

Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland 2021- 2026

Creating the Conditions to Empower Adults and Improve Life Chances in Scotland



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Ministerial Foreword

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Executive Summary

This Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland:

- **Aims** to create the conditions to empower adult learning and improve life chances for adult learners across Scotland. Overseen by the Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland (ALSFS), it focusses on actions to bring about greater collaboration within learning systems, and with learners, to create a more inclusive system which supports improved access to learning opportunities which are lifelong, life-wide and learner centred.
- **Builds** on the [Adult Learning Statement of Ambition](#) and what we have heard through extensive consultation with adult learners, practitioners and leaders from across the adult learning sector. These conversations highlighted the positive partnerships and practice that exists, and how these deliver improved outcomes for some of Scotland's most excluded learners. However, they have also brought to the fore the multiple barriers that adult learners face in accessing and progressing through learning.
- **Supports** a cross-sectoral approach both locally and nationally involving contributions from local and national government, agencies, learning and education providers and third sector partners.
- **Sets** out recommendations which require collaboration. These represent a national commitment to understanding the issues and taking action across the life span of the strategy. This will drive improvements in the learning experience for adults in Scotland, with a particular focus on increasing the availability of community-based learning opportunities.

There are 20 recommendations under 5 themes:

Theme 1: Expanding and Extending Adult Learning

1. Collect evidence on the current delivery of community-based adult learning, analyse and evaluate how well needs are being identified and met, and how progression is being planned in partnership.
2. Evaluate suitability of funding arrangements for adult learning, assessing how these arrangements identify and meet demand, support progression, and the extent to which adult learners are involved in decision making processes.
3. Undertake a review, with learners and practitioners, on the impact of 'Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020' and 'Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020' to produce recommendations on next steps for these specialisms within the context of the adult learning strategy.
4. Increase access to, and support for, accredited learning for community-based adult learning.
5. Increase availability of, access to and support for, online learning options for adults.

Theme 2: Connecting the Adult Learning Journey

6. Provide support and recognition for structured partnerships to ensure the needs of adult learners are at the heart of the decision making process locally, regionally and nationally.
7. Strengthen partnership arrangements which identify and meet the advice and guidance needs of adult learners.
8. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing systems for Recognition of Prior Learning and how they are used to ensure a coordinated, cohesive national Recognised Prior Learning process
9. Ensure the adult learning journey is underpinned by the SCQF, where appropriate, allowing seamless progression and equality of all learning across the Scottish education system.

Theme 3: Communication

10. Increase public awareness of adult learning opportunities nationally and locally through joined up and accessible messaging.
11. Increase cross policy support for the role of community-based based adult learning in improving outcomes across policy areas including education, employability, health, social isolation, poverty reduction and justice.
12. Develop coherent and consistent data and measurements for the impact of adult learning

Theme 4: Access and Inclusion

13. In consultation with learners, explore, define and reduce the barriers which impact adult learners, assessing how well systems provide accessible routes into and through learning leaving no-one behind and responding to learners' changing access requirements.
14. Ensure consistent and appropriate use of Impact Assessments to plan accessible provision which reduces the persistent inequalities experienced by people with protected characteristics.

Theme 5: Workforce Development

15. Strengthen cross sectoral professional learning (PL) opportunities available for staff and volunteers, supporting the use of the SCQF framework to underpin learning.
16. Refresh mapping of qualifications for adult learning practitioners. Address duplication and gaps with focus on both geography and level; ensure integration with CLD qualifications pathway and access to other lifelong learning qualifications.
17. Create shared understanding of roles and responsibilities across all those responsible for adult learning, underpinned by awareness of relevant national occupational standards and the CLD competences.
18. Develop an improved framework of support for adult learning volunteers.
19. Establish the availability, access and uptake of specialist adult learning qualifications, for example, in TESOL and literacies.
20. Explore and support training for the practitioners to ensure adequate digital skills as technology advances resulting in a digitally agile workforce.

Vision and Principles

This strategy aims to create the conditions for connected adult learning opportunities that link Scotland's communities, local authorities, third sector organisations, colleges and universities around an offer of learning for adults, particularly those furthest from inclusion and experiencing disadvantage.

Our vision is that

‘Adult learning in Scotland will develop better skilled, educated, confident and empowered people contributing to connected and inclusive communities.’

The strategy is based on the core principles of the [Adult Learning Statement of Ambition](#). Developed by the then National Strategic Forum for Adult learning and published in 2014 by the Scottish Government, the Statement set out ambitions for adult learning in Scotland. There are three core principles; that adult learning should be:

- **life-long**
- **life-wide**
- **learner-centred**

In its broadest sense, adult learning encompasses all 16+ post-compulsory education, taking place in a variety of settings including community venues, workplaces, colleges, universities, online and at home. The main focus of this strategy is on **community-based adult learning**. Community-based learning is often the first step back to education for many adult learners. This is due to its flexibility and its delivery in local community settings. Community-based adult learning programmes are built around the needs of the learner. Provision includes adult literacies, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Gaelic and digital skills but is not limited to those subjects. For some, the idea of a formal learning institution can be daunting, particularly, if a learner faces barriers or has been out of education for a long time. Community-based learning provides the right learning environment for many taking their first steps into or back into learning.

This strategy aims to ensure there are accessible opportunities for adults to learn throughout their lives. To do this, it sets out 20 recommendations, supplemented by a detailed implementation plan.

The actions are arranged under 5 themes that have been developed through extensive consultation with learners, practitioners and leaders from the broad adult learning sector:

- **Expanding and extending adult learning**
- **Connecting the adult learning journey**
- **Communication**
- **Access and Inclusion**
- **Workforce development**

The following overarching principles are embedded in the actions we will take:

- **Inclusion**
- **Involvement**

- **Empowerment**
- **Equity**
- **Partnership**
- **Co-ordination**

Why is this strategy needed?

Research and engagement in the development of this strategy has highlighted a persistent lack of understanding of the value and impact of adult learning, particularly community-based adult learning.

Education Scotland's report "Improving life chances and empowering communities Community learning and development in Scotland: Findings from inspection evidence 2016-19" stated that ¹

"The number of local authority CLD staff is declining and this can limit the capacity of CLD services to meet local needs and priorities. For example, there has been a noticeable reduction in community-based adult learning."

and that

"Community-based adult learning needs to be strengthened to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities available for adults to learn, achieve and progress".

