

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Glasgow (UofG)		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 23 Education		
Title of case study: Supporting collaboration and partnership to improve educational attainment		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013–2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
(1) Christopher Chapman	(1) Chair in Educational Policy and Practice	(1) 2013–present
(2) Daniel van Amersfoort	(2) Research Assistant	(2) 2017–2018
(3) Niamh Friel	(3) Research Assistant	(3) 2013–2016
(4) Stuart Hall	(4) Research Officer; Adviser of Studies; Research Officer	(4) 1992–2010; 2012–2013; 2010–present
(5) Kevin Lowden	(5) Research Officer	(5) 1987–present
(6) Mel Ainscow	(6) Professor in Education	(6) 2019–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is the primary priority for the Scottish education system. From 2013 onwards, UofG research informed the development and uptake of a partnership model involving collaboration within and between Scotland's schools and education researchers to address this issue. The research has provided evidence to inform: (i) the establishment of six Regional Improvement Collaboratives; (ii) the Scottish Government's decision to favour local authority-led collaborative practice over new legislation in 2018. Local authorities using the UofG model have demonstrated: (iii) improved professional practice (e.g. in the way that teachers use evidence to plan developments in learning and teaching); (iv) improved student outcomes (e.g. achievement in numeracy increased by 14% for participating Primary 4 students).</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
2.1. Context		
<p>Collaboration and networking are key to stimulating school improvement and to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. In 2015, an OECD policy review of education in Scotland called for, 'a strengthened "middle" operating through networks and collaboratives among schools, in and across local authorities'. The review added, 'As the local authorities are integral to such a development, there needs to be complementary action to address the gaps between the high and low performing authorities.' Since then, UofG researchers have worked alongside the Scottish Government, local authorities, school management and teachers to develop a shared strategic plan for research and professional learning to improve practice and student outcomes.</p>		
2.2. The School Improvement Partnership Programme (2013–2016)		
<p>The School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP) was a collaborative school improvement strategy developed by UofG researchers. Supported by funding from the Scottish Government/Education Scotland, it was intended as a three-year programme. The SIPP promoted new ways of working between teachers and staff in classrooms, schools and local authorities to tackle educational inequity in Scotland. It did so by bringing different types of knowledge and expertise together to enhance the use of data and evidence by teachers, in order to build professional capacity and improve student outcomes. It also aimed to build links between schools, so that ideas and effective practices did not remain hidden in individual classrooms.</p>		
<p>The SIPP involved the application of a set of key principles and methods by teachers and other staff to create bespoke interventions in classrooms, evaluate them and share within networks for school improvement. UofG researchers worked with teachers in classrooms using collaborative inquiry methods, including collaborative action research, lesson study and instructional rounds to design projects to improve teacher pedagogy and student performance. Each project was specific to each school context, led and evaluated by teachers with UofG researchers as collaborators and advisors. In three years, the SIPP involved partnerships with 25 secondary schools and 50 primary schools across 14 local authorities, and served as the pilot of the</p>		

collaborative inquiry approach within schools to address educational inequity. Research led by Professor Chapman evaluated and supported the development of the SIPP [3.1, 3.2, 3.3]. It found that this collaborative strategy had positive impacts on professional practice and partnership working within and between schools (e.g. 80% of participants agreed that the SIPP increased teachers' ability to address educational inequities) and demonstrated the flexibility of this approach to build professional capacity to drive improvements in student outcomes (e.g. 100% of participants agreed that the SIPP increased pupils' achievement).

2.3. Key findings

The research [3.3, 3.4] provided additional understandings that contributed towards the ongoing development of a 'self-improving school system' within Scottish education. The methodological innovation of collaborative action research within schools, and the success of between-school partnerships, led the SIPP research team to propose that the model move from a series of stand-alone and semi-connected partnerships to a series of 'innovation hubs' across regions (now known as Regional Improvement Collaboratives). Further research [3.5] used grid group theory to argue that for the 'collaboratives' to be successfully implemented, the Scottish system needed to introduce further steps to move from a hierarchical culture underpinned by bureaucratic public service organisations, to an egalitarian culture underpinned by *self-improving* public service organisations. These conclusions—based on the underpinning research in the SIPP and its descendant programmes—have since contributed to the development of this approach in the Global South context [3.6], which will likely come to full fruition in the next REF period.

