Learning Link Scotland Annual Report 2024-25

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Scottish Charity No. SC025308 Company No. SC380020

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@LearningLinkSCO

April 2022 - March 2023

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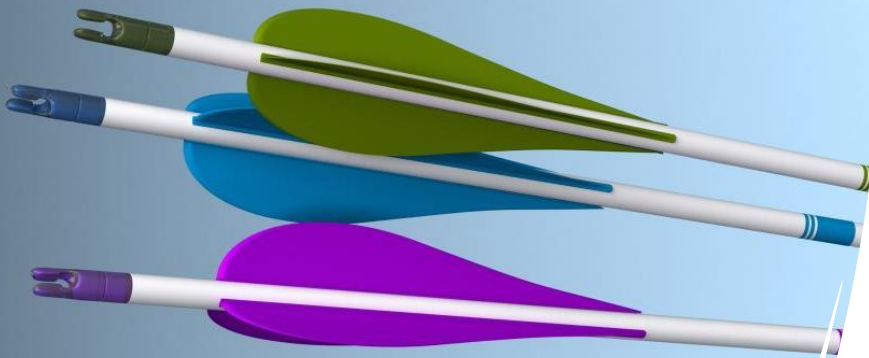
🤝 **Moving forward to** 2025

Our vision and purpose

- Learning Link Scotland was established for and by third sector adult learning organisations.

- Our vision for Scotland is for a learning nation where Scotland is not only the best place in the world to grow up in but also the best place to learn.

- At the heart of our vision is that adult learning in Scotland is recognised by all as a central element of personal and community empowerment. In our vision, people will have access and equal opportunity to strong, independent and vibrant third sector adult education, and that organisations work in partnership with others to fulfil lifelong learning, social inclusion, and democratic aspirations.

- Our purpose is to ensure third sector adult learning organisations work together to create a successful, dynamic and forward thinking Scotland.

Our Outcomes

• Outcome 1: Third Sector adult learning organisations and their learners are effectively contributing to emerging policies in order to build capacity, increase the effectiveness, and thereby maximise the impact, of adult learning provision on individuals, families and communities.

• Outcome 2: Workers in Third Sector adult learning organisations are supported and encouraged to assess their needs and engage in professional learning, networking and partnership opportunities, so that learners can increase their ability to achieve their goals as a result of high-quality learning experiences.

• Outcome 3: Learning Link Scotland members are supported to evaluate and monitor their impact and to share the evidence that Third Sector adult learning can make on learners' personal, family, work and community lives. This evidence strengthens the case for sustaining and developing the sector for the benefit of adult learners in Scotland's communities and Scotland as a whole.

Funding

- Please find our latest [Financial Statement for 2023-24](#) here
- Learning Link Scotland Core Funding from Scottish Government via Corra has been confirmed for the following year 2025-26

Staff Team

Jackie Howie, CEO

Shirley Howitt, Member Development Officer

We also have a great team of **Associate Workers** including

- **Alison McLachlan** from [**AMCLearn**](AMCLearn) who has worked on the maths and numeracy projects with us

- **Lucy Roy** who has worked on the writing and delivery of PDA in Adult Learning with us

Learning Link Scotland Board of Directors

Chair: **Sarah Burton**, Lead Scotland

Co-chair: **Lisa Bradley**, University of Glasgow

Treasurer: **Janet Napthine,** Independent, Co-opted

Director: **Kevin Brosnan**, University of Stirling

Director: **Bex Walker**, Workers' Educational Association (WEA)

Director: **Amy Cox**, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS)

Director: **Asma Abdalla**, Empowering Women for Change

Director: **Unyimeobong Matthews**, Inspiring Families

Director: **Pam Maxwell**, Independent

Positions of Vice Chair and Secretary are currently vacant

Projects 2024-25

- **Multiply** – Numeracy Tutor Training, training in Midlothian, East Lothian and Edinburgh

- **Volunteer Training** – East Lothian

- Launch of Scottish Government funded **SQA PDA in Adult Learning** – SCQF Level 6

- **PDA in Adult Learning –** delivery of SQA Level 6 Award

- **Tutoring Numeracy in Adult Learning** – delivery of SQA Level 8 Award

Learning Link Scotland Members

Membership update for AGM

- Membership has stayed around the same level, it is now at 230, with 508 supporters.