This strategy aims to address this by ensuring a strong, well-understood, well-connected and well-resourced system of adult learning in Scotland.

The current system of mainstream formal education provision in Scotland is long established and, for the majority of the population in Scotland, well understood. Schools, colleges and universities all have clearly defined roles within the system. The benefits from their programmes of learning and the impact they will make for learners are generally clear. Learner pathways and progression between schools colleges and universities are also familiar to most of the population. In contrast, the adult learning landscape is less clear and it can be challenging for prospective learners looking to access provision or progress from one provider to another. The opportunity to learn in a community setting and the potential benefits are also less widely recognised and understood, which in turn can impact resource, uptake and confidence of learners.

Throughout the development of this strategy, we have heard from adult learners across Scotland. They have told us about their journeys into or back to learning. Regardless of what they are learning, their motivation has been based on making a positive change in their lives, whether that is improved physical or mental health, to be able to better support their family, to improve their employability or career prospects, or to connect with others in their community. They have told us how adult learning has empowered them and built their confidence, describing how adult learning has been a transformative experience for them.

Adult learner, West Dunbartonshire

"The courses I attended gave me a lot of confidence, I met lots of new people and it got me out the house as well. After nearly 16 years out of education I gained a SQA qualification and received my SQA results, that was a great feeling! Knowing I was doing something I enjoyed and benefited me."

¹ <https://www.education.gov.scot/media/ryklpn1i/improving-life-chances-and-empowering-communities.pdf>

However, learners and practitioners have also told us about the barriers that many adults can face when trying to access and participate in learning. These include availability of local learning opportunities, financial barriers and accessibility, and, while some are personal barriers, many are systemic.

Feedback on challenges from engagement session in Dundee:

"Bus services are being cut so makes it's more difficult to get places."

"Financial barriers in terms of transport and lack of suitable transport."

Annex B provides an overview of the consultation and strategy development process.

In recognition that learning does not stop when you exit the compulsory system, this Strategy aims to make the adult learner journey more straightforward by improving the means of access, by making better connections between providers within the adult learning sector and the routes to and through learning, easier to understand. It will do this by providing increased opportunities for adults to learn and reducing the barriers that many face in taking their first steps into or back to learning.

This Strategy will also enable all stakeholders and policymakers to gain a better understanding of the contribution of adult learning in Scotland and the value it adds to a number of policy area. One of the ways it will do this is by supporting the sector to evidence its contribution. By enabling the adult learning sector to "talk with one voice", it will more effectively demonstrate its impact and create the basis for a more sustainable approach through the delivery of outcomes aligned to national and local policy objectives.

This case study shows how a well-connected system of adult learning which starts in the community can lead to positive outcomes for the learner, their family and their wider community.

Case Study Karen, Coatbridge

Just under three years ago I was introduced to a Family Learning CLD Worker who would help me take back control of not just my emotional self but my life too. My emotional state of mind was having a negative effect on my young daughter and we are eternally grateful to her. She told me about a course that I was a perfect candidate for. She then introduced me to an Adult Learning CLD Worker, who would show me the way forward on the 'Steps to Excellence' course. **This was the make or break choice for me that would change the course of my life.** I have to say here that my initial reaction was I don't want to do it, but felt compelled to as I don't like to let anyone down. **Since then I haven't looked back.**

To say I am a different person is an understatement. Although adopting a new thought process wasn't the easiest thing I've ever had to do, it certainly is the best. Through the steps course I became interested in Metaphysics, which is the mind body spirit connection and from there was born a deep-seated want to learn. Later that year I became temporarily employed. While there, I realized this was not where I wanted to be, there was something more awaiting me. I decided to go for a complete change in my working life but had no idea of what I wanted to do. **The thought of college had been going around my head for some time** and I felt I was ready to go back to full time education to find out just what I was capable of.

I have excelled in achieving what I set out to do. I now know through all that has happened since attending CLD classes what direction I want my life to go in. I would love to help others in similar situations to mine, to understand and accept there is indeed more to them than they could ever imagine.

I never thought during that very anxious and turbulent time I would be where I am today. My daughter has made huge progress in learning how to deal with her emotions too and I am in a position of knowing how to help her by what I've learned through 'Understanding Your Child's Behaviour', and 'Solihull' courses and the homework club at the school. All of this through Community Learning and Development with the two most inspirational women I have ever met to guide and support me. It isn't just what I've learned that has made the biggest difference; it's what **learning has given me, a deep sense of worth, making my confidence soar.** This is what was lacking for so long and I now know the sky is most definitely the limit. **I can, I will, I am**

Policy Context

ESOL learner, Aberdeen

“Learning does these thing: it gets me out of the house, it’s good for my mental health, it’s good for my brain, I meet new people, I increase my social circle, it improves employment opportunities and generally gives me better mental wellbeing”



The outcomes of [Scotland's national performance framework](#) describe the kind of Scotland we want to see. This strategy supports the delivery of many of these outcomes, but has a specific focus on :

Education - We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society

Poverty – We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

Community – We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe

Health – We are healthy and active

This strategy seeks to create the conditions for equity in the system for adult learners and give a step up to those who need it the most. Adult learning, and particularly community-based adult learning, has a significant role to play in this and can have a positive impact on the indicators of the National Performance Framework.

Annex C gives an overview of current policies in which the adult learning interventions can be effective. These include ambitions for education, health, civic participation and justice.

The strength of adult learning's role in delivering on public policy ambitions in Scotland rests on its location within the Community Learning and Development (CLD) policy and practice framework. CLD has established itself in Scotland as a profession bringing together the disciplines of adult learning, community development and youth work, supporting each of them individually and all of

them together to address the complex agendas referred to above in a holistic way. The *Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013*² place requirements on education authorities which they are required to meet in order to fulfil their statutory duty to secure adequate and sufficient provision of further education in their area. The Regulations set down requirements relating to CLD, including the process to be undertaken by education authorities to secure CLD in their area. This includes consultation requirements and a duty to publish a plan for the provision of CLD every 3 years.

