



2022-23

Annual Report

Introductory remarks from Peter Blackburn, SLF Chair 2022-23

I would like to take this opportunity to thank governors, SLF staff and head teacher colleagues for their support as I reach the end of my tenure as Chair of the SLF. My two years in the role leave me even more enamoured with the power of our schools working together in a collaborative and open system. The quality of discussions that I have been part of as Chair of the SLF has been a pleasure; I know that the openness and integrity with which the schools within the SLF support each other is rare and something to be cherished.

If 2022 was characterised by political turmoil and a revolving door at the Department for Education with a succession of Education Ministers barely having time to unpack their bag before moving on; 2023 has seen a return to a varied experience of the conduct by Ofsted when inspecting schools. Never has the system of schools within the SLF working together been more important - never has the support for colleagues that the SLF can offer across all levels of the organisation been more vital for their professional development, challenge and wellbeing. The impact of this can be seen in the strong set of outcomes that has been achieved by our schools in national exams this year.

The future holds challenges. The SLF will need to re-examine its place in an increasingly complex world as school structures and status evolve in the future, but the central tenet of working collaboratively to get the best for all the students in the South Lakes area is worth working hard to maintain.

Strategic Leader's report 2022-23

Last year was the second year of a 3-year strategy designed to create an effective community of practice able to improve and support its institutions through evidence-informed strategic development.

Our detailed year 2 action plan was reviewed throughout last year and got us to a point where our staffing and infrastructure can support the networking, peer learning and school development work needed to provide the best possible education for the young people of the South Lakes.

Whilst **curriculum intent** was a foundational focus in year 1 allowing departments to be confident about their long term and medium-term curriculum thinking, year 2 built on this to focus on **curriculum implementation**, particularly High-Quality Teaching (HQT), disciplinary literacy, assessment, and the required approaches to professional development underpinning these key developments.

We challenged leaders and teachers in year 1 to eschew notions of “best practice” in favour of evidence-informed practice and the tide has certainly turned with networks becoming more effective at collaborative enquiry and peer learning with research evidence at the core.

Our new **Literacy Leads Network**, led by Ian Walker and Alison Wilkinson was a timely innovation, instrumental in raising awareness of phonics to the extent that most schools now have trained staff and are able to implement high quality phonics interventions.

The **Teaching and Learning Group** (TLG) have been something of a powerhouse, engaging with research outcomes and thinking deeply about developing high quality teaching through effective professional development. The group decides on its agenda in response to emerging issues on the ground then uses literature review and peer learning to support contextualisation and implementation in our different schools.

We realised that we needed an equivalent network for senior leaders of behaviour and culture (LBCs), as our **Inclusion Advocates** group did not allow for adequate peer learning. We have therefore introduced a new **LBC** network this year which will work in a comparable way to the TLG, responding to significant research evidence and then deepening thinking through collaborative enquiry, challenging some of the norms and assumptions that are holding us back at times.

Similarly, our **Designated Safeguarding Leads** (DSLs) now have a network that meets away from Inclusion Advocates to allow for learning from Safeguarding Practice Reviews and to provide a minimum level of supervision. (It is important to note that adequate supervision for DSLs is still not in place.)

Our **Subject Networks** did well to put on our SLF shared INSET day in October 2022 and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive: colleagues other than subject leads welcomed the opportunity to network after the pandemic and the range of activities was impressive. We were grateful to Kendal College for hosting our Food specialists, to Lancaster University for hosting our Computing teams and to Lakeland Arts for hosting our Art departments. We have a year of development planned for subject networks starting with a workshop in September led by Ian Walker and Adrian Hall, who both support successful subject networks as part of their roles.

The SLF provided an excellent **PSHE** conference day led by the PSHE Association and colleagues left with a deeper understanding of the knowledge, skills and attitudes to approach this difficult but important aspect of provision.

Peer reviews have become more forensic and impactful as school leaders work in a culture of trust and respect in the SLF where leaders are comfortable giving a true picture of their schools and receiving constructive feedback from their peers. This is a rare phenomenon and needs to be appreciated and nurtured. Peer review reports now comprise detailed summaries of lesson drop ins as well as links to key evidence that underpin suggestions for school development or areas of focus. Governors now attend reviews as a matter of course and feed back that they find them useful and informative.

