we need to think about what impact it's going to have ... and I think this Highland framework and the model is just a fantastic way to link all our formative assessments with the AifL with the CfE and to take it forward that way. (Primary Teacher)

And the thinking child will come from the strategies and methodologies and pedagogy used by the reflective professional.   (Secondary Headteacher)

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[1] Not included here

1. Background and Context

This is a report of a small-scale study to evaluate formatively an educational innovation in the Highland Council. *Embedding Curriculum for Excellence in the Classroom: A Highland Journey, 04-08 and Beyond* was funded by Scottish Government through the Future Learning and Teaching (FLaT) programme and was managed by Kevin Logan. This evaluation was commissioned by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) – now the Scottish Government - and the Highland Council.

This report is one part of a formative evaluation of the FLaT project. The central body of evidence comes from interviews carried out with the major participants in the project – pupils, teachers and senior managers. It should be read, however, in conjunction with the report, *Just making them think (2008)* an evaluation of an existing Highland Council project commissioned by Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA). Within the context of the government funded Assessment is for Learning programme (AifL), in this project a number of teachers undertook to use formative assessment approaches with their Higher classes. This report and the three related three papers (targeted at teachers, local and national policy communities) and the SQA report form a resource intended to help inform the Highland Council's future *Engagement Strategy*.

Both the FLaT and SQA projects have emerged out of work on learning and teaching from a thinking skills perspective which had its origins in the early 1990s. The Highland journey is both an intellectual and a pedagogical one in which teachers have taken ownership of their CPD and have, in a real sense, become co-creators of the pedagogy emerging from AifL and approaches to thinking. In essence the Highland Journey sought to change school and classroom cultures: a challenging aspiration (Boyd, 2007)

The Context for the Highland Journey

In session 1993-94 Highland Region agreed to work with Strathclyde University to produce a course which would focus on developing thinking and reasoning skills within the wider context of theory and research. The course was underpinned by the idea of developing

thinking pupils through a commitment to fostering reflective professionals. This was to become the central idea of the future FLaT project a decade later.

During the period from approximately 1996 until 2004, CPD programmes were organised in Highland Council which essentially explored the themes from the above course (See Appendix 1 – insert Kevin's paper). Highland Council decided to build on this CPD initiative to support both the Council's new Learning and Teaching Policy and Toolkit within the framework of the national AifL programme. (please check this for accuracy) Highland Council had been involved in the national AifL initiative since its beginning in 2001. By 2004 it had become clear that AifL would provide a vehicle that would allow the Council to create a more reflective culture than had existed in the previous 10 years. The idea of teachers-as-reflective-professionals had been a recurring theme in the Coucil's work in this area throughout this period, and their subsequent bid for a FLaT project was a natural development of the ideas and philosophy that underpinned this concept. The FlaT project sought to work with teachers to explore ways of bringing together emerging ideas from Curriculum for Excellence (SEED, 2004, 2006), Assessment is for Learning (2005) and Approaches to Thinking. This process is described as the Highland Journey.

2004 – 2008

The document *Embedding a Curriculum for Excellence in the Classroom: a Highland CPD Journey (2008)* provides a clear overview of what is described as the Highland Journey from 2004-2008. The document suggests that:

> 'During the last four sessions, groups of Highland practitioners, SMT and researchers have collaborated to produce a distinctive CfE (AifL) pedagogical model designed to powerfully foster the CfE capacities. The developing ideas and practices have been captured in the Highland CPD Reflection Framework.' (The Highland Journey, 2008:1)

With an overarching aspiration of embedding the principles and practice of formative assessment in the classroom, the main aims of the Highland Journey were to:

➢ develop a coherent conception of formative assessment
➢ explore the links between formative assessment and approaches to making thinking explicit as a powerful way of fostering the CfE capacities
➢ encourage teacher learning communities which foster reflective professionals through a variety of approaches to CPD
➢ raise achievement, motivation and confidence

(The Highland Journey, 2008:2)

As a strategy to provide an overview of a complex set of ideas, members of the project team, led by the Project Manager, developed a reflection framework. He described the emergence of the framework

'In session 2005 – 2006 two consultancy groups of SMT and practitioners worked with Eric Young (reported inYoung, 2008) to explore what it means to embed and extend formative assessment as a way of linking AifL and CfE within the context of reflective professionals and thinking children. During this session we were also revising the FLaT proposal. By the end of this session we had produced the basic structure of the CPD Reflection Framework (i) managing transformational change (ii) embedding formative assessment and (iii) extending formative assessment. It was through this framework of ideas and practices that we developed the basic structure of the model with regard to the clear focus on principles and practice of formative assessment (with the centrality of peer and self assessment highlighted). It was also through this framework that we explored ways of encouraging reflective professionals willing and able to engage with new ideas and practices in collaboration with colleagues.'

The reflection framework was built around four principles - *participation, dialogue, engagement and thinking* - which became the basis for the development of a distinctive

Assessment is for Learning and Curriculum for Excellence CfE (AifL) model of effective learning whose articulated aim was to encourage formative assessment as a means by which pupils could take greater responsibility for their own learning. The reflection framework (Figure One) provides a conceptualisation of how teachers, researchers and policy makers involved in the Highland Journey initiative linked ideas and principles with practices to support their embedding in schools and classrooms. This framework is also used by the Highland Council team to illustrate how a range of professional development activities, designed as units (eg, Unit 1a Reflective Professional and Thinking Children) and reflection booklets (eg Using the Highland Model to Explore Established Learning and Teaching Approaches), link to ideas within the Highland framework. Work from a number of research sources remains influential in the design the CPD programme. For example, the Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 2002, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black et al, 2003; Gardner et al, 2008); the Teaching and Learning Research Project (James et al, 2007); and the Thinking movement, eg Perkins, 2003)

Figure One: The Highland Council Learning and Teaching CPD Reflection Framework

Embedding a curriculum for excellence in the classroom

resources to sustain professional dialogue and self   -evaluation

Discussion paper
Using
the Highland model
to explore established
learning and teaching
approaches

Reflection booklet
Engaging
with change

The Highland CPD Reflection Framework

Unit A1
Reflective professionals
and thinking children

Unit A2
Promoting and
sustaining change

The Highland Model

Participation

Metacognitive
discussion

Being explicit
about learning

P R I N C I P L E S

Dialogue → Thinking **Pupils taking responsibility for learning** Peer and self-assessment

Gathering
evidence of
learning

P R A C T I C E

Engagement

CfE
dispositions and capacities
(critical and creative thinke**rs)**

Focusing
feedback on
improvement

Unit B1
So what are the
pupils doing?

Unit B2
Making thinking
explicit

Reflection booklets
Subject and stage
peer and
self-assessment

Unit C1
Around the
AifL triangle

Unit C3
Planning
Learning experience**s**

Unit C2
Engaging purposes,
principles and
practice

CfE discussion paper
Thinking to learn

Support materials
Tools for thinking

Route to engagement
Exploring the principles of formative assessm**ent**
-
Developing formative assessment practice**s**
Creating autonomous learners

Exploring the model

Reflection booklets
Exploring dialogue
-
Using learning logs
-
Developing thinking

Framework unit
• PowerPoint
• notes
• activities
• reading

Reflection booklet
• case studies
• reflective commentary

Reflective professionals and thinking children

Evaluations
FLaT project
SQA assessment project
Stirling University
managing change study

During this period, the Highland Council was also involved in a number of initiatives that linked them to ideas beyond the Council. For example, Highland was a member of an inter-authority AifL group who formed their own learning community to keep informed of developments, to share practices and to work out ways of addressing shared challenges. In addition, Highland was one of two local authorities invited to become part of the Nuffield funded Analysis of Reforms in Education research project undertaken by members of the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (Gardner et al, 2008).

The Evaluation Process

This small-scale evaluation reflects on the progress made by the Highland Council towards the four key indicators established as aims by the project team. The formative nature of this evaluation is an important element in this study in three central ways, in the evaluation design, in the evaluation focus and in the products emerging from the evaluation. Firstly, there are implications for the way in which the evaluation was designed. The design was developed collaboratively. For example, the Highland Council wished to recognise the individuality of different school communities. This meant that there were negotiations amongst stakeholders from within the project to ensure that there was both a level of consistency in the evaluation process and that the research design was shaped by the features which were perceived to be unique to certain clusters/schools. The evaluators had both previously worked with the Highland Council initiative in different ways and had some understanding of what the Council was trying to achieve. Secondly, in addition to collecting evidence on progress made towards key indicators, the evaluation remit was that it should be future orientated, seeking to identify implications for further developments from the lessons learned by different communities within the FLaT project, teachers, senior managers in schools and members of the Highland Council policy community. Thirdly, the products of the evaluation were jointly negotiated. In addition to a brief report on the evidence emerging from the evaluation in relation to the four aims of the project, further evidence was analysed according to the implications for a range of audiences likely to be of significance to the next phase of the Highland Journey in the Highland Council where more schools from the Council become involved in the Highland Journey. The key audiences identified were, teachers and networks, school managers and local policy communities. It is intended that these reports will be used by the Highland Council in developing both policy and practices within the Council. A third paper was developed by the Porject Manager to identify possible implications for national policy communities arising from the Highland Council experiences. arising

The FLaT evaluation is closely linked to another recent research project, funded by SQA. The SQA project sought to explore an existing Highland Council initiative; trying to understand what teachers were doing in their classrooms when trying to reconcile

tensions between assessment for learning and assessment of learning. The study also sought to illustrate, why teachers were adopting particular approaches and to identify any differences particpants were able to discern in teaching and learning.   In particular, this study focused on classes working towards high stakes examinations.

The evidence used to inform findings in this report draws on documentation from the Highland Council, analyses of case studies developed by teachers and schools as they developed their own Highland Journeys, interviews from key stakeholders involved in the FLaT project and evidence from the SQA study as it relates to issues emerging in this work.

Looking back; looking forward

From the outset, it was understood that the evaluation process should reflect on the depth and scope of the Highland journey. This was perceived to be a key feature of the process.. One of the evaluators had been involved in the journey from the outset and had worked closely throughout the journey with the project manager. who initially was a mathematics teacher and then, worked as Highland Council's AifL development officer before becoming project manager for the FLaT project.   The project manager had been instrumental in creating and sustaining a CPD cycle involving teachers from the Authority and with input from nationally and internationally renowned educationalists. The *Learning and Teaching CPD Reflection Framework* that emerged from this process was very highly regarded by teachers and Headteachers.