Adult learning has a vital role to play in enabling learning throughout the lifespan, which is increasingly important given the pace of economic, social, demographic and environmental change. Public engagement, participation and empowerment is required for the successful delivery of a wide range of Scottish Government policies, and adult learning and other CLD practitioners have an essential role in supporting involvement in these processes, particularly by people who lack confidence, connections to influence and experience of organising with others.

Adult learning supports much more than educational outcomes for those who participate. Research has shown that:

- Adults who participate in learning themselves are more likely to engage in their children's education, improving outcomes. Intergenerational effects are particularly strong where levels of inequality are high, and thus may accentuate the effects of inequality and exclusions (OECD, 2016).³
- Adult learning is linked with smoking cessation, amount of exercise taken and life satisfaction (Feinstein and Hammond, 2004)⁴. The authors of this report also suggest "Evidence from additional analyses suggests rather that participation in adult learning is a very important element in positive cycles of development and progression."
- Adult learning fosters:
 - Civic participation⁵
 - local involvement and volunteering⁶.
 - a sense of identity, an ability to cope and a feeling of purpose in life⁷;
 - a greater level of wellbeing⁸, especially in older adults⁹; and
 - an increase in life satisfaction¹⁰
- Adult learning that engages in employability education and cognitive behavioural techniques can reduce reoffending rates for a number of categories of prisoner, including those with short-term sentences¹¹.

² [The Requirements for Community Learning and Development \(Scotland\) Regulations 2013 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2013/01/5134CB9C0B61D48BD6D10786CA26502)

³ <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/education-at-a-glance-2016-indicators.htm>

⁴ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0305498042000215520>

⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340254605_Wider_Benefits_of_Adult_Education

⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/356168/bis-14-993-community-learning-learner-survey-family-learning-July-2014.pdf.

⁷ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249005173_Impacts_of_lifelong_learning_upon_emotional_resilience_psychological_and_mental_health_Fieldwork_evidence

⁸ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249005173_Impacts_of_lifelong_learning_upon_emotional_resilience_psychological_and_mental_health_Fieldwork_evidence

⁹ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ageing-and-society/article/abs/effects-of-learning-on-wellbeing-for-older-adults-in-england/55134CB9C0B61D48BD6D10786CA26502>

¹⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/635837/Skills_and_lifelong_learning_-_the_benefits_of_adult_learning_-_schuller_-_final.pdf

¹¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/243718/evidence-reduce-reoffending.pdf

Learner, Highlands “It’s not just the subjects being taught, it’s the effect the process of learning has on my mental health”

The impact of Covid – 19

Scotland’s communities have been hugely impacted by Covid-19 and, within disadvantaged communities, the impact is being felt disproportionately. Almost all learning has moved online, which has created challenges for more excluded and/or vulnerable learners across the system. Access to learning online for community-based adult learners is challenging for a number of practical reasons including, access to equipment and data, digital literacy levels and general literacy levels. Even where access is possible, and skills are not an issue, there have been challenges in developing a delivering online content for many of the less formal contexts. There is no established platform for community-based learning and access to digital platforms, staff digital skills and equipment is not equal across providers. In addition, many staff have been furloughed or diverted to supporting the wider community support effort.

A report¹² into the impact of Covid-19 on equality in Scotland pointed out that :

“The further digital technology develops – and this may well be sped up by the pandemic – the more difficult it may be for those who do not use it to ‘catch up’. Digital inequalities are also likely to continue to be impacted by other inequalities, such as in income and education (as well as impacting on them)”

and that

“Socio-economically disadvantaged people are more likely to experience poorer mental and physical wellbeing, lower life satisfaction, and feelings of loneliness, all of which either have already been impacted by COVID or are likely to be impacted by an economic downturn and increased poverty”

The summary of impacts in this report also highlights the danger of a widening attainment gap, particularly for adults in the most deprived areas and with lower incomes, and increased feelings of loneliness and isolation amongst older people and disabled people. The report notes that *“women, especially single women and those that are lone parents, minority ethnic households and disabled people are all more likely to live in poverty”* and warns that *“compounded by Brexit, the adverse economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic may very well lead to greater wealth and income inequality going forwards.”*

This brings into sharp focus the need to ensure strong and supported adult learning services exist, particularly those which focus on those most excluded and experiencing disadvantage.

¹² <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2020/09/the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-equality-in-scotland/documents/full-report/full-report/govscot%3Adocument/Covid%2Band%2BInequalities%2BFinal%2BReport%2BFor%2BPublication%2B-%2BPDF.pdf>

What changes do we want to see?

The focus of the actions in this strategy is on bringing about systemic change to how learners can access and progress through learning to reach their goals and improve their outcomes. Therefore this Strategy will:

- deliver better outcomes for learners and make a positive impact to adult learners' lives and their life chances.
- reduce the barriers that prevent adults participating in learning or that adversely affect their levels of participation.
- aim specifically to support those who are not engaging in learning and create clear accessible first steps that enable the most marginalised and excluded adults to begin their learning journey.
- clarify and simplify how learners who have taken their first steps into or back into learning can progress.
- ensure that all learning is recognised and is given the due credit and recognition that the learners' efforts deserve.
- ensure that those furthest from formal mainstream education have parity of learning opportunities.

While there is no consistent, direct measurement of community-based adult learning in Scotland, partly due to the nature of the provision, various sources of analysis and research reveal areas in which this strategy can make a positive impact.

- In 2019, nearly 400,000 adults in Scotland had low or no qualifications. Within this figure, there is regional variation across Scotland. Glasgow City (18.1%), Falkirk (18.1%) and West Dunbartonshire (16.3%) had the highest proportion of people aged 16-64 years old with low or no qualifications while East Dunbartonshire (6.7%), Aberdeenshire (6.7%) and East Renfrewshire (7.0%) had the lowest proportion of people aged 16-64 years old with low or no qualifications.¹³
- In terms of in-work learning, the Employer Skills Survey reported 1.5 million staff received training in Scotland in 2017, accounting for 62% of Scotland's workforce. Within this, a greater proportion (70%) of workers in Skilled Trades jobs received training compared with any other occupation.
- Evidence from National Numeracy surveys suggests while Scotland performs slightly better than average for the UK in terms of adult numeracy skills, there are still around 56% of adults with low numeracy skills. This is the equivalent of 1.9 million working age adults¹⁴.
- Data from Scotland's Census¹⁵ showed that 7,796 (0.15%) of 18+ did not speak English at all and 46,993 (0.92%) of 18+ did not speak English well.
- Scottish Prison Service screening data suggests high numbers of learners lack functional literacy and numeracy at around 70% and 80+% respectively. However, these figures should be considered in the context that many learners within Scottish prisons have experienced institutional care, school exclusions and learning difficulties. When considering data of those lacking functional literacy/numeracy at and below the slightly lower SCQF Level 3 the numbers reduce to around 40% and 50% respectively.

