

Evaluation of community learning and development in Scotland: Considering the provision by local authorities and their partners

A report from His Majesty’s Inspectors of Education

**December 2024**

# Foreword

I am delighted to present this evaluation of community learning and development (CLD), which is the culmination of a year’s worth of visits to Scotland’s 32 local authorities in 2023/24.

This report follows two previous reports ([Improving life chances and empowering communities](https://education.gov.scot/resources/raising-attainment-improving-life-chances/) (January 2020) and [Responsive, supportive and resilient communities](https://education.gov.scot/inspection-and-review/hm-chief-inspector-reports-and-guidance/national-thematic-inspections/responsive-supportive-and-resilient-communities-september-2022/). (September 2022)) and is particularly timely in view of the review of CLD for the Scottish Government, led by Kate Still, and ahead of the Scottish Government’s response.

CLD is integral to the education system in Scotland bringing together youth work, adult learning, family learning, and community empowerment and development under one approach.

CLD is more than just an approach; it is a profession. Its specific methodologies are also adopted by other professions and sectors. So, although its impact is not always straightforward to track in the same way that education outcomes might be, the reach of CLD across the country is significant, and deep.

The person-centred, non-judgemental approach that is at the heart of CLD means that staff, volunteers and partners can reach those who face additional challenges in their lives. They are able to support people to make positive changes to their lives and to their communities. They support many children, young people and adults to discover new ways to engage in and enjoy learning, helping them overcome challenges.

Our report highlights where CLD leaders, staff, volunteers and partners are having the greatest impact. We highlight strengths such as how volunteers, local groups and voluntary organisations work to expand the range of social, educational and community opportunities across Scotland. We also explain how the CLD sector is at the forefront of responding to wider changes in society, for example supporting new Scots or working with local organisations to enable communities to be more resilient towards emergencies such as flooding.

Our report also emphasises messages from our previous reports around the critical issues that the sector continues to face. These include the complexity of and variation in how CLD is governed and resourced, which is increasing the disparity in the support that learners and communities facing the greatest challenges are offered.

Nowhere is this more evident than in community-based adult learning. Inspectors have seen time and again how local authorities have narrowed their focus to particular areas, such as literacies and employment support. While this is understandable in the current economic climate, it is reducing the informal routes into lifelong learning for adults significantly – and that creates a vulnerability in our communities.

As far as resourcing is concerned, an increasing number of CLD posts are only funded short-term. Inspectors have seen how this short-termism – understandable as it is – is having an impact on the sustainability of programmes and on the recruitment, retention and expertise in CLD methodologies of staff.

These are pressures that the sector has faced for some years but that are becoming more acute as society in Scotland is evolving. However, a long-standing issue for the sector is how it can demonstrate its full impact.

As we look forward to the Scottish Government response to the Still Review, it is our role as an inspectorate to make sure that our work with the CLD sector reflects its responsiveness and professionalism; that our inspection of CLD helps the sector to build resilience and continue to meet the diverse needs of our diverse communities.

HM Inspectors are privileged to hear how, for many people, participation in CLD is life-changing. In a few cases, it has been life-saving. It is my privilege that I also see this critical aspect of the Scottish education system.

**Janie McManus**  
His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education

# Background

CLD is a field of professional practice which includes:

* youth work
* community-based adult learning
* family learning
* community development.

It enables people to identify their own individual and collective goals, to engage in learning, and to take action to bring about change for themselves and their communities. CLD staff and volunteers support children, young people and adults in communities across Scotland, including those affected by deprivation. CLD activity has a strong focus on early intervention, prevention and tackling inequalities. It plays a significant role in raising attainment for all.

Lifelong learning is the skills development and learning each of us do throughout our lives. It includes many aspects of CLD, including youth work, community-based adult learning, family learning and intergenerational learning. CLD staff and volunteers support people of all ages to engage in learning to support wellbeing, fulfil personal ambitions and enjoy gaining skills and knowledge.

Community development is a process where people come together to take action on what is important to them. It helps communities to identify and organise the issues they want to address or the opportunities they want to explore. This can be done by communities of place or communities of shared identity. Community development is about making a fairer, more just and more inclusive society. It includes building the skills and capacities of community groups and organisations. It is one strand of CLD.

CLD activity has an important role in supporting community empowerment. The Scottish Government defines community empowerment as:

‘a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them.’

Communities may be geographically located or they may share common interests, concerns or identities.

Core to CLD methodology is that programmes and activities are developed with communities and participants. CLD professionals are committed to the values of:

* self-determination
* inclusion
* empowerment
* working collaboratively
* promotion of learning as a lifelong activity.

CLD methodologies are also used by practitioners in other sectors to engage with communities and learners.

A ‘CLD learner’ is any recipient of the services of a partnership or partner delivering CLD provision. They can be:

* children
* young people
* adults
* families
* volunteers
* community activists
* community members.

CLD partners include both organisations and groups that deliver learning and development in the community and other services and organisations that contribute to CLD partnerships. This may include, but is not limited to:

* CLD services and organisations
* early learning centres and schools
* culture and sport groups and organisations
* NHS
* colleges
* emergency services
* third sector local and national organisations
* community groups
* libraries
* employers.

