

## Next Practice in System Leadership – Case Study

### Cumbria-Furness

#### **Context for the Field Trial Site**

Barrow is the largest town in Furness, a peninsula on the coast of Cumbria in the north west of England. The major industry in Barrow, shipbuilding, including submarines, has in recent years seen a rapid reduction in its work force, with significant impact on employment opportunities. School rolls have fallen considerably, partly as a result of an increasing number of eighteen to thirty year olds leaving the town as academic or economic migrants

The resulting period of social and economic challenge has encouraged schools and colleges to build strategically on existing collaborative arrangements in order to ensure that transformation in learning also contributed significantly towards better social and economic outcomes for the communities they served.

The Furness Education Consortium (FEC), which comprises secondary schools, colleges, a Pupil Referral Unit, and Local Authority officers, has collaborated successfully for the last 20 years. Establishment of a 14-19 Development group and close strategic links between FEC, the Barrow Excellence Cluster Partnership and a Networked Learning Community of secondary schools, generated both a shared sense of purpose as well as opportunities to pool funding strategically in the interests of transforming learning outcomes.

Four related drivers have made strategic partnership working essential for Furness:

- A reorganisation of secondary education in the locality;
- the introduction of 14–19 diplomas;
- the establishment of a new University of Cumbria based in Furness; and
- the development of integrated Children's Services.

Over time the Furness 14-19 Partnership has attracted support from other agencies, new businesses coming into the area, FE, HE, and community groups. As the area has begun to regenerate, this foundation of secure relationships is providing a springboard for new collaborative projects that offer the potential to transform learning opportunities for the young people of the area.

A large-scale review of a full range of Children's' Services, including education is underway in Cumbria and Furness educators, working closely with regeneration, business and health partners, are investigating what they need to do to support a Cumbria Local Authority proposal to meet the criteria to be part of Building Schools for the Future.

Amongst all this development activity, the specific focus for the Next Practice project is the exploration of changes to leadership and governance arrangements required in order to make a coherent 14-19 offer in Furness.

#### **Organisational structure underpinning Next Practice**

The Furness 14-19 Partnership is one of five partnerships– each linked to a consortium of schools and colleges within Cumbria. Several members of the Partnership are also members of Furness Education Consortium.

A 14 -19 Development Group of school/college senior leaders develops strategy while a 14 -19 Development Team turns strategic priorities into worthwhile practice.

A Diploma Project Manager and additional administrative support have recently been appointed.

“Core principles for Partnership Working” - initially identified and agreed as part of the Next Practice project – have been further developed to meet the new challenges of locality leadership and management.

### **Leadership management & governance practices being developed**

Furness proposes to formalise and secure successful collaborative arrangements by developing and testing a number of new models of leadership and governance.

Their plans include:

- exploring the implications of seeking trust status for the locality;
- developing appropriate accountability frameworks and support mechanisms and processes;
- ensuring that new leadership and governance arrangements are compatible with developments elsewhere in Children’s Services and with other local delivery platforms;
- actively engaging learners, their families and the wider community in curriculum design, delivery and evaluation; and
- further developing existing collaborative arrangements for 14-19 provision.

To date their achievements have been to:

- develop a strategy for 14-19 provision locally which will be ready for implementation in September 08;
- develop initial proposals for potential BSF projects which have been co designed with key partners and stakeholders;
- consult on proposals for new leadership and management arrangements relating to 14-19 provision; and
- build strong relationships with FE, HE, business and local communities - all expected to become partners in the evolving locality leadership and governance model.

### **Impact; actual and predicted benefits**

After a considerable amount of partnership working, several initiatives are underway and becoming more strategically integrated. Three 11-16 secondary schools are closing to form one new 11-16 Academy, which has three education co-sponsors; University of Cumbria, Furness College and Barrow 6<sup>th</sup> Form college, all existing partners of Barrow Trust School Pathfinder (TSP).

The predecessor schools of the Academy and a 3 -19 special school hoping to co-locate, comprise four of the five members of the Trust School Pathfinder and the case for co-locating other extended services on the academy campus is being developed, again with support from TSP partners.

A Furness 14-19 Development team, supported through pooled funding, has led a successful bid for the first five diploma lines starting in September 2008: one of only ten sites nationally to achieve this.

For the future, Furness aims to develop context specific leadership, management and governance arrangements, structures and processes which:

- have long term sustainability and appropriate accountability;

- are based on real partnership with shared values, mutual trust and due recognition of all partners' roles and contributions;
- continually improve and make the best use of available resources, specialisms and expertise;
- support delivery of the full 14 – 19 provision; and
- expect and enable learners' direct involvement in developments and quality assurance.

Cumbria Local Authority has gained Beacon status for 14-19 learning in national recognition of countywide developments and, in particular, of decisive collaboration in Furness.

### **Emerging issues**

Participants in the Furness partnership are clear and united in the high value that they assign to effective partnership working, decisive collaboration and networked professionalism. Having endured a long period of significant challenge in the locality, careful brokerage and skilled negotiation have been the methods by which school and college leaders have been encouraged to trust each other and to take risks together, to their mutual benefit.

Relationships between the partnership and the local authority have not always been wholly positive. It is unclear where and why any tension arose in the past. But what is clear is that bringing other stakeholders from business, HE and FE and the wider community into the partnership seems to have introduced new expertise, energy and enthusiasm and acted as a catalyst for a more collaborative and mutually beneficial arrangement. Consequently, the local authority is increasingly supportive of and involved in the partnership's plans.

Furness made good use of the Bridge Change Framework and have valued the connections that involvement in Next Practice has made possible for them. Geographically isolated schools and colleges often find it difficult to connect with high quality consultancy and provision. Participation in NCSL/IU events in London and the visit from the Bridge consultants, as well as regular meetings with their Innovation Unit consultant, have boosted the profile of the 14-19 work amongst participating school and college leaders.

### **Implications**

The outcomes of this case study suggest that leaders of large-scale partnerships could usefully consider the following questions:

What leadership models and strategies work for different kinds of partnership? If there is more than one requirement, can just one person deliver that? What might a collaborative model offer?

What value might a charter or some other explicit statement of principles and working practices offer your partnership? What degree of formality is appropriate?

How can working towards a shared future help to repair relationships damaged in the past? What contribution might other individuals or organisations make?

What support and external expertise do partnership leaders need?