Guidance for your peer-led community sessions and 'buddy pairs'

What are the communities and how do they link to my NPQ?

Communities are structured, peer-led sessions focussing on solving problems, applying the theory in context and supporting with network building. The aim of your community sessions is to help you to:

> Identify your trickiest professional problems and explore ways to address them.
> Learn from one another's experiences and develop a network of support.
> Improve knowledge and practice around the NPQ Framework.

What preparation do I need to do before a community session?

Ahead of the session, you should identify a problem that you would like to discuss. This problem should be a tricky professional problem that you currently face, and link to an area of the NPQ framework. You may wish to bring an artefact to the discussion – such as an email or planning document – to illustrate the problem and make it more concrete.

A 'good' problem for discussion in a 'communities' format should be:
> **Specific –** The problem should relate to the NPQ and will therefore be easily understandable to all in the group.
> **Solvable –** Solvable problems are those where our efforts can result in progress.
> **Controllable –** They are things that you, in your specific role, have a high degree of control over.

Example problems:

	Specific	Solvable	Controllable	Suitable problem?
1. Education doesn't get enough funding	✗	?	✗	**No**
2. My team aren't in the best roles for them	✗	?	✓	**No**
3. I'm struggling to build consistency around assessment practices	✗	✓	✓	**No**
4. My pupils keep forgetting what I teach them	✓	✓	✓	**Yes**

Here are some questions you could consider before the session, to help you to communicate your problem:

Questions	Example
1. **The Problem:** What problem do you wish to discuss?	My pupils keep forgetting what they are taught, especially in Maths.
2. **The Evidence:** What evidence do you have that this problem is a problem?	Pupils answer questions correctly in lessons and complete work but then can't remember the content in subsequent lessons. This has been observed during learning walks and it is reflected in the end of unit results.
3. **The Context:** What contextual factors matter?	With the pandemic and school closures over the previous academic year teachers are trying to plug the gaps and teach pupils all the content that they missed. We also have a number of new teachers this year including a new head of Maths and three early career teachers.
4. **The Why:** Why is this problem important?	We need pupils to learn what we are teaching them so that we can build knowledge over time and ensure all pupils have access to a broad, rich and balanced curriculum.

What structure should we follow during our session?

During your session you should follow this problem-solving protocol which will support you to have a structured discussion in order to crystallise the problem, investigate its causes, and come up with possible solutions.

Time	Activity		Purpose
0 - 5	Start on time All leaders share one success from the last week. *For your first community you will need to assign a chair. We suggest the colleague with the birthday earliest in the year goes first, and all colleagues will take a turn as chair throughout the programme.*		Reconnect
5 - 17	**Problem owner**		Investigate, critique and develop practice
	2 mins	**1. Introduce the problem (problem-owner)** The problem owner briefly describes the persistent problem they are focussing on (see appendix A) and how it manifests in their context.	
	2 mins	**2. Clarify (Peers)** Questions about the problem (*e.g. Has this happened before? What happened last time?*)	
	4 mins	**3. Look deeper (Peers; problem-owner listens but does not speak)** Questions and discussion about the problem (*e.g. What does this show about teachers' beliefs? What possible responses are there?*)	
	2 mins	**4. Action step (Peers; problem-owner listens but does not speak)** What can be done next? (*e.g. If this were my school, I would…*)	
	2 mins	**5. Response (Problem owner)** What will you do in response? (*e.g. That's interesting – it made me think about… I think my next action will be*)	
	1 min	**6. Our reflections (All)** What did we learn from that round? (*e.g. A common strand to today's problems has been… It's interesting that we all struggled to offer suggestions for the problem*).	
17-30	**Person 2**		
30-43	**Person 3**		
43-55	**Person 4**		
55-60	• Any other questions/feedback/requests for help • Appoint a chair for the next meeting		Review learning, refine calls

The above table outlines timings for four participants. However, if the number of participants in your session is larger than this, you can adapt using the timings as below:

> **Groups of five:** reduce the time for each turn to ten minutes: Clarify – 1, Look deeper – 4, Action step – 2, Response – 2, Observations – 1.

> **Groups of six:** reduce the time for each turn to eight minutes:
> Clarify – 1, Look deeper – 3, Action step – 2, Response – 1, Observations – 1.

What are 'buddy pairs'?

Application modules offer participants an opportunity to practise/apply learning from a course and are designed to take the key learning from the preceding insight module and make sense of it with a 'buddy'.

The aim of application modules are to be:

> **Supportively challenging:** We create experiences that help teachers to get better, but do so in ways that can become part of typical school routines
> **Socially helpful:** We use structured opportunities for collaboration to create enhanced understanding and practice

The role of the buddy pair is to:
1. Provide opportunities to discuss and make sense of key content from the insight and application modules.
2. Support their buddy by constructively questioning and challenging them, where appropriate, helping them to reflect on their actions and thinking.
3. Give feedback on practice to develop more effective behaviours and mental models.
4. Hold their buddy to account over time to progress actions or tasks identified during application modules.

How should a delivery partner create the conditions for a successful buddy pair?
It is up to delivery partners to decide on the best way to create the conditions for buddy pairs to happen in their own contexts.

Buddy pairs will…	Key information to support
Agree a fortnightly slot to complete their application module synchronously (at the same time)	> To form strong habits, we suggest that buddy pairs set recurring meetings at the same day and time. > It can be beneficial to set an 'alternative' plan in case a buddy isn't available.
Agree a fortnightly format to meet	> We strongly suggest that participants either meet in person, or use a computer/laptop to meet using software, such as Zoom or Teams. > Phones can act as a barrier to sharing effective examples, videos and slides.
Complete the adequate preparation to stretch and support buddy's learning (e.g. so they can ask the right questions/give high quality feedback)	> Before each application module, buddies should ensure they complete the insight module in advance of their meeting so they have a shared understanding of the content they are coming together to make sense of.
Be flexible with their time, and courteous with the time of their buddy	> Sometimes meetings will need to be moved. > Buddies should look ahead and pre-empt any calendar conflicts to avoid cancelling meetings at the last minute. > Although it's best to work in buddy pairs in each application module, participants need to accept that, in some instances, solo practice may be required to not halt progression onto the next insight module.