A particularly well received innovation last year was the reformed **spring review** whereby school leaders chose from a “menu” of issues and review types to design a bespoke deeper exploration of a key area. This was supported by senior team members as well as headteachers and gave middle leaders the opportunity to have professional dialogues and articulate their thinking. Issues ranged from SEND, Safeguarding, Behaviour and Attitudes, PSHE and stretching the most able to name but a few. In some cases, schools in the “Ofsted window” were able to have a 2-day programme involving subject leaders.

South Lakes Federation
2022-23 Annual Report

The SLF team (Alison, Ian and Adrian) meet after peer reviews to discuss the work needed to address emerging issues. This can be the individual deployment of officers to schools, or the design of agendas and activities for our networks, often informed by additional research undertaken by Alison.

It has been interesting to work with **Governing bodies** this year, offering training around strategic governance and supporting the development of mission, values, vision, strategy and monitoring to inform review cycles. This is working well when we can accompany a governing body on a “journey” rather than a one-off input, just like any effective CPD which takes professionals on a “novice to expert” journey.

Governors have of course been involved in the **Headteacher Appraisal** process supported by the SLF and accessed by most SLF heads. We have worked hard to clarify the difference between the school improvement plan and headteacher appraisal targets, focusing on the headteacher’s personal professional development rather than a list of tasks.

We have been pleased to work more closely with **Kendal College** on Teaching and Learning this year, offering half day training sessions on the Science of Learning, Disciplinary Literacy and Adaptive teaching to curriculum and apprenticeship leads as well as teaching assistants. Kendal College colleagues are part of our networks.

Similarly, we have been able to include **University of Cumbria** colleagues in our networks and look forward to more research focused working with the university this next year.

Our **website’s** curated library of resources and evidence sources continues to grow and increasing numbers of SLF colleagues use it as a one-stop shop or first port of call when they are researching or planning any delivery.

The Local Government Reform (LGR) created a new local authority, **Westmorland and Furness**, in April 2023. For education providers in the South Lakes this has presented the challenge of working in an authority without permanent staffing in key roles for several months. This also presented an opportunity, however. The SLF executives have worked with our counterparts in the Furness Education Consortium to draw up a strategy document and convene a group of education leaders so that all sectors and schools are represented. We have been able to present this strategy and a ready-made consultation forum to the new Director and this will certainly have saved us months of waiting. It is true to say that the size and status of the SLF has been instrumental in achieving this.

We have had some staffing changes. Sarah Platt, our finance and administration officer, left for a new post in December last year and Miriam retired at Easter. Before Miriam retired, she helped me to appoint Hazel Plant, our new finance and administration officer, and both Sarah and Miriam have been generous of their time in ensuring a good handover. The changes have meant some changes to roles: Alison has taken on Inclusion Advocates and oversight of the subject networks from Miriam, whilst Hazel services a wide range of meetings including subject networks, and deals with financial and administrative matters. She is already proving to be an invaluable part of the team.

We are grateful to Sarah and Miriam for their dedication and hard work, and we miss them.

South Lakes Federation
2022-23 Annual Report

Ofsted inspections have been rather salutary experiences for our schools over the past year. School leaders and governors need to be confident that they have understood the paradigm shift needed to be ready for an inspection framework that focuses on the enacted curriculum rather than outcomes data, where the lived experience of pupils and staff is front and centre and where the leadership and governance of safeguarding needs to be robust and effective. Equity of provision for children with SEND, good careers programmes, an intentional focus on the teaching of reading, and assessment for learning that checks for understanding and addressed misconceptions during lessons all matter as does a regard for teacher workload. We are in a different world in which the peer reviews and the curated networks of the SLF can make a difference if school leaders “buy in.”

2023-24 is the third year of our 3-year strategic plan. Now that we have established the structures and culture of collaborative enquiry needed by our peer network, we can focus on the presenting issues that have been highlighted in our work and design the network activity and the connections between networks so that we have an eco-system working coherently to move understanding and practice on.

The unique selling point of the SLF is that coherence. Officers join together learning from peer reviews, appraisals and networks to create strategies and action plans that are implemented over time within relationships of trust. We have moved beyond peer reviewing as an event to peer learning as a process.