

# Work Collaborative Forum 4: Growing Our Organisation

*21st January 2026*

## Executive Summary

Our fourth forum marked a significant organisational moment for Work Collaborative. With our community maturing, we turned our attention to the structures and systems needed to sustain and scale our impact. This wasn't about abandoning our grassroots spirit but about creating frameworks that let us work more effectively together.

The forum surfaced honest questions about sustainability, compensation, and how we balance collaborative idealism with individual livelihoods. We're learning that professionalising the collaborative doesn't mean losing our values - it means operationalising them. Key developments include structural changes in leadership, a commissioned white paper nearing completion, plans for a second foundation certificate cohort, and the emergence of special interest groups to channel our community's diverse expertise.

This summary reflects our open source ethos - all ideas, frameworks, and resources developed by Work Collaborative are freely available for adaptation and use by the education community.

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## Organisational Evolution

### Leadership Transition

Work Collaborative has reached a natural turning point. Efraim Lerner, who co-founded the collaborative with Shane, is deeply engaged in exciting projects in the UK that require his full attention. Rather than stretching himself thin, we've made an intentional decision about focus and sustainability.

Efraim remains part of the collaborative as adviser and co-founder, but day-to-day leadership has transitioned to Shane through Education Leaders Ltd. This shift allows the collaborative to maintain momentum whilst honouring Efraim's capacity to contribute in ways that work for his current commitments.

The collaborative now operates as the not-for-profit arm of Education Leaders Ltd. All financial activity is tracked transparently and published annually on our website.

## The Not-for-Profit Question

Several forum members raised practical questions about formalising as a charity. The complexity isn't just legal - it's about governance, jurisdiction, and sustainability. Where should the organisation be registered? Who serves on the board? How do we balance local requirements with our global reach?

One member highlighted how different countries have vastly different requirements for not-for-profit status, making international operations complicated. Another noted that non-profits require careful governance structures to avoid becoming burdensome administrative exercises.

We're not rushing this decision. For now, we're operating transparently through Education Leaders Ltd whilst we gather expertise about the right structure for our global community. If you've got experience creating not-for-profit entities or charitable organisations, we'd welcome your insight.

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## Research and Development

### The White Paper

Dr Kathryn Taylor has been authoring a commissioned white paper titled "Creating Conditions for Community-Led Change" for The Bridge, Wellington College's journal. This represents a significant step in establishing our research credibility.

Kathryn has synthesised research on organisational change and professional learning in education. The paper explores how communities can confidently engage with external expertise without becoming dependent on it.

The paper is in strong shape and aiming for submission in February. Once published, it'll be openly accessible - no paywalls, freely available for our community and the wider education sector. This work will give us themes to explore and evidence to build upon.

It's worth noting that this work was funded by Work Collaborative. That's unusual in academic publishing, where journal writing typically happens unpaid. But we're committed to valuing people's time properly, which requires funding.

## Foundation Certificate Cohort 2

Last year, the first cohort of the Foundation Certificate in Resonant Change ran successfully. Six online sessions allowed participants to explore principles of creating community-led change in schools through an explorative, values-based programme.

We're planning to launch a second cohort in autumn 2026. The dates can flex, but we're looking for someone to co-facilitate with Shane. The resources exist; what's needed is someone willing to spend time training on those resources whilst also helping develop them further.

This is one way we can fund the collaborative's work, so there's compensation involved - it's not purely voluntary. If you're passionate about change and think you'd love delivering this programme, get in touch.

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## Funding and Sustainability

### The Reality Check

One forum member asked the question that needed asking: how does this work alongside what we're each trying to achieve professionally? When you're running your own business or working independently, how do you balance contributing to the collaborative with paying your bills?

This sparked an honest conversation about sustainability. The forum is valuable professional development, but development work and delivery need fair compensation. We can't build an organisation on everyone's spare time, however passionate we are about the mission.