¹³ [Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places, and Regions - Statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2019](#)

¹⁴ [Counting on the Recovery \(compressed\) FINAL.pdf \(nationalnumeracy.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/ods-web/standard-outputs.html>

Adult learner, West Dunbartonshire

"The difference adult learning community courses have made to my life has been extraordinary. I find it hard to put into words how important they have been for me and the wider community. I met so many inspirational people from all walks of life who all had something different to bring to the table. The magic with these courses is anyone can fit in and make friends they give you confidence you never knew you had as well as learning new skills which can be further developed as you go along. I have progressed onto higher education at college doing what I love. I know many people whose lives have been improved by doing these courses they are a lifeline for many in a remote location with limited resources."

Governance and Oversight

The development of this strategy has been guided by the Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland (ALSFS). ALSFS was established in 2019 to advise the Scottish Government on strategic matters of direction, performance and planning in relation to adult learning. Chaired by Mhairi Harrington OBE, ALSFS brings together key national stakeholders and decision makers to:

- provide advice and scrutiny
- support and share ways of making improvements in practice
- coordinate and support whole system approaches
- promote the goals and successes of adult learning.

The ALSFS acts as a champion and advocate for the delivery of high quality adult learning in Scotland by working collaboratively and across sectors to build understanding between different parts of the education, skills and employment sectors.

The ALSFS will have strategic oversight for the delivery of this strategy, using their connections to identify opportunities for cross sector work and supporting delivery groups and sub groups through their organisations and networks.

Full membership of ALSFS can be found at ANNEX D

Themes and Recommendations

Theme 1: Expanding and Extending Adult Learning

ESOL learner, Aberdeenshire
“Online is easier to attend, I have children and in person is difficult but I need more online.”

Our ambition

Adult Learning happens in a variety of places, in a range of ways for any number of reasons. We want policy and decision-makers to understand the value of adult learning and to make sure adult learning is available and accessible. We want learning to be meaningful to the learner. We want adult learning to be life-long, life-wide and learner-centred.

What learners, practitioners and leaders in the adult learning sector have told us

Through consultation we have understood that there needs to be more choice available to adult learners as to where, when, how, why and with whom they learn. Community-based adult learning should be valued as part of the wider learning and education system and as complementary to other options and, as such, should be given equal status and stability in its funding.

That opportunities to learn digitally were considered important to adult learners, however there was no joined up or uniform approach to this and many learners lacked the skills, devices and reliable internet connection to learn from home. Some learning providers reported that staff and volunteers lacked the skills, expertise and resources to develop an online offer.

Learners and practitioners reported that adult learning contributes towards improving people's health and well-being and reduces the need for health, mental health and social care services.

What is already happening

[To be completed following feedback]

Our recommendations

1. *Collect evidence on the current delivery of community-based adult learning, analyse and evaluate how well needs are being identified and met, and how progression is being planned in partnership.*
2. *Evaluate suitability of funding arrangements for adult learning assessing how these arrangements identify and meet demand, support progression, and how adult learners are included in decision making processes.*
3. *Undertake a review, with learners and practitioners, on the impact of 'Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020' and 'Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020' to produce recommendations on next steps for these specialisms within the context of the adult learning strategy.*
4. *Increase access to and support for accredited learning for community-based adult learning.*
5. *Increase availability of, access to, and support for, online learning options for adults.*

Theme 2: Connecting the Adult Learning Journey

Adult learning practitioner, Elgin
“Adult learning isn't always about employment and many people report that provisions meet their personal and social needs”

Our ambition

There are different motivations for adults to learn throughout their lives and we see adult learning as a route for personal development, community involvement and community empowerment. We want adults to have access to the appropriate level of information, advice and guidance at each stage of their learning journey. We want this information, advice and guidance to be accessible and support fair access to learning and progression. Adults come to learning with a variety of skills gained from previous experiences throughout their lives. These experiences are not always formally accredited but should still be recognised .

What learners, practitioners and leaders in the adult learning sector have told us

Through consultation we heard from learners and practitioners that there is strong support for awards and recognition. There was a desire for better links to prior learning, including non-formal learning. Awards like the Adult Achievement Awards were viewed as being an appropriate focus to encourage adults to build on their experience and boost their confidence, although the cost of becoming involved could be prohibitive for some providers.

Learners and practitioners told us that they would like to see improved signposting to help guide adults to their first point of contact for advice and guidance. This should be well connected to local networks. A trusted worker was seen as essential to guiding adults through their individual learning journey. There was also a suggestion that a national, online, adult learning portal was needed to support the adult learning journey.

Co-operation between family learning, youth work and adult learning was important for many as well as better links between local adult learning partnerships and employability partnerships. Practitioners and learners were keen for adult learning specialisms, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Literacies to be more closely linked into the wider education system.

What is already happening

[To be completed following feedback]

Our recommendations

6. *Provide support and recognition for structured partnerships to ensure the needs of adult learners are at the heart of the decision making process locally, regionally and nationally.*
7. *Strengthen partnership arrangements which identify and meet the advice and guidance needs of adult learners.*
8. *Evaluate the effectiveness of existing systems for Recognition of Prior Learning and how they are used to ensure a coordinated, cohesive national Recognised Prior Learning process.*

9. *Ensure the adult learning journey is underpinned by the SCQF, where appropriate, allowing seamless progression and equality of all learning across the Scottish education system*

Theme 3: Communication

Our ambition

We want to ensure that adults are aware of the learning opportunities available to them. We want to create a cross-policy understanding of the issues and barriers adults may face in accessing learning and work across policy boundaries to address these. In doing so, we want to promote the wide benefits that are achieved through adult learning which help to deliver the ambitions of the strategy.