- In the last year we have reduced our use of Twitter as it has become a less effective method of connecting with other organisations and individuals. At Board and Officer level we continue to explore alternative social media platforms, for example Blue Sky and Facebook.

- Members continued to engage with us on our online network meetings. These are now held on Teams and members join from Scotland, including the Western Isles, Highlands, Orkney and Aberdeenshire.

- We held 3 online network meetings this year and co-led a cross-sectoral in person event to launch the PDA in Adult Learning in Scotland

- We have published regular Ebulletins, with a total of 10 published in the last year. We also produced 12 shorter E-Express bulletins to highlight news items which were time sensitive or which we wanted to focus members attention on, such as; new funding streams; sector relevant events, information on UK elections and Scottish Government briefings on Adult Learning.

- We have maintained the frequency of news items on our website in the last year, aiming to have at least one new posting per month, and usually have managed to exceed this.

Network Meetings 2024/25

- **May:** Official in person launch event for the new PDA in Adult Learning in Scotland. Many members and supporters attended this event held in Clydebank.

- **June:** This Network meeting shared the new PDA Adult Learning in Scotland, and introduced participants to the resources that have been developed to support the PDA and the New Teams site we set up to hold all the PDA resources.

- **August:** We considered the impact of the Independent Review of CLD on third sector adult learning in Scotland. Learning Link Scotland summarised the discussion and passed our thoughts on to Scottish Government.

- **November:** This Network meeting focused on the recently published Learning: For All. For Life. A report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) - gov.scot (www.gov.scot). We discussed what the recommendations could mean for Third sector organisations and how it might impact on our work in the years ahead.

* we had a further Network meeting planned for September which was cancelled due to staff illness.

Learning Link Scotland Members

Future Actions

- We would aim to steadily increase membership in the year ahead.

- We will further investigate alternative social media platforms and begin to use these during the year ahead.

- Once we have established a new social media platform, there will need to be a focus on building a presence there and connecting with relevant organisations and individuals.

- Maintenance of website will include deletion of areas we no longer want on the website, and ensure the news and information on our website is up to date and relevant to our membership

Reviewing 2024-25 Professional Learning

- We have continued to distribute information on professional learning opportunities in Scotland and provide support through National Network Meetings

- We run the National Numeracy CLD Network with Education Scotland

- We support the National STEM CLD Network with Education Scotland and partners from across CLD

- We regularly contribute to the ESOL Leads Strategic Group

- Jackie Howie sits on the CLD Standards Executive Committee

- We have delivered an increasing number of professional learning opportunities to a range of cross sectorial organisations

Looking forward to 2025-26

- Continuing to campaign for raising awareness of and funding for third sector adult learning

- CLD Review

- CLD Regulations Review

- Focus on equalities and fair funding

- Challenge of funding for third sector adult learning

- Seeking funding to develop our support for evidencing the impact of adult learning

