

Guidance on consortium working

Effective consortium working is central to the delivery of Every Child a Reader (ECaR) and Every Child Counts (ECC). This paper sets out some of the most successful ideas and practices to be found in current Every Child a Reader/Every Child Counts consortium working around the country.

What is a consortium?

For the ECaR and ECC programmes, a consortium is an association of two or more local authorities (LAs) sharing and pooling their resources and expertise to achieve some common goals:

- a) To maximise the reach of Reading Recovery and Numbers Count - the interventions which form the core of the programmes - to individual children and schools.
- b) To improve literacy and numeracy outcomes at Key Stage 1 for all children and, specifically, to narrow the attainment gap for the lowest achieving children through access to intervention approaches with a proven evidence base of success.
- c) To harness the collective capacity of the LAs within the consortium so that every school can benefit from access to the layers of intervention of ECaR/ ECC.
- d) To derive maximum benefit from the specialist expertise of Teacher Leaders and of Reading Recovery and Numbers Count teachers.

The resources may be both human and material to achieve maximum benefit to the greatest number of children.

Why work in consortia?

Teacher Leaders (TLs) train, develop and help to deploy and quality assure Reading Recovery Teachers (RRTs) or Numbers Count Teachers (NCTs). The design of the ECaR and ECC roll out models was predicated on maximising the reach of the programmes to individual children. In order to achieve this and maximise the available resources, both LAs and schools work in clusters – sharing the expertise of both TLs and RRTs/NCTs. It is a core principle of ECaR and ECC that schools and teachers should be able to access training in the neighbouring LAs which do have TLs. In practice, therefore, the majority of LAs are operating in consortia although, for employment purposes, each TL is currently based in a named LA – referred to in this paper as the ‘host’ LA. For reasons of size or geography, 11 of the 150 LAs operate on their own; the remaining 139 LAs are members of a consortium.

What does a consortium do?

- Identifies a representative from each LA involved who has management responsibility and decision making authority in relation to the ECaR/ECC programmes
- Meets on a regular basis to agree, monitor and review the strategic aims and principles of the consortium.
- Oversees the training, deployment and support for TLs, RRTs/NCTs.
- Initiates systematic approaches to identification, selection and support for schools and families of schools engaged in the ECaR and ECC programmes and that the Teacher Leader(s) are appropriately supported in partner LAs.
- Disseminates learning from the programme.
- Maps provision for interventions across the consortium to enable approaches and resources to be used to maximum effect and with minimum duplication.

How often does a consortium meet?

This is for each consortium to determine, but it is suggested at least once a term. Within ECaR and ECC, each term brings new expectations and challenges. The consortium that meets regularly to discuss these can prepare for the following term and make progress on the above agenda.

Who attends consortium meetings?

Consortium meetings enable both strategic and operational decision making. Attendance at consortium meetings is not restricted to one person per LA. However, the person who attends regularly and is in a strategic position in the LA is able to make decisions (usually this is the Primary Strategy Manager). Actual attendance is a decision for the consortium itself and may vary from meeting to meeting depending on the focus. TLs are pivotal to the effective working of consortia and may need to attend most meetings. However, there may be some meetings where their attendance is not necessary.

At some meetings you may want someone to attend from the Institute of Education (IoE) or Edge Hill University (EHU), and this can usually be arranged with sufficient notice.

Who leads the consortium?

The membership of the consortium should agree a lead LA; this does not have to be the LA with the TL but often is in practice. The lead LA chairs the meetings and makes provision for the minutes to be taken, agreed and distributed. It may be helpful for meetings of the consortia to be hosted by LAs on a rota basis or at the relevant ECaR/ECC training room facilities and for leadership of the consortium to be rotated also.

Who sets the agenda?

The agenda belongs to the consortium and is agreed in advance of the meeting. Matters for consideration will depend on the time of year, but often include:

Training costs

A host LA employs the TL. However, the other LAs need to contribute to the TL salary and operating costs by paying for the training of RRTs/NCTs from their LA. The amount for this is negotiated within consortia, but is currently around £2,500 per teacher (with amounts varying according to local needs such as travel and venue costs). In addition, consortium LAs need to agree the amount that will be contributed to the host LA every year after the first year of RRT/NCT training, to support continuing contact with the teachers and the provision of their entitlement to continuing professional development, and to quality assure their role.

