
CLD Workforce Survey 2025-2026

A Rocket Science report for CLD Standards
Council

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1. Executive summary

This report presents findings from the 2025–26 Community Learning and Development (CLD) Workforce Survey, commissioned by the CLD Standards Council and delivered by Rocket Science. It provides an updated picture of the size, shape and experiences of the CLD workforce in Scotland, including paid practitioners, volunteers, employers and key stakeholders.

The evidence highlights a sector facing rising demand, constrained capacity and uneven professional support, and points to priority actions for workforce planning, professional learning, and strengthening standards and recognition.

1.1 Background

CLD plays a critical role in supporting lifelong learning, community empowerment and tackling inequality across Scotland. It is delivered through a wide range of local authority services, third sector organisations and community groups, with a substantial contribution from volunteers. However, the diversity of delivery models and job titles means there is no single, consistent source of workforce data. The 2025–26 survey updates the evidence base first established in 2015 and refreshed in 2018, providing intelligence to inform national and local planning, investment and professional support.

The survey was redesigned using stakeholder insight and cognitive pre-testing to improve clarity, accessibility and relevance across respondent groups. It was delivered online and promoted through coordinated national and local communications, including targeted outreach to under-represented groups such as third sector staff and volunteers. In total, 849 responses were received: 80% practitioners, 9% volunteers, 7% stakeholders and 5% employers. Findings are reported descriptively and segmented by respondent group, with small base sizes interpreted cautiously where applicable.

Responses indicate that CLD activity continues to centre on community development, youth work and adult learning, delivered through a mix of permanent and fixed-term paid roles alongside extensive voluntary contribution. The workforce profile suggests long tenure in the sector and an ageing practitioner base, with limited pipeline of younger entrants.

The survey also highlights ongoing challenges around representation: respondents remain predominantly White, and a notable proportion of practitioners and volunteers report long-term conditions or disabilities, underscoring the importance of inclusive employment practices and support.

- **Rising demand, constrained capacity:** most respondent groups report increasing demand for CLD services, alongside perceptions of decreasing budgets and insufficient resources to meet need.
- **Workforce sustainability pressures:** practitioners report increased workload and pressure, while employers describe mixed trends in paid staffing and increased reliance on volunteers in some contexts.

- **Skills needs and barriers to professional learning:** digital capability, leadership/management and evaluation skills are prominent development needs. Funding constraints and lack of staff time are key barriers to meeting these needs.
- **Professional identity and registration are unevenly embedded:** 76.2% of practitioners and 47.8% of volunteers report being registered with the CLD Standards Council, yet 53% of employers neither require, expect nor encourage registration—indicating inconsistent organisational expectations.
- **Equality and representation remain challenges:** the responding workforce remains less ethnically diverse than Scotland’s population, suggesting a need for targeted action on recruitment, progression and inclusive pathways into CLD.

The findings point to a widening gap between policy ambition for CLD and the system capacity available to deliver it. To protect and strengthen CLD’s contribution, the findings support the development of a national CLD workforce plan, aligned with the Independent Review of CLD (2024), and recommends action across five areas: improving workforce sustainability and wellbeing; strengthening diversity, inclusion and entry pathways; addressing priority skills needs through accessible, planned CPD; improving workforce planning, recruitment and retention; and raising the profile and consistent recognition of CLD, including clearer expectations and support for professional registration and membership.

1.2 Methodology

The survey was redesigned in collaboration with stakeholders to improve clarity, relevance and accessibility across different respondent groups. A revised questionnaire was developed using insights from the previous surveys and consultations with the CLD Standards Council and sector partners, and was then refined through cognitive pre-testing to ensure questions were consistently understood. The final survey was delivered online between December 2025 and April 2026, supported by coordinated communications through national networks and local distribution routes.

In total, 849 responses were received: 80% practitioners, 9% volunteers, 7% stakeholders and 5% employers. Promotion included targeted outreach to groups that have historically been under-represented, including third sector staff and volunteers, although some groups remain smaller in the response base and findings should be interpreted with caution where numbers are low. Results are presented descriptively and, where appropriate, segmented by respondent type to highlight similarities and differences in experience and perspective.

1.3 Summary of key findings

The survey received 849 responses (80% practitioners, 9% volunteers, 7% stakeholders and 5% employers), representing a lower overall response than 2018, while awareness of CLD among respondents was very high (97.8%). Employers report that CLD activity spans all three practice areas, with the strongest emphasis on community development (55%), followed by youth work (52%) and adult learning (45%) (small employer base: n=42). Most practitioners (76%) use the term CLD to describe their job, though a sizeable minority prefer more specific role labels to reduce perceived complexity—highlighting both strong identification and some ongoing ambiguity in how CLD is named and understood across settings.

Professional registration is unevenly embedded: 76.2% of practitioners and 47.8% of volunteers report being registered members or associate members of the CLD Standards Council, yet 53% of employers neither require, expect nor encourage registration, suggesting inconsistent organisational expectations. The workforce profile raises sustainability concerns, with an ageing practitioner base (responses clustering in the 45–64 age bands) and a limited under-35 pipeline, alongside mixed staffing trends since 2018—38% of employers report fewer paid staff while 44% report increased volunteering, implying that pressure is being absorbed partly through volunteers. Diversity also remains a challenge: over 90% of respondents identify as White (similar to 2018 and above Scotland's 87% census figure), while a notable minority report long-term conditions or disabilities, strengthening the case for inclusive support. Skills and CPD pinch points are clear—digital skills and leadership/management are the most common development needs, and employers most often struggle to recruit evaluative skills—yet time and funding constraints are repeatedly cited barriers. These issues sit within a wider context of rising demand (76% of employers, 54% of stakeholders and 69% of practitioners report increases), demand exceeding supply (81% of employers and around half of practitioners/volunteers), and reported budget decreases since 2018 (55%).

1.4 Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the findings point to a widening gap between policy ambition for CLD and the system capacity available to deliver it. Rising demand, workforce pressures and uneven professional support underline the need for coordinated national and local action to sustain delivery, strengthen standards and invest in the skills, wellbeing and diversity of the workforce. The recommendations below summarise the priority actions set out in Section 6.2.

- **Workforce sustainability and wellbeing:** reduce workload pressures through improved resourcing, clearer prioritisation and capacity reviews; and strengthen staff wellbeing through effective supervision and supportive policies.
- **Workforce diversity and inclusion:** build a stronger pipeline of younger entrants; and strengthen inclusive employment practices and reasonable adjustments for staff and volunteers with disabilities and long-term conditions.
- **Skills development and progression pathways:** prioritise development in digital skills and leadership/management; expand training and resources on evaluation and impact; and improve visibility and accessibility of pathways into and through CLD, including opportunities to gain qualifications.
- **Recruitment, retention and workforce planning:** strengthen long-term workforce planning in response to demand outstripping supply; and target recruitment and progression activity towards priority groups, including young people and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- **Raising the profile and value of CLD:** build public and partner awareness of CLD's contribution; improve visibility of CLD careers and sector impact; and introduce a progressive expectation that people working or volunteering in CLD roles become members of the CLD Standards Council.
- **Budgets and funding:** clarify and strengthen funding expectations so investment is more consistent and sustainable, and decision-makers better understand what CLD funding enables.

