

Community learning and development

Until 2015 we inspected the learning community¹⁰ surrounding non-denominational secondary schools at the same time as the school was inspected. From 2015 onwards we moved to carrying out inspections which had a focus on learning within a wider local authority area. This included three reviews of Creative Place, in partnership with Creative Scotland; and three reviews of Development Trusts in partnership with Development Trust Association Scotland.

Inspectors identified a number of key strengths in the work of the community learning and development services (CLD). We found that young volunteers were having a positive impact in their local communities and that, increasingly services were supporting family learning and parenting in partnership with schools.

Inspectors found that, while approaches to self-evaluation across community learning and development partners are improving, there is more to do. There is also scope to capture and measure the impact that volunteering has on individuals and communities. The sector now needs to consider what provision can be put in place to support professional development and training of the workforce.

How well are partners improving learning, increasing life chances, promoting and securing wellbeing?

Inspectors identified some key strengths in the work of CLD. These included effective support for increasing learners' employability and life skills, and well designed activities which improved individuals' mental health and wellbeing and increased confidence and self-esteem. We found that most CLD provision was targeted appropriately at those most in need. Most provision also made a strong contribution to increasing the number of young people achieving a range of accredited awards. For some vulnerable, disadvantaged or less confident young people, we found that participation in accredited youth awards was helping to build their resilience and for a few, this was positively life-changing.

Overall, the number of young people gaining youth awards has increased, including the numbers of young people volunteering through award schemes such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Youth Achievement Award and Saltire awards. As a result, nationally, volunteering is strong in many learning communities. We found that volunteers, including young volunteers, were helping to increase life chances and build a stronger sense of community.

We noted that many young people who attended youth groups and other out-of-school activity were gaining a wide range of skills that complement those they were gaining elsewhere. Increasing numbers of young people could articulate what they were learning. Inspectors found that volunteers and community groups were building their skills, confidence and capacity through good quality support and training from a wide range of CLD providers in the public and third sectors.

¹⁰ The range of publicly funded CLD providers within the geographical areas surrounding non-denominational secondary schools

In many learning communities, inspectors found that adult learners benefited from provision that was increasing their literacy and numeracy skills, including well-targeted learning aimed at the most disadvantaged and those with low levels of qualifications. Many adults progressed to other learning and employment as a result of the support from CLD providers. Inspectors judged the provision that was helping learners whose first language is not English progress to other learning, employment and further and higher education to be of good quality. However, we identified gaps in the provision of opportunities for family and adult learning in a few learning communities.

In almost all learning communities, inspectors identified that a common strength was the way in which community-led organisations engaged effectively with their local community. We highlighted that in the most effective examples, local people were empowered to influence decision-making in their local communities. Local people increasingly secured new services and created employment opportunities in disadvantaged areas, for example through the creation of development trusts. There is scope for providers to involve local people and community groups more in decision-making processes, including Community Planning Partnerships.

How well are partners working together and improving the quality of services and provision?