Between 2016 and 2019, inspections identified several recurring themes, including that CLD is contributing strongly to local communities and that staff and volunteers are improving the life chances of participants across Scotland. HM Inspectors also identified areas requiring further development, such as improving the measurement of performance against aims, strengthening the community-based adult learning offer and making progression routes for learners clearer. The report, [Improving life chances and empowering communities,](https://education.gov.scot/media/ryklpn1i/improving-life-chances-and-empowering-communities.pdf) published in January 2020, highlighted key strengths and aspects for improvement in the leadership and delivery of CLD provision. As we resumed inspections in 2023/24, following the pandemic, we wanted to assess whether local authorities had made progress in addressing these key areas of improvement, especially given the challenges posed by COVID-19.

CLD adapted and worked flexibly to help meet the needs of communities during the pandemic. CLD practitioners worked in a range of venues, including learning hubs, and quickly adapted how they delivered learning. They supported volunteers and communities to meet local needs. In September 2022, HM Inspectors published a report highlighting features of effective community development practice in response to COVID-19: [Responsive, supportive and resilient communities](https://education.gov.scot/inspection-and-review/hm-chief-inspector-reports-and-guidance/national-thematic-inspections/responsive-supportive-and-resilient-communities-september-2022/).

As CLD continues to evolve post-pandemic, the sector faces several ongoing challenges and opportunities that affect its ability to deliver positive outcomes. These include variability in the governance of CLD and how well available resources are matched to current and emerging needs. However, there are also significant strengths in the sector, such the commitment of staff and volunteers at all levels to supporting participants and communities to make positive changes.

This report seeks to explore these critical areas by evaluating how effectively local authorities and their partners are leading and governing CLD provision, as well as the extent to which their work is delivering measurable impact. By understanding both the successes and challenges, we aim to provide insights that will inform the future development and sustainability of CLD across Scotland.

# Methodology

Between September 2023 and June 2024, HM Inspectors carried out a programme of visits to all 32 local authorities as part of the 2023/24 annual programme of inspection. These inspections were designed to support improvement and provide external assurance of the quality of CLD provision across Scotland, specifically evaluating quality and improvement in leadership and governance. Individual reports are available on the [Education Scotland website](https://education.gov.scot/inspection-and-review/find-an-inspection-report/find-an-inspection-report/?searchFor=reports&organisationType=Community%20Learning%20and%20Development&orderAlias=relevance).

There are statutory duties on local authorities in [The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2013/175/contents/made) to work with partners and communities to co-produce and secure the delivery of CLD in their area and publish a 3-yearly CLD Plan. During the inspections, HM Inspectors assessed the extent to which local authorities are fulfilling these statutory duties, looking at the progress made by local authorities and their CLD partners against their CLD 2021–24 plans.

Before the inspections, CLD leaders were asked to self-evaluate progress with their CLD plan in key areas such as leadership, governance and their impact on learners and communities. This self-evaluation, which was structured around 2 high-level questions and 5 themes from the CLD quality framework [How good is our community learning and development?](https://education.gov.scot/inspection-and-review/inspection-frameworks/how-good-is-our-community-learning-and-development/), highlighted strengths, progress against their CLD plan, and areas for development.

During the inspections, HM Inspectors gathered information from a wide range of stakeholders, including children and young people, adult learners, community activists, volunteers, staff and senior leaders. They observed CLD activities and reviewed documents and reports against CLD plans to evaluate progress and outcomes.

At the end of each visit, HM Inspectors provided an overall evaluation of how effectively local authorities and their CLD partners were delivering on their plans. Additionally, they identified highly effective practices that demonstrated strong collaboration and successful provision of services.

This report presents an evaluation of:

* how effective the leadership of the local authority and their CLD partners is in improving outcomes; and
* how well the performance of the local authority and their CLD partners demonstrates positive impact.