2. Introduction and context

2.1 Task and scope of the research

This report presents results from the 2025-26 Community Learning and Development (CLD) workforce survey undertaken by Rocket Science. This work was commissioned by the CLD Standards Council, the professional body for those working in CLD roles.

CLD is grounded in an inclusive, education-focused approach that seeks to empower individuals and communities to actively participate in, and influence, their own learning and development. It covers a broad spectrum of activity, including community development, youth work, adult learning in community settings, provision for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, health and wellbeing initiatives, and volunteer development. It is delivered across a range of organisations and contexts, including local authorities, third sector organisations, and volunteer-led groups. This diversity is a key strength but also creates challenges, as there is no single, consistent source of workforce data capturing capacity, roles, skills, and deployment across Scotland.

Up-to-date and evidence-based workforce intelligence is essential to support effective planning and investment, inform a national CLD workforce plan, strengthen policy and improvement support, and enable local and regional partners to align provision with identified needs and demand. It also supports efforts to ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the CLD sector in responding to community demand.

This research builds on the 2018 workforce survey by providing an updated baseline and enabling comparison over time where possible. It also seeks to address known gaps in participation by using targeted engagement and communications to better include under-represented groups, particularly third sector staff and volunteers, ensuring the findings are inclusive, credible, and practically useful.

2.1.1 2015 and 2018 surveys

The CLD Standards Council undertook workforce surveys in 2015 and 2018 to develop a reliable evidence base about the CLD workforce in Scotland, to inform policy, workforce planning, and professional development.

- The 2015 survey was conducted to address a lack of up-to-date national data, providing a baseline picture of the size, roles, and structure of both paid staff and volunteers across the sector.
- The 2018 survey updated the data and enabled changes to be tracked over time. It aimed to identify workforce trends, challenges, and capacity issues, including whether the sector had sufficient staffing and skills to meet community needs.

2.2 About CLD in Scotland

CLD in Scotland refers to a distinct educational based approach to lifelong learning that aims to empower individuals and communities to participate actively in, and shape their own, learning and development.

CLD involves a wide range of individuals and organisations, including learners, young people, community members, community volunteers, local authorities, voluntary and charity sector organisations, educational institutions, and other organisations across the public and third sectors. It is delivered in diverse settings and sectors, by practitioners with a wide variety of job titles and volunteer roles, working with people of all ages.

The areas of CLD practice are widely understood and accepted as being [community-based adult learning \(including ESOL, community development and youth work\)](#).¹

CLD has an impact on a wide range of public policy objectives, and many aspects of policy and legislation affect the context for CLD practice.²

- The Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships (2012)³ sets out the Scottish Government's commitment to CLD as a consistent, central element of public services stating: "We see [CLD] as empowering people, individually and collectively, to make positive changes in their lives and in their communities, through learning."
- The main statutory basis for CLD is provided by The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013⁴, as well as the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, 2015.⁵

2.2.1 CLD as a profession

CLD is a field of professional practice that:⁶

- Enables people to identify their own individual and collective goals, engage in learning, and take action to bring about change for themselves and their communities.
- Uses a range of formal and informal methods of learning and social development with individuals and groups in their communities.

¹ Local Authority CLD Budget Allocation, Financial Year 2025-26, *CLD Standards Council*, (2026). [Link](#)

² A Guide to Community Learning & Development in Scotland, *CLD Standards Council*, (2025). [Link](#)

³ Strategic guidance for community planning partnerships: community learning and development, *Scottish Government*, (2012). [Link](#)

⁴ The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations, *Scottish Statutory Instruments*, (2013). [Link](#)

⁵ Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, *Scottish Government*, (2017). [Link](#)

⁶ A Guide to Community Learning & Development in Scotland, *CLD Standards Council*, (2025). [Link](#)

- Develops programmes and activities in dialogue with communities and participants, working particularly with those excluded from participation in the decisions and processes that shape their lives

CLD practitioners work in various contexts; from local authority and third sector organisations to further and higher education institutions and national agencies.

2.2.2 Professional support for CLD

The [CLD Standards Council](#) is the professional body for people who work or volunteer in CLD.⁷ It works with members to be a voice for the CLD profession and supports the development of consistent and high standards of professional practice. It sets out the Values of CLD⁸, Code of Ethics⁹, and competencies of CLD practitioners¹⁰ which are fundamental to the practice of CLD across all of its different settings.

[Education Scotland](#) also supports the CLD sector in a range of ways¹¹, including:

- providing professional advice and guidance to the sector
- engaging with national policy implementation and embedding policy in practice
- supporting professional learning for CLD, including national practice networks¹²
- targeting improvement support, working alongside local authority CLD providers and partners
- supporting CLD link officers for each of the 32 local authorities

2.2.3 Local authority planning and funding of CLD

Local authorities have a responsibility to initiate, maintain and facilitate a process by which CLD is secured within the area of the education authority, and Education authorities are required to publish three year plans for CLD.

CLD services are solely located within the education directorates of local authorities¹³, and are in practice organised by various governance arrangements. Most CLD Partnerships have representation from local authorities, the police, Further Education colleges, health boards and the voluntary sector.

⁷ What is the CLD Standards Council?, *CLD Standards Council*. [Link](#)

⁸ Values of CLD, *CLD Standards Council*. [Link](#)

⁹ Code of Ethics, *CLD Standards Council*. [Link](#)

¹⁰ Competences, *CLD Standards Council*. [Link](#)

¹¹ Community Learning and Development (CLD), *Education Scotland*. [Link](#)

¹² Professional learning for Community Learning and Development, *Education Scotland*. [Link](#)

¹³ Local Authority CLD Budget Allocation, Financial Year 2024-2025, *CLD Standards Council*, (2025). [Link](#)

The Scottish Government Community Learning and Development: Guidance for 2024-2027¹⁴ outlined the national policy context for community learning and development (CLD) that education authorities should be aware of in complying with the Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013 during the period of 2024 - 2027.

The CLD Standards Council has undertaken three annual reviews of local authority budget allocation for CLD services to collate a data set of budget allocations aligned to the statutory CLD planning requirements. Although the CLD Standards Council state that it is not possible to have a comprehensive data overview as local authorities allocate their budgets in different ways and for some aspects can only provide approximate amounts due to internal financial procedures.¹⁵

The CLD Standards Council report of local authority CLD budget allocation for 2024/25¹⁸ observed an increase in the number of local authorities moving their CLD services from a single service as reported in 2023/24, to a combination of one or more service areas in 2024/25. The CLD Standards Council highlight that multi-service CLD delivery in local authorities presents a challenge for professional practice and professional support requirements.

The CLD Independent Review¹⁶ undertaken in 2023-24 by Kate Still also detailed the challenges related to local authorities having their CLD services located in one or more service delivery areas, including the dilution of professional recognition of CLD as a single unified profession. The review included a recommendation for a process to improve consistency regarding where CLD is situated within local authority structures across all 32 Local Authorities.

