

# Independent Review of Community Learning and Development – Colleges Scotland Response– March 2024

## Introduction

Colleges Scotland is the voice of the sector, supporting the delivery of thriving colleges at the heart of a thriving Scotland. When Colleges Thrive, Scotland Thrives. As the membership body, Colleges Scotland represents all 24 colleges in Scotland, which deliver both further education and around 13% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

Colleges across Scotland offer opportunities for the most vulnerable learners, to ensure they can achieve their full potential and have a significant track record in delivering Community Learning and Development programmes across Scotland, delivering Equality and Opportunity within Communities for learners to succeed and move into the workplace and/or other education settings.

Colleges Scotland welcomes the opportunity to provide views on the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) on behalf of the college sector, and in doing so has consulted with sector leads and those with close knowledge and understanding of how this is delivered within a college setting.

## Key Points

### **1. Awareness and visibility. How visible is CLD, and the positive outcomes it can deliver? (please consider learners/potential learners, decision-makers, and other relevant service providers)**

The majority view from the sector was that CLD, and the positive outcomes it can deliver, is not particularly visible. This lack of visibility may be down to the setting CLD takes place in (i.e. community centres, libraries, and youth centres), meaning many people will not be aware of or engage with this work, and as a consequence, much of CLD goes unrecognised.

Another perspective offered was that there is a lack of general awareness of CLD because very few individuals are involved in its delivery from a college perspective. A further view was that CLD activity often takes place in isolation, rather than collaboratively, meaning there is a lack of awareness of the opportunities available and how to access these for the broader population.

From the evidence presented by the sector, the key factors behind strong awareness and visibility of CLD included strong partnership working across partners within communities, with joint evaluation and planning key to demonstrating positive impact and outcomes across local communities.

### **2. Awareness and visibility. If you work in CLD or are a local decision-maker, please tell us how you go about making people aware of CLD learning opportunities?**

Sector leads expressed the importance of working closely with local and regional partners in making people aware of CLD learning opportunities. Partnership working is key to ensuring that opportunities are highlighted, but that gaps in provision are also identified and addressed for the benefit of learners within communities. One view put forward to improve awareness of opportunities was that planning of activity at regional levels could be improved, to maximise the communication of opportunities available, and to inform the provision of specialist support within communities to respond to need.

One sector lead highlighted some specific examples of raising awareness of CLD learning opportunities. This includes advertising community courses through social media and official college marketing channels. Lecturing staff also promote CLD directly to local communities through community centres, community events, and liaising directly with schools, nurseries, and community education workers.

### **3. Awareness and visibility. Do you think there are clear career progression pathways in CLD for practitioners or volunteers?**

Sector leads were generally of the view that career progression pathways in CLD for practitioners or volunteers are not as clear as they could be. It was highlighted that career progression routes are clear for those in an existing CLD role, but less so for those considering a career in CLD, and further work is required to map the pathways into the CLD space and in evidencing clear linkages between qualifications and roles.

One view expressed was that with a suitable level of commitment from the Scottish Government, the college sector is well positioned to support the development and delivery of clear career progression pathways into the CLD profession and in maintaining professional development opportunities for CLD staff.

Some sector leads felt that as partner organisations, it was difficult to comment from the perspective of a practitioner or volunteer. However, it was highlighted by one sector lead that there are examples of where practitioners have progressed to teaching positions within the college, such as teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

From responses provided by the college sector, what is apparent is that when a College Community Staff Team is registered with the CLD Standards Council, there are clearer career progression pathways, and there is the provision of opportunities for professional development and advancement within the field.

### **4. Accessibility and availability. If someone wants to do CLD learning, how likely are they to find the learning they need or want?**

Sector leads had varying views on this question around accessibility and availability. One view was that those who are part of a recognised group (e.g. identified through the Parental Employability Service) are more likely to find relevant learning opportunities, than those who are not.

There was some consensus on this topic that the CLD landscape is quite cluttered and could present difficulties for individuals to identify relevant learning opportunities. In particular, it was felt that CLD provision is based on majority need, and this tends to be focused around Personal and Social Development, ESOL, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital, so needs outside of these areas are less likely to be met by current provision.

That said, sector views also expressed confidence that individuals in their area would be able to access their specific learning needs, as the college's learner and community-centred approach means they continuously assess and respond to evolving needs.

A key factor in ensuring prospective CLD learners find the learning they need or want is suitable signposting from partners and articulation of learner pathways and routes that are available within CLD provision.