# Main findings

* **The leadership of CLD in most local authorities is strong and effective. The majority of local authorities have effective governance of CLD.** However, the leadership and governance of CLD needs to be strengthened in a number of local authorities. This includes a few local authorities where leadership and governance are now less effective than before the pandemic.
* **Almost all community planning partnerships have a strategic role in planning CLD, and monitor progress through regular reporting.** CLD is increasingly aligned to local outcome improvement plan priorities and locality planning structures. This is raising the awareness and understanding of the impact of CLD across a wider range of partners.
* **The recognition of CLD as a distinct and important part of Scotland’s education system continues to develop and grow.** Senior leaders in local authorities and community planning partnerships increasingly understand how CLD practitioners and partners use CLD methodologies to support children, young people, adults and communities. They are also recognising the value of CLD’s contribution to meeting key national and local priorities.
* **Local authorities and their CLD partners are not yet sufficiently involving community representatives and learners in the planning and decision-making about CLD at a strategic level.** There are a small number of local authorities who are effective in supporting young people, adult learners, or community groups to play a role in CLD strategic planning. However, no local authority is yet involving all 3 groups as fully active partners. This includes participants’ involvement in the development and review of CLD plans. In particular, adult learners are under-represented in CLD planning at area and strategic level.
* **The way CLD is resourced and governed varies significantly between local authorities.** Where CLD sits in local authorities varies significantly. This can cause challenges in developing a coherent approach to CLD delivery and governance across local authority departments and in CLD leaders being able to benchmark across local authorities. The funding of CLD is also complex. Local authorities use a varying mix of core funding (which is diminishing year on year), short-term grants and, particularly for third sector organisations, local fundraising. This is leading to significant disparity in the support that learners and communities, including those with high levels of need, are offered across Scotland.
* **In recent years, local authorities have increasingly funded CLD staffing through short-term funding.** This creates uncertainty for CLD provision and staff and longer-term sustainability issues within the workforce. It also restricts the ability of local authorities and partners to plan effectively in the medium to long term, which can in turn have an impact on the delivery and quality of provision.
* **Overall, the capacity of CLD providers to fully understand and report on their collective impact is under-developed.** There is no nationally agreed data set or consistently used outcome measures to demonstrate the impact of CLD and its contribution to Scotland’s national priorities. Progress since January 2020, when HM Inspectors last highlighted the lack of capacity of CLD providers to demonstrate and benchmark their impact, has been limited. Increased shared self-evaluation across CLD partners would support them to better understand and report on their collective progress in meeting CLD and community planning priorities.
* **Participating in CLD activities is life-changing, and in some cases life-saving, for many children, young people and adults**. This is an enduring and recurring feature of the significant impact of CLD and reported on consistently by HM Inspectors and others. It results from CLD staff and volunteers delivering learning opportunities that meet the needs of individuals of all ages well.
* **CLD staff, volunteers and partners are effective in reaching and supporting those who face additional challenges in their lives.** Children, young people and adults value highly the support they receive from the CLD workforce. This includes those experiencing poverty, disadvantage, social isolation and those with disabilities and mental health and wellbeing challenges.
* **There are significant challenges for CLD providers in meeting the needs of learners and communities, particularly in community-based adult learning.** Due to a mix of changing resources and increased targeting of provision, the range of community-based adult learning offered by local authority CLD services has narrowed. As a result, the needs of some individuals and communities are not being met. An increase in the number of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants has significantly increased the demands on English for speakers of other languages provision. Even where CLD resources have been redirected to this work, providers are still not sufficiently resourced to fully meet the demand.
* **Local authority CLD staff and volunteers are increasingly working alongside partners, including schools, to provide targeted opportunities for those learners who require additional support.** This is supporting children, young people and adults to achieve and progress. However, not all children and young people are supported sufficiently to be able to fully recognise, celebrate and build on their skills and achievements.
* **Community organisations and volunteers are making important and effective contributions to CLD delivery across Scotland.** Their work greatly extends the number of people and communities who benefit from community learning and community development. The role of the third sector, and particularly local volunteer-led organisations, in CLD provision and community empowerment is expanding.

# Recommendations

**Recommendations for local authorities and their CLD partners**

* Local authorities should work with their CLD partners to improve their collective use of data and shared self-evaluation to better monitor and report on CLD outcomes.
* Community planning partnerships should ensure that the reporting of CLD enables them to understand the progress being made against CLD plans and how CLD is contributing to wider priorities. This will support them to fulfil their strategic role in the planning, governance and leadership of CLD.
* CLD partnerships need to better involve young people, adult learners, community organisations and local representatives in CLD planning. In particular, they should ensure that CLD participants have a greater influence and become partners in decision-making about CLD planning at strategic level.

**Recommendations for the Scottish Government**

* The Scottish Government should consider how national infrastructure can be best used to support the CLD sector to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. There are a number of critical issues that currently diminish the sector’s capacity to meet the needs of learners and communities. These include the lack of a shared CLD outcomes and measurement framework or system to track and report progress at local authority and national level.
* Community-based adult learning provision, including English for speakers of other languages learning, should be reviewed to understand better supply and demand and how current challenges might be addressed. This should include exploring how well community-based adult learning is contributing to national priorities and enabling adults to move into employment and supporting wellbeing.

* The Scottish Government should review national policy and legislation for CLD to ensure that they take account of the current context and support strengthened governance.
* The Scottish Government and local authorities should consider whether a national approach is required to better support schools and CLD partners to record and track young people’s achievements and skills. This is a long-standing challenge. A consistent, systematic approach would allow young people to have their progress, and skills better recognised and celebrated.

# Providing effective leadership

How effective is the leadership of the local authority and their CLD partners in improving outcomes?

**Profile of CLD**

The varied roles that CLD staff, volunteers and organisations took on during the pandemic increased the visibility of CLD and its impact on individuals and communities. This increased the recognition, particularly by senior leaders in local authorities and community planning partnerships, to the role of CLD practitioners in supporting children, young people, adults and communities. This includes an increased understanding of the value of CLD’s contribution to meeting national and local priorities, for example supporting those most affected by poverty and disadvantage. All of this underscores the critical need for local authorities and their partners to capitalise on this momentum as they work to strengthen their governance and leadership.

**Governance**

The governance and resourcing of CLD have become increasingly complex in recent years. Local authorities have been continually restructuring their services in response to financial pressures and competing priorities. This restructuring, while necessary, has added complexity to how they manage CLD, affecting both governance and the allocation of resources.

Most CLD practitioners, both within local authorities and partner organisations, now operate under shared priorities as outlined in their CLD plans. Across Scotland, the leadership of CLD in most local authorities is strong. In the majority of local authorities, the governance of CLD is effective. However, poor governance in some areas has led to inefficiencies, duplication of effort and an inability to clearly demonstrate impact. Notably, a few local authorities are at risk of not fulfilling their statutory duties in relation to CLD. Whilst several local authorities have strengthened their governance since HM Inspectors last reported on this nationally in January 2020,[[1]](#footnote-2) others are now performing less well.

Involving communities in CLD planning

An ongoing challenge for many local authorities and their strategic CLD partners is that they are not sufficiently involving community stakeholders, such as young people, adult learners and community representatives, in the CLD planning process. There is a clear opportunity to strengthen governance through greater engagement of stakeholders.