The Independent Review also recommended that the Scottish Government and COSLA establish a joint community learning and development strategic group. The Community Learning and Development Strategic Leadership Group¹⁷ was established in December 2024 to provide sustained strategic leadership, working to set out and deliver a clear, learner-centred vision of how CLD will provide the best outcomes for Scotland's communities and the people in them.

The CLD Standards Council 2024/25 budget allocation report¹⁸ outlined a reduction in spend and downward trend in the availability of resource for the CLD sector. The CLD Independent Review¹⁹, reporting in 2024, stated that there was an urgent need to reconsider the current weight of funding to ensure CLD receives the resources it requires.

¹⁴ Community Learning and Development: Guidance for 2024-2027, *Scottish Government*, (2024). [Link](#)

¹⁵ Local Authority CLD Budget Allocation, Financial Year 2025-26, *CLD Standards Council*, (2026). [Link](#)

¹⁶ Learning: For All. For Life. A report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD), *Scottish Government*, (2024). [Link](#)

¹⁷ Community Learning and Development Strategic Leadership Group, *Scottish Government*, (2024). [Link](#)

¹⁸ Local Authority CLD Budget Allocation, Financial Year 2024-2025, *CLD Standards Council*, (2025). [Link](#)

¹⁹ Learning: For All. For Life. A report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD), *Scottish Government*, (2024). [Link](#)

The latest CLD Standards Council budget allocation report is for the financial year 2025/26²⁰ and stated that the reduction for the third financial year of conducting the annual reviews demonstrates the continued downward trend in the availability of resource for the sector.

²⁰ Local Authority CLD Budget Allocation, Financial Year 2025-26, *CLD Standards Council*, (2026). [Link](#)

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodology overview

Between December 2025 and April 2026, Rocket Science led work to redevelop, collect, and analyse the 2025-26 CLD workforce survey. A five-phase methodology was conducted.

3.1.1 Inception and planning

An inception meeting with the CLD Standards Council was held to agree the research approach and key questions. Rocket Science then reviewed the 2018 survey, mapped existing labour market intelligence, and engaged key stakeholders and sector bodies early to ensure alignment and support in the early stages.

3.1.2 Qualitative insight and survey design

Online group discussions with 32 stakeholders representing a diverse cross-section of the CLD workforce; including stakeholders, influencers and associates of the CLD Standards Council, generated in-depth insights into workforce challenges, skills needs, and employer demand. Detailed findings from this qualitative stakeholder engagement are presented in section 4 research findings.

Findings from the stakeholder engagement directly informed the redesign of the national survey. The 2018 survey was updated to;

- Adapted to reflect the changes in delivery in the CLD sector and organisational structures.
- Refined definitions and routing so respondents could more easily select role/capacity they were responding – with all following questions appropriate to the audience type.
- Ensured language was clear and explicit, recognising the barriers in sectors, e.g. voluntary, in identifying with the CLD sector.
- Included items on registration and professional identity.
- Tested the survey design, framing, and comprehension in cognitive pre-testing group discussions.

3.1.3 Cognitive pre-testing

The groups were designed to identify where stakeholders would interpret survey questions differently, struggle to answer, or don't feel safe answering honestly. It prioritised depth over coverage by testing a carefully selected subset in detail and scanning remaining questions for any ambiguity.

The core principles of the sessions were to make it clear to participants that they were testing the survey, to focus on how people interpret and answer questions and if there are any confusion or disagreements. In the group setting it was important to also protect solo thinking times, to avoid any dominating voices creating a consensus.

Structure of the sessions:

- Introductions and framing: explanation of the sessions purpose and how it differs from a usual research focus group.
- Warm up: quick discussion on what makes workforce surveys hard to answer honestly and what can drive drop-off or completion.
- Silent completion of a curated subset: participants answered selected questions individually and noted where or why they may be disrupted. The questions included demographics, key outcomes, sensitive or evaluative items, and open end text.
- Targeted probing and discussion: this section used structured probes for ease, hesitation, interpretation, decision process, response-option fit, and comfort answering honestly – going question by question.
- Fast scan of remaining questions: rapid scroll for confusing, repetitive, unnecessary, or risky items.
- Wrap up and prioritisation: identifying the two or three most worrying questions, most important to get right, and where questions can be cut if needed.

After the session, there was a list of high-risk questions, clear evidence for why changes are needed, concrete rewording or cuts, and estimates of perceived versus actual survey length.

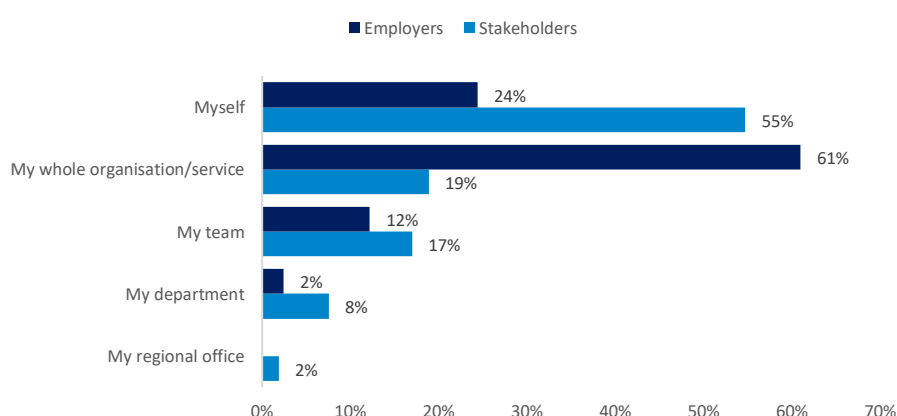
3.1.4 National survey delivery

The survey was delivered online via SmartSurvey and promoted through a coordinated, multi-channel communications strategy involving national and local partners. Targeted outreach, stakeholder endorsements, and tailored engagement aimed to maximise participation, particularly among under-represented groups such as third sector organisations and volunteers. Survey responses were monitored in real time to allow adaptive promotion and improve coverage.

The survey secured 849 respondents of which 80% were practitioners, 9%, volunteers, 7% stakeholders, and 5% employers. Compared to 2018, 1,200 respondents including 80% practitioners, 10% employers, 12.5% volunteers and 5.4% stakeholders.

In terms of what capacity the respondents were completing the survey, a larger proportion of employers (61%) responded on behalf of their whole organisation while most stakeholders responded on behalf of themselves.

Figure 1: Capacity under which responded- Employers and Stakeholders



n=41 (Employers), n= 53 (Stakeholders)

3.1.5 Data analysis and synthesis

Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed in an integrated way to develop a robust, triangulated understanding of the CLD workforce. Analysis focused on producing clear workforce intelligence (size and make-up of the responding workforce, characteristics, roles, skills and development needs) and on identifying implications for workforce planning, professional support, and policy.

Survey data were cleaned and validated prior to analysis; for example, removing blank records, checking for duplicates, and reviewing free-text 'other' responses for consistency. Descriptive analysis was used to report distributions, percentages and key summary measures, and results were segmented where appropriate by respondent group (practitioners, volunteers, employers and stakeholders). Where base sizes were small, figures have been interpreted cautiously and the report presents sample sizes (n) alongside results. Where questions were comparable with the 2018 survey, results were reviewed side-by-side to identify indicative change over time; where wording, routing or response options differed, findings were treated as non-comparable and interpreted as contextual rather than trend data.