2.4. Network for Social and Educational Equity (2016–present)

In 2016, the SIPP evolved into the Network for Social and Educational Equity (NSEE), which builds on the approach to embed partnership working within and between schools. As with the SIPP, researchers led by Chapman co-produced and evaluated design-based research with participating schools with the aim of closing the poverty-related attainment gap by improving student outcomes in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. The SIPP approach has also been adapted and refined as part of the [What Works Scotland](#) and [Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland](#) programmes of research funded by the ESRC and the Scottish Government. This approach and these methods of collaborative inquiry have become the standard set of tools for improving teaching and student outcomes in schools and within the Regional Improvement Collaboratives—a newly established education governance structure that strengthens and supports collaborative working, innovation and the sharing of best practice between schools and across the education system (as outlined in section 4 below).

3. References to the research

3.1. Chapman, C., Chestnutt, H., Friel, N., Hall, S. and Lowden, K. (2017) [Taking the lead: teachers leading educational reform through collaborative enquiry in Scotland](#). In: Harris, A., Jones, M. and Huffman, J. B. (eds.) *Teachers Leading Educational Reform: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*. Series: Teacher quality and school development series. Routledge: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY, pp. 11-31. ISBN 978113864105. [available on request from HEI]

3.2. Chapman, C., Chestnutt, H., Friel, N., Hall, S. and Lowden, K. (2016) [Professional capital and collaborative inquiry networks for educational equity and improvement?](#) *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1(3), pp. 178-197. (doi: [10.1108/JPCC-03-2016-0007](https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-03-2016-0007))

3.3. Chapman, C. (2018) [School-to-school collaboration: building collective capacity through collaborative enquiry](#). In: Connolly, M., Eddy-Spicer, D. H., James, C. and Kruse, S. D. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of School Organization*. SAGE Publications Ltd: London, pp. 540-561. ISBN 9781526420664.

3.4. Chapman, C. (2014) From within- to between- and beyond-school improvement: A case of rethinking roles and responsibilities, ICSEI Monograph Series: Issues 3, ICSEI: NSW, Australia. [available on request from HEI].

3.5. Chapman, C. and Ainscow, M. (2019) [Using research to promote equity within education systems: possibilities and barriers](#). *British Educational Research Journal*, 45(5), pp. 899-917. (doi: [10.1002/berj.3544](#))

3.6. Pino Yancovic, M., González, A., Ahumada, L. and Chapman, C. (2019) [School Improvement Networks and Collaborative Inquiry: Fostering Systemic Change in Challenging Contexts](#). Series: Emerald professional learning networks. Emerald. ISBN 978178769738 [available on request from HEI]

Evidence of research quality: Outputs **[3.2]** and **[3.5]** were published in high-ranking double-blind peer-reviewed education journals. Outputs **[3.1]** and **[3.3]** were published by leading international publishing houses.

4. Details of the impact

4.1. Background

In Scotland, the majority of legal responsibilities for education sits with local authorities. As a result, there are distinct differences in actions to address school improvement in each local authority area. In 2014, the Accounts Commission (the independent auditing body for local government in Scotland) found significant variation in attainment between local authorities. Previously, there was no national vision or framework to overcome this issue. The underpinning research has informed the development and implementation of a targeted intervention (outlined in sections **4.5** and **4.6** below) and provided evidence to support complementary policy initiatives (outlined in sections **4.3** and **4.4** below) designed to improve system-wide collaboration.

4.2. Pathways to impact

Based upon this body of research, Professor Chapman was appointed as Senior Academic Advisor to the Scottish Government's Learning Directorate and as a member of the First Minister's International Council of Education Advisors. These advisory roles have drawn materially and distinctly upon Chapman's research and provided a direct channel for his work into the national policy arena (confirmed by statements **[5A]****[5B]**). Chapman is also the Founding Director of the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change, which provides an opportunity to implement collaborative action research projects with practitioners using the SIPP/NSEE model developed by the UofG.