### **5. Accessibility and availability. Do you have any concerns or hopes about the CLD learning offer in the future?**

One of the general concerns expressed by sector leads about the CLD learning offer in the future was around financial constraints, with it being highlighted that continued funding reductions to the college sector will mean that CLD provision is reduced as colleges will need to prioritise core learning and teaching.

In particular, concerns were expressed around how future demand around ESOL would be met due to a lack of clarity around funding and a likely increase in migration to Scotland, at a time when demand for ESOL provision has been consistently increasing in line with inward migration to Scotland by refugees from Ukraine and other countries.

On this basis, sector leads expressed their hope for continued and strengthened partnership working to maximise the CLD opportunities available to those who need them.

#### **6. Accessibility and availability. To what extent do you feel that CLD learning is available at a time and location that works for the learner?**

Sector leads acknowledged the importance of accessibility and availability of learning to CLD learner audiences. It was highlighted that there can be barriers to this, such as transport challenges, work commitments, caring responsibilities, and digital poverty.

Colleges accommodate these needs as far as possible to ensure individuals can access CLD, for example, by scheduling family-friendly class times, or assisting with transport provision. It was noted, however, that individual needs cannot always be accommodated due to resource constraints currently facing institutions.

One sector lead highlighted that CLD is only offered at one of their campuses due to localised demand, but this makes it less accessible for learners in other areas. This evidences the current tension in delivering CLD learning and a time and location that works for the learner, whilst also remaining sustainable activity for colleges.

#### **7. Accessibility and availability. Are you aware of any financial costs for learners in accessing CLD learning?**

Sector leads were unanimous in the view that there are no financial costs for learners in accessing CLD learning.

#### **8. Support and learning. Are CLD staff and volunteers trained/qualified to support a learner's journey towards achieving high-quality positive outcomes?**

The majority view from sector leads was that their CLD staff are well trained and suitably qualified to support a learner's journey towards achieving high-quality positive outcomes. One sector lead highlighted that CLD has a strong tradition of maintaining professional practice standards and specified that their CLD staff hold registrations with the CLD Standards Council, General Teaching Council for Scotland, and Scottish Social Services Council.

Another sector lead advised of the need for consistent and close partnership working to identify appropriate training and upskilling qualifications for people volunteering and working in CLD and to ensure that volunteers are well supported and trained to engage with and support learners.

It was clear from sector responses that volunteers are engaged and enabled to support learners, but that it is becoming more difficult to ensure that volunteers are suitably qualified, considering some of the costs involved, and there may be some qualifications which are not available to those who are not in employment, with further work required around enabling access to these learner groups.

## **9. Support and learning. From your experiences, is learning taking place in a safe and welcoming environment?**

Sector leads were unanimous in the view that learning takes place in a safe and welcoming environment, where individuals feel valued and supported.

## **10. Support and learning. Are learners encouraged to give and receive regular feedback on their learning, and if it is meeting their goals?**

Most sector leads commented that learners are encouraged to give and receive regular feedback on their learning, and if it is meeting their goals. One sector lead stated that their college often produces good news stories to highlight learner success and celebrate their achievements as part of the wider college community of which CLD forms a key element of.

Sector views underlined that giving and receiving feedback is integral to the college educational process, allowing learners to evaluate their learning experiences, identify areas for improvement, and receive guidance tailored to their individual needs, ensuring their ongoing growth and success.

## **11. Support and learning. How 'joined-up' are CLD services to other related services, such as schools, mental health support, benefits/money advice, employability services, etc?**

Feedback received from the sector on this topic indicated that CLD and other related services have become more joined up in recent years as partnership working and collaboration has improved between CLD, third sector organisations, colleges, and universities.

That said sector leads held the view that CLD services are not as joined up to other related services as they could be, and that this varied depending on the role of the college in supporting these services. One sector lead commented that their CLD activities are all learning-based and do not move into the advice or support space, with views also indicating that services are not sufficiently joined up because their CLD Partnership does not meet regularly enough.

In terms of what good looks like for joined-up services, it was raised by one sector lead that their college fosters a partnership approach, ensuring that CLD services are well-integrated with other related services, including schools, mental health support, benefits/money advice, and employability services.

## **12. Support and Learning. What role do Colleges and Universities play in CLD?**

Sector leads underlined the pivotal role that colleges play in CLD, acting as community anchors and providing a platform for communities to engage in valuable learning opportunities within their own settings as well as within the formal college environment.