It was intended that this CPD framework would offer teachers opportunities to undertake a journey, both intellectual and professional, within mutually supportive networks. The aim was to enable them to become more reflective as professionals so that they could create the conditions in which their pupils could develop as thinking individuals. Curriculum for Excellence became a perfect context within which to focus on pedagogy, and Assessment is for Learning provided the research-led opportunity for teachers to improve their practice in the classroom. There were to be no "quick fix" or "tips-for-

teachers". The central concern of the initiative was that teachers, whatever their starting point, would be involved in the co-creation of knowledge, enabling them to deepen their insights and to build sustainable networks of support

2. Scope and Methodology

The study focussed on three clusters of schools in the Highland Council, referred to in this report as clusters A, B and C. Each cluster involved a secondary school and a number of associated primary schools. Clusters A and B were largely urban . Cluster C was largely rural. Each cluster had been involved in the FLaT project although there were quite significant differences in the nature of their involvement (what does this mean?). 28 schools were involved in the evaluation process in a range of ways, 25 primary schools and 3 secondary schools.

The framework for the evaluation emerged from the Highland Council where the four main aims of the project had been linked to a number of key indications. Thus progress towards aims one and two

Aim 1. To develop a coherent conception of formative assessment

Aim 2. To explore the links between formative assessment and approaches to making thinking explicit as a powerful way of fostering the CfE capacities,

would be discerned by progress made on the following objectives

- The links between CfE and AifL, DtS, thinking skills and other learning and teaching perspectives will be explored and integrated into one structural model for learning and teaching.
- Opportunities for embedding the 4 CfE capacities in the curriculum will be identified and explored.
- Models of thinking skills based personal learning planning will be developed
- Opportunities for and threats to permeation will be identified and addressed.

Similarly,

Aim 3

: to encourage teacher learning communities which foster reflective professionals through a variety of approaches to CPD

would be described in terms of progress made on the following objectives:

- School based communities of learners will be established.
- Cluster based communities of learners will be established.
- Primary-secondary coherence and progression will be enhanced.

Finally, progress towards

Aim 4, to raise achievement, motivation and confidence would be identified through progress in relation to the following:

- Achievement and motivation among pupils will be enhanced.
- Morale and confidence among staff will be improved.

Since a major aim of the evaluation was to understand more deeply the processes of the Highland Journey and to explore individuals' perceptions of their own journeys, it was important to adopt a methodology that would offer the opportunity to explore issues with individual participants. It would also be important to examine the ways in which the Highland journey was represented in different public fora, eg, through the project related case studies and in the project related documentation. Thus a range of research methodologies was employed, e.g., textual analysis, analysis of oral conference presentations and semi structured interviews. Documentation and presentations were analysed to identify key themes and a wide range of project participants was interviewed with key participants from both policy and practice communities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). The interviews were taped and transcribed. In two cases where interviewees

declined to be taped during an interview, notes were taken and dictated onto tape as soon as possible after the interview. Transcriptions were then analysed using NVivo8[2] to identify key themes. Since the evaluation was essentially a formative one with a clear focus on implications for future action related to growing the project more widely in sustainable ways, a further dimension was introduced to the research design The themes emerging from the analysis of the evidence from the variety of sources described above was then compared to broader evidence on key features of transformational change using an amalgam of a number models. The first model emerged from research on Assessment is for Learning in Scotland (Hayward, Simpson & Spencer, 2006), the second from a Nuffield funded study that analysed reforms in Assessment across the UK (Gardner et al, 2008) and the third from work on learning communities (Hakkarainen et al, 2004**;** Cassidy et al, 2007).

Finally, the draft sections of this report were discussed with key participants from the communities for which they were intended to ensure that ideas emerging from the study were grounded in practical understandings of the issues arising and written in ways that were consistent with the voices of the different target communities.

The evaluation began in May 2008 and ended in May 2009.

It was agreed amongst all participants that there would be four outputs from the project and that these would form the structure of this report. Firstly, there should be this report of the context of for the FLaT project including evidence of progress of towards the stated objectives. This would be based on evidence from interviews with teachers, headteachers and pupils. It would also be based on an analysis of data emanating from within the project and interview/discussions with representatives form the policy community.

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[2] NVivo8 is a software package used to handle very rich qualitative information, where deep levels of analysis of data are required.

This report, including where appropriate findings from the SQA project would form the basis of three further short papers on the Engagement Strategy, focused on three target communities identified as key to the future growth and to the sustainable development of the Highland model.

- The first would be a paper on what matters for sustainable development from the perspective of the role and functioning of ASGs. The target audience for this would be senior managers in primary, secondary and special schools.

- The second would be a paper on what matters for sustainable development from the perspective of the role and functioning of managers. The target audience for this would be managers in schools and local authorities.

- The third would be a paper on what matters for sustainable development from the perspective of the role and functioning of the policy communities in the Highland Council. The target audience for this would be national policy communities.

This project was ethically approved by the University of Glasgow and was undertaken in a manner consistent with their guidelines.

3 Evaluation Findings and Implications

This section presents the findings from the formative evaluation of the Highland Journey. As indicated in section 2 of this report the findings focus on two main areas. The first section presents findings related to progress on the Highland Journey. The second section identify issues for sustainable development. These issues are targeted at different communities whose continued active participation is crucial for the future growth and development of the Highland Journey.

3.1   Progress on the Highland Journey

1)   This section presents an analysis of the views obtained from key stakeholder groups, namely headteachers, teachers, learners and Local Authority personnel with reference to the four general aims of the Highland Journey identified in section two of this report.

Each of the four aims is formulated as a question followed by a discussion of emerging findings. Quotations used are intended to be illustrative of issues raised by numbers of respondents. Where an issue was raised by only one person, this is indicated in the text.

3.1.1   To what extent did people on the Highland Journey have a coherent conception of formative assessment?
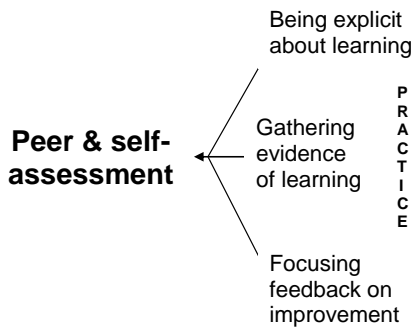
The CPD model which forms the backdrop for the Highland Journey identifies three aspects to what might be described as a coherent conception of formative assessment. The first relates to the Principles of Formative Assessment