Adult learning practitioner, Dundee
“Partnerships could be improved. Awareness of learners of what's available. Also awareness of other partners of what's available and what each partner's offer is”

What learners, practitioners and leaders in the adult learning sector have told us

In consultation sessions we heard that there is a need for clearer communication on what adult learning is, what opportunities are available and where to go for more information. Information signposting to adult learning should be available through a variety of mainstream media outlets, such as TV and radio, as well as social media. The messaging should be inclusive, easily accessible, and, where possible, point adult learners to a first point of contact for advice and guidance within local networks. The messaging should also be tailored to meet local, regional and national needs as well as specific ‘targeted’ needs where applicable. There was also some suggestion that there was a need for a strong, national message, possibly supported by a national portal to guide adults through what is available both nationally which goes beyond the current offer of the Big Plus.

Feedback from across the adult learning strategy themes was that communicating the benefits of adult learning to stakeholders, partners, local authorities, funders, third sector, key decision-makers and other service providers would help encourage more collaborative working which would benefit learners. It was also felt that information should convey the mental health and well-being benefits of adult learning.

What is already happening

[To be completed following feedback]

Our recommendations

10. *Increase public awareness of adult learning opportunities nationally and locally through joined up and accessible messaging.*
11. *Increase cross policy support for the role of community-based based adult learning in improving outcomes across policy areas including education, employability, health, social isolation, poverty reduction and justice.*
12. *Develop coherent and consistent data and measurements for the impact of adult learning*

Theme 4: Access and Inclusion

Our ambition

We want to remove barriers to make ensure support can be accessed by those who need it most. We want to build the confidence of adults to participate in learning opportunities which engage, develop skills and empower adult learners. In doing so, we want to ensure adult learners are supported to have a voice in identifying and meeting their own learning needs throughout their lifelong, life-wide journey. We want to support the changing needs of learners to access blended learning opportunities.

Adult learning practitioner, Edinburgh
"Limitations of rooms means excluding learners, sometimes venues are not accessible so learning becomes exclusive"

Adult learning practitioner, Glasgow
"ESOL community classes are not frequent enough. To access multiple classes per week incurs cost in travel expenses, which isn't feasible for asylum seekers and low income learners"

What learners, practitioners and leaders in the adult learning sector have told us

The consultation sessions suggested that there were a number of barriers to adult learning, such as, knowledge of what is available/rights and entitlements, learner confidence, travel, funding/resource availability, support requirements and caring or employment responsibilities. Overall, these barriers were more challenging for those living in poverty or experiencing exclusion.

Many felt that the issue of flexible funding to allow disadvantaged communities to access learning was key, and, it was also noted that learners themselves, should be empowered to determine their own learning, noting that, given some adult learners fears of formal institutions, these are not always the most appropriate first step. A 'culture change' of valuing learning which takes place outside formal institutions was felt needed, to allow access for the most disadvantaged learners who want to learn in the community.

Feedback also revealed a lack of clarity for learners and practitioners about their rights and entitlements to additional support arrangements and equipment when compared with the experience of adult learners at colleges and universities.

What is already happening

[To be completed following feedback]

Our recommendations

13. *In consultation with learners, explore, define and reduce the barriers which impact adult learners, assessing how well systems provide accessible routes into and through learning leaving no-one behind and responding to learners' changing access requirements.*
14. *Ensure consistent and appropriate use of Impact Assessments to plan accessible provision which reduces the persistent inequalities experienced by people with protected characteristics.*

Theme 5: Workforce Development

Our ambition

We want to ensure a coordinated approach to the development of the CLD and adult learning workforce. We want to provide a coordinated approach to the development of the CLD and adult learning workforce.

Adult learning practitioner, Elgin

"Time is a huge barrier to accessing professional learning if you're in work. Too many demands in the job. I feel invested in as a practitioner but no progression routes unless people retire"

Adult learning practitioner, Glasgow

"Well trained and supported volunteers can support informal learning"

What learners, practitioners and leaders in the adult learning sector have told us

Feedback from consultation indicated a need for cross-sector workforce development opportunities, including access to accredited qualifications, and mapping of what currently exists to identify gaps. There was comment on the need for increased investment, for example to increase availability of relevant qualifications in college settings. The types of opportunities referred to included peer-to-peer support, PDA qualifications and "upskilling", in relation to digital delivery and more generally. There was comment on the need for information on professional learning opportunities to be more consistently available to practitioners across all locations and settings.

Comments indicated a need for clarification of roles and responsibilities, for example, in relation to information, advice and guidance. Some felt that an emphasis on inclusion required a stronger definition of the boundaries of adult learning practice, meaning that learners were referred into services that were unable to meet their needs. This, suggested a need for clarification of roles and for professional learning opportunities to explore the positive potential for inclusive learning. Barriers for learners was a major theme across the consultation, and this included comments on the need to develop practitioners' knowledge and skills in identifying and overcoming them.

There was significant feedback around the role of volunteers, including concern about an over-reliance on their input to the delivery of adult learning due to a lack of sufficient numbers of paid workers. Comments identified volunteering as a key step towards employment, the importance of focusing on supporting progress into sustained and quality employment, and the role of CPD opportunities in adult learning in supporting volunteers to progress.

There was comment that practitioners need to be supported on their professional learning journey. The SCQF, relevant National Occupational Standards, and the CLD Competence Framework were referenced as supports for the learning journey, and the importance of access to CLD qualifications was identified.

What is already happening

[To be completed following feedback]

Our recommendations

The following recommendations will be taken forward through the CLD Workforce Development Strategy being led by the CLD Standards Council with progress reported to the Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland.