Through collaboration with community organisations, colleges can develop tailored programmes that cater to the diverse needs of learners, thereby supporting their educational journey. As a result, many learners have successfully progressed to various education and career paths, thanks to their involvement in CLD initiatives delivered by their local college.

This collaborative approach fosters empowerment, skill development, and social mobility, enriching the lives of individuals and strengthening communities and delivers against the Scottish Government priority areas of Equality, Community, and Opportunity.

Colleges, arguably, also have an underutilised role in promoting CLD practice, training its practitioners and in leveraging funding and resources.

Colleges and universities can also provide a progression route for CLD learners. From one perspective offered by a sector lead, within their region the college and university have collaborated in developing a 'pipeline' approach which allows CLD learners to move on into further study, when they are ready. This then creates space for others to start their CLD journey.

**13. Pathways and progression. How are learners made aware of opportunities to take their learning to the next stage e.g. volunteering, more advanced learning, employability support, etc?**

Most sector lead advised that learners were made aware of opportunities to take their learning to the next stage through their strong links with other partner agencies. By actively engaging with partners and providing comprehensive information and guidance, colleges empower learners to make informed decisions about their educational and career pathways, enabling them to effectively take their learning to the next stage.

To give one example of this in practice, one sector lead advised that their college was engaged in direct discussion with learners regarding their next steps, with other cases of good practice evidencing the specific support provided to learners completing ESOL courses to enable them to access further training and development through the college.

It was proposed that it would be useful for colleges to benchmark their CLD provision against other CLD partnerships and organisations to share best practice and understand how they support their learners in response to the Independent Review.

**14. Pathways and progression. How are learners supported with their learning to transition to the next stage?**

In terms of working with learners to support transitions a range of pathway initiatives were highlighted by sector respondents.

One respondent advised that their CLD services provides support with transitions and the Local Employability Partnership has a specific sub-group that focuses on transitions and ensuring that all students have the support required to progress to the next stage.

Another sector lead highlighted that their college supports CLD learners in their stages of learning through a multi-faceted approach that addresses their academic, personal, and professional needs. There was a consensus from other sector leads that learners have similar access to careers and progression guidance from college practitioners.

**15. Pathways and progression. How do we know if CLD learning is delivering positive/good outcomes for the learners?**

From responses received from sector leads it is apparent that the positive impact of CLD can take time to come to fruition as it can be a long journey of learning for some individuals, given their respective starting points and previous levels of educational attainment.

One practical measure that could be progressed would be to improve data sharing between partners to fully measure the outcomes of CLD learning, as suggested by a number of respondents. Other sector leads said they seek feedback from learners to measure the impact of CLD for learners, as well as analysing student progression and completion data, but that progress could be made in creating a central picture of learner progression and positive outcomes.

**16. Please use the space below to provide any further thoughts or evidence about Community Learning & Development.**

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is evident in learner presentation within colleges and as a consequence there are continuing challenges for the college sector in its community and civic role, including improving literacy, numeracy, and digital skill levels within disadvantaged communities. In

terms of CLD provision colleges are now having to cater for learner needs but for the needs of the person behind the learner.

Currently, to give an example of one college, it aims to develop literacy, numeracy, and digital skills within the community by integrating core skills into practical courses that are designed to enhance skills for both personal and professional life. By embedding core skills into these programmes, it is intended that barriers to learning can be broken down.

CLD activity delivered in the college sector is a key element to support the employability pipeline and to grow a fair work and wellbeing centred economy but, on the evidence presented by sector leads, would benefit from a more integrated approach and funding at the regional level.

For example, closer partnership working with youth work teams to develop further learning and developments pathways for practitioners into Higher Education was flagged by sector respondents as an area that could be explored by the Independent Review. It was also advised that effective partnerships such as these in which CLD providers and colleges are resourced appropriately would be a highly effective means of countering the persistent social and economic challenges across Scotland today.

## **Conclusion**

As the Scottish Government receives responses with which to inform and shape the delivery of CLD, we would expect that the knowledge and thinking of the college sector is taken into consideration in the next stages of this work.

In doing so, Colleges Scotland would be able to facilitate engagement with appropriate college representatives to shape the design and development of CLD to ensure we can maximise the number of learners able to access education in Scotland's college sector.

Colleges Scotland  
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