4.3. Informing the development of Regional Improvement Collaboratives

Research led by Chapman provided evidence to inform the establishment of Scotland's Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) in 2018. As a result of the success of the SIPP approach in schools, the UofG's Phase 1 SIPP Report to Education Scotland **[5C]** argued for a regional approach to school improvement efforts through the establishment of 'innovation hubs'. Shortly after its publication, this proposal was taken up by the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, who directly referred to the evaluation of the SIPP and advice from the Robert Owen Centre in calling for the introduction of 'Inter-authority Improvement Partnerships' (confirmed by report **[5D]**). This activity supported the establishment of two pilot 'collaboratives' in 2016. In his role as Senior Academic Advisor, Chapman's team evaluated a pilot collaborative in Tayside, which was a precursor to the establishment of the RICs (confirmed by statement **[5B]** from the former West RIC Lead).

This period of policy development culminated in the Scottish Government's 'Education Governance: Next Steps' report (2017), which supported the full establishment of the RICs, citing research led by Chapman as part of its evidential basis (confirmed by report **[5E]**). The Director of the Learning Directorate confirms that [text removed for publication].

4.4. Informing the decision not to legislate on education reform

Running concurrently to the establishment of the RICs was the development of the Scottish Government's flagship Education Bill (2018), which proposed the most radical reforms since devolution. As a member of the First Minister's International Council of Education Advisors (ICEA), Chapman co-authored a report **[5F]** on the implementation of reforms outlined in ['Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland'](#) (2016). The ICEA report, which cited research led by Chapman in establishing evidence of the positive

impact of collaboration within the Scottish education system, was put directly to the First Minister **[redacted]**. The report recommended that the Scottish Government should: *‘Consider how further development and deepening of the implementation of its future approaches to educational improvement can be achieved by the collaborative approach that has achieved the progress to date, rather than pursuing a legislative approach.’* (confirmed by ICEA report **[5F]**).

In June 2018, the decision to put the proposed Education Bill on hold was announced in a statement to Parliament. The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills said: *‘Why should we wait 18 months for an education bill? [...] we have an opportunity to reform our schools more quickly through investment in consensus building and collaboration’* (confirmed by meeting papers **[5G]**). The central role of the cautionary advice presented in the ICEA report (co-authored by Chapman and drawing upon UofG research) was widely reported in the media at the time. The significance of both the ICEA report and the development of the then newly-established RICs in terms of this evidence-based shift in policy direction is confirmed by Scottish Education Council minutes from September 2018. At that meeting, the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills *‘agreed that there was a clear and shared agenda around the need to create a culture of empowerment.’* **[5H]**.

4.5. Improved professional practice

The SIPP is introduced and cited as an example of best practice in the national school self-evaluation guide, *How Good is Our School 4* (2015), which is used by every headteacher in Scotland **[5I]**. Since 2013, 107 school teams have worked alongside UofG researchers—and one another—to develop and implement collaborative action research projects using the SIPP/NSEE model. These projects include all of the schools in the West Partnership RIC, which consists of 8 local authorities serving 35% of all Scotland’s students (confirmed by statement **[5B]**). West Dunbartonshire (one example selected from the local authorities involved) has expanded its use of the SIPP/NSEE model to improve professional practice and student outcomes (which are specifically outlined in further detail in section **4.6** below). In 2019, 83% of collaborative action research participants in West Dunbartonshire reported that learning and teaching quality had improved; collaboration with the Robert Owen Centre was highlighted as working particularly well in this respect (confirmed by report **[5J]**).