- Artificial Intelligence

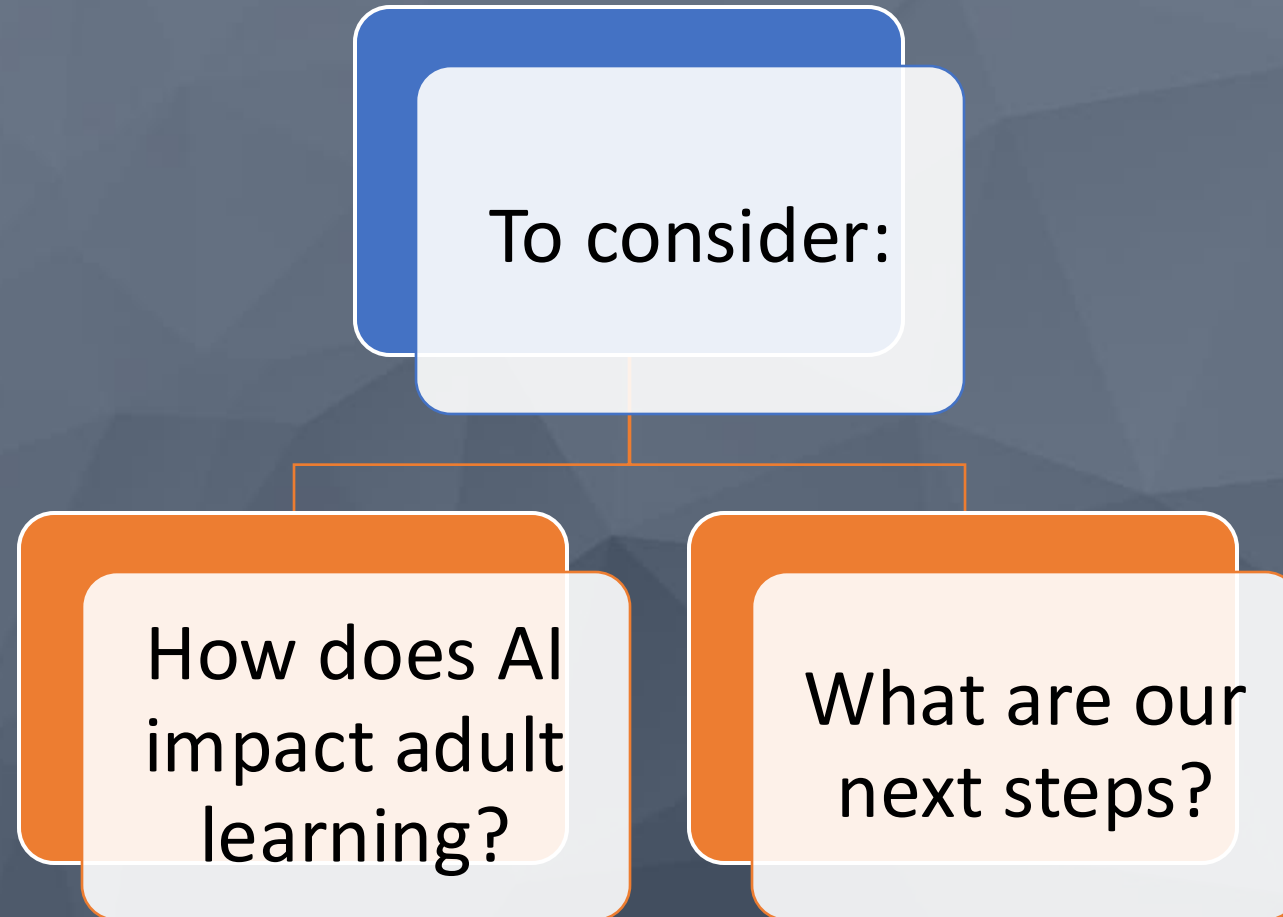# Artificial Intelligence - Implications for Adult Learning

"Artificial intelligence presents a "vast potential" for rejuvenating UK public services, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer said on Monday."

AI and Funding

- [Using Artificial Intelligence tools in funding applications | The National Lottery Community Fund](#)

- [How we're using AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools | Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#)

Next steps

To consider:

How does AI impact adult learning?

What are our next steps?

Reviewing 2024-25
CLD Review

- This year has seen the launch of the results and recommendations of the Independent Review of CLD.

Learning: For All. For Life. A report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD)

Published in July 2024, the report evaluates the current state of CLD in Scotland, identifies challenges, and provides recommendations for improvement.