However, there are examples of good practice: a minority of local authorities are leading the way in incorporating young people and community members into CLD planning at a strategic level. They are seeing the benefits, with improved provision and outcomes when learners and communities are actively involved and their views inform decisions. Several local authorities have also enabled young people to participate in broader planning decisions beyond CLD, further enhancing service quality. However, the practice of including stakeholders as partners in strategic planning of CLD is not yet consistent across all local authorities. In particular, adult learners are under-represented in CLD planning at area and strategic level. To maximise the potential of CLD and improve outcomes across Scotland, it is essential that more local authorities actively involve their communities, including learners of all ages, in planning processes.

**Partnerships**

In almost all local authorities, CLD is held in high regard by other services within the local authority and by many external partners. Most local authorities that are working well with their CLD partners have a clear vision for improving CLD provision. Effective partnership working is crucial in supporting providers to adapt to changing needs and make the best use of often diminishing resources. Where there is a strong shared ownership of CLD priorities and actions across partners, the volume and quality of provision consistently improves.

However, well-organised approaches to partnership working are not yet consistent across all local authorities. Local authorities that have yet to develop and sustain strong partnerships are less likely to achieve the same level of provision and positive impacts for learners and communities as those with well-established collaborations. In strong CLD partnerships, staff and volunteers are supported effectively to make a significant contribution to meeting community planning priorities. These include issues caused by poverty, inequality and poor mental health and wellbeing.

**Resourcing**

Over the past decade, local authority CLD resources have increasingly been directed towards supporting community planning partnership priorities, with a focus on those facing the greatest challenges. Whilst this targeted approach has enabled CLD staff and volunteers to work closely with individuals and communities in need, it has reduced the availability of wider, often more informal CLD provision that is often the first step for those new to accessing CLD provision. This is evident in the reduction in universal youth clubs and in many aspects of community-based adult learning opportunities.

There is also significant variability in the CLD services available across Scotland. While some of this variation is justified by local needs and demographics, much of it is driven by the resources available in different local authority areas rather than the actual demand. This disparity is particularly damaging in areas where CLD investment is low, leaving those with high levels of need without sufficient access to support or learning opportunities.

CLD services and partnerships are using external funding effectively to help sustain existing programmes and develop new ones, expanding the reach of CLD. This includes the use of Attainment Challenge Fund funding, which has allowed schools and local authorities to extend CLD provision and support for children and young people. However, the reliance on time-limited funding creates risks for the longer-term sustainability of CLD and the stability of staff development and job security.

Even where partners work together well to avoid duplication and share resources, meeting the wide range of needs of all children, young people, adult learners and communities remains a significant challenge. Community-based adult learning provision in particular has been reduced to core areas such as numeracy and employability in many local authorities. This is leaving gaps in the broader range of programmes that provide an initial route into learning, including for those adults who have not previously had positive experiences of education.

One particular gap is in the provision of English for speakers of other languages support for refugees and new immigrants. While many local authorities and their partners are successfully using joint resources to increase English for speakers of other languages services, demand continues to significantly exceed supply in a minority of local authorities. This includes for those local authorities where the need is greatest.

**Evaluation**

There are strong examples of leaders who actively support staff and volunteers in self-evaluation, enabling them to reflect on their work and better understand the impact of their work on meeting the needs of their communities. Where staff and volunteers are supported consistently and encouraged to self-evaluate, improvements are more visible, and services are better aligned with community needs. However, only a minority of local authorities undertake self-evaluation regularly to drive continuous improvement.

Too few local authorities have put in place joint self-evaluation with their CLD partners. This lack of shared self-evaluation and reporting on progress has been a long-standing issue, repeatedly highlighted in previous national inspection reports. In a few local authorities, self-evaluation practices and shared approaches to evaluation, which were paused during the pandemic, have yet to be reinstated. As a result, joint self-evaluation remains inconsistent across Scotland and continues to be an area requiring significant improvement.

Positively, the majority of local authorities use qualitative feedback from partners, learners and communities well to inform their planning. They routinely produce and disseminate case studies showing the impact of CLD activities on individuals and groups. These case studies offer a rich picture of how CLD is making a meaningful difference in people’s lives and in communities.

**Monitoring and reporting**

High-quality reporting of CLD is evident in local authorities where the governance of CLD is strongest. In these local authorities, CLD leaders can clearly demonstrate progress towards meeting the priorities outlined in their CLD plan and against wider community planning priorities. However, a minority of local authorities do not yet have effective processes for reporting on CLD. Too often, the contributions of all partners towards meeting shared CLD priorities are not fully captured or reported. A minority of local authorities urgently need to set clear, measurable outcomes and targets in their CLD plans to improve how well they can monitor progress.

Although the use of data to inform CLD planning is improving, enhancing the use of data and evaluative evidence to monitor and report on CLD is a key focus for leaders and staff across Scotland. Whilst a few local authorities and their CLD partners are using shared data analysis well to guide the allocation of resources and inform decision-making, most local authorities need to strengthen how they use data to inform planning and monitor outcomes.

Overall, the ability of CLD providers to fully understand and report on their collective impact is under-developed. The impact that CLD work has on wider local authority, community planning partnership and national priorities needs to be better captured, understood and reported. There is no consistent approach to measuring CLD progress across Scotland. This limits how well local authorities and their partners can assess their progress against others to help them review their provision and identify areas requiring more attention. The development of a set of common key performance indicators by CLD Managers Scotland, the professional network of local authority managers, is a positive step. However, the data gathered is inconsistent, with for example only some including data from partners.