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Participation
P
R
I
N
C          Dialogue ──────▶ Thinking
I
P
L
E
S
Engagement
```
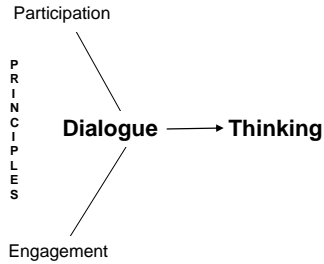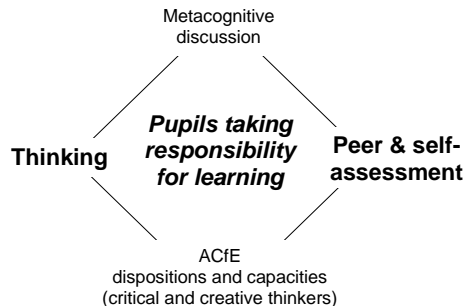
'If children are to become engaged in their own learning, they need to be thinking for themselves and teachers can stimulate and support this by encouraging active classroom participation through dialogue designed to both investigate learning as it occurs and dispel misunderstandings before they get in the way of future learning'

The second relates to the Practice of Formative Assessment

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                    Being explicit
                    about learning
                                        P
                                        R
                    Gathering           A
Peer & self-        evidence            C
assessment   ◀──    of learning         T
                                        I
                                        C
                                        E
                    Focusing
                    feedback on
                    improvement
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'The acid test of embedding formative assessment is not that teachers are using the right strategies in the classroom but that pupils are engaged in assessing their own learning.'

The third is concerned with the shifting of traditional power relationships within classrooms.

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                    Metacognitive
                    discussion

                    Pupils taking
Thinking            responsibility      Peer & self-
                    for learning        assessment

                        ACfE
                dispositions and capacities
                (critical and creative thinkers)
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'The Highland Council CPD Reflection Framework recognises the importance of the role teachers play in helping pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

It also understands that building independent, self-motivated learners often requires both pupils and teachers to change well-established classroom habits and practices.'

The themes from the analysis of interviews illustrated a strong relationship between the Highland Journey definition of formative assessment and understandings amongst headteachers, teachers and pupils that emerged from analysis of the interviews. There were several key themes identified:

'Recognising the next steps'

Formative assessment was seen as crucial in achieving 'a quality interaction' that aimed to 'influence the next steps of learning and teaching' (Primary Headteacher) and 'lead(s) to an improvement in the learners' performance' (Secondary Headteacher):

> *... [children] can get as much support ... whether it be giving them support from a teacher or from another child or a group of children. ...so that they feel that their next step of learning has been identified for them, they know what they have to do and they know where they can get help to do it..*
>
> (Primary Headteacher)

> *It's about providing feedback to pupils, recognising the next steps that they have to take and what they have to do to get there [by] actively involving the pupils within their own learning, involving them in their thinking and learning skills.*
>
> (Primary Teacher)

> *... assessment procedure that will allow a child or a teacher find out what a child can do and ... any gaps that are [there]. It's not a case of ranking them, it's much more of an information giving exercise that allows the children to say 'This is now what I can do'.*
>
> (Secondary Headteacher)

These accounts illustrate ways in which formative assessment was future-orientated – and how teaching and learning was perceived to be a bridge between teachers and pupils enabling them to work towards shared aims.

Teachers suggested that pupils were the primary beneficiaries of formative assessment. There was also recognition that formative assessment was an essential part of teachers' learning, prompting them to reflect on and to inform their practice leading to the 'adjustment of the teaching and learning' process (Primary Teacher):

> *We've tried to encourage staff to be aware of and alert to their own teaching and their impact ... assessment for the purpose of helping with learning... and it does help the process of learning but it also helps the process of teaching ... assessments that would elaborate the areas that pupils were finding difficult and we were amending their teaching and rewriting the teaching and reconstructing the way we taught lessons to take account of what the assessment was telling us about pupils' learning or mis-learning.*

> (Secondary Headteacher)

Pupil engagement and responsibility

Another crucial aspect of formative assessment was 'a joint partnership' characterised by continuous 'dialogue' between teacher and pupils and amongst pupils. There was perceived to be an observable increase in pupil engagement. As a result, pupils were encouraged to think more purposefully and explicitly, as they developed to become more 'responsible', autonomous and independent learners:

> *...it's about involving pupils and being more involved in lessons, becoming more responsible for their own involvement in the lesson. We've*

encouraged staff to try out techniques that will involve pupils in peer
assessment and self-assessment.

(Secondary Headteacher)

...helping children become more responsible for their own learning, more
autonomous and independent..

(Primary Headteacher)

...it's about trying to increase pupil engagement, and making the activities
that they are doing a bit more purposeful by thinking about what they are
doing ... it's about them [being] reflective, and starting to think a bit more
about why they are doing something, and what they are doing it for....

(Primary Headteacher)

There was a universal recognition of the significance of a shared responsibility
between teachers and learners. As one headteacher emphasised, this additional
responsibility given to learners resulted in both challenge and enjoyment:

... pupils were engaged, pupils were participating ... there was dialogue
going on between pupils and between teachers and pupils. And that the
pupils were being challenged and were happy....

(Secondary Headteacher)

Pupils interviewed offered evidence that they understood what was happening in
teaching and learning in their classrooms. Pupils clearly identified the importance
of having a clear idea of what they were learning. In one classroom observed
pupils had had a clear role in developing the curriculum plan with the teacher. The
class was asked to think about the topic (farming) they were about to study and to
identify in groups what they wanted to learn about the topic and how they might

best learn. The groups presented their plans to the class and the teacher discussed with the children other ideas that they might incorporate into their plan. The negotiated plan was then used as the curricular framework for the topic.

Two types of assessment were in common use: self- and peer-assessment. For self-assessment, numbers of pupils spoke of how they assessed their own and others' progress using 'success criteria'. They clearly articulated the role of the adult in this process as someone who monitored that they were 'getting them right'. Pupils indicated a preference for these ways of working. They suggested that self-assessment helped them to reflect more meaningfully and to understand what they had to do to improve their learning. Peer-assessment was also positively regarded. ,Pupils commonly referred to 'response partners' who offered them feedback. To promote balanced feedback some children spoke of using 'Two stars and a wish'. Pupils interviewed described this as providing positive comments about other children's work and offered one next step based on the 'success criteria'.

Many of the young people interviewed had an impressive awareness of the process of learning and of the centrality of their own role in that process. They clearly enjoyed more participative ways of working and were less complimentary about more passive approaches to learning that they had experienced.

A 'journey'

With formative assessment, the majority of stakeholders interviewed (teachers, headteachers, project manager) perceived themselves to have embarked on a learning journey. This idea of assessment as a means of enhancing learning was perceived to a core idea in promoting assessment for formative purposes becoming 'embedded in the practice' thus, becoming 'a standard way of doing things' (Primary Teacher):

...it is a tool or process of learning ... shared between the pupil and the teacher, and the pupil and the pupil and it's about discovering next steps or where you want to go and more about how you want to get there so it's more to do with the journey rather than the end result .

<div align="right">

(Secondary Teacher)

</div>

...it's a way of life rather than just about ... one thing. It's about absolutely every aspect of your classroom, not just single lesson, not just giving the children targets and learning outcomes and then doing peer assessment ... it covers behaviour, increasing standards, being more open with the children about why I need them to do such and such .... While it can be seen as very academically targeted, I actually see it as ... the whole ethos of the classroom.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

...before I thought it was something that I did as the teacher, and it was really another form of summative assessment but just more informal, I thought it was more for a teacher and a form of assessing. Whereas now I really think it's part of the whole learning and understanding of the whole class, the children, and it's actually a joint partnership. The formative assessment is ... a way of summarising how they got on; how they're getting on; it's actually embedded in the practice and the children know it's part of their learning. It's a way of moving the learning on.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

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There was clear evidence that many of the teachers and headteachers interviewed had developed holistic conceptions of learning, teaching and assessment. There was a strong sense of many of the teachers/headteachers understanding that a fundamental shift in the power relationship between teacher and learner lay at the heart of effective learning. It was noticeable that many of the teachers, in both primary and secondary schools, talked of progress not in terms of curriculum, ie,

naming text books or reading levels, but in relation to children's achievements and to their next steps.

With regard to the 'distance travelled', many teachers spoke of their own journey to a point where the process had become 'second nature' to their practice as teachers:

> *That's what's beginning to come together. Staff who've been engaged in formative assessment now for a number of years. This is becoming second nature.*
>
> *(Secondary Headteacher)*

Not all teachers felt that they had travelled very far. A small number of teachers suggested that the approaches suggested in the Highland Journey had been their previous practice and that the policy community was now catching up. One teacher suggested that it all seemed very complicated.

3.1.2 Links between formative assessment and approaches to making thinking explicit as a powerful way of fostering the CfE capacities

Many of the teachers interviewed had been involved in considerable thinking about the relationship between assessment for formative purposes and ideas behind CfE.

Connections were commonly made between ideas that were central to enhance children's learning and ideas central to enhance teachers' learning

> *I would start with engagement, with whatever the teacher's doing, it's going to have engagement with the staff, then you get participation and then you get dialogue and from the dialogue comes thinking. That is a robust model.*
>
> *(Secondary Headteacher)*

... we actually talk with all the pupils. We actually talk about metacognition with them so that we [can] understand how they're thinking and what their thinking processes are and where these things are appropriate to learning.

<div align="right">

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

</div>

It's about providing feedback to pupils, recognising the next steps that they have to take and what they have to do to get there [by] actively involving the pupils within their own learning, involving them in their thinking and learning skills.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

'Making thinking explicit'

In translating this concept into practice, one of the headteachers emphasised that 'making thinking explicit' amongst learners had strong implications for the overall philosophy of teaching.

One primary teacher stressed how sharing ideas on thinking actually helped them to get started into 'thinking about thinking'. It was also argued that 'the climate in the classroom' needed to be appropriate for encouraging new ideas about thinking:

When I was first thinking about thinking, I thought about how it would look like and how is my classroom going to change and how are the children going to feel about this and I just went in to them and shared those thoughts with them. I talked to them the whole time and shared my thoughts with them from the beginning. I said, 'what do you think thinking does look like and what does it feel like?' and that's basically where we started ... That generated a lot of discussion from the children, that was a really good starting point.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

...it has quite a lot to do with the climate in the classroom where the pupils even understand that they should be thinking in the first place, not just remembering.

<div align="right">*(Secondary Teacher)*</div>

Similarly, there was evidence of a concern for a deep understanding of process. For example, one headteacher argued that it was very important to establish children's understanding of what they are asked to do. To illustrate this point the headteacher used the example of success criteria, where teachers needed to 'model' how to use these criteria with the pupils and discuss ideas with them before asking pupils to use these criteria with other children. This required teachers' genuine understanding of the importance of moving away from the 'what' towards the and 'how' of teaching:

...we've got staff here that have realised that it's not how much you can cram into the learning process, it's the way it's done. The discussions that we are beginning to have now ... this session has been about the how of teaching. It's getting staff to step back from this element of the curriculum that has suggested that there's a huge amount to learn, a huge volume to learn rather than to think about.