The Report

Introduction:

- The review was commissioned by Graeme Dey MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education, and Veterans.
- Emphasises the importance of CLD for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.
- Highlights the need for strategic leadership and collaboration among government, local authorities, and stakeholders.

What the Review Learned:

- **Visibility & Awareness**: Limited public awareness of CLD; need for better outreach and communication.
- **Availability & Accessibility**: Challenges include inconsistent service provision, transport issues, and lack of childcare.
- **Learning & Support**: Positive feedback from learners but highlights development needs around professional standards and workforce diversity.
- **Pathways & Progression**: Need for better data collection and outcome measurement.

Highlights for adult learning

Learning Link Scotland welcomes the following:

- **The recognition that, "Third Sector and voluntary organisations have played, and will continue to play, a crucial role in delivering CLD services across Scotland, often doing so to groups with specific needs or characteristics."**

- The acknowledgement that, "Third sector organisations continue to initiate and develop a dynamic role in adult learning across Scotland's communities."

- The recommendation for, "a clear and cohesive Scottish Government policy narrative on Life-Long Learning. One that goes beyond the hitherto focus on careers and employability (crucially important as they are) and accepts that there will be different motivations behind why people want to learn. Moreover, not everyone will learn well within the current institutional structures, so alternative or additional approaches need to be available."

- The recommendation that, "the Scottish Government should fund Scotland's participation in the OECD International Survey of Adult Skills, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)".

Highlights for adult learning

- **The recognition that, "People will need or want to learn throughout their lifetime, and that they will benefit from that learning in multiple ways. So, rather than talking about a 'Learner Journey', we need to see it as a true 'Life-Long Learning Journey', during which the individual will have different motivations for learning needs and wants, and the system needs to be ready to support that. This should also be based on an understanding that not everyone will flourish in 'traditional' or 'formal' education settings, and that those settings may not always be best able to provide additional support to those who need it."**

- An awareness that, Scotland's Third Sector Adult Learning organisations frequently work in close partnership and collaboration with other CLD providers, for example, Local Authorities. Learning Link Scotland welcomes the report findings which highlights this key enabler to participation in CLD.

- In highlighting the major barriers to participation in CLD, the review notes how previous poor experience of the education system along with socio-economic factors and poverty manifests in lower levels of literacy and educational attainment. Third sector adult learning provision work in collaboration with a range of providers to tackle these issues for adult learners.

Highlights for adult learning

- **The recognition of the detrimental impact short-term funding has on adult learning provision. "We wouldn't expect those delivering learning in our schools or Colleges, or those providing professional social work support across our communities, to operate on that basis, (short-term funding) and I don't see why it should be the case for professional CLD staff delivering learning to some of our most marginalised and disadvantaged learners. Funding to teach our young children how to read and write isn't tied to a specific and time-limited project, so funding to teach older learners how to read and write should be provided on the same basis."**

- An awareness of the current ESOL crisis in Scotland. "It has been clear from the very start of this review that there is an ESOL crisis. I heard from those working on ESOL that there are thousands of New Scots currently on the waiting list for a place on an ESOL course in Glasgow alone (with circa 400 more being added every month)."

- The report acknowledges that Scotland could look beyond its borders to countries such as Finland and Sweden for other CLD models to learn from. Third sector adult learning organisations in Scotland have established worldwide links with adult learning agencies, providers and practitioners. Learning Link Scotland would be pleased to share our experience and knowledge on developing active worldwide links.

Recommendations: Leadership and Structures

1. By Autumn 2024, the Scottish Government and CoSLA should establish a joint CLD Strategic Leadership Group (SLG) including an Equalities Forum.

2. The work of the SLG should be supported by a working-level CLD Strategic Delivery Group (SDG).

3. CoSLA and the Scottish Government need to reconsider current arrangements supporting CLD policy and delivery.

4. CoSLA should initiate and lead a process to improve consistency in terms of where CLD is situated within Local Authority structures across all 32 Local Authorities.