**Building the workforce**

The CLD workforce is diverse, including staff and volunteers with CLD qualifications, those who have other relevant qualifications, and individuals who have gained skills through experience. This workforce works across a wide range of settings. This includes local authorities, national and third sector organisations, community groups and other sectors where CLD methodologies expertise is used for engaging and supporting stakeholders and communities.

Most CLD staff and volunteers feel well-supported, empowered and valued by their managers to carry out their roles and responsibilities. Distributed leadership in a minority of CLD services and many partner organisations is leading to greater staff empowerment. Overall, CLD staff and volunteers working for local authorities and their CLD partners have access to good quality professional development opportunities. Collaboration across local authority staff and partners enables the sharing of training and expertise. This supports staff and volunteers to improve their practice and confidently take on new aspects of work and responsibilities, including those programmes developed to meet changing community needs.

An increasing number of local authorities have developed an effective ‘grow your own’ culture, supporting their workforce to gain relevant CLD awards and qualifications. This approach helps maintain staffing levels and supports them to sustain their services and meet growing demands. However, access to professional qualifications and pre-qualification professional development awards varies across Scotland depending on location and systems in place to support staff. Limited access to professional learning and qualifications can hinder recruitment and retention of staff.

Volunteers continue to play an increasingly significant role in the delivery of CLD across Scotland. Skilled and active volunteers play an essential role in addressing local needs. Almost all local authority and third sector CLD services provide effective support to their volunteers. Experienced CLD leaders, both staff and long-standing volunteers, understand and take action to ensure routes for learners to become volunteers.

Whilst the growth in services and organisations delivering CLD outcomes and using CLD methodologies is positive, it also presents challenges. It is not always clear how CLD qualified staff are supported to maintain their professional standards and practice. Staff and volunteers who are not CLD-qualified but use CLD methodologies need continued support and guidance from experienced practitioners to ensure that they continually meet professional standards consistently. This includes in organisations that do not consider themselves to be CLD providers but that are delivering against CLD priorities. It also includes those local authorities who are taking a community development approach to involving communities in the delivery of services and where CLD, school and early years staff are coming together to share expertise and methodologies to better support children and young people and their families.

**Demonstrating positive impact:** How well does the performance of the local authority and their CLD partners demonstrate positive impact?

**Use of data to demonstrate impact**

Almost all CLD providers have developed a strong understanding of their communities and the socio-economic context in which they operate. Increasingly, CLD partners are sharing data and other information to identify both existing and emerging needs more effectively. For example, CLD partners are increasingly using data to target provision towards addressing critical issues such as poverty and inequality. In a few cases, targeted interventions have already resulted in tangible improvements in the lives of individuals and entire communities. Additionally, the majority of local authorities are seeing participation in many CLD programmes return to pre-pandemic levels. For example, the numbers of young people participating in youth groups, which had reduced significantly, is now steadily rising.

However, there remains a challenge for many local authorities in fully integrating and sharing data, particularly to monitor progress, with CLD partners. This includes sharing data between CLD and schools, to demonstrate the achievements of young people. A few CLD partnerships do not yet fully capture data from the wide range of community organisations such as development trusts. This is limiting their ability to understand and collectively plan to meet community priorities and risks duplication of engagement with communities.

**Success for all**

CLD staff and volunteers across Scotland support communities and learners of all ages effectively. The majority of CLD partnerships have a clear focus on addressing barriers to participation and reaching those most in need and those facing discrimination or disadvantage. In all local authorities, CLD teams have shifted their focus from universal services to targeted programmes that prioritise high-need groups such as new Scots, care-experienced young people and older adults. Local authorities and their CLD partners, including community organisations, provide personal support to those affected by poverty. This is helping adults and families to access vital support services, to manage their finances better and to maximise incomes. However, only a minority of local authorities are able to demonstrate progress in helping communities to tackle poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.

CLD staff and volunteers are making a significant difference in supporting participants with their mental health and wellbeing. By building resilience, helping individuals develop strategies to manage their mental health, and reducing isolation through social engagement, for many participants CLD programmes are life-changing. For example, adults with long-term health challenges have gained and sustained employment through bespoke CLD support that raises their self-belief and self-worth. In addition, there are examples of intergenerational and family learning programmes impacting positively on both children’s education and family dynamics. Most participants receive timely support from CLD staff and volunteers, allowing them to make positive changes in their lives. As a result of engaging in CLD learning opportunities, participants say they are becoming more resilient and better equipped to cope with life changes.

Overall, CLD staff and volunteers are successful in creating inclusive, welcoming and learner-driven provision. This is supporting participants living in communities affected by poverty and disadvantage to achieve and progress. However, there are significant resourcing challenges. Many communities face high demand for services, but local authorities and their partners struggle with not enough staff and volunteer hours to meet these needs.

**The importance of volunteers**

Volunteers make a significant difference to the reach and quality of CLD provision across Scotland. Through their work in local authorities, public services, voluntary organisations and community groups, volunteers provide invaluable support to children, young people and adult learners. For example, young volunteers help to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard in local authority-wide decision-making, while many community events that increase cohesion are delivered entirely by volunteers.

Volunteers in CLD come from diverse backgrounds, with many having started as participants in CLD activities. As they transition into volunteer roles and start to contribute to supporting others with their learning and towards their communities developing, many find their confidence and wellbeing improves. This personal growth reflects the value of volunteering, not only for the beneficiaries but also for the volunteers themselves.