Implementing the layers of intervention

Training will be needed in order to utilise the full range of layered interventions which exist within ECaR/ECC. With the support of the TL, the consortium maps out what expertise already exists within the consortium for training and provision of particular layered interventions for literacy, such as: Better Reading Partners, Fischer Family Trust Wave 3, Catch Up Literacy, Early Literacy Support, Talking Partners, etc. For numeracy, the layers may include: Catch Up Numeracy, Mathematics Recovery, Closing the Gap with Numicom, Overcoming Barriers materials and Talking Maths.

The TL can support discussion and identification of interventions to be offered to schools but is not expected to deliver all the training. The training of specialist tutors in other LA services and in LAs across a consortium is highly supportive to overall capacity building.

Other areas for discussion may include:

- the monitoring and quality assurance of the implementation of ECaR and ECC
- identifying excellent practice in schools and identifying ways to disseminate this
- sharing information on tracking children and effective practice in maintaining the gains after their ECaR/ECC interventions
- the impact that ECaR/ECC is having on school standards overall
- communicating ECaR/ECC to other services in the LA to facilitate joined-up working
- shared consideration and completion of the self-evaluation documents

Can the same consortium meeting be used for both ECaR and ECC discussion?

Yes. Where possible, the same LA consortium will run both the ECaR and the ECC programmes, which operate along almost identical lines. The training of TLs and either RRTs or NCTs follow similar patterns. It is therefore practical and sensible for the consortium to develop a good working relationship for both programmes.

What does an effective consortium look like?

Where consortia are working effectively they have agreed aims, principles, roles and responsibilities, as well as agreeing financial protocols.

Further examples of good practice might include:

- A commitment from all parties to making the consortium a success.
- Open and honest discussion to enable issues to be resolved.
- A united voice and consistent message across the consortium.
- Regular meetings with clear agenda and the opportunity for all members to contribute as equal partners, share good ideas and emerging developments.
- Common aims for the promotion of ECaR/ECC practice with positive impact on school improvement and pupils' progress across the consortium.
- Development and dissemination of models for RRTs/NCTs to provide outreach support and share good practice with schools that do not have a specialist teacher
- Opportunities for specialist teachers across LAs to share practice and participate in joint training sessions.
- Schools developing good practice identified across LAs and opportunities to visit these schools.
- Opportunities for all RRTs/NCTs across the LAs to meet.
- Forum for headteachers to meet across LAs.
- Newsletters from the consortium.

Are there any issues that have arisen from consortia working?

In the main, consortia are working well. However, consortium working has not been without its challenges. Effective communication seems to be the most prevalent area of challenge. Other issues include:

- TLs often have less familiarity with the systems and structures in other LAs. They have, therefore, to work hard at establishing relationships with senior leaders in schools of other LAs, and need support from the senior management team of the partner LAs to do this.
- Partner LAs have not always made their structures clear and available to TLs, so that TLs are unsure who to refer to should they encounter issues which require discussion with or guidance from the LA. TLs need a named contact, with senior management responsibility, who is accessible on a regular basis and who can provide support with the TL's negotiations with schools.
- The issue of travel for TLs – particularly across large geographical areas – has to be managed by the consortium for effective use of TLs' time. This may necessitate the strategic location of schools invited to train in a given year or the development of more than one training centre in a consortium.
- Consortium working takes into account the need for TLs to be able to commit to training on a regular basis.

Further examples of good practice

The partners within ECaR and ECC (the Institute of Education and Edge Hill University and the Department for Education) will continue to find examples of good working practice from consortia. These will be shared on a regular basis through newsletters.

Contacts:

To arrange an attendee from the IoE/RR Trainer contact: readrec@ioe.ac.uk

To arrange an attendee from Edge Hill University contact: ecc@edgehill.ac.uk