- 15. Strengthen cross sectoral professional learning (PL) opportunities available for staff and volunteers, supporting the use of the SCQF framework to underpin learning.*
- 16. Refresh mapping of qualifications for adult learning practitioners. Address duplication and gaps with focus on both geography and level; ensure integration with CLD qualifications pathway and access to other lifelong learning qualifications.*
- 17. Create shared understanding of roles and responsibilities across all those responsible for adult learning, underpinned by awareness of relevant national occupational standards and the CLD competences.*
- 18. Develop an improved framework of support for adult learning volunteers.*
- 19. Establish the availability, access and uptake of specialist adult learning qualifications, for example, in TESOL and literacies.*
- 20. Explore and support training for the practitioners to ensure adequate digital skills as technology advances resulting in a digitally agile workforce.*

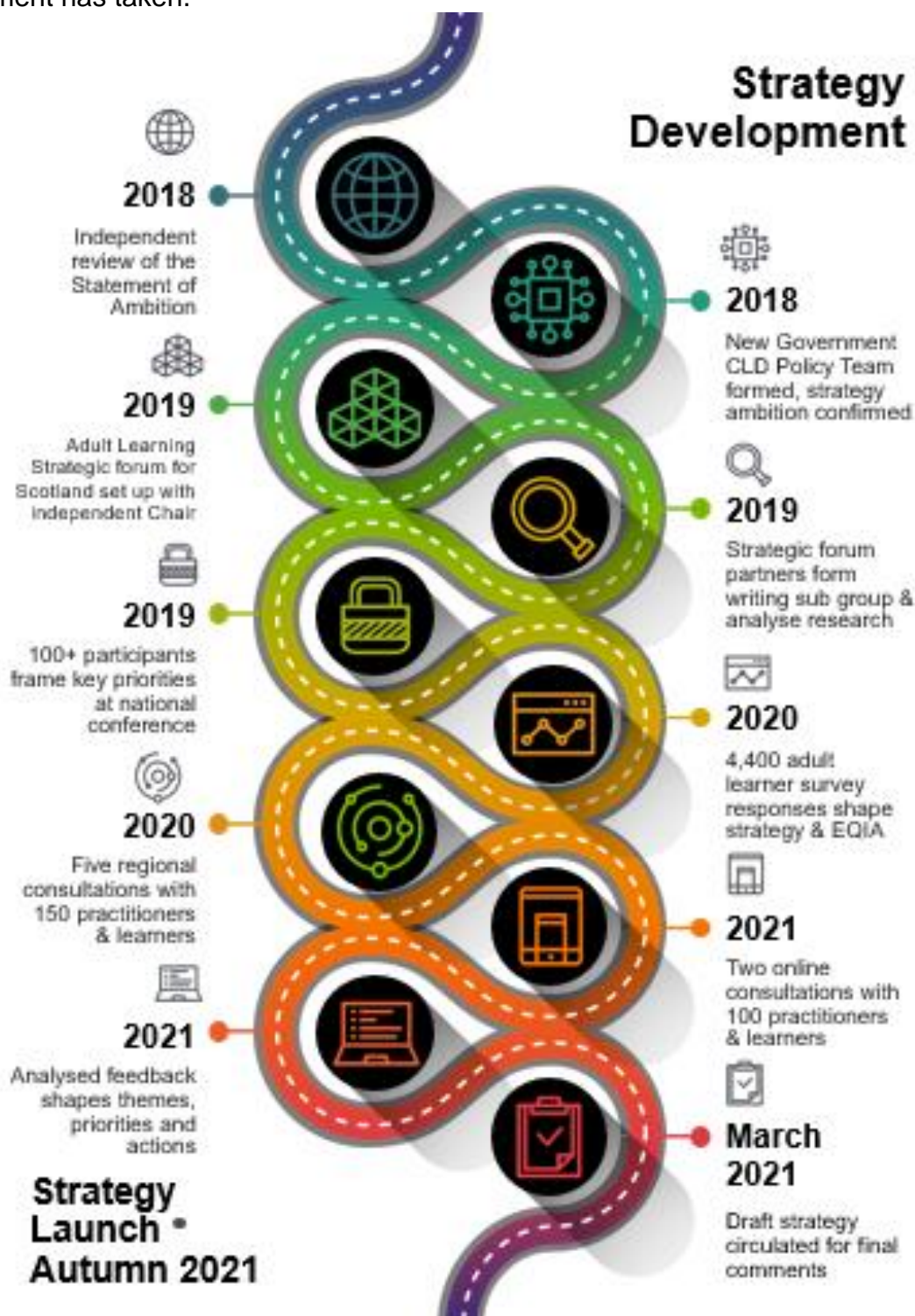
Annex A: Implementation Plan

[To be produced as next stage of strategy development using input from feedback]

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Annex B – Strategy Development

Starting with a review of the statement of ambition in 2018, this strategy has been under development for some time. Following the formation of the CLD policy team in Scottish Government in late 2019, which led to the development of the Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland, policy officials have worked with the adult learning sector to consult with learners, practitioners and leaders from across Scotland to develop and refine the strategy. The following outlines the journey this development has taken.



Annex C: Policy Context

Community Empowerment

Community empowerment is relevant to all parts of the public sector and is an area of increasing importance. [The Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) requires community planning partners to secure the participation of community bodies in community planning. Account should be taken of the interests of people who experience inequalities of outcome as a result of socio-economic disadvantage.

Implementing community empowerment is a national priority for the Scottish Government. It is an important part of the national performance framework with indicators toward progress. Community empowerment is important throughout public service reform, focusing attention on reducing disadvantage and inequality, and improving outcomes for communities. Community empowerment and participation is central to a human rights based approach to policy and decision-making. The human rights PANEL principles (Participation, Accountability, Non-Discrimination and Equality, Empowerment and Legality) means:

- people should be involved in decisions that affect their rights and be fully supported to take part in developing policy and practices which affect their lives;
- prioritising those people who face the biggest barriers to realising their rights.

Community empowerment is a process which involves continual learning and the constant building of a community's capacity to articulate and address their priorities. It also involves communities having greater influence and input to decision-making on issues that affect them. Public bodies and communities are likely to be at different stages as they develop their understanding and gain confidence in working together. Public bodies need to invest in capacity-building appropriate to their local communities, particularly those facing disadvantage.

In some communities, people may already be driving change and public bodies have a role in supporting and facilitating this. Other communities will need to be supported to participate more fully. Public bodies should be finding ways to empower communities, for example by sharing and shifting power in decision-making. Adult learning is key to helping people and communities exercise their rights under the Community Empowerment Act.