Qualitative consultation notes were analysed thematically to identify recurring themes, points of divergence across groups, and illustrative insights to explain and add depth to the survey patterns. Findings from both strands were then synthesised through a triangulation process, using qualitative insights to interpret patterns may be present in the quantitative data, and using survey results to test the breadth and relevance of stakeholder views. Internal quality assurance checks were applied throughout, this included sense-checking tables and charts, reviewing outliers, and checking interpretation with delivery partners, which ensured accuracy and clarity.

3.2 Limitations to the research

This research provides an updated snapshot of the CLD workforce in Scotland, building on the 2015 and 2018 surveys. As with any voluntary, self-completed survey and qualitative consultation, the findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations relating to representativeness, self-reporting, and comparability over time. Key limitations include:

- **Definitional complexity of CLD:** CLD is delivered across diverse settings and job titles, and some individuals and organisations do not use the term "CLD" even when their work aligns with its values and practice domains. This may contribute to undercounting or misclassification and makes workforce boundaries difficult to draw precisely.
- **Sampling and response bias:** participation was voluntary and promoted through the sector and partner networks. As a result, those most connected to national networks, most engaged with CLD identity, or with stronger views may be over-represented, while some groups may be under-represented.
- **Representation across sectors and roles:** the overall respondent profile includes a strong practitioner base, but smaller numbers of employers and certain stakeholder groups. This constrains the extent to which results can be generalised, particularly when interpreting employer perspectives and organisational-level questions.
- **Coverage of volunteers and smaller organisations:** despite targeted engagement, volunteers and smaller community organisations are generally harder to reach through online surveys,

and their experiences may not be captured proportionately. Differences in how volunteering is organised (formal and informal) may also affect who chooses to respond.

- **Self-reported data and interpretation:** responses rely on self-reporting and may be affected by recall issues (e.g., changes since 2018), differing interpretations of terms (e.g., what counts as CLD activity), and variations in how people categorise their roles and skills.
- **Small base sizes for some questions:** several analyses (particularly for employers, volunteers, and stakeholders) are based on small numbers. Percentages for these groups should therefore be interpreted cautiously, and where possible the report presents the base size (n) alongside results.
- **Comparability with 2018:** while the survey was designed to enable comparison, differences in question wording, response options, survey routing, and the composition of respondents limited direct like-for-like comparison in some cases. Any apparent changes over time may partly reflect these methodological differences rather than real-world change.

These limitations do not undermine the value of the findings; rather, they indicate where caution is required in interpretation and where further workforce intelligence (including administrative data and repeat measurement) would strengthen a future national CLD workforce evidence base.

4. Research findings

4.1 Qualitative findings: stakeholder consultation

As noted, 32 stakeholders were engaged across eight focus groups and four 1-2-1 interviews. The findings from this engagement both shaped the updates to the survey, and provide important insight about the sector challenges.

4.1.1 Existing gaps in knowledge about the CLD sector

The stakeholders were asked what additional information they would like to find out from the survey, i.e., what information is currently missing from knowledge on the CLD workforce. Ten key priorities emerged:

- **Demographics:** moving beyond just age to consider ethnicity, disability and financial status as priority to understand if representative of communities
- **Workforce overview and identity:** size, roles, types of manager, where it fits, how people identify.
- **Different recognised professional learning:** ensuring engagement with accredited, badged, non-SCQF accredited etc.
- **Pathways into CLD:** starting as a volunteer or people moving from other professional roles within and outside of the sector. Difference in demographics for types of routes into the sector.
- **Workforce support:** perceptions on adequate opportunities, abilities for people to use support, F2F vs online, membership value and types, potential barrier of professional registration
- **Importance of capturing lived experience perspectives,** e.g. those with a disability supported by peers.
- **Digital literacy and access:** is the older workforce adapting? Rural/ urban access. Is there adequate support for vulnerable or marginalised populations?
- **Ability of sector to deal with societal issues** such as the rise of nationalism, racism, homophobia – with the re-elections occurring soon, this is important.
- **Comparative trends and results from 2018:** to illustrate the changes in the sector and society in those years – differences across local authorities.
- **Missing voices:** NHS, non-CLD managers, higher education.

4.1.2 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the CLD sector

Stakeholders were also asked about their views on the current strengths and challenges facing the sector.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
• The ambition and the provision offered to people on the ground. • Collaboration within the domains. • Focus on delivery and practice. • Lots of organisations delivering with budget cuts and limited resources.	• Lack of sector coherence CLD means different things to different people/organisations. • Sector is spread thin with resources with roles unclear or 'bitty'. • Workforce has decreased over the years but are still playing a critical role for the government to achieve its priorities. • Lack of sector profile: not all CLD agendas/roles are recognised. • Underrepresentation of groups such as ethnic minorities in education and community-led organisations.	• Training on digital literacy and security, some learners not being able to read/write - skills gap. • People knowing where they can be supported and know when to challenge discourse – is there hierarchical backing? • The role of community in policy. • Investing in specific posts/roles for workforce development – dedicated investment in staff and beyond. • Education, teaching, colleges could be better represented and acknowledged in partnerships.	• Funding is short-term and often fragmented – lack of sustainable funding. • Restructuring and cost-cutting processes in the public sector, increasingly within employability • Lack of a coordinated approach for community development – volunteers can be at capacity. • External bodies delivering training as individual organisations lack capacity. • Organisations not wanting to be badged as CLD such as mental health and wellbeing support. • Parliament / re-elections – CLD and EDI could be attacked.

4.1.3 Systemic barriers to professional learning

Stakeholders were asked to comment on real and perceived barriers to professional learning, here are the themes highlighted:

- **Information on pathways and moving between professions:** stakeholders mentioned that there is no clear, accessible map of routes into and across CLD role. For example, volunteer to paid youth work, to community development and adult learning, to local authority roles. This creates potential uncertainty about qualifications being recognised and how individuals can progress. There is a need for clearer signposting and indicative timescales for progression.
- **Opportunities for volunteers and clarity on skills needs:** varied roles and experience needed across the sector, with a range of skills required. There is a lack of consistent role descriptions, induction, and progression routes for volunteers. This makes it more difficult for them to build confidence and capability.
- **Lack of any coordinated or strategic learning and training for CLD:** there is a 'dearth' of support and practitioners can be 'isolated'. Stakeholders described professional learning as fragmented across organisations, localities, with limited shared planning of what was needed on a national level.
- **Delivery method since covid and finding the balance with online professional learning and the richer face-to-face approach:** those in rural areas have accessibility barriers. Rural and island populations still face barriers, such as connectivity, travel cost and time, and limited local provision. Stakeholders emphasised the value of blended models and intentional design, interaction and peer exchange; rather than webinar-only provision.
- **National emphasis of university graduates at the expense of other routes into work:** stakeholders felt some recruitment and professional norms privilege degree focused routes, potentially undervaluing community-based experience and vocational learning. This can narrow the pipeline and reduce diversity of entry, deterring strong candidates who may not have traditional qualifications.
- **Lack of confidence in the learners and working remotely:** there is no advice or support available. Remote and hybrid delivery can introduce new risks and uncertainties around safeguarding, boundaries, digital facilitation skills, and confidentiality. Stakeholders noted that practitioners and volunteers do not always have timely guidance and supervision, this can lead to reduced confidence and inconsistency in practice.
- **Poverty and low engagement, access and awareness barriers:** people may have limited time, digital access, transport, childcare needs, making it more difficult to engage with trusted services. Awareness of support available is uneven across communities, and signposting and referral can be unclear.
- **Local authorities variation of practice:** stakeholders described inconsistent local policies – this can deter participation on national events or training which limits collaboration across local authority areas.
- **Councils not recognising the importance and value of CLD:** stakeholders linked this to CLD being positioned across multiple service areas, reducing visibility and weakening professional identity.
- **Community centres closed and organisational amnesia:** where previous positives were and how to reimplement them for the future. Loss of physical spaces reduces opportunities

for informal learning, peer support, and place-based collaboration—both for communities and staff.