5. The CLD Standards Council should be supported to transition towards an independent status more akin to the General Teaching Council Scotland.

6. Ministers should commit to providing regular reports to the Scottish Parliament about follow-up to this Review.

Recommendations: Overarching Policy Narrative

1. The Scottish Government should develop and communicate a clear and cohesive policy narrative on Life-long Learning.

2. Informed by and consistent with the policy narrative recommended above, the Scottish Government should develop and communicate a clear Statement of Strategic Intent for CLD.

Recommendations: Focus on Delivery

1. By the end of 2024, the Strategic Leadership Group should agree and publish a detailed, prioritised and timed Delivery Plan.

2. The Scottish Government working alongside New Scots partners, Colleges and Local Authorities needs to take immediate action to tackle the current crisis in ESOL.

Recommendations: Budgets and Funding

1. The Scottish Government should undertake an urgent and overdue reassessment of the current balance of spending across all dimensions of learning in Scotland.

2. Consistent with the Verity House Agreement, the Scottish Government and CoSLA should work together to identify indicative allocations for Local Authority spend on CLD.

3. Wherever possible, funding should be part of core budgets rather than project related. If this is not possible, then project funding should be provided over a multi-year period, with an explanation provided if that is not the case.

Recommendations: Developing the Workforce and Standards

1. The Scottish Government should appoint a Chief Adviser on Community Learning & Development.

2. The CLD Standards Council should lead work to develop a CLD Workforce Plan for consideration by the Strategic Leadership Group.

3. There should be a progressive requirement for all those working or volunteering in CLD roles to be members of the CLD Standards Council.

4. Consideration of HMIE CLD inspection report findings should be a standing item on the Strategic Leadership Group agenda.

Recommendations: Demonstrating Impact

1. The Scottish Government should fund Scotland's participation in the OECD International Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).

2. Existing outcome measures, including the Youth Work National Outcomes and Skills Framework and the CLD managers Scotland KPI data, should be used as the basis to develop a shared CLD Outcomes and Measurement Framework for use across the sector.

3. There should be an annual celebration of CLD successes, in the shape of a CLD Annual Report and CLD Awards event.

Recommendations Summary

1. **Leadership and Structures**: Establish a joint CLD Strategic Leadership Group and a working-level Strategic Delivery Group.

2. **Overarching Policy Narrative**: Develop a clear policy narrative on lifelong learning and a strategic intent for CLD.

3. **Focus on Delivery**: Prioritize actions, especially addressing the ESOL crisis.

4. **Budgets and Funding**: Reassess spending across learning dimensions and encourage multi-year project funding.

5. **Developing the Workforce and Standards**: Appoint a Chief Adviser on CLD and develop a workforce plan.

6. **Demonstrating Impact**: Fund participation in the OECD International Survey of Adult Skills and develop a shared outcomes framework.

Conclusion

- Emphasizes the need for sustained strategic leadership and better resource allocation.
- Calls for regular updates to the Scottish Parliament on progress.

LLS letter to Graeme Dey, Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans

- Scottish Government has not yet responded to the CLD Review publicly – it would be really good to hear what's happening, we feel excluded and are concerned timescales are already slipping, will we hear anything before Scottish Budget?

- Good to acknowledge ESOL in crisis, those working on New Scots policy have already referred to CLD ESOL developments

- Role of volunteering mentioned, we hope this is for an investment in volunteering and that assumptions haven't been made that volunteering is a cheap option. Volunteers need training, supported and organised

- Many third sector don't see themselves as CLD so aren't sure how this will impact

- Discussion around visibility of CLD – it is important our services are clear and visible to wide audience

- National Outcomes – there is some support for National Outcomes but we will need to be really clear how this might impact. If it is used to promote visibility of impact of service, then that would be good. However, they may be difficult to manage across third sector unless they are also useful in terms of reporting to our funders. Another layer of reporting has to be useful to all. For example, third sector who are part of CLD could report to national outcomes.