The collaborative's three-ring structure offers one answer. The centre - research and advocacy - remains free and open source. This is our gift to the sector. The middle ring - education - is owned by the collaborative, with revenue supporting our work. The outer ring - systems - allows practitioners to draw on our open source materials to create products they can sell through their own businesses.

What we're protecting is the centre. We don't want products or commercial interests driving our research and advocacy. Influence must flow from the centre outward, not the reverse.

## Finding Funding

Projects like the white paper, the foundation certificate development, and our growing initiatives have been funded through Education Leaders Ltd donations so far. That's not sustainable long-term.

We need funding streams. Grants, philanthropic support, organisations willing to fund research papers or course development. If you know of funding opportunities or organisations that might support this work, please share. If you've got expertise in grant applications or fundraising, we need your knowledge.

One member mentioned US State Department grants but noted they require matching categories and aren't usually large sums. Another pointed out that UK funding exists but you need to be very specific about what you're applying for. This is new territory for many of us.

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## Pipeline Projects

### Values Framework

We're exploring the creation of a values framework for organisational change. What values underpin sustainable, resonant change? How can we conceptualise this in ways that help not just our organisation but schools and service providers across the sector?

Some members discussed the idea of accreditation for providers working in education - a way to signal alignment with values-based approaches. This is complicated territory, but starting with a clear values framework might help. We're looking for collaborators on this work.

### Organisational Coaching Training Programme

Can we create a programme that trains coaches to guide schools through sustainable change management? Many forum members already do this work. Could we develop a programme that formalises this approach, runs a pilot, and scales it properly?

We're thinking 2027 for launch, with development happening through this year. If you're interested in collaborating on an organisational coaching programme, let us know.

## Special Interest Groups

The forum concept works well for our community's professional development. But we need smaller groups working on specific projects between forums.

Special interest groups would meet a few times per year to develop initiatives within the framework of organisational change. These groups form around genuine interest and mutual benefit - not just volunteering your time, but working on something that serves your professional practice whilst contributing to the collaborative.

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## Voices from the Forum

### On Professional Sustainability

One member raised the tension between collaborative work and individual business needs: "We each develop our own work... how do we contribute here? Does it compete with what we're doing? What do we contribute that gives something back as well as taking?"

This led to reflections about what we each bring and gain. The forum offers thought partnership that individual practice doesn't always provide. One member described having projects on their to-do list for years but never finding the collaboration needed to actually produce them. The collaborative offers space for work that brings immense professional pleasure but doesn't fit into day-to-day schedules.

Another member emphasised being mindful about not taking volunteer contributions for granted: "We have to be mindful that what's given for free can be taken for granted. That's just how we are as human beings."

### On Structure and Governance

When discussing not-for-profit status, members shared practical insights: "There's no global non-for-profit, so where you've registered matters. It depends on who the registered people are, where they're located. It can get very complicated unless you have the right structure."

The conversation acknowledged that governance boards require careful thought: "With governance comes all the questions about who's appointed, what power they have, how it works. You have to be aware of these things before jumping into it."

## On Learning and Development

An early-career school leader described their motivation: "I'm primarily here to learn. Everything Shane does, I jump on and try. I'm happy to give time and organisational work because it directs my personal CPD in a nice way."

They described being able to share learning immediately: "I was on a course recently where someone mentioned something, and I could say 'I can do that' because I'd been on the call with James about slice teams. That's the type of thing I'm here to do."

## On Cultural Context

The same member raised an important challenge: "I keep coming up against when I learn about change theory or organisational research... everyone says 'yes, that's great theory, but we're in China and it's very difficult to apply here with the cultural differences.' I'm extremely sensitive about being here and not trampling over local ways of doing things, but wanting the best school I can. How do we approach that in a different culture?"

This led to discussion about special interest groups focused on specific contexts, where people working in similar situations could develop solutions together.

## On Provider Selection

One member described a common scenario: "Just today I got an email from a school saying 'are you available this day and what do you think we should do?' I'll be honest, it's frustrating. HR gets put in charge of professional development and they're asked to do more than handle admin - they're asked to develop programming without training."