<div align="right">*(Secondary Headteacher)*</div>

There were fewer references to why particular topics or ideas should or should not be part of the curriculum.

There was a view amongst a number of headteachers that 'making thinking explicit' as part of the Highland Journey had gradually transformed learning practices in many classrooms. A number made reference to the fact that some teachers remained to be convinced of the importance of these changes. Some teachers had made more progress than others:

... we've come a long way on the Highland Journey but there's still variations between our classrooms and our teachers but I would walk into one classroom and I can see evidence of children being involved in discussing what thinking is all about, what thinking looks like and feels like to them and what it means to them, how they think.

(Primary Headteacher)

A small number of teacher and headteachers raised concerns. Although they suggested that they had some understanding of what they were trying to achieve, they also admitted their uncertainty about what the ideas really meant in practice. This led to some discomfort for some teachers, especially at the initial stage. There was also a suggestion that the difficulty emanated from the abstractness involved in thinking:

I don't like that phrase - 'making thinking explicit'. ... It throws me a bit because I don't think I'm very clear myself about what it is. ... I think it's really important to get the children involved in dialogue so that they're really clear about what's going on....

(Secondary Headteacher)

That's one of the hardest things to get your head around because I don't think children, even staff, it's not always clear what you do to think and a couple of us went to a really good course ... and that really got us going and it's led to a lot of discussion. We brought in quite a lot of thinking skills materials.

(Primary Headteacher)

I must admit that that's something that I'm not completely happy with. How I deliver it in the classroom, but I have been more explicit to them,

using success criteria and learning outcomes and peer assessment and self-assessment, I feel quite comfortable with that now.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

Interviewees identified a number of components they believed to be central in making pupils understand their own thinking processes in order to enhance their learning skills. These were:

- ➢ understanding the underlying principles
- ➢ dialogue and transparency between teachers and learners,
- ➢ creating a suitable 'climate in the classroom',
- ➢ teachers 'stand[ing] back from their planning', and
- ➢ teachers engaging pupils with what they are doing (including modelling)

Likewise, pupils expressed the view that they liked being engaged with their learning. Pupils believed that in doing so, they 'get a better chance of learning' as they liked to do things that were of interest to them:

…if we do what we want to do, then we'll learn it better….

<div align="right">

(Primary 6 pupil)

</div>

Development of Personal Learning Planning (PLP)

In the following accounts, teachers and headteachers described some of the focal characteristics of PLP. These included learners being the drivers; PLP being integral to the curriculum; personalised or individualised planning; a student-centred approach and learner ownership. . Some teachers associated PLP with

documentation and spoke of, the possibility of using an electronic system as beneficial to all parties concerned:

...planning the teaching, learning ... which is really to meet the needs of every pupil, the pupil's at the centre. It's the whole essence of effective teaching and learning. It involves setting targets, maybe personal targets....

(Primary Teacher)

It's the how that's the key in [children's] planning.

(Primary Teacher)

You don't want it to be exactly the same in each class.... You can personalise it so you can be doing the same things but in very different ways.

(Primary Headteacher)

I think they'd have to be [electronic] so that the pupils and the staff are engaged and there's a dialogue going on, where there's a personal learning planning going on and there's a product at the end where there's a record of what that planning was.

It has to be in the hands of the learner ... the children have written the questions that they want answered. The teacher's questions will be in there as well ... but ultimately with time, by the time they get up to the senior school, it should be wholly the young person's process and product....

It's got to do with the curricular structure....

(Secondary Headteacher)

In linking models of thinking skills with the development of the personal learning planning (PLP), comments made by headteachers and teachers were mainly positive:

With the learning logs, we started with short sentences on areas they want to improve on or something they hadn't done in a while. ... With the topic it has worked really well, they've been able to identify already what they already know, what they'd like to know and how they are going to go about it.

(Primary Teacher)

...children get weekly reports and they reflect on how they've done, how they've behaved, how their attitude has been, what they've achieved, and then there's a column ... a column for the teachers and it goes home with a comment for the parent, comment from the pupil, comment from the teacher and then from home, comment from the parents. We have changed that ... adapted it to the CfE so that they're reflecting in the line of the four capacities on a weekly basis. So that's also influencing part of their learning, part of their personal learning planning.

(Primary Headteacher)

Certainly, a big part of the formative process ... reflecting with the kids through the use of learning logs on the success [of their learning experiences]. We've looked really carefully at what they have been learning but also how and why they've been learning it....

(Primary Teacher)

According to teachers, not only did these 'learning logs' benefit the children as they took some control of their learning and enhanced their progress, but it also helped them, as teachers, to reflect on their teaching style by listening to their

students' voice, evaluate their methodology and adjust their approach accordingly. Teachers also conveyed a sense of satisfaction when other people saw how their use of PLP had progressed and had become embedded in the learning practice:

...we have started to keep learning logs ... we try to keep them fairly regularly, ... usually weekly, where the children reflect on what they have done, what they have been involved in... they look at the things they have been pleased about, where they feel they have achieved well, and also try to set themselves targets for the next week, fortnight, month....

(Primary Teacher)

...it was nice when somebody came in to say we're doing personal learning planning and now it has really moved on because it's part of the learning, it's not an add on, it's essential. It directs my learning and teaching because ... it's impacted on the way that the activities are set up and the children, listening to their voice, the way that they work now they have a much stronger voice.

(Primary Teacher)

Yet, it was also acknowledged by one of the advocates that PLP did not necessarily come easily to all children and that careful consideration would have to be given to how these might best be supported:

...I'm not going to say that it works for every child as successfully, there are some children who ... respond to it really well and have just taken the whole work of this and run with it. Other children I suppose still struggle with [it] ... it doesn't mean that they can't do it but they might need some support ... at different levels.

(Primary Teacher)

For those who managed to integrate PLP into their practice, teachers attributed the progress they made to the CPD programme offered by Highland Council (including practical materials that were highly regarded):

Nearly all the staff have had CPD in this and they go on teaching the standard we expect ... thinking skills ... and all the four capacities and so on, it's one of the big dimensions we ask [teachers] to think about.

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

... most staff had been led and had been told in a very prescriptive way so I had to lead the few staff I had into thinking in a different way. So this four-page booklet helped the staff come to the realisation that it was the dialogue that was important, the planning was important and not the plan.

(Primary Headteacher)

Schools varied in the ways in which PLP was being developed.

All the children are able to do personal learning planning to some extent. They work with the teachers to set their targets and they work with each other to set targets. We don't record all the targets for all the curricular areas in one place but the Primary 7s have been doing personal planning logs, they have half an hour each Friday when they keep these up-to-date with the targets for the week and what they need to do to improve and they get a chance to discuss it with the teacher and each other.

(Primary Headteacher)

While we've been involved in this project, each cluster, each school, has developed their own particular way. We have not been down the personal learning logs way to any great extent ... they way I'd see it, it would be an

extension of what we're doing. ... I don't want the learning log to be ... a piece of bureaucracy.

<div align="right">*(Secondary Headteacher)*</div>

Some headteachers observed that there was still a certain degree of ambiguity in what mattered in how PLP. One suggested that although it may be worthwhile to have a plan and learning targets, s/he expressed reservations about writing them down:

I'll be honest and say I'm still a bit vague on that. ... My own personal view of it first of all is that it isn't a piece of paper but what it is that children are able, sometimes on their own, in primary more likely in a group, to turn around and say this is what I can do, this is what I need to be able to do next ... this is what I'm expecting to do and this is how I'm going to go about doing it. I don't think that necessarily needs to be written down. What we have here is that each child has what we call a target sheet.

<div align="right">*(Secondary Headteacher)*</div>

We're at the very early stages of this ... It's not been widely done ... it will be part of the school plan next year ... the use of ... learning logs. These will be something that the children will be writing up ... to give them a chance to evaluate ... it will help them identify targets as well.

<div align="right">*(Secondary Headteacher)*</div>

For some, 'learning logs' were still to be included in their future planning; others remained unconvinced of the value of 'learning logs':

Personal learning planning faced quite a lot of opposition except from the P7 teacher who did some work with the class on learning dispositions and

developed a pupil progress file … The opposition from the other teachers

was too much paperwork, and loss of time….

<div align="right">*(Primary Headteacher)*</div>

Opportunities for, and threats to, permeation

Opportunities

Various factors as potentially important if all schools were to become involved in the Highland Journey. Teachers identified the following types of support from schools as imperative:

- ➢ high quality inset experience ,
- ➢ school embedding the CfE four capacities,
- ➢ 'a really good course' with complementary material,
- ➢ 'opportunity to observe and personally learn from colleagues', and
- ➢ allocated time for discussion, reflection, thinking and reading.

Of all these opportunities, what practitioners valued most was the prospect of getting down to the 'nitty gritty' and learning practical ways of putting research informed ideas into practice, often through informal chat, observation and conversation in the corridor. A headteacher stressed how CfE is playing a vital role in creating an ethos of open discussion amongst teachers, making it 'a way of thinking.' The importance of there being clear links with policy was also highlighted:

Watching people like Mrs A, she went to similar courses and she'd come

back with a different perspective and I would be able to talk to her about

it. I've got excellent staff but she had the potential and it has developed

professionally and personally to such a degree that it's been a joy to watch her taking it on. You only need one person like that and your staff feels fired up. Everyone wants to know what she's doing and before you know it the whole thing's snowballing.

(Primary Headteacher)

...it's direct face to face contact, face to face dialogue, teacher-pupil dialogue ... changing the focus, because ... we (teachers) think we know best ... because we have a degree and we are the teacher and we have the access to the reports and the research that we know, but actually ... this will allow us to get the pupil perspective.

(Secondary Headteacher)

...one of the cruxes is that the outcomes are beginning to appear on the scene... and that's the level of debate that ... our senior staff are really good at doing, they do openly discuss, they open their classroom doors and they talk to each other a lot, so CfE has become a way of thinking.

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

There was encouragement for the Local Authority to continue , cross-sectoral working which enabled headteachers and staff from different sectors and partner centres to work together. This was perceived to have a number of benefits, eg, promoting a stronger relationship between sectors as well as a better transition for learners and learning :

The FLaT project ... was helpful. Working as an ASG, that's helped greatly. ... This has helped us pull together and gives us a focus and we can see great benefits because we started to work together as teaching communities.

(Primary Headteacher)

One headteacher spoke very positively about the impact of beginning teachers on school developments, particularly in their willingness to seek to share standards.

Senior staff and principal teachers have been used to a different way of working ... but the younger generation coming through, seem to have much more awareness of the need for this sharing of the standard and they're doing it naturally. They're in and out of each other's classes and talking to each other and I think with that generational change, it must be happening in their training.

(Secondary Headteacher)

Threats

One of the key issues is the 'management of change' within schools and within local authorities. Change often means that teachers are asked to move beyond their traditional comfort zone:

... it is a difficult process to manage the change, where we have staff who have done a particular thing for the past 20 years and who have become very good at it and who are perhaps regarded as quality, experienced staff. For them to break out of what is a comfortable and good way of teaching, it's difficult for them.

(Secondary Headteacher)

For experienced teachers who have taught for a number of years using a particular style that has proved effective, encouragement to use a radically different approach can be daunting.

A further concern expressed was related to the notion of 'achievement and attainment'. The approaches to learning, teaching and assessment being advocated in the Highland Journey invite teachers and schools to develop broader ideas of

what matters in achievement in education beyond the recent strong focus on attainment fairly narrowly defined. Attainment remains an important goal for all concerned. Many teachers spoke of increases in attainment and better achievement, however, one headteacher had different experiences:

Unfortunately attainment this year has taken a bit of a dip and I wasn't expecting that because I was so confident that the children were much more confident and much more involved and taking responsibilities, I assumed that naturally attainment would rise… so we need to look at our summative assessment … raise the bar.

(Primary Headteacher)

Many teachers and headteachers expressed concerns about current assessment and examination arrangements

…we tend to set the examinations in a way that it encouraged that road of learning and it's not genuine learning … [is] there a way of measuring this in a way that is meaningful. …we can see achievement and we can recognise it and celebrate it but attainment … is a very specific thing within it and it dominates at the moment.

(Secondary Headteacher)

I'm a bit wobbly about whether we'll lose the progression and the cohesion, that's the tricky thing.

(Primary Headteacher)

…the nature of the exam, you assess areas that … probably aren't measurable but they're obvious if you see them. I don't think you can set up an exam.

(Primary Headteacher)

Other perceived threats to permeation included:

➢ Whether or not is would be possible for every participant to have access to key aspects of the CPD model, eg, the high quality seminar programme

➢ The perception that the programme had an overwhelming amount of paperwork to read,

➢ Fear that there would be few opportunities for teacher-teacher dialogue or for school to school dialogue.

➢ Change of staff being 'a massive stumbling block',

➢ Lack of confidence in teachers' professional judgement and the need for priority to be to sharing standards for learning and teaching,

➢ Pressure on time amongst teachers, and

➢ Lack of support from school senior management/leadership team.

Opportunities for embedding the CfE capacities in the curriculum

For some schools who suggested that their existing teaching, learning and assessment approaches were consistent with the principles of A Curriculum for Excellence, they described that their engagement in the Highland Journey enabled them to enrich rather than change their practice. Teachers most commonly cited common ground between CfE and the Highland Journey as being a concern to promote criticality in thinking as well as intellectual engagement:

…[CfE is] going to enrich what we do … I don't see any major changes in what we do, I see teachers for once glad that this is what I think my children need and that's the way I'm going to teach it. I would only see it as minor tweaks….

(Primary Headteacher)

...The starting point within the school was for all departments to identify what they were already doing in terms of promoting successful learning, confident individuals, and so on. And they were surprised at what they came out with, pleasantly surprised. There was a lot of it going on already.

(Secondary Headteacher)

On the other hand, one teacher explained how she initially thought that her educational practice was aligned with CfE but came to believe that there had been significant differences. She perceived her earlier practices to more like using a 'spoon-feeding' . She believed that shifting towards CfE had had a positive impact on the overall quality of classroom practice:

...although I like to have thought that I always encouraged my children to think and be independent and not give them too much ... I did spoon-feed them. Now, the children are far more willing to go out and decide what they want to learn themselves.... They come up with ideas ... they don't sit there blank and wait for you to tell them what to learn. They are more willing to suggest ... what they would like to learn .... it has had a huge impact on the way that classrooms work....

(Primary Teacher)

The inherent connection between the CfE and the broader Highland Journey was made explicit by one of the headteachers, who perceived that each initiative directly endorsed the other. The practical benefits to pupils were described in various ways

The fact that the children were focusing on the four capacities, to make children confident and effective and all the adjectives and nouns. To do that they got to be able to think for themselves, they got to be independent learners so it all ties in really well. The bit that we're missing is that the children who are passengers – we have to make the thinking explicit for

them in order to help them fulfil the four capacities, so it ties in pretty easily and in a quite simple way.

<div align="right">

(Primary Headteacher)
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If the children are formatively assessing their own learning, to an extent they are taking responsibility for it by just looking back at what they've done and considering how to improve it.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)
</div>

...in speaking to the staff, they feel that the collaborative approach with children working together coming up with joint decisions and talking to each other a bit more.... Quite a lot of them do feel that the children are progressing and becoming more confident ... so you have the confident individuals starting to emerge.... I think we are getting successful learners, and effective contributors, because they are all contributing within a smaller group....

<div align="right">

(Primary Headteacher)
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Likewise, teachers themselves also claimed to gain intellectually as they put CfE into practice:

...there's a level of debate and a feeling that because of that intellectual engagement [teachers are] more evaluative about things than they were before, they're allowed to be more critical ... in the correct sense.

<div align="right">

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)
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One headteacher suggested that there was still a long journey to be undertaken to realise the aspirations of CfE.

I'm not confident that we've gone very far down that road. ... I'd be a liar if I said [our school] was at the forefront. ...having said that, we did hint a while ago to the staff that .... we really need to think about how we are structuring the curriculum in the school.

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

Links between CfE and AifL, DtS, thinking skills and other learning and teaching

In exploring the links between various educational initiatives and perspectives in an attempt to integrate them into 'one structural model for learning and teaching', interview respondents agreed that there were clear relationships that are 'naturally linked together'. However, many teachers found the relationship a complex one to articulate. Amongst those who attempted to describe connections, the most common link a perception that all were grounded in a common concern about 'developing and nurturing children's learning and their personal development' as they take responsibility for their own learning. Most participants were highly complimentary about the Highland Framework and their experiences of it but there were some concerns expressed about its complexity:

All this information that we got relating to the Highland model was very useful but a lot of it, a lot of fantastic research, a lot of theory which is worthwhile which people needed to get to grips with and not just the practice, you'd have a real understanding of what's going on but I think it has to be broken down. And looked at almost individually as separates before you can gel it all together ... I was just introducing it individually rather than here it all it is, here's the model. We just looked at bits and pieces and then staff were actually able to link them all together. It was just a natural step, to link them together. I felt having all the information at once was too much and it was good to put it into bite-sized chunks or modules if you like and it naturally linked together.

I don't find the models very easy to understand, I must admit, ... but I don't find them terribly easy to understand as they stand. But it's really about developing and nurturing children's learning and their personal development in order to develop the four capacities. To do this effectively, we need to use formative assessments which includes thinking skills, cooperative learning and so on in order to assist the learners to engage with the process and take more responsibility for their own learning.

(Primary Teacher)

One teacher emphasised the importance of the context for the initiative. For example, the school ethos, appropriate attitudes amongst staff and pupils:

Somebody asked me what changes would the school make with the CfE and AifL ... this school in particular, I'm not saying it's perfect, but certainly ... we value our children, we expect a lot from them. This is the whole school. ... It's like breathing to them, they know that they will be doing this because they've seen the other children as role models and it's a really nice thing. ...if you have the ethos and the behaviour and the children onboard, everything else will fall into place.

(Primary Teacher)

Teachers also agreed that integrating different initiatives was crucial:

To me, it should all be integrated. I think for a long time, we have been compartmentalising everything. This is this and that is that. It has to be seen as a whole cycle, everything feeding into this central core, which is to make them successful learners and confident individuals.

(Primary Headteacher)

...if we are going to be looking at a new curriculum, we need to think about what impact it's going to have ... and I think this Highland framework and the model is just a fantastic way to link all our formative assessments with the AifL with the CfE and to take it forward that way.

(Primary Teacher)

3.1.3   Encourage teacher learning communities which foster reflective professionals through a variety of approaches to CPD

There was little doubt that in the formation and development of 'the thinking child', teachers were perceived to play a very significant role. As one headteacher suggested:

And the thinking child will come from the strategies and methodologies and pedagogy used by the reflective professional.

(Secondary Headteacher)

Teacher learning communities were perceived to be a crucial part of the Highland Journey. Of various possible approaches to CPD, teachers tended to favour both 'professional discussion or dialogue' and CPD offered by leading thinkers. The latter was often linked to ideas of sustainability.

I think some of the sustaining courses ... were very helpful, because ... it ... gave us a bit of a kick start, and I think that some schools will need some input before they are able to take some of this on, and I think they maybe do need somebody from outside to come in and motivate people to get going with it ....

(Primary Headteacher)

Those who have been through the process are much more likely to talk about how you engage pupils, how you encourage participation, how you

get the dialogue going in a way that is leading to deep thinking rather than superficial knowledge....

<div align="right">

(Secondary Headteacher)

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Teachers and headteachers suggested that for some teachers the Highland Journey represented a major challenge to their existing practice leaving them 'frightened to change practice'. A further crucial idea within the Highland Journey was the move from ideas of success and failure to ideas of learning, where making mistakes was seen to be an acceptable part of a learning process:

...it's OK to be wrong. It was a big, big message that we learn from our mistakes, everybody makes mistakes and as long as you learn from them ... that's been a real push.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

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It was also suggested that learning would be less frightening if teachers were to 'focus on one thing' instead of everything at once.

A number of teachers commented on approaches to change that they perceived to be ineffective, eg,   the 'cascading approach':

Because of financial constraints, usually one or two teachers will go to centralised courses, and the expectation is the thing that they experienced will cascade down to the other teachers, but this does not work. We all know it does not work. Though it is possible to attend a course, and your motivation is up, and full of ideas, it is very difficult to pass this to your colleagues who did not experience this.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

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<u>School-based communities of learners</u>

In some school based clusters groups of teachers had established learning communities where they shared knowledge, experience and examples of practice, successes and mistakes. In other schools, the headteacher suggested that the entire staff of the school were involved:

For my colleagues ... we gave them things to talk about ... 60 or 70 teachers here for the whole day. That was really the turning point for them....we saw their enthusiasm ... and the feedback was so good ... so much easier to embed issues even the one or two doubting Thomases, by the end of the day we were beginning to see...It was right across the board, I don't think you can do it unless everyone's on board..

(Primary Headteacher)

A small number of headteachers described the establishment of a large community of learners a way of honing their teachers' leadership skills or bringing out the leaders in schools:

This also gives opportunities for leadership. In a sense, what we're doing is saying to people, 'Try to be professional. Try something out. If you don't like it, then fine.' ... What we're finding is that people want to tell others and in the telling of others, the leadership emerges. ... So we had classroom teachers standing up in front of 120 and that's leadership.

(Secondary Headteacher)

...you do need people who are enthusiastic, motivated ... you need people who can lead and facilitate ... for everybody to get down together and talk

