

Why employers in the public and 3rd sectors need professional CLD practitioners

Public policy goals, public services and the CLD competences

Community Learning and Development (CLD) practitioners have a distinctive set of competences that makes them essential to the achievement of core public policy goals¹.

Public service providers in both the public and third sectors seek to work in partnership with the communities they serve, close the “attainment gap” through more inclusive education, co-produce more of their services with the people that use them, and strengthen the capacity of people and communities to shape their own futures. While professionals in many disciplines seek to do their jobs in ways that contribute to these aims, the competence framework that guides CLD practitioners focuses on them as their core purpose.

As a result, the need for CLD practitioners in a wide variety of job roles that require skills in informal education and empowering participants, communities, and service users is increasingly recognised. Some of these job roles fit clearly within the well-established disciplines of youth work, adult learning and community development; some don't, while just as clearly applying CLD methods.

As CLD practice, whether described as such or not, plays an increasingly important role, it is essential to ensure its quality.

Assuring quality CLD practice

As they shift towards services that work with people and communities, rather than for them, there are strong reasons for employers to employ professional CLD practitioners, with qualifications appropriate to the roles they undertake.

CLD practitioners often start by working in their own communities, for example as an active member of a community group, or a volunteer working with young people or with people developing their literacy skills. The way in which the CLD profession is organised, and the learning pathways that are available, enable people who have previously had few education or career opportunities to develop as professionals and achieve qualifications.

Ultimately the reason for employers to employ professional CLD practitioners with appropriate qualifications is the same as for employing professionally qualified practitioners in any other setting: that this is the best available and most effective means of assuring the suitability of the practitioners carrying out essential work with people of all ages in communities.

¹ See for example Scottish Government Strategic Guidance to Community Planning Partnerships on CLD: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/06/2208>

This paper shows how this quality assurance works and expands on the reasons why providers of public services need professional CLD practitioners with appropriate qualifications. It outlines how professional CLD practitioners:

- Bring added value;
- Undertake approved qualifications;
- Commit themselves to recognised Values and a Code of Ethics;
- Are guided by a framework of Competences;
- Commit themselves to continuing professional learning;
- Can register as members of a recognised professional body;
- Have a distinctive role in achieving public policy goals; and
- Are needed to meet statutory obligations.

Professional CLD practitioners bring added value

CLD has a fully distinctive role, rooted in the key elements of its practice, which makes it essential to the achievement of core public policy goals. The impact of CLD is achieved not as a “support” to other core disciplines but as a distinct profession working in partnership with them in order to deliver better outcomes for communities.

To achieve this impact, CLD practitioners require a wide range of complex skills, knowledge and understanding. These relate for example to: the nature of communities and the development of community organisations; individual development and models of practice related to the stages of this; community-based education, critical dialogue and developmental groupwork; as well as more generic aspects of professional practice such as effective communication, self-management, evaluation and research.

The contexts (community, policy, economic, social, political) in which these competences need to be applied are subject to rapid change. The distinctive role of CLD, and the impact it has on key public policy goals, requires professional practitioners who are properly prepared for it and who continue to refresh and update their competences.

Scottish Government guidance refers to “an integrated approach to all stages of professional learning” and “a core of highly skilled practitioners”:

“We want to see an integrated approach to all stages of professional learning. A core of highly skilled practitioners will remain essential to achieving the impact we expect from CLD.” (Scottish Government, Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships on CLD, 2012).

A degree-level qualification in CLD approved by the CLD Standards Council², together with verified practice experience, provides the benchmark for this “core”, and the CLD Standards Council’s Individual Recognition Process provides a means for highly skilled practitioners who do not have an approved qualification to be recognised as part of this it.

² <http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/>

Employers may also need other CLD practitioners, often working around and alongside this core, whose roles require different levels of skill, knowledge and understanding. However assuring the quality and professionalism of their practice is equally essential given its impact on communities and the sensitivity of many of the contexts in which they work.

The CLD Standards Council requires all members to commit to practise in line with the values, code of ethics and competences of the profession, and to have this verified by a referee, and sets clear expectations for continuing professional learning. The Standards Council also approves a range of qualifications at below degree level, including the Working with Communities HNC. Membership of the CLD Standards Council, and possession of an approved qualification, provide employers with means of assuring the competence of CLD practitioners at all levels.