Across Scotland, volunteer-led organisations increase the sustainability of communities by delivering large-scale projects, such as building and running facilities. In many local authorities, volunteers have successfully taken over and now manage community assets, further embedding themselves in local development. Community organisations, including development trusts, are delivering a wide range of services such as community shops, improving pathways and learning programmes for all ages. Whilst improving local facilities and services, many are also supporting other community groups in their development.

Strong examples exist of local authorities working well with community organisations to address issues such as extreme weather events. In many areas, volunteers are directly influencing and shaping local services to better meet the needs of their communities. However, despite their significant contributions, the impact of volunteers in local communities is not fully understood, recognised or monitored. This includes their significant contributions to the education system and wider community developments in Scotland.

**Skills for learning life and work**

Through a range of CLD programmes, learners of all ages are gaining skills that support their learning, lives and careers. CLD providers offer a wide range of learning activities and support, from one-day events and short courses to long-term individual support. CLD programmes are highly person-centred, ensuring that each participant develops skills that are relevant to their individual goals and aspirations. In most cases, these programmes help children, young people and adults to build confidence and to apply their skills across different situations in their lives. Most are gaining knowledge and life skills that help them to consider their next steps and, where relevant, their career aspirations. CLD staff and volunteers also help children, young people and adults gain awards or qualifications.

Across most local authorities, CLD partners actively involve children, young people, adult learners and community members in designing learning programmes. Learner progress is often tracked through individual or group learning plans. A few local authorities still need to make better use of these tools to help participants understand and build on their progress.

There is growing, albeit limited, evidence that joint work between school and CLD staff is helping children and young people to improve school attendance and attainment. In the majority of local authorities, CLD partners work closely with school staff to deliver support to young people. This includes young people on flexible learning pathways, those with low levels of attendance and those exhibiting negative behaviours or who are isolated within school. CLD staff support young people well to gain strategies to manage their behaviour, build friendships and enjoy learning. In addition, in the local authorities with effective family learning programmes, parents and carers report increased confidence in supporting their children’s learning, leading to improvements in children’s attendance and attainment.

Over recent years, CLD partners have become more involved in supporting, delivering and leading learning programmes focused on employability. By taking a person-centred and holistic approach, CLD is proving successful in helping some individuals who are furthest from the labour market progress into training, volunteering and employment. For example, there are CLD programmes which help those prisoners recently paroled to gain literacy and numeracy skills, and projects which mentor adults who have limited work experience to build skills and progress to volunteer.

CLD provision is making a significant difference to those gaining core skills including literacy, numeracy, English language and digital inclusion. In the majority of local authorities, through the support of Multiply funding from the UK government’s shared prosperity fund, the number of adult learners improving their numeracy and financial management skills is increasing. English for speakers of other languages learners are gaining valuable language skills as well as knowledge of Scottish culture and systems. They are now better able to participate in their communities and access support that they need. Gaelic learning for young people and adults features prominently in a few local authorities, as part of Gaelic Learning plans. This is helping participants to understand more about their area’s culture and history as well as learn the Gaelic language.

**Achievement**

In the majority of local authorities, CLD partners work effectively to ensure that learning pathways for participants are clear and aligned with their goals and interests. This is supporting learners of all ages to make progress towards, and often achieve, their personal aims and ambitions. In the majority of local authorities, well-defined learning pathways guide adult learners from entry-level learning to more advanced accredited qualifications on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. However, in a few local authorities, young people and adults are not always clear how they can progress in their learning, and learning pathways need to be developed further to provide clearer routes to achievement.

Many young people are developing important skills, such as team working, communication and leadership, by participating in a variety CLD activities. These skills are often recognised through nationally accredited awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, Saltire Awards and Youth Achievement awards. Gaining these skills and awards supports young people to recognise and have more confidence in their own abilities and motivates them to continue developing their skills. CLD partners are aware of the need to better recognise and track the achievements and skills young people are developing both within and outwith school. Whilst there are a few positive examples of CLD staff working with schools effectively to capture, celebrate and build on the achievements of young people, this is not yet happening across all local authorities. A key challenge for Scottish education is ensuring that the skills young people gain through CLD activities are fully recognised and valued as part of their overall development and achievement.

Ensuring that all CLD learners understand and celebrate the progress they are making remains a challenge. There is also a pressing need to increase opportunities for learners of all ages to gain recognised awards or other formal accreditation for their achievements. By expanding access to accredited qualifications, CLD can ensure that learners not only gain valuable skills but also have the credentials to support their further education, employment and personal development.

# Next steps

Between September 2023 and June 2024, HM Inspectors completed a comprehensive programme of visits to all 32 local authorities. This work provided valuable insights into the leadership, governance and impact of CLD provision across Scotland.

In July 2024, the Scottish Government published *Learning: For All. For Life.*, the report from the independent review of community learning and development, led by Kate Still. We now await the Scottish Government's response to this review, which will inform future direction for the CLD sector.

This is a timely opportunity for HM Inspectors to reflect on our approaches to the inspection of CLD provision. By drawing on the findings from our recent programme of visits and being informed by the Scottish Government’s response to the independent review, we will seek to ensure that our inspection work remains relevant, forward-looking and aligned with the evolving needs of learners, communities, and the wider education system. We will remain adaptable and responsive to emerging priorities, regularly reviewing the focus and purpose of thematic inspections at a national level. Through these efforts, we are committed to ensuring that inspection of CLD continues to provide valuable support for driving improvement and meeting the diverse needs of Scotland’s communities.