about the craft. And at school-based level, keep the high quality teacher-teacher dialogue going, but that has to be underpinned by somebody who can lead.

(Primary Headteacher)

Smaller groups were favoured in other schools – normally represented by teachers having different levels of experience:

Within the school, we've had regular meetings where we've shared a lot of what we've been doing and then broken up into smaller groups as well, maybe into threes and worked on a particular area together and that was really good as that was working with people from other departments within this school….

(Secondary Teacher)

…we asked six members of staff to deliver to their colleagues what they've been doing. Two of them were probationers; one of them was the first year teacher just out of probation, and three others including a senior colleague, all from different departments.

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

A number teachers expressed views on peer observation. Some teachers described it as 'threatening' whilst others suggested that it was one of the most enjoyable and productive aspects of their interaction:

…the staff to do a bit more peer observation of each other, and that was something the staff here were very unsure about and a little bit, well, not negative, but they were reluctant to go into people classes, and they have all done it and they have all really enjoyed it. I think they have learned a lot from seeing other people working and came back and tried different

things in their classroom that they had seen in somebody else's classroom....

<div align="right">*(Primary Headteacher)*</div>

Overall, teachers getting together to learn from each other had been perceived to promote more effective communication within school and advanced the teacher-teacher dialogue.

I have talked to the Maths department more in the last two years than I probably did before ... now I would go down to them and say, 'How do you explain that to the third years?' and I go back and make sure I do it the same way.... There's more communication, I don't think we've quite got to the point where we can say we've got it matched up and that we've got it right when we're teaching ... But there is dialogue going on ... it's increased the dialogue among the teachers and I think we're on the road to getting there but we haven't quite got there yet.

<div align="right">*(Secondary Teacher)*</div>

Cluster-based communities of learners

The opportunity to learn from teachers from other schools was also seen as a very positive step as exemplified by the following accounts:

We thought we would have a meeting each term in different classes and that's been talked about and shared with other clusters and different schools. People who came here really enjoyed looking at our classrooms and we like to have a nose at theirs. That's very positive.

<div align="right">*(Primary Headteacher)*</div>

Highland did an amazing thing this year. They got every teacher in Highland to look at CfE, nursery right through the lot and they did it on a cluster basis. They had presentations in rooms where a nursery teacher

and a middle primary and a couple of secondary teachers were discussing things in a group and … you can imagine the scepticism of the value of an inset day being spent doing this. But at the end of it people said that it was quite interesting….

(Secondary Headteacher)

Across the ASG, the teacher-teacher dialogue, get together, all together, teachers, classroom assistants, LSEs, nursery staff …we never talk about teaching and learning …. We've done it once as a whole ASG …but I would say at least once a year … for everybody to get down together and talk about the craft.

(Primary Headteacher)

Teachers forming cluster-based communities was perceived to encourage 'cross-fertilisation' of ideas not only amongst teachers and departments but also across sectors. Teachers also explained that visiting other schools, particularly speaking to 'likeminded teachers' within the cluster was very encouraging, supporting their continuing involvement. Headteachers viewed this as an excellent opportunity to build good relations amongst schools and their staffs:

There's a good relationship amongst [name of place]ASGs … if someone talks warmly about another school then you feel warm towards them so you're more receptive to going out there. It is breaking down the barriers. I think it's the general human nervousness or fear…

(Primary Teacher)

…well, the three of us … someone named us the A-team. We've been working very closely on all our personal learning logs or diaries because we're all tinkering away in our own schools and when you see the strength of each other, put them together and I really think we have such a brilliant

package now. People in our school are now coming and asking for material ... I wanted to plant the seed and say here it is and they're coming and asking for it now.

(Primary Teacher)

The evidence pointed to a healthy establishment of cluster-based communities where teachers really valued the benefit of partnership.

Primary-secondary coherence and progression

Interview participants highlighted improved relationships as a pre-requisite for a closer partnership between the two sectors. They also reported improvements in primary-secondary transition and progression:

...we've done lot of the transition work with the P7 teachers.... We were already quite ahead of the game here and had good transition going on between Nursery and P1 but this year there's going to be better transition between classes.

(Primary Headteacher)

The transfer of information from primary to secondary is quite good, we've had lots of good development work done there, but I think the most significant thing recently [was] through the FLaT project....

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

It's more about our team working ... like this whole learning community came out years ago. We didn't really know what we were meant to do and now it really has a purpose and I would say this model has given our ASG meetings a real focus for discussion. So that all children moving up to secondary are having the same experiences, but going with a good

knowledge … once they've got this they can work with secondary more closely than the P7-S1 transition.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

…lots of heads are good friends with each other so that's going to take them forward. There's a good relationship between the primary and secondary, there's been a lot of effort going in to that so I think we'll be able to sustain it in our ASG….

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

The English Department has strong links as well with a primary for sharing standards.

<div align="right">

(Secondary Teacher)

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Furthermore, one headteacher observed that primary pupils were learning in such a way that they were 'beginning to think the way science pupils [in a secondary school] would think'. (Secondary Headteacher).

3.1.4   *Raising achievement, motivation and confidence*

Raising pupil achievement, motivation and confidence, it was argued, had implications for both the short-term and the long-term:

…the enhancement of pupils' self-esteem and confidence was crucial. This is what leads to a desire to be lifelong learners. A kind of discovery of self as a thinking, reflecting person….

<div align="right">

(Primary Headteacher)

</div>

In general, many interview participants agreed that there was an interconnection between the learning activities, that were contributing to pupil enjoyment, motivation, 'a rise in confidence', engagement, and a learning climate that was conducive to effective learning.

As a consequence, they 'felt the buzz and excitement' from being part of that experience. It was also highlighted that a stimulating environment reduced pupils' fear of participating, sharing their ideas and contributing to the classroom discussion.

> *The children's confidence and self-esteem, from making the classroom atmosphere and ethos is really spot on and positive ... the children know their boundaries and the general rules. They have real rapport and respect ... and that they feel their work is valued, that every contribution is valuable, not just the right answer. ....*
>
> (Primary Teacher)

> *Everybody's ideas are valued and that's created a lot of confidence and it's helped with self-esteem because they don't feel so afraid of their ideas any more. They can contribute more effectively ... because they are happier to. When they do speak and realise that their ideas are accepted, ... it boosts them to contribute even more.*
>
> (Primary Teacher)

Achievement and motivation among pupils

Teachers believed the learning approach employed had had a direct influence on pupil motivation and achievement. They also suggested that improved motivation and engagement were expected to produce higher achieving pupils:

> *I think we have made some grounds on raising the achievement, just from the fact that they are much more involved, and they are being asked for their ideas, I think that has helped their achievement, particularly with their topic work where they are choosing what they want to do ... when I have been speaking to [the teachers] about their planning, they feel the children are more motivated, but they are achieving more that is of*

interest to them. I think there is a link between motivation and achievement. If you have the motivation, you are going to get the achievement.

<p align="right">*(Primary Headteacher)*</p>

...children are ... far more involved and because [of that] and they have ownership of it, the majority are more motivated. The majority are able to talk about what they are actually doing, to talk about their learning, as opposed to what's being done to them. Achievement-wise, the very fact that they are taking more responsibility for peer and self-assessment in a more meaningful way and understanding what that's about. I suppose ... move us towards autonomous learners and it's the confidence. ... Attainment, far too soon but achievements wise, yes, I think the achievement and the confidence of the children is greater.

<p align="right">*(Secondary Headteacher)*</p>

When I got the class they were really de-motivated ... they were really switched off and they just sat there and weren't interested. They thought they couldn't do things, or different areas of the curriculum especially Maths. Some of them thought they were useless. [Then] they became motivated. If children feel they have ownership of their learning then they're motivated. ...they went from level C to level D Maths in eight months. That's ... really quick....

<p align="right">*(Primary Teacher)*</p>

Some teachers indicated that whilst they recognised the positive changes taking place in the classroom they believed that many of these changes would be difficult to quantify.. However, they described evidence from the classroom that lay behind their beliefs.

It's hard to describe but yet definite. Especially Maths, a lot of people say, I can't do Maths, I've never been able to do Maths. I've definitely seen an improvement in their belief in themselves that they can do this and that ... 'You made a mistake

<p align="right">51</p>

there but this is what you'll have to do to make it right and you know you're
going to make progress' ... I have noticed that. It's quite hard to pin down.

<div align="right">(Primary Teacher)</div>

...sharing learning intentions are happening much more often in every
class...not just for writing but for all the curricular areas ... the children
are much ... clearer about what they're supposed to be doing.... We have
done self-assessment before ... and we've done peer assessment before,
and that wasn't new to us. But in the same way what is now happening,
it's so much more of a regular feature of every class and in different
curricular areas, much clearer. We are doing much more collaborative
learning where they are having to talk about what they're doing, how
they're doing things. We are definitely giving them more thinking time....
The children are more motivated and enjoy that, definitely, they're more
involved.

<div align="right">(Secondary Headteacher)</div>

A number of teachers and headteachers, on the other hand, cautiously stated that although 'pupils are much clearer about what they have to do to achieve success through their learning targets and the success criteria' they believed that it was too early to identify whether or not there had been any increase in achievement:

In terms of achievement, I don't want to say anything about the summative
assessment side of things, I don't know ... [it's] early days to say yet if
there's been much improvement there. ....

<div align="right">(Primary Teacher)</div>

I would say it's probably too early. What we probably should have been
doing, all of us, is doing a study before on some of key markers, we'd
come back after two or three years to have a look at, but we probably
didn't identify these markers early enough.

Morale and confidence among staff

One teacher described her personal journey being part of this project and how her perceptions and attitudes changed as she became more deeply involved. Initially, she had found the large amount of written material made it 'a bit daunting' and questioned her capability to get through it. However, as she, and other teachers looked back at their experiences, they their descriptions of their experiences were extremely positive:

I just get so excited about it! It's been fantastic! It's just great and, just selfishly, has been the best thing, the whole project. I now feel that I could go to any school in Highland and seek support, share ideas and also that there's been this breaking down of barriers ... that it really is a whole group partnership.

(Primary Teacher)

...it's very exciting. It's really taking learning and teaching forward and I've been completely excited by it and that rubs off on the children as well.

(Primary Teacher)

Apart from taking part in what was seen as a fascinating project, the support received from 'likeminded' colleagues was valued highly by teachers. They were encouraged by a perception that they were not on their own but instead were part of a much bigger project:

The FLaT project for a start was helpful. Working as an ASG, that's helped greatly…. We're all very likeminded. This has helped us pull

together and give us a focus and we can see great benefits because we started to work together as teaching communities. Staff are now put in touch with each other ... which wouldn't have happened you know [if] we all went beavering away doing things.   *(Primary Headteacher)*