Professional CLD practitioners undertake approved qualifications

The CLD Standards Council Scotland has as part of its core remit to “Deliver a professional approvals structure for qualifications, courses and development opportunities for everyone involved in CLD”. This structure supports learning pathways for practitioners and provides assurance for employers that practitioners have undertaken programmes that meet quality standards, focus on professional competence and link knowledge to practice skills.

The Professional Approval route provides quality assurance of learning opportunities in CLD offered at degree and post graduate level. The process involves a significant written submission followed by a panel visit to the provider. Learning opportunities at degree and post graduate level must also achieve academic validation.

Qualifications approved by the CLD Standards Council must include a substantial component of supervised and assessed practice, comprising at least 40% of the curriculum.

As for other disciplines, the quality of degree and post graduate level courses is underpinned by a Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education’s Subject Benchmark Statement, in this instance for Youth and Community Work. Following a Review, a 2nd edition of this was published in February 2017³.

The Subject Benchmark Statement makes clear the wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding that professional CLD practitioners are expected to have acquired; these relate for example to:

- Working in and with communities.
- Working with young people; working with adults.
- Approaches to learning and development and reflective practice.
- Developing community-based organisations.
- Understanding, developing and managing their professional role.

³ https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/sbs-youth-and-community-work-17.pdf?sfvrsn=fb97f781_10

- Fostering democratic and inclusive practice.
- Maintaining and developing organisations which support practice.
- Facilitating personal and collective learning, development and capacity building.
- Networking and multi-agency working.
- Generic skills such as self-management, communication and research.

The CLD Standards Council's Developmental Approval process offers quality assurance for programmes and qualifications below degree level. Programmes need to have been validated by the SQA (or be delivered by an SQA Approved Centre).

Professional CLD practitioners commit themselves to recognised Values and a Code of Ethics

The Standards Council, building on the work of predecessor bodies, has worked with partners to articulate:

- The values that inform all CLD practice;
- The Code of Ethics for CLD; and
- The CLD Competences.

The Values that CLD practitioners commit themselves to are:

- Self-determination.
- Inclusion.
- Empowerment.
- Working collaboratively.
- Promotion of learning as a lifelong activity.

Through the Code of Ethics⁴ Professional CLD practitioners commit themselves to their constituents as their "primary clients", and to a set of principles that enable them to apply their professional values to practice.

Professional CLD practitioners are guided by a framework of Competences

Professional CLD practitioners commit themselves to practice using the CLD Competence Framework⁵, with these 7 Competences at its core:

- Know and understand the community in which we work.
- Build and maintain relationships with individuals and groups.
- Provide learning and development opportunities in a range of contexts.
- Facilitate and promote community empowerment.
- Organise and manage resources.
- Develop and support collaborative working.
- Evaluate and inform practice.

The values, Code of Ethics and competences enable CLD practitioners to take responsibility for their own practice as critically reflective professionals. They provide

⁴ <http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/resources/code-of-ethics/>

⁵ <http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CompetentPractitionerFramework.pdf>

assurance to employers that practitioners can be expected to do this, and a means to hold them to account.

Professional CLD practitioners commit themselves to continuing professional learning

Like other professionals, CLD practitioners work in a constantly-changing environment. Through the CLD Code of Ethics, they make the commitment that they:

“Will work reflectively, identifying and using the information, resources, skills, knowledge and practices needed to improve our capacity to meet our obligations to constituents.”

*Growing the Learning Culture in CLD*⁶ sets out a professional learning strategy based on the commitment of practitioners alongside their employers, learning providers and other partners. Like the Code of Ethics, it was developed by the CLD Standards Council working with practitioners and learning providers..

The Standards Council Standard Mark⁷ supports employers to ensure that CLD practitioners have access to the quality professional learning opportunities they need.

CLD practitioners are supported by a framework for professional development and those who are registered members of the CLD Standards Council make a commitment to continuing professional learning. This provides assurance for employers, and together with the Standards Council Standard Mark assists them in supporting the development of their CLD workforce.

Professional CLD practitioners can register as members of a recognised professional body

The CLD Standards Council is the professional body for community learning and development practitioners, established on the direction of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning in 2008. It is a member-led body with a mission to “drive high standards of professional practice in the CLD sector by the approval of professional learning, the registration of practitioners and the enabling of professional development, working with our members to be a voice for the profession.”

