GTC
General Teaching Council
for England

Booklet 8

Audit

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

Deciding where you are as a professional learning community

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What is an implementation rubric?

Rubrics are usually used as assessment tools to measure pupils' work. They are scoring guides that don't depend on a numerical score. Instead, they list a full range of criteria or elements to assess a particular piece of work or performance. They describe varying degrees of quality for each element, increasing from left to right. A benefit of rubrics is that they provide signposts to where you can get to as a result of development, and pointers to next steps that might be taken when trying to develop particular activities.

What is the purpose of this rubric?

This implementation rubric helps you see where colleagues think you are as a professional learning community (PLC) as they reflect on different criteria related to specific characteristics and processes of PLCs. The 12 topics down the left-hand side are the eight characteristics and four developmental processes of PLCs we identified in our study. For each of these, a number of key descriptors are mapped out horizontally, showing the development of each through four phases of their journey, highlighted at the top of the four columns. These range from what might be happening when you are starting on the journey to develop a PLC to action taken when the PLC is self-sustaining:

> **Starting out;** acquiring information and beginning to use ideas.
> **Developing;** experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment.
> **Deepening;** well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits.
> **Sustaining;** introducing new developments, re-evaluating quality – PLC as a way of life.

How might you use the rubric?

You might choose to use the rubric in a range of ways. For example:

- individual staff members complete the rubric privately and give it to a designated person or team who collate(s) responses and feed(s) these back to the staff for discussion
- individual staff members complete the rubric before sharing and discussing their responses with each other
- small groups complete the rubric together and then compare and summarise their responses

The rubric on pages 3–9 and summary response sheet on page 10 can be photocopied for circulation. Each person completing the rubric needs to look at the descriptors, perhaps highlighting comments that represent your PLC. They can then decide which phase best represents the PLC's current position, either highlighting the appropriate box in the table or marking the box in the blank response sheet included after the rubric. There is also a space labelled 'How do you know?' where people can note down evidence.

Looking through individual highlighted responses can help you see trends and patterns as well as differences in opinion. You can prepare a summary sheet of all the responses using the blank summary response sheet.

At the end of the activity, you will find some questions to discuss once you have pulled together the results.

The process can be repeated each year. You can look at changes people think have occurred and discuss the reasons for these changes.

Professional learning community implementation rubric

PLC characteristics	Starting out *Acquiring information and beginning to use ideas*	Developing *Experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment*	Deepening *Well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits*	Sustaining *Introducing new developments, and re-evaluating quality – PLC as a way of life*
Shared values and vision	Staff have diverse values related to educational issues. They are beginning to recognise the need to attend to some PLC-wide issues. There are initial discussions about these issues. Some smaller groups (PLCs) within the staff may share values about education and leadership.	An increasing number of staff share educational values, and participate actively in discussions about vision and values. Shared educational vision is often stronger and more apparent in particular sections or departments of the PLC.	Educational values and vision are fairly widely shared throughout the PLC and generally demonstrated through practice. The vision is revisited regularly and commitment to whole-school, centre or college-wide professional values is increasing.	Educational values and vision are widely shared throughout the PLC, regularly revisited and revised as appropriate by the whole staff, and demonstrated through practice. There is a high degree of commitment to whole-school, centre or college-wide professional values and a strong sense of cohesion and consistency of approach.
How do you know this?				

PLC characteristics	Starting out *Acquiring information and beginning to use ideas*	Developing *Experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment*	Deepening *Well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits*	Sustaining *Introducing new developments, and re-evaluating quality – PLC as a way of life*
Collective responsibility	Staff do not feel a sense of whole-school, centre or college-wide shared responsibility for *all* pupils. Some smaller groups, particularly those with common teaching or support responsibilities, feel a sense of shared responsibility. There are few whole-school, centre or college discussions about learning, progress, development and successes of pupils.	Some staff members feel a sense of collective responsibility for *all* pupils in the school, centre or college. Smaller groups (PLCs) feel a sense of shared responsibility for all pupils within their subject, year, key stage or phase. There are some whole-school, centre or college discussions about pupils' learning, progress, development and successes.	There is a growing sense of collective responsibility throughout the school, centre or college for the learning, progress, development and success of *all* pupils. Discussions of learning, progress, development and success of *all* pupils.	A desire to do the best for all pupils pervades the school, centre or college. There is regular and deep whole-school, centre or college dialogue about learning, progress, development and successes of individual pupils.
How do you know this?				
Learning-focused collaboration	Many staff mainly work in isolation. They focus on their own goals, value self-reliance and rarely share practices and strategies. Some smaller groups or departments collaborate and share learning and teaching and support strategies.	Some staff work together across the PLC, with joint planning, sharing strategies, and engaging in whole-school, centre or college-wide projects. Some support staff or care workers and teaching staff collaborate closely but this is not a common feature.	Staff increasingly plan together, collaborate and share ideas through meetings, website resources, team teaching etc. There are examples of productive teamwork between teachers and support staff.	Collaborative planning of learning and teaching activities is taken for granted. Sharing of ideas and strategies and joint problem-solving are widespread. Teamwork involving teachers and support or care staff is widespread.
How do you know this?				