What [the project] has done for me is, it has brought me [into contact] with likeminded people so that I'm not on my own to having to jot things down and muse, I'm able to engage with other people that I didn't know existed ... It's reminded me that I'm not doing this on my own ... there are lots of people doing it, not just in Highland.   *(Primary Headteacher)*

To share anything, you have to have ... to trust, professional trust and openness and that's one thing we have in school, there are no closed doors. We have had for many years a system for critical friending within the school so each class teacher or each member of staff can choose their own critical friend. Something that the FLaT project has given us is a much sharper focus to the critical friend programme.

(Primary Headteacher)

A few teachers reported that being involved in the project had confirmed and reinforced what they believed about learning and teaching, some of which they had already been doing for quite a long time. However, they now felt more positive and confident that what they were doing was right. Therefore, they had become more inclined to share their ideas and experiences with other teachers.

For a number of teachers, they described their journey as one from being cynical and resistant to new ideas to becoming more accepting as they began to see the impact made on their teaching practice:

I feel now that, that what I'm doing is what I've always believed should be done. Children should always have ownership and responsibility and opportunities for choice and they should be involved in setting their learning goal and knowing how to get there. It's always been the way I've taught I'm just a bit tighter on it now. (Primary Teacher)

I feel more confident now ... I've been able to e-mail or phone up and say, 'Hi, I'm from Highland, can I come down?', whereas before I wouldn't have had the confidence to do that. It's really opened up networks ... a key for the sustainability (Primary Teacher)

I found it really worthwhile ... I seriously hope it's not going to end now ... I think it's a good model to actually work through. Once you sit down and actually analyse it ... it's not difficult.

(Secondary Teacher)

This formative evaluation has suggested that significant progress has been made by numbers of teachers involved to date in the Highland Journey. In the next section of this report key messages are offered targeted at different communities all of whose involvement will be essential in growing to Highland Journey to every school in the Authority.

3.2 Sustainable development – what matters for senior managers in schools

The Model of Professional Learning is crucial: a focus on learners and learning; intellectual stimulation; clear links to research and policy; opportunities to develop ideas in practice in different ways; opportunities for individual and collective reflection

Taking headteachers' and depute headteachers' perspectives, the issues that emerged as crucial for the future included:

- **Teachers modelling the concepts** – Teacher-teacher dialogue was claimed to be the most useful in deepening teachers' understanding of the initiative:

    We've gone to other schools and as far as staff are concerned it's one of the best learning experiences they have had because they have been able to talk to the staff and pick up ideas. And people are then, perhaps, not as scared when people are watching… Watching people like Mrs [Name] she went to similar courses and she'd come back with a different perspective and would be able to talk to her about it. … You only need one person like that and your staff feels fired up. Everyone wants to know what she's doing and before you know it the whole thing's snowballing.

    (Primary Headteacher)

    …the most useful thing has been the meetings we've had with other people, other headteachers and for the staff, for them to meet together as a cluster has been the best in-service … it has actually moved on their thinking and their way of looking at their own teaching and other people's….

    (Primary Headteacher)

- **Having a 'lead officer'** – The effectiveness of the officer leading the initiative was strongly suggested to be key not only to the programme's success but also to its sustainability:

    …we need to keep on investing in somebody … who's going to be a hub for things to happen for the other schools … it needs leadership at the very top who understands ….

you [need] a lead officer, someone who's going to keep it all together ... if these things are not going to be available to us ... if the authority won't take on a development officer ... to progress it and move on, I don't know what we're going to do.

(Primary Headteacher)

[Name's] role in it has been pivotal ... he understands things at a level which is ahead of most of us ... the impetus has to be maintained ... it needs that leadership right the way through, in the authority and in the schools and across schools....

(Secondary Headteacher)

... somebody's got to be high octane ... I do think that high octane can keep the thing burning for a lot longer than if it's just going to trickle feed every now and then....

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

There has to be someone who has a handle of the whole rationale ... and a shared agreement with the schools involved in it ... of where we're going, where we've been. Without that, different clusters could go down a completely different road. Somebody needs to have an overview of the things so that we're basically travelling in the same direction.

(Primary Headteacher)

- **'Professional trust'** – An important component of effective networking and sharing of ideas amongst teachers is their ability to trust and respect other teachers' views and ideas, as well as the courage to take risks and to learn from their mistakes if something did not happen as expected:

The main thing in a school like this is to have professional trust or to create it where you know you can take risks and it will be respected if it

doesn't work because you will learn from it but the main thing is to let staff know that they're valued as much as any part of the operating….

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

To share anything, you have to have … to trust, professional trust and openness and that's one thing we have in school, there are no closed doors.

(Primary Headteacher)

'A degree of individualisation' – Headteachers support the idea that teachers should be given a certain degree of individualisation in their teaching as long as it is within the parameters of the school's overall approach and ethos.

…there has to be a degree of individualisation. As it is about teachers in their own classroom and how they are going to develop that. I think there also has to be some kind of cohesiveness about the approach that is going to go on in the school … You don't want people going off totally on their own direction, and maybe where the whole school ethos and whatever, so it has to be both … you want to encourage teachers to do their own thing, what you think is right for their class, but it has got to be within a structure that's agreed.

(Primary Headteacher)

- **'Intellectual engagement'** – Schools need to continue with professional discussion either formally or informally as they empower the teachers with knowledge, skills and confidence:

  …a really good course … and that really got us going and it led to a lot of discussion… We realised you couldn't really go into [it] unless you … are very clear about yourself, how you think about things….

  (Primary Headteacher)

  …because of that intellectual engagement, [teachers] are much more evaluative about things than they were before, they're … more critical …

in the correct sense. ... they'll say, 'We'll take that bit, but we don't like that bit.' That's been really healthy and I hope it can be sustained.

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

That kind of professional discussion boosts confidence.

(Secondary Headteacher)

- **School ethos and values** – From the comments provided, staff members' attitudes towards the initiative inform the school ethos either positively or negatively. As exemplified below, there was already evidence of how teachers' motivation and enthusiasm have started benefiting their learners:

  ...I do believe that if we're passionate enough about it and believe in it enough, then we will find the creative ways of doing it ... the staff I've got, most of them are dead keen to move things on, some have already moved things on and are reaping the benefits and the rewards of it, as have the children.

  (Primary Headteacher)

  ...the problem with any initiative is the sustaining part of it because two years along the line you'll be thinking, 'Oh now, we'll have to do what?' ... It's to hold on to the things that [your school] really values, and to ensure that they are continuing to be used.

  (Secondary Headteacher)

- **Strong support from SMT** – Headteachers acknowledged that the success of the project also depends upon the nature and extent of the support and steer from the SMT. Apart from providing leadership, they also play various roles:

  The role of the headteacher should be changed to the role of the head learner ... to be visionary and to know your school, staff and pupils, where

you're at and to know your strengths, school strengths ... to be the bus driver [and] make sure you've got folk on board your bus [and] to ... drive it at a speed that ... they are comfortable with.

(Primary Headteacher)

The headteacher has to have an understanding of where they want to go and an understanding of learning and teaching in the widest sense. They then have to stand up and say 'This is important and it's important for our school for the following reasons and here's how I think it will benefit other people ... and enhance the enjoyment you get out of your practice'.

(Secondary Headteacher)

My role is being enthusiastic, to provide them with the resources and the time as best I can ... to keep it alive, really.

(Primary Headteacher)

The headteacher has to be knowledgeable.... They have to have rough ideas as to what the purpose is and why we're doing this ... the headteacher needs to be very well informed. ... The headteacher has to enthuse about it the same way the teacher would with the kids....

(Secondary Headteacher)

In this regard, continuity of strong leadership (where some headteachers are retiring) is also something that headteachers think about:

I'm actually retiring in about 10 days' time, so there is a succession issue here ... who's going to carry these outline plans forward is the big issue...?

(Secondary Depute Headteacher)

The concern is that some of the key people in it at the moment are going to retire within two years and who's going to come in and what will happen at that point?

(Secondary Headteacher)

… the whole cluster will change because we're losing one very experienced headteacher….

(Primary Headteacher)

3.3 Sustainable development – what matters for teachers and networks

The Model of Professional Learning is crucial: a focus on learners and learning; intellectual stimulation; clear links to research and policy; opportunities to develop ideas in practice in different ways; opportunities for individual and collective reflection

In this section, teachers present what they believe to be significant as they reflect on lessons learned from the Highland Journey.

- **Professional development** – According to teachers, the CPD programmes had given them a lot of 'super ideas'. They had major concerns for teachers who might not be able to have such opportunities and argued that either such programmes should be continued or alternative approaches to realise the same objectives found.

  ' …how we can introduce this to folk, who haven't had the benefit of what [we] had of going to high quality CPD events? … how can we make it meaningful for them?

...the courses themselves and the training day have been fantastic. ... I've been able to share ideas with a few people ... and it's been tremendous what we've been able to share and I think that's the key – practitioners sharing their ideas....

(Primary Teacher)

The real issue for us going forward is getting folk out of the schools on an informal basis to talk through some of the stuff and start setting up networks ... we share an awful lot [of ideas and resources] now. That's great, but the real challenge now it to try to spread that.

(Primary Teacher)

One teacher suggested recording CPD events and making a DVD as this would enable teachers to have 'that first-hand experience of hearing some of the key speakers'. The cascade approach was not deemed effective.

Other aspects argued as crucial were

- **Freedom to individualise** – Generally, it was suggested that this is about giving teachers 'the space to plan their own journey' (Primary Teacher). It is also recognised that as much as individualisation is important for the children, it is equally important for teachers as well:

  ...with some of the key ideas coming out of the Highland model ... people have different takes on them and I would be worried that people would use them in the wrong ways if they weren't sure about something or if they understood something incorrectly. [For example] comment only marking, it's important that they know what that actually is and that they're not having their own. ... Some people see it as ... you go through an essay and you don't highlight spelling, you don't highlight incorrect things and the

only thing you do is write a comment at the end whereas other people see it as still doing things through the body of the essay and giving them a comment but not giving them a mark.

(Secondary Teacher)

- **Leadership** –the demonstration of commitment of the Highland Council was important in persuading staff that the Highland Journey really mattered. Similarly, there was perceived to be an important role for a strong leader who led the school, supporting and challenging all school staff as they became:

...the biggest challenge. [Name] has played such a crucial role and he's so passionate about it and given his all to it. Hopefully, some of his enthusiasm has rubbed off on the rest of us and that the project now has quite a number of significant people in different areas that are able to lead it in their individual schools.

(Primary Teacher)

- **Networking and sharing of practice** – Teachers explained that both reading relevant resources and going on courses were very good ways of stimulating their interest. Demonstration and/or discussion of what ideas might look like in practice was crucial:

...the teacher-teacher dialogue was definitely the best. I was mixing with people who were in senior management whom I wouldn't normally have the opportunity to speak to freely and that was the best thing. You always learn from other people or you have an idea and somebody else always makes it better.

(Primary Teacher)

... it's definitely the practical things they're looking for and visiting in other classes. ... they need practical things, the theory is not what it's about.