4.1.4 How the CLD Standards Council can contribute to solutions

Stakeholders also suggested how the CLD Standards Council can expand its support for the sector.

- **Provide leadership:** stakeholders felt the CLD Standards Council could play a stronger convening and advisory role, offering a clear point of contact for organisations seeking guidance on workforce development, supervision, and supporting staff and volunteers. This includes sharing practical tools (e.g., role profiles aligned to CLD competencies, supervision templates, and CPD planning guidance) that employers can adapt across different settings.
- **Widen the reach and visibility:** stakeholders noted that many roles and initiatives align with CLD values and practice but are not labelled as CLD, particularly in the third sector and in thematic areas such as health, wellbeing, employability and community support. They suggested ongoing outreach that uses accessible language, case studies and partnership channels to bring in ‘adjacent’ parts of the workforce, improve survey reach, and strengthen a shared understanding of CLD’s contribution.
- **Clarify remit and relationships across the whole sector:** stakeholders raised questions about how the Standards Council’s role interacts with wider system leadership following the Independent Review of CLD. They suggested that Scottish Government and national partners should take a whole-sector view of workforce governance and accountability; across local authorities, third sector, national programmes and partner services). Also clarify where the Standards Council can influence practice, standards and workforce development.
- **Support review of CLD regulations and expectations:** some stakeholders felt that the current statutory requirements and guidance do not sufficiently reflect how CLD is delivered today, particularly the diversity of delivery models and the challenges of ensuring consistency across areas. They suggested that regulations and associated expectations should be reviewed and updated so they are clearer, more actionable for local partners, and better aligned with workforce development and quality improvement.
- **Drive standards of practice and strengthen training provision:** stakeholders saw a role for the Standards Council in promoting consistent standards across employers while recognising the diversity of contexts and job roles. This includes helping to define what “good” looks like in practice, signposting high-quality training, and supporting a balanced approach to professionalisation that strengthens quality and safety without creating unnecessary barriers for volunteers or non-traditional entry routes.
- **Grow the membership and strengthen the membership offer:** stakeholders felt that some practitioners and volunteers do not clearly understand the benefits of joining, or do not see a direct return for their time and cost. Suggestions included clearer messaging about tangible benefits (professional recognition, CPD access, guidance and support, networks/peer learning, and influence/voice), simplifying processes where possible, and tailoring the offer for different groups (volunteers, early career staff, managers, and those in ‘adjacent’ roles).
- **Take a bottom-up approach to CPD:** stakeholders emphasised that professional learning should be shaped by what practitioners, volunteers and employers say they need, rather

than relying solely on top-down priorities. They suggested regular needs assessments (e.g., short pulse surveys, consultation through networks, and analysis of workforce data), followed by targeted investment in the highest-priority areas and practical formats that people can access (blended delivery, bite-sized modules, and local peer learning).

- **Promote a more connected approach across the domains of practice:** stakeholders noted that community development, youth work and adult learning are interdependent, but support and attention can be uneven across domains depending on local structures and funding. They suggested the CLD Standards Council could help convene cross-domain learning, ensure resources and guidance reflect all strands of CLD, and encourage shared language and joint professional learning so that practice is strengthened across the whole sector.

4.2 Survey findings: overview of the CLD sector in Scotland

Employers, practitioners and volunteers were asked questions around their understanding of how the CLD operates across Scotland.

4.2.1 Main focus of CLD activities

Respondents were asked about the main focus of the community learning and development work of their service or organisation. Employer and practitioner responses are largely aligned and show that community development, youth work, and adult learning are the main areas of focus.

Figure 2: Main areas of focus of CLD work as per employers, practitioners, and volunteers

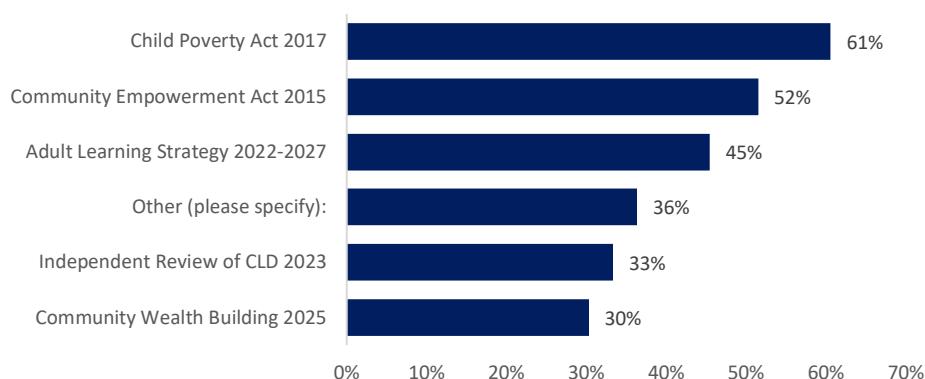


Note: n=42 (Employers), n= 658 (Practitioners), n=72 (Volunteers); respondents could select multiple options

4.2.2 How legislation informs the CLD work of organisations

Employers were asked about which legislation, apart from the CLD guidance, inform the CLD work of their organisation. As shown in Figure 3, the majority of employer respondents 61% (n=33) reported that the Child Poverty Act 2017, 30% Community Empowerment Act 2015, 45.5% Adult Learning Strategy 2022-2027 informs their work.

Figure 3: Legislation informing the CLD work of employer organisations



Note: n=33; respondents could select multiple options

Stakeholders were asked if the skills and competencies required for staff and volunteers in CLD roles changed since 2018 as per the CLD Standards Council's Competency Framework. Of the 45 stakeholder respondents, 62% mentioned that they don't know while 22% disagreed.

For reference, the 7 competences are:

- 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.

4.2.3 Extent of registration of the CLD workforce

Most employers (53%) neither require, expect, or encourage the staff or volunteers to register. Over one third (36%) encourage staff to register (36%) while 11% expect them to, and 3% mandate registration.

Despite this, 76.2% of practitioners and 47.8% of volunteers are a registered member or registered associate member of the CLD Standards Council Scotland.

4.2.4 Identification with the term 'CLD'

Of all respondents, 97.8% were aware of CLD while 2.2% were not. However, this could be a case of responder bias, in which people that are unaware of what it means think it is not relevant for them to complete the survey.