As of November 2020, West Dunbartonshire had collaborative action research projects involving approximately 250 practitioners. The former West Partnership Lead confirms, *‘research that built upon the evaluation of the national School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP) led by Professor Chapman [...] has provided evidence of the potential of a focused partnership approach to school and local authority activity’*. She added, *‘This programme of work has significantly improved the way that teachers use data to plan improvement through collaborative action research to enhance the quality of teaching practice and build their leadership capacity [...] We are also seeing a growth in leadership capacity among middle and senior managers in schools as they develop their own understanding of collaborative practitioner enquiry and its potential to bring about sustained improvement in classroom practices.’* (statement **[5B]**).

4.6. Improved student outcomes

Through improvements in professional practice, the SIPP/NSEE model has been shown to contribute to improvements in pupils’ numeracy and in writing in participating schools over the intervention period. Since 2015, participating schools in West Dunbartonshire have shown *‘a stable, high performance for P1 and S3 and a generally increasing performance for P4 and P7’*, the latter of which were two groups of focus in the SIPP programme at its inception in the local authority. The West Partnership Lead Officer also reported that *‘since 2016 achievement in numeracy has increased by 14% for P4 and 11% for P7, while achievement in writing has increased by 9% for P4 and 13% for P7’*; changes that leaders believe the work of SIPP/NSEE has directly contributed to (confirmed by correspondence and briefing **[5K]**).

4.7. Next steps

In 2020, UofG research on equity within education systems fed into Chapman’s role on the COVID-19 Scientific Advisory Sub-Group for Education and Children’s Issues, which was formed by the Scottish Government to react to the challenges posed by the global pandemic. Amid concerns that COVID-19 may deepen inequality in education, UofG research on the SIPP/NSEE informed guidance that went out to all schools in August 2020. The Deputy First Minister and

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills wrote, *‘the sub-group has shaped policy and guidance directly [...] The advice it has considered and developed, often at pace, of complex issues often at the intersection of science and its implementation, has been first rate.’* (confirmed by letter [5L]). Beyond Scotland, the impact of the research has begun to internationalise through collaboration with stakeholders in Chile. Existing research on School Improvement Networks has paid little attention to education systems in the Global South, such as in Chile, where more than 500 School Improvement Networks were created in order to promote a culture of collaboration in 2015. [Chapman’s engagement activity](#) with academics and practitioners in this setting looks set to pave the way for significant impact beyond the REF2021 period.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5A] Statement from the Director of the Learning Directorate [redacted] **[PDF available]**.

[5B] Statement from former West Partnership Lead (2017–20) (confirms the impact of the research on professional practice) **[PDF available]**.

[5C] Chapman, C., Lowden, K., Chestnutt, H., Hall, S., McKinney, S., Hulme, M. and Watters, N. (2014) Research on the Impact of the School Improvement Partnership Programme: Using Collaboration and Enquiry to Tackle Educational Inequity. Phase 1 Report to Education Scotland. Project Report. Education Scotland, Livingston (see p.41) **[PDF available]**.

[5D] ADES Report (2016) (directly refers to the evaluation of the SIPP and advice from the Robert Owen Centre) **[PDF available]**.

[5E] Scottish Government (2017) [Education Governance: Next steps](#) (the underpinning research is directly cited on four occasions, though in terms of the central claim on p.32) **[PDF available]**.

[5F] [International Council of Education Advisers: Report 2016-2018](#) (co-authored by Chapman; the underpinning research is directly cited on p.22) **[PDF available]**.

[5G] Scottish Parliament Meeting Papers Education and Skills Committee Agenda (5 September 2018) (quote from p.14; the ‘context’ section on p.1 also makes the link between the ICEA advice and the decision not to legislate) **[PDF available]**.

[5H] Scottish Education Council minutes September 2018 (see p.3-5) **[PDF available]**.

[5I] How Good is Our School (4th Edition) 2015 (the SIPP is cited on p.10) **[PDF available]**.

[5J] Scottish Attainment Challenge Authorities Programme 2018/19 End Year Progress Report (figures used in section 4 from p.11) **[PDF available]**.

[5K] Collated evidence: (i) Correspondence from West Partnership Lead Officer; (ii) briefing from West Partnership Lead Officer **[PDF available]**.

[5L] Letter from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (September 2020) **[PDF available]**.