(Primary Teacher)

I've done a lot of reading ... That really interested me ... [but] seeing what [another teacher's] practice was and sharing practice. That was a really big part, sharing practice.

(Primary Teacher)

Opportunities to share what you've been doing, that's really a key aspect. Maybe setting up small groups of threes that are quite diverse so that you can have time to go into classes, have a particular focus and build on that. Keeping regular contact with those people so it's almost like your own little support group ... that's the best way to build on things that have been done and to take it forward.

(Secondary Teacher)

But it was also acknowledged that there are also some major barrier as teachers endeavoured to share good practice:

It's the time unfortunately ... To find the time to share good practice ... they're just so busy planning and marking, preparing for their classes ... it's really hard to find the time for things like this. ... Time is the thing that's holding it all back.

(Primary Teacher)

It's getting money to get the people who have been involved in the FLaT project out to establish connections with schools.

(Primary Teacher)

- **Motivation and commitment** – In any initiative, teachers' overall motivation , commitment and enthusiasm were the inherent driving force in engagement:

...what seems to be a key element in it is motivation. That's the engagement part of the framework. I've made that a big thing for me when I look at a lesson for the year and I say, right, I need to engage them and a big part for me ... is motivation. If you motive them, they'll start to speak about it.

<div align="right">

(Secondary Teacher)

</div>

...about having a network and a real sense of collegial cooperation within the clusters ... everyone's a winer here, it's trying to convince them of that….

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

...for people to really be committed to this, they have to believe that it does make a positive difference to children's learning and one of the big challenges in that is how do we actually show that difference.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

3.4 Sustainable development – what matters for policy communities

In this section, the focus will be on the implications of sustaining the Highland Journey for the policy communities:

The Model of Professional Learning is crucial: a focus on learners and learning; intellectual stimulation; clear links to research and policy; opportunities to develop ideas in practice in different ways; opportunities for individual and collective reflection

- Support from Local Authorities – Schools were convinced that the 'authority is seeing [the FLaT project] as an integral part of what [it is] doing'. For initiatives like this, they required strong support to initiate and to sustain the

development.. This support may be in the form of 'partnership', 'dialogue' and assistance with what really matters to make the initiative work:

Keeping that partnership and dialogue ... that's the biggest thing, keeping the dialogue going but the authority has to take it on board and has to go out to schools, that this really is valuable and that this is a priority, not just something that's been done and dusted.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

[Name's] role has been absolutely crucial, instrumental. His motivation, his enthusiasm and commitment has been totally infectious ... if the authority doesn't have a visionary leader, that visionary, inspirational person, still making sure that as an authority, we're all still on board, then we won't get the consistency we deserve.

<div align="right">

(Primary Headteacher)

</div>

There are occasions, however, when policies conflict with each other. It was suggested that better communication and cooperation between schools and the Local Authority are the means to resolve such issues:

Teachers need support from the Local Authority, and they need the Authority to develop ways to make teaching children supported. Some policies conflict, and there needs to be more cooperative working between the Schools and the Authority.

<div align="right">

(Primary Teacher)

</div>

- Sharing standards of assessment – It was suggested that 'sharing the standard' is equal to 'sharing practice'…. The importance of building trust in teachers' professional judgement by sharing standards across the curriculum and across sectors was highlighted

…there has been discussion and in-school consultation and debate on moderation of standards for levels/judgements in writing. These typically involve the class teacher and another teacher and the support for learning

teacher, and, occasionally, the headteacher if agreement is not reached by the others. This is done typically for a sample of pupils at a level rather than for all pupils. ... This moderation activity was within schools, it was not shared with other schools .

(Primary Headteacher)

...there are several elements to that ... with less consistency across schools in sharing standards with the pupils. There are some staff that are doing that and some who have been trying ... and doing very well .... What we've tried to do in this session is to share standards with colleagues in this school, but also with other colleagues in our ASG. We might be coming at it from a different angle but I think we'll probably get to the same point in the end but having different outcomes and different possibilities have arisen in what we've done.

(Secondary Headteacher)

...national tests do help in the process of sharing standards, I have no doubt about that, whether it's important or not, that's another issue. It certainly will give you some idea of sharing targets [and] standards.

(Secondary Headteacher)

After having observed 'a variety of standards', some teachers suggested that the starting point towards having standards shared by schools is through openness and sharing – use of 'professional dialogue':

...there's real sharing all the time and a lot of teacher dialogue ... so many formal and informal ways to talk to each other which is the key – the professional dialogue. ... There's still a bit of variety across the board as far as standards go, I don't know how much that's going to change until we're all willing to open our doors and work together.

(Prmary Teacher)

Another raised the issue of cross marking and the importance of shared criteria

> *…as far as having benchmarks by which we determine if the children have achieved what we have set out to achieve. Within school, we do, and we do meet with our colleagues, we do cross-marking to make sure that what we are doing is of equivalent standard…. Generally speaking, they are based on the 5 to 14 criteria…*
>
> *(Primary Teacher)*

Reflections on the Highland Journey and Summary of Findings

The Highland Journey, begun in the early 1990, was predicated on the belief that engagement of teachers in the process of transforming their practices, often through action research, would be the most sustainable way of improving learning and teaching in the classroom.   It emphasised that for real change, as with all learning, the individuals involved needed to take more control of what they are being asked to do. They needed to make sense of ideas and practices through reflection and sharing with others until new ideas and processes became internalised.   Ideas of engagement, of purposes, of collaboration, of manageability and of contextualisation were seen as central in order to avoid the adoption of actions and procedures that are separated from the ideas and purposes behind them. Ideas of transformational change were also central to the Assessment is for Learning (AiFL) programme in Scotland.

The evidence from this evaluation suggest that *The Highland Journey* has been, for those involved, both an intellectual and a pedagogical one. Not all of the individuals within the FLaT-funded project began their personal journeys from the same starting point; all of them made progress. It was, in a real sense, the initial stages of the Highland journey in the 1990s were essentially a *bottom-up* process. The bringing together of the Highland Journey and the Assessment is for Learning programme changed the model to become both a top down and bottom up model where within a national programme the Highland Council sought to *co-creat*e knowledge and understandings facilitated by networks established within the project. Finally, bringing together the early Highland Journey with AifL and CfE has enabled teachers and schools to tackle curriculum and assessment change in rigorous and meaningful ways.   .

 The evidence from these teachers and Headteachers is compelling and the evidence from this FLaT project suggests that *engagement* rather than *dissemination* is a key concept.in the development of a sustainable model. One central message emerging is that teachers need leadership and time to engage as members of learning communities with the

purposes, principles and practices offered by Curriculum for Excellence and Assessment is for Learning if they are really to improve learning and teaching for all of their pupils.

The evidence also suggests that change is possible and the evidence from this evaluation and the SQA study suggest that these changes can and do lead to improvements in pupils' achievements as learners, as contributors and as the current and future citizens of Scotland.

Summary of Findings

With an overarching aspiration of embedding the principles and practice of formative assessment in the classroom, the main aims of the Highland Journey were to:

- develop a coherent conception of formative assessment
- explore the links between formative assessment and approaches to making thinking explicit as a powerful way of fostering the CfE capacities
- encourage teacher learning communities which foster reflective professionals through a variety of approaches to CPD
- raise achievement, motivation and confidence

(The Highland Journey, 2008:2)

The evidence from the members of staff interviewed was almost entirely positive. As might be expected, some were further along in their personal and professional journey than others and had a deeper understanding of the FLaT project in its entirety. Many of them ware appreciative of the links between the CPD Framework and the aims of the project itself, and could see the way in which the aims of Curriculum for Excellence

could be furthered by working together to explore the purposes, principle and practices of Assessment is for Learning.

A number of issues, discussed above are worth listing as important if others are to learn from the experience in Highland Council:

The Model of Professional Learning is crucial. This model included a focus on learners and learning; intellectual stimulation; clear links to research and policy; opportunities to develop ideas in practice in different ways; opportunities for individual and collective reflection

Support for teachers

Teachers suggested that a number of factors were crucial in enabling them to improve their professional practice. CPD emerged as key and this was seen as more than simply courses. 'Professional discussion' was a phrase which emerged as a strength of this project and the existence of communities of learners, within schools and across schools, was a strength. Engagement with research and 'constant reading' were a feature of this approach and getting feedback from children was, for some, a key change in their classroom practice.

Sustainable development

Teacher-teacher dialogue was facilitated by the grouping of teachers who were able to meet, albeit mostly in their own time. Professional trust was seen to be an important issue since some of the teachers were trying new approaches and therefore needed the trust of colleagues and senior management. The school's culture, ethos and values were also seen as being crucial. At a personal level, intellectual engagement arose from participation in the project and helped sustain teachers' engagement during periods of

stress. While funding within the FLaT project limited (similar in fact to that offered to ASGs within the Assessment is for Learning initiative), it was clear that the existence of a 'lead officer' was absolutely crucial.

Engagement

At a strategic level, nationally or within local authorities, the challenge is to put teacher professional development at the heart of curriculum change. Sharing standards of assessment within and across schools is a key feature of raising attainment for all pupils. Networking and sharing of practice can facilitate this process and at the same time motivation and commitment can be sustained.

Teachers need some freedom to individualise and this demands leadership at school level. Above all, support from Local Authorities is necessary if schools and teachers are to engage fully with the challenges of Curriculum for Excellence.

Changing Assessment Practice (CAP)

It is clear from the evidence, both from the participants in the FLaT project and the cumulative effect of the work which led to the Project itself, that not only has have the aims and the objectives been achieved, but that something significant has emerged within Highland Council. Here, not only has practice been changed but teachers' conceptions and insights into formative assessment have been altered. For many teachers, the *reflective professional,* for too long merely an aspiration, has been a very real outcome of the FLaT project. The confluence of theory and practice, the embedding of the principles of formative assessment within teachers' professional practice and the deepening of understanding of the principles of *Curriculum for Excellence* have been achieved by empowering teachers to co-create knowledge and develop their professional practice in a collegiate manner.

Sustainable development has always been a challenge in any educational initiative (Gardner et al, 2008). In Highland Council the ASG concept has become embedded. Teachers and headteachers recognised the important role that the Project Manager had

played in that process. The support from the AifL augmented by FLaT funding was relatively small, but the long-term gains it has produced may well be considerable. The development of ideas over a period of some 15 years undoubtedly contributed to the success of the Highland Journey. The production of high quality, research-led CPD Reflection Booklets was a clear example of the drive to link theory to practice and deepen teachers' professional knowledge.

If *Curriculum for Excellence* is to herald a new paradigm in pedagogical thinking and practice, the Highland model may well offer important insights into future developments. It offers evidence that there are no quick fixes and that engagement, not dissemination, is the key to improving teachers' professional practice in Scottish schools.

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Appendices