Over three quarters (76%) of practitioners reported that they use the term 'CLD' to describe their job as their work aligns with the different strands. For the 24% that don't use CLD to describe their role, they do so to avoid complexity associated with acronym and rather describe the direct area of work or their specific role. Similarly, 58% of volunteers report using the term CLD to describe their job.

A quarter of practitioners are not using the term CLD to describe their job is a potential challenge, and one that would not be seen in other sectors. This suggests a lack of aligned sector identity.

4.3 Survey findings: workforce dynamics in the CLD sector

Employers, practitioners and volunteers were asked to describe their typical working arrangements to provide insight into how the workforce operates and which types of people work in it.

4.3.1 Contract types and working hours

On average (median²¹), employers reported they had 9 (n=29) members of staff working 35 or more hours per week, 4 (n=30) staff working between 17.5 and 35 hours per week, and 3.5 (n=22) staff working less than 17.5 hours per week.

In terms of type of contract, on average (median), the respondent employers had 7.5 (n=27) members on permanent contracts, 4 (n=13) on long-term fixed term contracts of more than a year, 2 (n=17) on short-term fixed term contracts, and 1.5 (n=10) on other contract types. Responses from practitioners largely mirrored this. Of the 654 respondents, 73.5% were on permanent contract, 10.7% on long-term fixed term contract, 10.2% on short-term fixed term contract, 2.9% on other contract types, and 2.4% were on casual/sessional basis.

For volunteers, 16.7% of employers reported that they had no volunteers. For those that had volunteers,

- 12 (n=25) volunteering for less than 5 hours per week,
- 3.5 (n=14) between 5 and 15 hours per week on average,
- 6 (n=4) volunteering for more than 15 hours per week on average.

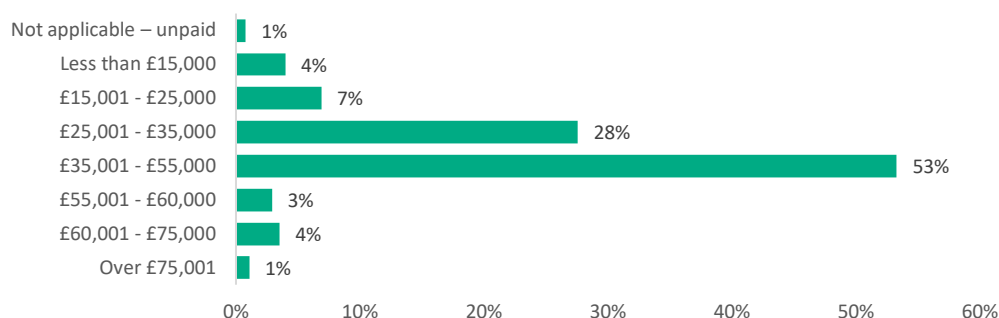
Employers were also asked about the proportion of staff working primarily for CLD activities. Of the 38 respondents, 37% reported that all staff worked primarily for CLD activities, 42% replied that over three quarters of staff worked primarily for CLD activities, and 10.5% reported that around half of staff are primarily engaged in CLD activities.

In terms of salary, as visible from Figure 4, a majority of practitioners (53%) earn between £35,001-£55,000, followed by 28% earning between £25,001 to £35,000. This means the majority of workers earn above the national average, with median gross earnings in Scotland equivalent to £739.70 a week, meaning the £35,000-£55,000 range is above or around the national figure.²²

²¹ Note: median was used to avoid misrepresenting data as some organisations had very high number of staff and skewed a mean.

²² Annual survey of hours and earnings: 2024, *ScotGov*, (2025). [Link](#)

Figure 4: Annual salary as reported by practitioners



Note: n=653

4.3.2 Length of time in the sector and current role

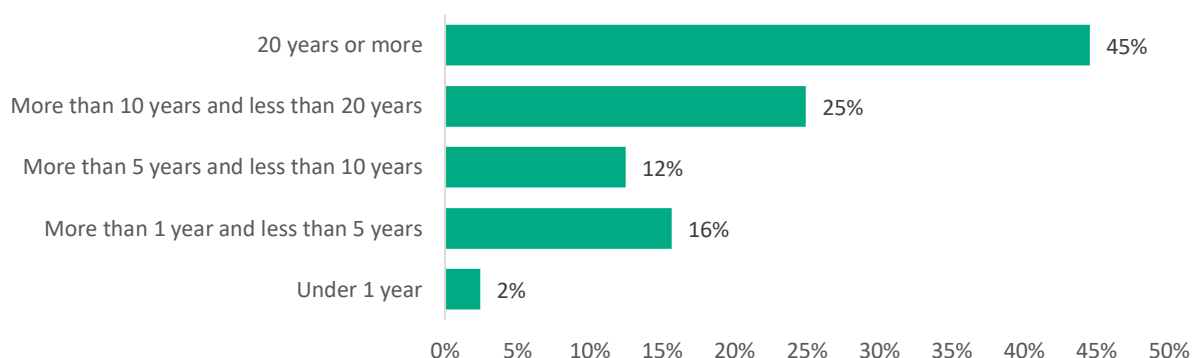
As shown in Figure 5, of the 658 practitioner respondents, most (44.5%) had worked in CLD for 20 years or more, with an additional 25% being in the sector between 10 years and 20 years. Just 2.4% reported that they had worked in the sector for under 1 year. It must be noted that this could reflect respondent bias, in that those with a longer time in the sector were more likely to see or feel the importance of responding to the survey.

In 2018, practitioners appeared to stay in the CLD sector for a long time. 68% of practitioners had been part of the CLD workforce for 10 years or more, and 28% for 20 years or more.

For volunteers, around 29% have volunteered for at least 10 years, with most 42% (n=72) volunteering between 1 to 5 years, and an additional 15% for less than 1 year.

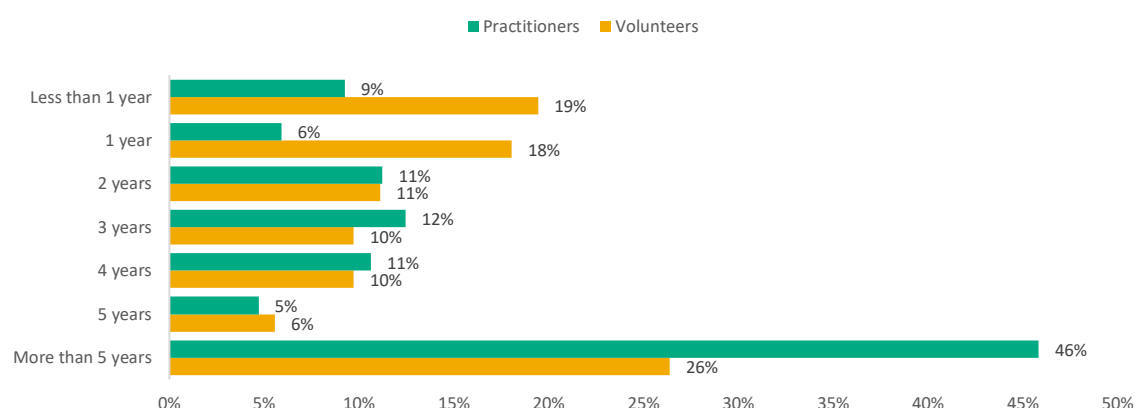
As visible in Figure 6, a large proportion of both practitioners (46%) and volunteers (26%) have been in their current roles for more than 5 years.