- Could national outcomes be a way of gathering collaborative case studies?

- **Adult Learning Strategy has been officially suspended – what will its status be? Clearer policy on the value of adult learning is required.**

- Working as a tutor in third sector is becoming the preserve of those who already have another income source… we need to be able to pay tutors properly and training and support volunteers properly

Letter from Graeme Dey, Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans

- Thank you for your correspondence of 4 December 2024 regarding the Independent review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) and Third Sector Adult Learning in Scotland.

- I welcome your interest in the report recommendations and note the areas that you strongly support.

- Both the Scottish Government and CoSLA broadly welcome the report with the recognition of good practice that already exists across Scotland.

- The themes from your consultation are helpful to see and I recognise many of these points from my contact with people and organisations across the whole of CLD.

- On your first point, I can now confirm that the Scottish Government and CoSLA have announced that we will take forward the recommendation to set up a CLD Strategic Leadership Group (SLG).

- The first meeting of the SLG is being planned for early in the New Year.

- The SLG will play a central role in developing our detailed responses to the other 19 recommendations, which cover the other points that you've highlighted.

- We look forward to working closely with sector leaders, to get into the detail of making the changes and improvements we all want to see.

- **From this point of view, I warmly welcome your offer of support across the adult learning field and I expect we will be in contact with you as the work from the review moves forward.**

Letter to Kate Still, Independent Reviewer of CLD

- The first recommendation of your report was that the Scottish Government and COSLA should establish a joint CLD Strategic Leadership Group (SLG).

- We have discussed this recommendation and agreed that we should seek to establish an SLG with an initial meeting early in the New Year. COSLA and Scottish Government officials are working closely to agree the membership and terms of reference for the SLG and to confirm the date of the first meeting.

- As we finalise the approach to the establishment and operation of the SLG, we are planning to invite you (Kate Still) to address the group in due course.

- Both the Scottish Government and COSLA broadly welcome the report with its recognition of good practice that already exists across Scotland.

- Your report makes 20 recommendations which vary in terms of complexity and scope, and there are some which will be challenging to deliver.

- **The SLG will play a central role in developing our detailed responses to the other 19 recommendations, working together with sector leaders.**

- We are confident the SLG will help us to make progress in considering and responding to your recommendations in 2025, in collaboration with the sector.

- We look forward to working together, and with sector leaders, to further strengthen CLD provision and support the best possible outcomes for communities across Scotland.

Graeme Dey Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Veterans; Cllr Maureen Chalmers COSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing; Cllr Tony Buchanan COSLA Spokesperson for Children and Young People; 20 December 2024

Social Media

Social Media: Which is best for LLS?

- **Twitter X** : We have reduced our use of this platform at present, should we delete our account or restart?

- **Facebook**: We used it in the past, but have not done so for a few years. Should we reinstate use?

- **Instagram**: Mostly about photo sharing. Is this likely to be practical for our social media needs?

- **Blue Sky**: A very new social media platform set up as a rival to X. Very few users amongst our contacts so far.

- **Threads**: an app from Instagram where you can view and share public conversations. Only available as a mobile app.

- **LinkedIn**: should we invest in researching how to use this effectively?

LLS	Twitter / X	Facebook	Instagram	Linked In
CLD Standards Council	•	•		
Education Scotland	•	•		
Dyslexia Scotland	•	•	•	•
Lead Scotland	•	•	•	•
ESOL Scotland	•	•	•	
WEA	•	•	•	•
Luminate	•	•	•	
Scottish Government	•	•	•	
GCVS	•	•	•	•
EVOC	•	•	•	•
LGBT Youth Scotland		•	•	•
Moray Council	•	•		
City of Edinburgh Council	•	•	•	
Orkney Islands Council	•	•		

Social Media

- What platform does your orgnisation use?

- What are the pros and cons of those platforms?

- What is your opinion on which we should use?

Thank you!