PLC characteristics	Starting out *Acquiring information and beginning to use ideas*	Developing *Experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment*	Deepening *Well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits*	Sustaining *Introducing new developments, and re-evaluating quality – PLC as a way of life*
Existence of professional learning	Professional learning mainly consists of formal, short courses and whole-school, centre or college in-service training. Take-up is largely based on individual interest. Enthusiasm for whole-school, centre or college professional learning experiences is limited. There are few work-based professional learning opportunities eg peer observation, coaching etc. There is mainly ad hoc talk about learning from external courses and visits.	A considerable number of staff are engaged in a variety of professional learning opportunities based on individual interest (eg courses, higher degrees etc) and increasingly this is also linked to school, centre or college aims. An increasing number of staff participate enthusiastically in whole-school, centre or college professional learning experiences. Staff feed back on their learning to smaller groups and, sometimes, the whole staff.	Staff are generally interested in a diverse range of individual and group opportunities to increase their knowledge, understanding and skills. Many staff participate enthusiastically in whole-school, centre or college professional learning experiences. Staff generally feed back their learning to the whole staff.	All staff are enthusiastically involved in a diverse range of individual, group and whole-school, centre or college professional learning experiences. The school, centre or college as a workplace is seen as an important site for learning by all staff. Staff devote effort and energy into incorporating valuable new strategies into their practice. Learning is widely shared across the whole staff.
How do you know this?				
Reflective professional enquiry	There is little reflection on, or enquiry into, practice. Data collection and the use of data to inform and develop learning and teaching practice are limited. Data may be seen as an end in itself and often as someone else's problem.	Some staff are involved in activities to investigate and improve learning and teaching, eg peer observation and coaching, action research, review and moderation of pupils' work etc. Data collection and the use of data to inform and develop learning and teaching are variable across the school, centre or college.	Many staff are actively involved and show increasing confidence about using different methods to explore and improve learning and teaching. Data collection and the use of data to inform and develop learning and teaching are increasingly consistent across the school, centre or college.	A questioning orientation to practice and 'need to know how we are doing and how we can improve' is pervasive. Staff confidently use a wide range of methods to investigate learning and teaching, using findings to inform and develop their practice. Data are collected, analysed and used to support this process.
How do you know this?				

PLC characteristics	Starting out *Acquiring information and beginning to use ideas*	Developing *Experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment*	Deepening *Well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits*	Sustaining *Introducing new developments, and re-evaluating quality – PLC as a way of life*
Openness, networks and partnerships	There is very little professional contact outside the school, centre or college. External networks and partnerships are limited, as is the seeking of external ideas and strategies. The school, centre or college is relatively isolated from its community.	Some staff are interested and engaged in networks and activities beyond the school, centre or college as a source of generating and sharing ideas and strategies. There is some involvement with the community.	External sources for generating and sharing ideas and strategies are generally perceived as valuable. Staff are increasingly taking up opportunities to become involved in networks and external partnerships. Some whole-school, centre or college networking is being explored. Community partnerships are generally welcomed and positive.	Staff look beyond the school, centre or college for new ideas and strategies. External input is sought out and welcomed. Links with other schools, centres, colleges and external agencies are seen as valuable, productive and important. Many staff are involved in individual and school, centre or college-wide external networks. Community partnerships are thriving.
How do you know this?				
Inclusive membership	Membership of the PLC is confined to a small group of teaching staff and some or all school leaders. Input of support staff is not invited. Parental and governor or school council member involvement is limited.	Classroom support staff are increasingly involved as active members of the PLC. Other support staff are less involved. Parental and governor or school council member involvement is generally welcomed.	Many support staff (teaching and other) participate as active members of the PLC. Parental and governor or school council member involvement is welcomed.	The PLC includes all members of staff. All support staff are highly valued members of the PLC. The whole-school, centre or college PLC draws people together from across the organisation. Parental, pupil and governor or school council member involvement is welcomed and encouraged.
How do you know this?				

PLC characteristics	**Starting out** *Acquiring information and beginning to use ideas*	**Developing** *Experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment*	**Deepening** *Well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits*	**Sustaining** *Introducing new developments, and re-evaluating quality – PLC as a way of life*
Mutual trust, respect and support	Staff relationships highlight issues around trust and conflict. A blame culture may exist. Trust and respect exists among some members of smaller groups or departments. Development issues are viewed as a threat by a number of staff.	A moderate level of mutual trust exists school, centre or college-wide, with increasing mutual respect, although there is some anxiety about classroom observation etc. There is strong mutual trust and respect among some groups of staff who work closely together.	Trust, respect and positive professional relationships are developing school, centre or college-wide. Staff are increasingly open about their practice.	Staff relationships are characterised by openness, honesty, mutual trust, respect, support and care. Everyone's contribution is valued.
How do you know this?				