Figure 5: Time worked in CLD as reported by practitioners



Over two thirds (68%) of the practitioner respondents had other previous roles in CLD, suggesting lots of movement within the sector.

Figure 6: Duration in current role for practitioners and volunteers



Note: n=659 (Practitioners), n=72 (Volunteers)

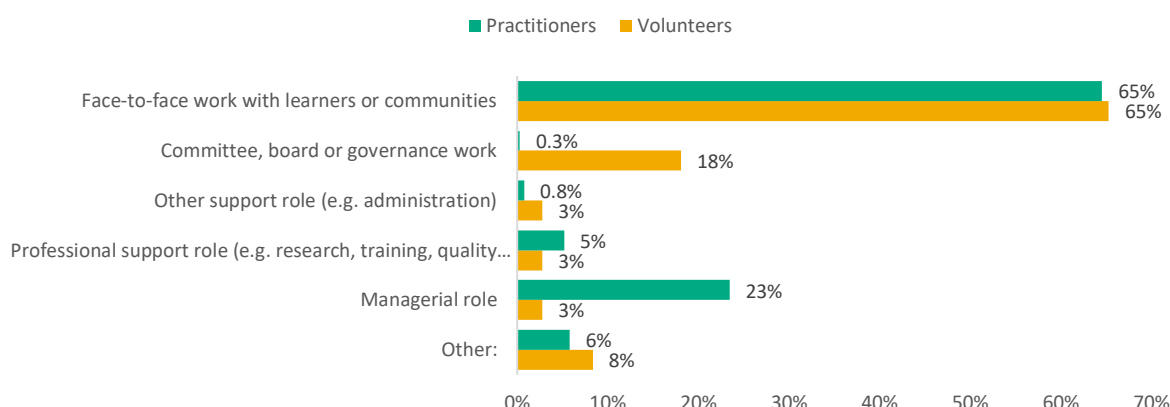
4.3.3 Roles within the CLD sector

In terms of type of work by paid staff, on average (median), the respondent employers had

- 2 (n=35) members of staff with managerial responsibilities,
- 8.5 (n=34) working directly with communities,
- 2.5 (n=26) providing professional support
- 3 (n=30) providing other support functions.

As Figure 7 shows, most practitioners and volunteers had job roles that involved face to face work with learners and communities. However, while around a quarter of practitioners perform managerial role, 18% volunteers perform committee, board or governance work.

Figure 7: Work types and job roles of practitioners and volunteers



Note: n= 657 (Practitioners), n=72 (Volunteers)

In terms of job-title of practitioners, responses show that most CLD practitioners are based in community development, CLD, youth work, adult learning, and family learning roles, with a smaller share in management, employability, support, and specialist positions. The volunteer-role responses

reflect a similar pattern, with strong involvement in community support spaces, youth and family work, learning-related volunteering, and trustee or committee roles, suggesting that both paid and unpaid activity are closely rooted in community engagement, learning, participation, and support for people facing disadvantage or isolation.

When analysing the job titles of practitioners in particular, the roles do not sit into neat categories, they tend to describe multiple functions such as; teaching and mentoring, project delivery and partnership building, support work and policy implementation. The wide range of roles within CLD can be grouped into a small number of overlapping functions.

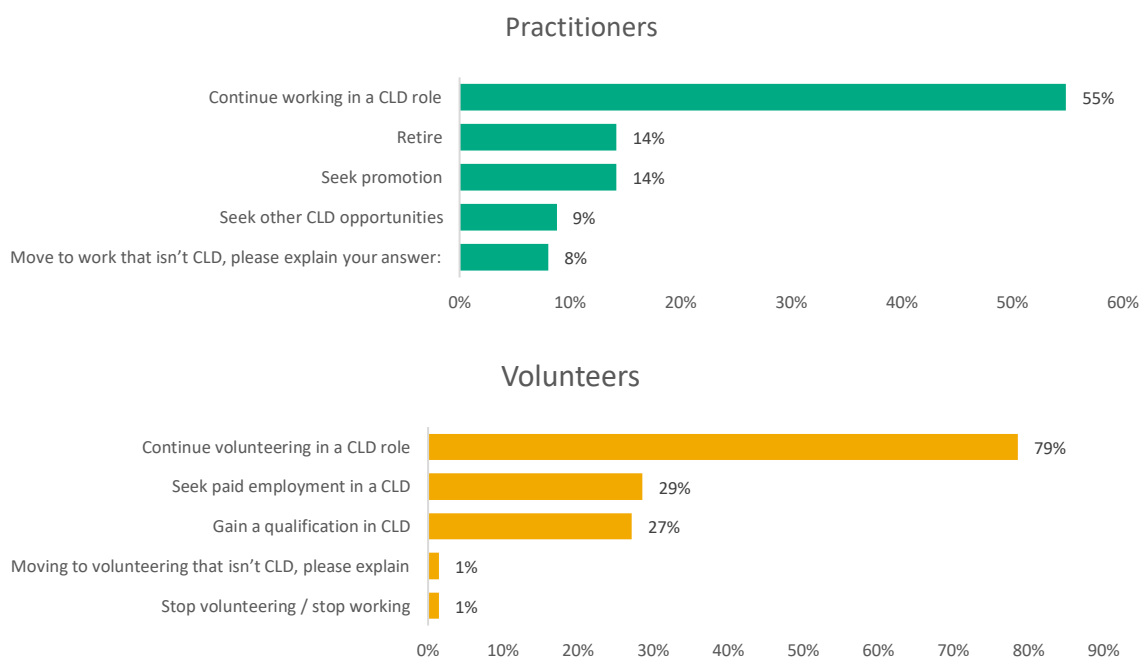
Frontline roles, such as youth workers, community education workers, and tutors, focus on direct engagement, informal learning, and sustained relationship-building with individuals and groups. Alongside these are specialist roles addressing areas such as employability, mental health, and inclusion, often working across service boundaries. Development and coordination roles design and manage projects, build partnerships, and translate community needs into structured programmes, while leadership and strategic roles provide oversight, shape direction, and align practice with policy. Supporting all of these are operational and learning support roles that enable delivery and maintain access to services.

Across these groupings, common themes include a focus on empowerment and participation, rooted in Community Development, and a commitment to Lifelong Learning as a lifelong, community-based process. However, the sector is characterised by blurred boundaries between roles, with similar work often carried out under different titles depending on organisational context or funding. This flexibility supports responsiveness but also creates ambiguity around professional identity, responsibilities, and career pathways.

4.3.4 CLD career plans for practitioners and volunteers

As seen in Figure 8, 55% (n=649) of practitioners wish to continue working in their community learning and development role, while 14% want to seek promotion or retire, 9% want to seek other CLD opportunities and 8% want to move out of CLD work altogether. For volunteers, 79% (n=70) of volunteers wish to continue volunteering in a CLD role while 29% want to seek paid employment in CLD and 27% want to gain a qualification in CLD.