All registered members of the CLD Standards Council commit to specified standards of behaviour and to undertake appropriate professional learning. The CLD Standards Council is introducing a requirement for members to re-register every three years, and a professional learning and review process. There will be a process of review as to how and whether re-registrants have met the expectations for professional

⁶ <http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/cpd/cpd-strategy/>

⁷ <http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/approval/standards-council-standards-mark/>

learning. A process for decisions on de-registration of individual members, where serious issues relating to conduct and/or practice arise, is in place.⁸

The CLD Standards Council has a growing registered membership (over 2300 in April 2019) and as a result engages an increasing range of CLD practitioners with improving standards, raising quality and enhancing impact. Employers can support this, and enhance their own ability to assure the quality of services, by encouraging all their CLD practitioners to register with the Standards Council.

Professional CLD practitioners have a distinctive role in achieving public policy goals

Value-based CLD practice and the competences of CLD practitioners have a key role in achieving the national outcomes and Scottish Government policy priorities. This currently includes in particular:

- The following National Outcomes:
 - We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society.
 - We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.
 - We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally.
- Policy priorities of community empowerment, closing the attainment gap and improving employability.

Competent CLD practitioners have readily transferable skills, for example in working collaboratively and supporting others to do so. This is particularly valuable in the context of public service reform and the importance of partnership working between service providers in the public and third sectors and with communities

CLD as a profession is also socially necessary in a much broader, longer-term sense. By actively engaging those who are excluded from social processes that shape their lives, and through its use of informal education as a means to transform

⁸ There are 2 categories of membership: Registered Members and Registered Associate Members.

Becoming a Registered Member of the CLD Standards Council requires the achievement of a BA degree (or equivalent postgraduate qualification) recognised by the Council and two years verified practice in a CLD setting. As outlined above, this is recognised as defining the benchmark for the “core of highly-skilled practitioners” essential to the provision of high-quality services to individuals, groups and communities. Practitioners without a recognised degree who demonstrate their competence to practise at this same benchmark level through the CLD Standards Council Individual Recognition Process can also become Registered Members. Registered Members have an essential role in providing direction, higher-level skills and the capacity to develop the role and impact of the profession.

CLD practitioners who do not hold a degree (or equivalent postgraduate qualification) recognised by the Standards Council can achieve professional recognition and make a commitment to the CLD Values, Code of Ethics and Competences by registering as Associate Members of the Standards Council. This includes practitioners who hold CLD qualifications such as HNCs or Modern Apprenticeships, or in another discipline, and those who do not have a qualification but have verified experience in CLD. It includes practitioners in paid (full-time or part-time) and volunteer roles

situations, structures, communities and individuals it will continue to repay investment long after specific policies and priorities have changed.

Professional CLD practitioners are needed to meet statutory obligations

The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013⁹ clarified the statutory obligations on local authorities to work with their partners to secure the provision of CLD.

The CLD Regulations are subordinate legislation made under section 2 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Section 1 of the Act requires each local authority to secure in their area adequate and efficient provision of further education, which in this context includes CLD and is not age limited.¹⁰

A range of other statutes, notably the Community Empowerment Act, include requirements that can be most effectively met with the involvement of professional CLD practitioners.

Conclusion

The values, ethics, skills, knowledge and understanding required for competent CLD practice are clearly defined. Processes to assure the suitability of professionally qualified CLD practitioners in relation to these requirements for competent practice are in place. The Scottish Government supports these processes and places a high value on the role of CLD in delivering key policies.

Employers can be effective in closing the “attainment gap” through more inclusive education, in developing partnerships with the communities they serve, in co-producing more of their services with the people that use them, and in strengthening the capacity of communities to shape their own futures by:

- Employing professional CLD practitioners, including a highly skilled core group;
- Ensuring that these practitioners have qualifications that are appropriate to their role and approved by the CLD Standards Council;
- Requiring or encouraging them to register as members of the CLD Standards Council;
- Using the CLD competence framework and Code of Ethics to support their CLD practitioners and hold them to account;
- Achieving the Standards Council Standards Mark.

⁹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2013/175/introduction/made>

¹⁰ See Guidance on *The Requirements for CLD (Scotland) Regulations 2013*
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7b8EYXAkdl0UDVtTzlpV2g0blU/view>

The diagram below was used in the 2012 Strategic Guidance on CLD for Community Planning Partnerships to illustrate the policy context for CLD in Scotland. A number of specific policies have been replaced or amended, but it continues to provide a useful picture of the pivotal role of CLD.