# Appendix 1 National guidance

CLD work in Scotland is guided by the [Strategic Guidance for Community Planning partnerships: Community learning and development (2012)](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/06/2208). The Strategic Guidance sets out the outcomes for CLD as being:

* Improved life chances for people of all ages, through learning, personal development and active citizenship.
* Stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities.

There are statutory duties on local authorities in regard to CLD [The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2013/175/regulation/1/made). This legislation sets out that all education authorities in Scotland have a statutory duty to secure CLD provision with young people, adult learners and community groups/organisations in their area. The legislation has a requirement for all education authorities to publish a 3-year plan for CLD no later than 1 September 2015; and each third year after the date of publication of the previous plan. The most recent plans were due in September 2024.

“These plans must specify-

(a) how the education authority will coordinate its provision of CLD with other persons that provide CLD within the area of the education authority;

(b) what action the education authority will take to provide CLD over the period of the plan;

(c) what action other persons intend to take to provide CLD within the area of the education authority over the period of the plan; and

(d) any needs for CLD that will not be met within the period of the plan.

An education authority is required to initiate and, having done so, to maintain and facilitate a process by which CLD secured within the area of the education authority is secured in a way that:

a) identifies target individuals and groups;

(b) has regard to the needs of those target individuals and groups for that CLD;

(c) assesses the degree to which those needs are already being met; and

(d) identifies barriers to the adequate and efficient provision of that CLD.”

All children and young people are supported by Scotland’s curriculum, [Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)](https://education.gov.scot/curriculum-for-excellence/curriculum-for-excellence-documents/curriculum-for-excellence-benchmarks/), which places learners at the heart of education. CLD staff and volunteers contribute to the delivery of this curriculum.

[The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Scotland) Act 2024](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2024/1/contents/enacted) was enacted on 16 July 2024. The Act will ensure that children’s rights are respected and protected in Scotland. All [public bodies](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2024/1/section/19/enacted) and organisations that provide services on behalf of a public body must comply with the legislation. This includes CLD services.

Within Scotland, there is a commitment to supporting communities to do things for themselves, and to make their voices heard in the planning and delivery of services. The [Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6)  provided new rights to community bodies and new duties to public sector authorities. CLD staff and volunteers can provide a vital role in enabling communities to participate as partners. This includes following the best practice for public bodies to engage with communities via the [National Standards for Community Engagement.](http://www.voicescotland.org.uk/Seven-NS/)

In July 2024, the Scottish Government published the report from the independent review of CLD, [Learning: For All. For Life. A report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/learning-life-report-independent-review-community-learning-development-cld/).

The Scottish Government’s [Programme for Government 2024-25: Serving Scotland](https://www.gov.scot/publications/programme-government-2024-25-serving-scotland/pages/1/#page-top) sets out the government’s priorities and intentions for the next 4 years. Local authority CLD services and their partners are well placed to contribute to the 4 priorities. These are:

* eradicating child poverty
* growing the economy
* tackling the climate emergency
* improving public services.

# Appendix 2 List of outcomes for all 32 local authority areas

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| [Aberdeen City Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/imodqvsu/cld-aberdeen-city-council-pv-090724.pdf) | Progress report |
| [Aberdeenshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/02lodnqz/cld-aberdeenshire-council-pv-230124.pdf) | Progress report |
| [Angus Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/2ishgroo/cld-angus-council-pv-020724.pdf) | No further action |
| [Argyll and Bute Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/zvanxiql/cld-argyll-and-bute-council-pv-270224.pdf) | Progress report |
| [Clackmannanshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/irmlanw3/clackmannanshire-council-cld-pv-191223.pdf) | No further action |
| Comhairle nan Eilean Siar ([English](https://education.gov.scot/media/aisfujyi/progress-visit-comhairle-nan-eilean-siar.pdf)) ([Gaelic](https://education.gov.scot/media/bjnpgqdx/cld-comhairle-nan-eilean-siar-pv-gaelic-230424.pdf)) | No further action |
| [Dumfries and Galloway Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/scojgaht/cld-dumfries-and-galloway-council-pv-190324.pdf) | No further action |
| [Dundee City Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/zfsidzbz/dundee-city-council-pv-120324.pdf) | No further action |
| [East Ayrshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/2cqlwgn2/east-ayrshire-council-cld-pv-191223.pdf) | No further action |
| [East Dunbartonshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/zc3hvzqq/east-dunbartonshire-council-cld-pv-051223.pdf) | No further action |
| [East Lothian Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/ic5b1qeb/cld-east-lothian-council-pv-160724.pdf) | Further visit |
| [East Renfrewshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/dngdnv4c/east-renfrewshire-council-cld-pv-281123.pdf) | No further action |
| [The City of Edinburgh Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/0ryl2sxr/cld-edinburgh-council-pv-020424.pdf) | Further visit |
| [Falkirk Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/cejnhg1e/cld-falkirk-council-pv-200224.pdf) | No further action |
| [Fife Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/2pobetrk/cld-fife-council-pv-130224.pdf) | Progress report |
| [Glasgow City Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/25bbeshf/cld-glasgow-city-council-pv-280524.pdf) | No further action |
| [The Highland Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/4dzmccq4/cld-highland-council-pv-160724.pdf) | Progress report |
| [Inverclyde Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/xmdp0133/inverclyde-council-progress-visit-230424.pdf) | No further action |
| [Midlothian Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/nzte3qi0/cld-midlothian-council-pv-300424.pdf) | No further action |
| [Moray Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/a4jpdfgx/moray-council-cld-pv-051223.pdf) | Progress report |
| [North Ayrshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/bithotce/north-ayrshire-council-cld-pv-311023.pdf) | No further action |
| [North Lanarkshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/cuebfbfd/cld-north-lanarkshire-council-pv-060224.pdf) | No further action |
| [Orkney Islands Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/yu2h2fju/orkney-islands-council-cld-progress-visit-23-april-2024.pdf) | No further action |
| [Perth and Kinross Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/vyqkq0jt/cld-perth-and-kinross-council-pv-110424.pdf) | No further action |
| [Renfrewshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/ogjfrtts/cld-renfrewshire-council-pv-160424.pdf) | Further visit |
| [Scottish Borders Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/t3sffrdd/cld-scottish-borders-council-pv-230724.pdf) | Further visit |
| [Shetland Islands Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/sjpbntyx/cld-shetland-islands-council-pv-260324.pdf) | No further action |
| [South Ayrshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/hhslobf1/south-ayrshire-council-cld-pv-141123.pdf) | No further action |
| [South Lanarkshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/oe3h2lwi/cld-south-lanarkshire-council-pv-020724.pdf) | No further action |
| [Stirling Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/qd1n4ocy/stirling-council-pv-241023.pdf) | No further action |
| [West Dunbartonshire Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/0a2irx2i/cld-west-dunbartonshire-pv-040624.pdf) | Further visit |
| [West Lothian Council](https://education.gov.scot/media/ot4dg3fa/cld-west-lothian-council-pv-050324.pdf) | No further action |