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

Although [Scotland's curriculum](#) covers ages 3-18, it is learner-centred and at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence is the development of citizens as lifelong learners in their adult, social and working lives, enabling them to reach their full potential.

There are strong connections between the curriculum's four capacities of successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors and the aims and ambitions for this Adult Learning Strategy. Those capacities can and should be sustained into adult life, and which will in turn help to promote those capacities in the next generation of Scottish children. Another important aspect within Scotland's curriculum is the aim to bring schooling, learning in the community and out of school life in general more closely together. The curriculum aims to help our children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century – and aim which is highly relevant to adult learning.

It is important, therefore, that the connections between the role and contribution of schools and the role and contribution of community learning and development are developed in a collaborative way.

Fairer Scotland

Fairer Scotland is a commitment to the people of Scotland to take long term action to change our society and make it a fairer and more equal place to live.

The Fairer Scotland Action Plan was published in 2016 and sets out actions to help tackle poverty, reduce inequality and build a fairer and more inclusive Scotland. Progress is reported annually.

The Fairer Scotland Duty, set out in the Equality Act 2010 came into force in April 2018. The duty places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland to have due regard, when making decisions about exercising their functions, as to how they can reduce inequality caused by socio-economic disadvantage.

Digital Access

Digital access and skills are an essential lifeline and are increasingly important to access information, public services and maintain contact with support networks.

The Connecting Scotland Programme¹⁶ aims to get 50,000 digitally excluded households online by the end of 2021, with a focus on supporting older people, disabled people, low-income families with children and care leavers.

The programme also provides information for anyone in Scotland about devices, data and getting connected, as well as basic digital skills and important information about how to stay safe online.

Employability: No One Left Behind

No One Left Behind¹⁷ sets out our ambition to create a more joined up and aligned employability system in Scotland with existing employability services aiming to deliver flexible, person-centred employability support, in partnership with local government, private and third sector partners. Our overarching principles of equality of access to fair, inclusive labour markets and high quality jobs will remain key in any decisions we make.

Scottish and Local Government published the No One Left Behind Delivery Plan¹⁸ in November 2020 outlining our shared vision to reform Scotland's employability system to be more adaptable and responsive to the needs of people and a system that is capable of adapting to rapidly changing labour markers, tackles inequalities and grows Scotland's economy.

No One Left Behind employability services are provided by a mixed economy of public, third and private sector providers, often to the most vulnerable with multiple barriers to accessing the labour market. This includes people with a disability, people with convictions, care-experienced young people, single parents, minority ethnic people, and people living in the most deprived areas in Scotland. Key worker holistic support identifies strengths and areas of development for participants signposting to available support including CLD Adult Learning opportunities.

We will continue to work collaboratively with partners to integrate employability support with health, justice and housing services providing holistic support which addresses wider challenges and barriers

¹⁶ [Connecting Scotland](#)

¹⁷ [No One Left Behind: next steps for employability support](#)

¹⁸ [No One Left Behind Delivery Plan](#)

Child poverty remains a priority and access to Fair Work is the best route to support families out of poverty. The Parental Employability Support fund is collaboratively managed between Scottish and Local Government and aims to support low income parents to access or progress in work, supporting parents to upskill, re-train and increase overall household income.

Fair Start Scotland (FSS) is our national devolved employment support service. It aims to provide support to those who have challenges in accessing the labour market such as long-term unemployment and for those with health conditions or disabilities. The service is voluntary and offers personalised, one to one support tailored to individual circumstances.

Through partnership with Local Authorities, our jointly managed No One Left Behind approach provides employability support to individuals of all ages, supporting them to increase confidence, skills and experience; and enabling them to progress towards or enter employment.

A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Employment Action Plan

In December 2018 the Scottish Government published A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Employment Action Plan, outlining the key steps Scottish Government will take to reduce the employment Gap between disabled people and the rest of the working age population (referred to as the Disability Employment Gap) by at least half by 2038. The plan covers three key themes:

- Supporting Employers to Recruit and Retain Disabled People
- Supporting disabled people to enter employment
- Young People and Transitions

The plan works within the social model of disability; which states that disability is caused by barriers that arise because society is not designed to accommodate people who have impairments, and that it is these barriers that disable people who have impairments.

The Scottish Government remains committed to working with Disabled People's Organisations (DPO's) and other partners to ensure support to disabled people in the labour market remains a key focus; and continue to work to address the root causes of the disability employment gap.¹⁹

New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy

New Scots²⁰ sets out a vision for a welcoming Scotland where refugees and asylum seekers are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive. This approach to integration recognises the challenges people can face which may limit inclusion and aims to support people and communities to share and build their skills, knowledge and experience. It includes specific work to support participation, including through access to education and employment, and to build connections which can strengthen communities.

Language was introduced as a specific theme in the second New Scots strategy in 2018. This recognised the importance of language for all elements of integration. Learning or improving English is often a priority for refugees and people seeking asylum so that they can understand essential information about services, speak with people in their communities, find employment or pursue further education. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) access and other community-based learning are valuable not only for the skills people can develop but for the opportunity to meet with local people and build connections as peers.

¹⁹ [A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Employment Action Plan](#)

²⁰ [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy](#)

Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020

First produced in 2007, refreshed in 2015 and reviewed in 2017, Scotland's ESOL Strategy ²¹ sets ESOL in the broad context of learning in Scotland with the expectation that providers will look at this broader context to inform the direction of provision. It aimed to inform the approaches and practice of ESOL providers across the range of sectors.

The vision of the strategy is that all Scottish residents for whom English is not a first language have the opportunity to access high quality English language provision so that they can acquire the language skills to enable them to participate in Scottish life: in the workplace, through further study, within the family, the local community, Scottish society and the economy. These language skills are central to giving people a democratic voice and supporting them to contribute to the society in which they live.

Ending Destitution Together

Ending Destitution Together sets out a strategic approach to improve support for people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) living in Scotland. Inclusion is one of the action areas for the strategy, with an aim that 'people are able to participate in society and access support, wherever services can be made available.' Adult learning can support inclusion by enabling people to build, maintain and refresh their skills. Not only supporting participation and engagement as active community members but also helping people to achieve their ambitions and support employability.

Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement and Family Learning

Family learning is an approach to engaging families in learning outcomes that have an impact on the whole family. CLD plays a vital role in providing engaging and impactful family learning opportunities. Family Learning is supported by National Occupational Standards. In order to support a consistent understanding of family learning Education Scotland have published a number of documents, reports, case studies and resources.

Parental engagement is recognised in the National Improvement Framework as one of seven key drivers in achieving excellence and equity in Scottish education. The engagement of parents and families can help raise attainment for all and help to ensure every child has an equal chance of success. Adults who participate in learning themselves are more likely to engage in their children's education, improving outcomes for families.

Widening Access

[Policy update to follow]

Adult Literacies in Scotland (ALIS) 2020

ALIS 2020 set out that *"By 2020 Scotland's society and economy will be stronger because more of its adults are able to read, write and use numbers effectively in order to handle information, communicate with others, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners."*

Currently we define Literacies as being:

- Communication – reading and writing
- Numeracy – including functional skills in budgeting

²¹ [Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020 \(education.gov.scot\)](https://www.education.gov.scot/publications/2015/01/welcoming-our-learners-scotland-esol-strategy-2015-2020/)

- Problem solving
- ICT – using technology for everyday purposes.

In the development of this new Adult Learning strategy there is opportunity to focus on the developing literacies needs of adults in a wider context.

Scottish Prison Service Learning and Skills Strategy

The Scottish Prison Service Learning and Skills Strategy makes clear its intention to ensure that everyone in their care has: *“the opportunity to engage in creative and flexible learning that unlocks potential, inspires change and builds individual strength.”*²²

Learning and Skills is a foremost consideration of SPS rehabilitation interventions to guide learners on their journey, promote individual change and contribute to the Scottish Government’s objective of achieving a safer Scotland for all. The range of learning opportunities sits within the context of wider interventions of behavioural programmes, training opportunities and employability initiatives to meet the educational needs and aspirations of learners to increase skills for employment post-liberation.

Creativity is at the core of prison based education to stimulate engagement for disaffected learners with project themed learning structured around contemporary issues of interest and to tackle offending behaviours such as racism, sectarianism, domestic violence, bullying etc. These and associated issues are utilised to nurture critical thinking skills, self-reflection, empathy and appreciation of the impact of negative behaviours on others.

²² <http://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Publications/Publication-4017.aspx>

Annex D: The Adult Learning Workforce

Delivering on the aims of this strategy depends on the skills, knowledge and understanding of the adult learning workforce: on their ability to engage effectively with learners; develop and deliver learning opportunities in partnership with them; enable them to acknowledge and assess what they learn and gain recognition for it; and work collaboratively with CLD colleagues, partners across the education and skills systems and others such as regeneration agencies; all in the context of a rapidly changing society and economy.

In order to support and develop the workforce to meet these challenges, we need to continue to build understanding of its size, composition and competences. [Working with Scotland's Communities](#) (2018) reported on research into the Community Learning and Development workforce, including adult learning practitioners alongside those in youth work and community development. 34% of the 963 paid practitioners who responded to a survey as part of the research identified the sole or a major focus of their work as adult learning/adult literacy and numeracy/ESOL. From the range of data gathered, the research estimated a total of 21,000 paid CLD practitioners (full and part time) and a much larger number of volunteers carrying out CLD roles. The data did not support an estimate of the number of adult learning practitioners within this total, but it does indicate a significant adult learning workforce located mostly within the voluntary sector. It should be noted that not all adult educator would identify with the CLD profession and may hold a variety of qualifications in other disciplines.

Of respondents who identified as adult learning practitioners, 58% were over 50 (and less than 13% under 40). The issue of an aging workforce was shared with other parts of the CLD workforce (and, from other information, public services more generally) but appeared to be more acute in relation to adult learning. This indicates that issues of recruitment and succession planning need attention.

Other significant issues identified included a low level of ethnic diversity, a gender pay gap, and skills development needs that employers did not feel confident they could meet, in relation to leadership and digital skills in particular. Practitioners and those responding on behalf of their employers considered there to be an ongoing gap between the CLD (including adult learning) resources available and the needs of communities.

The Statement of Ambition indicated that “there should be a framework of professional development learning opportunities available for practitioners involved in delivering adult learning. Practitioners will be encouraged to improve their skills through this framework in order to provide high-quality learning experiences for adult learners”. The Scottish Government’s Guidance Note for CLD Plans 2021-24 indicated that “education authorities should...recruit qualified CLD practitioners, at the appropriate level of practice or leadership across all areas of Adult Learning, Community Development, Family Learning and Youth Work”. The framework of learning opportunities for adult learning practitioners (including volunteers) needs to bring together in a coherent way:

- The CLD Competent Practitioner Framework: providing core practice competences, Code of Ethics and underpinning values; and linking to CLD professional qualification;
- The range of more specialist skills, knowledge and understanding required in particular adult learning settings (including adult literacy and ESOL);
- The more generic skills, knowledge and understanding required by adult learning practitioners to carry out their roles effectively, such as self-organisation or mental health awareness;

- Awareness of emerging skills requirements, such as the recognition of the importance of meta-skills; the development of new ways of meeting these, such as the use of micro-credentials; and the role of community-based adult learning in this context.

*Growing the Learning Culture*²³, the professional development strategy for CLD, supports adult learning practitioners themselves to shape their own professional learning across all these aspects, accessing clear pathways to recognised professional qualifications; and articulates how employers should support them in doing this.

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²³ [Professional Development Strategy | CLD Standards Council for Scotland](#)

Annex D: ALSFS Membership

Chair: Mhairi Harrington, OBE

Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
City of Glasgow College
CLD Managers Scotland – Adult Learning
CLD Standards Council
College Development Network
Colleges Scotland
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Education Scotland
Inverness College
LEAD Scotland
LearningLink Scotland
Newbattle Abbey College
NHS Education for Scotland
Open University
Robertson Trust
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig
Scotland's Learning Partnership
Scottish Community Development Centre
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
Scottish Funding Council
Scottish Government
Scottish Libraries
Scottish Prison Service
Scottish Union Learning
Skills Development Scotland
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Scotland)
Universities Scotland
Volunteer Scotland
Workers Education Association