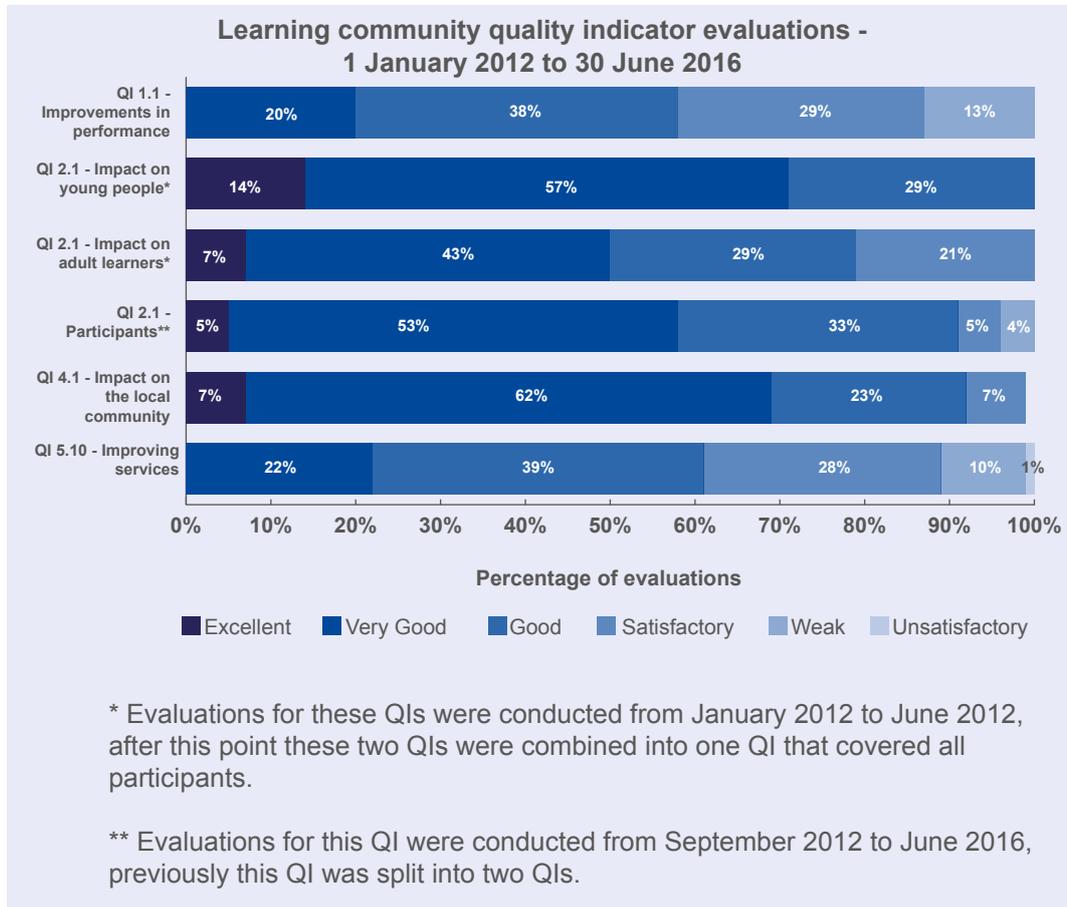
Across CLD, inspectors have seen growing evidence of partners working together more effectively to improve the quality of provision over the period of this report. In most learning communities, partners were clear about their roles and how they contributed to community learning and development locally. In the best examples, we saw partnerships that were well-developed and based on mutual trust and respect. In a few learning communities, there is more to do to ensure coherent delivery of services and to minimise duplication.

We have also seen increasing evidence of effective partnership working between community learning and development providers and schools. We found that, in secondary schools, local businesses and community organisations are increasingly contributing to the curriculum. This is leading to a clearer focus in some schools on improving skills for learning, life and work. This was most effective when teachers and community learning and development staff planned and evaluated learning experiences together. Inspectors often noted that CLD staff working in schools were making a valued contribution to supporting young people's learning, in particular those who face additional challenges. Examples included home/school partnership officers working directly with families to improve attainment and achievement, and family learning.

While planning for improvement was strong in a few local authority CLD services, many others need to make better use of evidence to inform future priorities. Joint self-evaluation and planning between CLD services and their partners remains an under-developed area.

In June 2012, the Scottish Government issued the [Community Learning and Development Strategic Guidance](#) directed at Community Planning Partnerships. This in turn led to the requirement that all local authorities must produce a Community Learning and Development plan. In the most effective examples we saw, partnership structures were supporting the development of these plans. As a result, a shared sense of purpose and ownership has been developed. In a few cases, however, plans were not sufficiently specific or measurable.

In a majority of local authorities there has been a decline in numbers of staff in community learning and development roles in the past five years. With more demands, fewer full-time staff and greater reliance on part-time staff and volunteers, more needs to be done to support professional development and training at all levels of the community learning and development workforce to maintain the quality of service, including investing further in the development of leadership.



Partners working together in community learning and development to support young people

In Midlothian Council, learning pathways provided by Lifelong Learning and Employability (LLE) are improving the life chances of young people. These targeted programmes cover 10 career areas and are supporting those in greatest need effectively. The Learning Pathways, Pave and Pave 2 are an integral part of the learning provision of the council and work closely with all the high schools in the area. The service uses a joint approach to meet the needs of children and young people experiencing a range of social, emotional and behavioural needs and who are disengaged from mainstream education. The team offers flexible support to re-engage young people with learning and careers helping them to achieve their potential. The learning is tailored to individual need and is regularly reviewed. There is a high level of commitment and intensive support from the team towards building up strong, trusting relationships with young people. Some young people are going on to gain Saltire and Youth Achievement awards. The pathways are progressive, supporting and rekindle the interest and belief of young people to secure their next steps whether that be increased accreditation, volunteering, college or sector specific jobs such as retail, admin, green pathway, or music.

Quote from Mum: *“She has went from lying around all day and being quite depressed and unhappy to having more of a spring in her step and is much more motivated. I’m really glad your workers knocked on the door and helped my daughter access the green pathway.”*

Quote from an LLE worker: *“One of the young people I have supported was very quiet and did not speak very much. I liaised with CITB and his brother’s painting company to set up a modern apprenticeship. He is now working five days a week, some night shifts and also weekends. I noticed a massive change, he appeared more confident, talkative and working everyday was having a positive impact on his self-development. The young person and his family were very appreciative of the support from me and the social work team.”*