PLC processes				
Optimising resources and structures	There are few systems and policies in place to support the development of the PLC. Time, space, money and/or communication mechanisms tend to act as barriers.	Attention is paid to trying to put into place the necessary structures, systems and policies that will help support PLC development: creating time; locating space; planning communication mechanisms; use of meetings and other procedures; arranging staff deployment etc.	Most of the necessary structures, systems and policies are in place to support PLC development. Attention is paid to dealing with resource and structural issues that get in the way of PLC development.	Time, money, space, meetings, communication procedures and staff deployment are targeted as a priority to promote the ongoing development of the PLC. Resource and structural issues are dealt with swiftly and actively.
How do you know this?				

PLC processes	Starting out *Acquiring information and beginning to use ideas*	Developing *Experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment*	Deepening *Well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits*	Sustaining *Introducing new developments, and re-evaluating quality – PLC as a way of life*
Promoting professional learning	An explicit needs identification process is rarely used, either for individual staff or whole-school, centre or college needs.	A needs identification process has been developed and is being used for staff and whole-school, centre or college professional learning needs.	Staff and whole-school, centre or college professional learning needs are clearly identified.	Staff and whole-school, centre or college professional learning needs are regularly and consistently identified.
	Co-ordination responsibility for continuing professional development is unspecified or unclear.	Continuous learning of all staff is increasingly promoted.	Continuous learning of all staff is promoted and carefully co-ordinated. A range of opportunities is planned to enable staff to learn from and with each other and facilitate the transfer of new learning into practice.	Continuous professional learning and development for all staff is actively promoted and carefully co-ordinated.
	Information for staff mainly comprises details about courses and training days.	Attention is paid to strengthening the co-ordination of professional learning.	Performance management is used as a positive process to support the PLC's development.	Attention is paid to ensure that new learning is transferred into practice.
		Performance management is starting to be used as a process to support the PLC's development.	Some staff are encouraged to take responsibility in promoting the professional learning of colleagues.	Opportunities are automatically planned to ensure staff can learn with and from each other.
				Staff are actively encouraged to take responsibility in promoting the professional learning of colleagues.
How do you know this?				

PLC processes	Starting out _Acquiring information and beginning to use ideas_	Developing _Experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment_	Deepening _Well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits_	Sustaining _Introducing new developments, and re-evaluating quality – PLC as a way of life_
Evaluating and sustaining the PLC	There is little or no discussion about the concept of a PLC. There is little evaluation of how the process of the PLC operates or how its development progresses. There is little evaluation of continuing professional development's (CPD's) impact or of other PLC activities.	The idea of a PLC is introduced to staff. There is occasional evaluation of how the process of the PLC operates or how its development progresses. There is some evaluation of CPD's impact and of other PLC activities	The PLC is consciously and actively developed. There is regular evaluation of how the process of the PLC operates or how its development progresses. CPD's impact on practice is evaluated, as are many other PLC activities.	Being a PLC is just 'part of the way we do things here'. People understand and support the idea of a PLC. Regular attention is given to evaluating the process, progress and impact of the PLC and all of its activities, including CPD.
How do we know this				
Leading and managing to promote the PLC	The headteacher (principal) works to build trust and begins to develop and share a learning vision and focus. Senior leadership team members are encouraged to participate in PLC leadership. Few other staff are involved in leading any PLC activities.	Attention is given by senior leaders to developing and spreading a learning vision and focus and building trust. Senior leaders model teamwork and leadership of learning. Other staff are involved in leading some PLC activities.	Senior leaders maintain their attention to developing and spreading a learning vision and focus and building trust. Senior leaders model learning. Leadership for different PLC activities is increasingly taken up by other staff.	Senior leaders are deeply committed to the development and sustainability of the school's PLC and prioritise this as a major leadership and management task. Distributing leadership among staff is an accepted practice.
How do we know this				

Summary response sheet

	Starting out	Developing	Deepening	Sustaining
Shared values and vision				
Collective responsibility				
Learning-focused collaboration				
Existence of professional learning				
Reflective professional enquiry				
Openness, networks and partnerships				
Inclusive membership				
Mutual trust, respect and support				
Optimising resources and structures				
Promoting professional learning				
Evaluating and sustaining the PLC				
Leading and managing to promote the PLC				

You can use this sheet to: a) mark down individual responses to the implementation rubric;
b) summarise all of the responses of individuals.

Questions for reflection and discussion

What did you notice as you were completing the rubric?

Which are the characteristics and processes, or aspects of these, where you feel you have progressed furthest along the route? What factors seem to have helped you?

Which are the characteristics and processes, or aspects of these, where you feel progression has been slower? What seems to have been holding back the PLC's development in these areas?

How will you move forward with this information? (You may also find it helpful to use *Investigating the culture of your professional learning community*, another *Audit* activity, to gather some different kinds of data. Alternatively, the *Planning* and *Action* materials may offer some ideas about next steps.)

Audit

Investigating the culture of your professional learning community

Comparing your preferred future and the current situation in your professional learning community

Deciding where you are as a professional learning community