This sparked interest in creating guidance: "What questions should schools ask when selecting external providers? How many times has someone been put in that position? What guidance could we produce that helps them?"

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## Advisory Board Formation

With the forum becoming primarily a professional development platform, we need an Advisory Board to guide strategic direction. Shane can't lead this operation alone.

The Advisory Board would meet four times per year to:

- Develop strategic focus for the collaborative
- Guide and assess the viability of projects

- Ensure we're staying true to our mission whilst growing effectively

There will be an application process soon. This will help professionalise our operations and strengthen our strategic thinking. Advisory Board membership would be voluntary, recognising this is governance work rather than delivery.

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## Emerging Special Interest Groups

Based on forum discussions, several potential special interest groups are emerging:

### **Provider Selection and School Guidance**

Creating frameworks and resources to help schools make informed decisions about external support. Questions to ask, processes to follow, avoiding the tick-box approach to professional development.

### **PD Planning and Decision-Making**

Guidance for schools on how to actually decide what professional development they need. Self-reflection activities that help schools look inward before looking outward. Using PD days strategically rather than reactively.

### **Change in Complex Cultural Contexts**

Specifically exploring how to lead sustainable change in international schools, particularly in contexts like China where cultural differences create unique challenges. How do you honour local ways whilst implementing evidence-based practice?

These groups would work between forums to develop resources, run pilots, or create frameworks that benefit both the wider collaborative and the individuals involved.

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## Areas for Continued Exploration

The forum surfaced questions for ongoing inquiry:

### **About Sustainability:**

- How do we balance collaborative idealism with the reality that people need to earn a living?
- Which activities should be paid work versus voluntary contribution?
- What funding models support the collaborative without compromising our values?

### **About Structure:**

- Where should a not-for-profit entity be registered for an international organisation?
- What governance structures work for a global community with diverse contexts?
- How do we professionalise without losing our grassroots character?

### **About Special Interest Groups:**

- How do we ensure these groups benefit participants professionally whilst serving the collaborative's mission?
- What support and structure do these groups need to be effective?
- How do we evaluate whether a special interest group is working?

### **About Cultural Context:**

- How might our frameworks adapt across different educational cultures?
- What's universal about community-led change versus culturally specific?
- How do we avoid imposing Western change models on non-Western contexts?

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## **A Closing Reflection**

This forum felt different. We're no longer just exploring ideas - we're building an organisation. That brings practical questions about money, structure, governance, and sustainability.

But these questions don't diminish our vision. They're evidence that what we're creating matters enough to deserve proper foundations. The honest conversations about compensation, sustainability, and professional needs showed a community mature enough to balance idealism with reality.

We're learning that you can be values-driven and sustainable, collaborative and professional, grassroots and structured. These aren't contradictions - they're the tensions we need to hold well.

The journey continues, now with clearer foundations and honest questions guiding our next steps.

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## Forum Participants

### Online Meeting Details:

- Date: Tuesday, 21st January 2026
- Time: 9:00-10:00 GMT

### Attendees:

- Shane Leaning
- Sandy Lennox
- James Mannion
- Yael Cass
- Claire Peet
- Catherine Cooke (joined later)

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## Open Source Commitment

This document is published in the spirit of Work Collaborative's commitment to open source collaboration. All content, ideas, frameworks, and resources developed through our forums are made freely available to the global education community.

We encourage adaptation, modification, and sharing of these materials to support schools and education organisations worldwide. This document will be housed in the Work Collaborative open source library at [workcollaborative.com/library](https://workcollaborative.com/library), alongside other resources developed by our community.

Our open source approach reflects our core belief that sustainable change in education emerges through community collaboration rather than proprietary solutions.

*This summary utilises AI to synthesise contributions from our forum discussion. It represents the collective thinking of our community and is intended as a working document for feedback and refinement.*

**Next forum meeting: March 2026 (Date TBC)**

*For more information about Work Collaborative or to access our open source library, visit: [workcollaborative.com](https://workcollaborative.com)*