# Appendix 3 Highly effective practice

There were 31 examples of highly effective practice worth sharing more widely. These were identified across 22 local authorities. A few local authorities had more than one example. Those published to date can be found [here](https://education.gov.scot/inspection-and-review/promoting-improvement-through-sharing-highly-effective-practice/community-learning-and-development/). A summary of the emerging themes is outlined below.

Community development (community-led organisations)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Clackmannanshire Council | * Wimpy Park Community Group delivering a large-scale infrastructure project |
| * Aberdeenshire Council | * Aberchirder Men's Shed helping local people to develop new skills whilst improving their own health and wellbeing |
| * Dumfries and Galloway Council | * Community asset transfers (CAT) |
| * Glasgow City Council | * Strategic Approach to Family Learning in Glasgow City |
| * Angus Council | * Community resilience groups |
| * East Lothian Council | * Young people and older adults attending the weekly “Dinner at Dunbar Grammar School are learning new skills and forming friendships |

Community engagement (participatory budgeting)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * East Renfrewshire Council | * Community-led participatory budgeting (Linking Communities) in East Renfrewshire |

Employability

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * South Ayrshire Council | * Local approach to employability at South Ayrshire Council CLD |
| * East Ayrshire Council | * Alternative education provision in East Ayrshire |

Workforce Development and Employability

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * North Ayrshire Council | * Modern Apprenticeship youth work programme |
| * North Lanarkshire Council | * Local approach to ‘Grow Your Own’ employability pathways in North Lanarkshire |
| * Dumfries and Galloway Council | * Grow our own: Staff and volunteer pathway - Dumfries and Galloway Council CLD |

English for speakers of other languages

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Falkirk Council | * English for speakers of other languages |
| * Dundee City Council | * Partnership working to create better pathways for English speakers of other language learners in Dundee |

New Scots (community development)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Inverclyde Council | * New Scots Youth Group |
| * Aberdeen City Council | * Ukrainian Hub supporting social, cultural and educational activities |

Family learning and intergenerational learning

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Glasgow City Council | * Strategic Approach to Family Learning in Glasgow City |
| * Perth and Kinross Council | * Intergenerational family learning in Perth and Kinross |

Mental health and wellbeing

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Dumfries and Galloway Council | * Mental health support for young people in Dumfries and Galloway |

Tackling poverty and inequality

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Dundee City Council | * An asset-based approach to tackling poverty and inequalities in Dundee |

Alcohol and drugs prevention

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Fife Council | * Developing a community approach to supporting recovery and access to services in Fife Council |
| * South Lanarkshire Council | * ‘GIVIT’ Youth Recovery Service |

Partnership working

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Dundee City Council | * Developing, promoting and sustaining partnership working in Dundee |
| * West Dunbartonshire Council | * Adult Learning Partnership |

Leadership and governance

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Orkney Islands Council | * The leadership and governance of CLD in Orkney Council |

Safeguarding and child and/or adult protection

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Stirling Council | * Protecting vulnerable adults at Bannockburn enterprise hub |
| * Moray Council | * Keeping children and young people safe online at Moray Council CLD |
| * North Lanarkshire Council | * Contextual safeguarding in North Lanarkshire Council |

Youth voice in decision-making

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * East Ayrshire Council | * Young people informing and influencing community planning |

Youth work and schools - partnership working

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * East Renfrewshire Council | * Barrhead High School and CLD youth work partnership |
| * Falkirk Council | * Joint working agreements between the CLD service and schools |

1. [improving-life-chances-and-empowering-communities.pdf (education.gov.scot)](https://education.gov.scot/media/ryklpn1i/improving-life-chances-and-empowering-communities.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)