Figure 8: Career plans- Practitioners and Volunteers



Note: n=649 (Practitioners), n=70 (Volunteers)

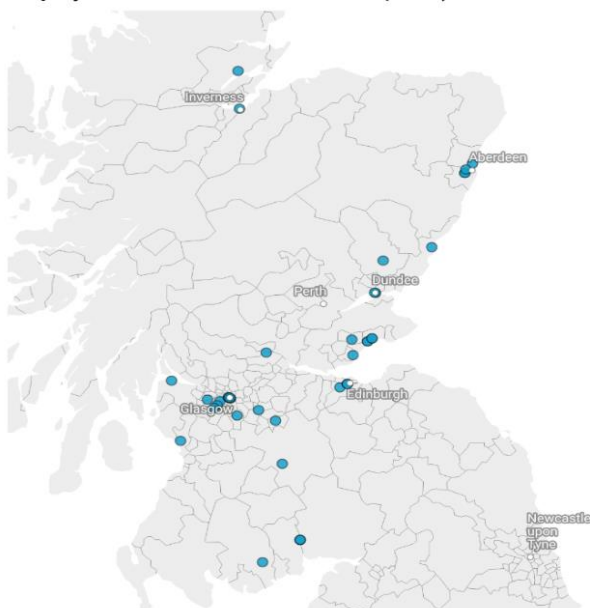
This suggests a relatively high desire to remain in the sector, with less than 1 in 10 practitioners seeing opportunities outside of the sector.

4.3.5 Demographic profile of practitioners and volunteers

Practitioners and Volunteers were asked questions about the address and area of jurisdiction of their organisation. As Figure 9 and Figure 10 show, a larger proportion of employer and stakeholder respondents came from organisations situated in and around Edinburgh and Glasgow and in eastern Scotland. Figure 10 shows a large proportion of employers and stakeholders from Glasgow, Fife, and South Lanarkshire. With high employer responses coming from Dumfries and Galloway and East Renfrewshire.

Figure 9: Postcode of head office -Employers and Stakeholders

Employers: Postcode of head office (n=40)



Stakeholders: Postcode of head office (n=50)

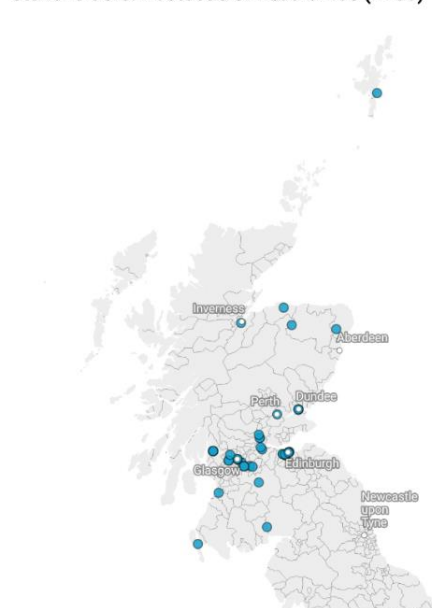
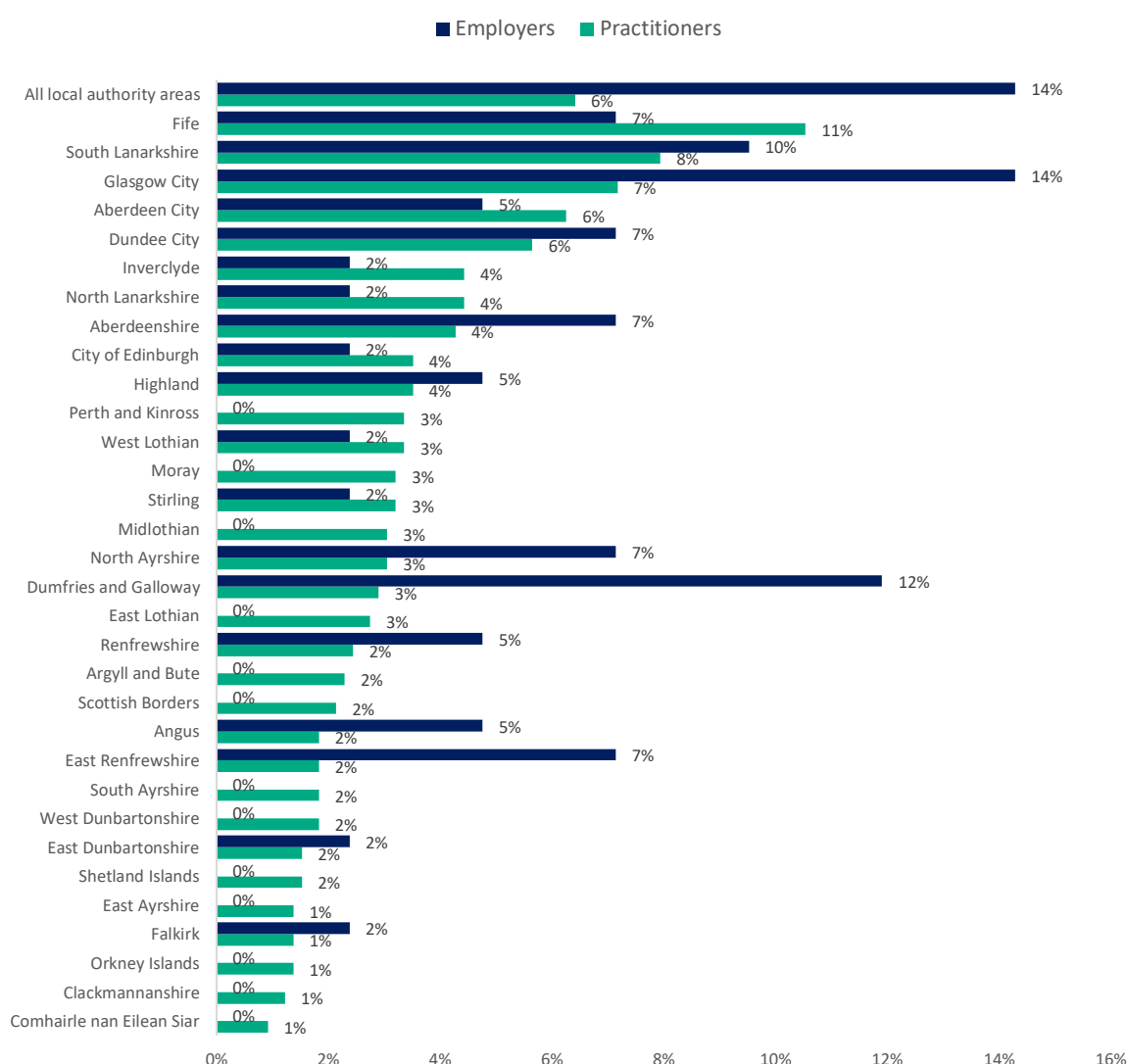


Figure 10: Local authorities covered under scope of work for employers and practitioners



Note: n= 42 (Employers), n=655 (Practitioners)

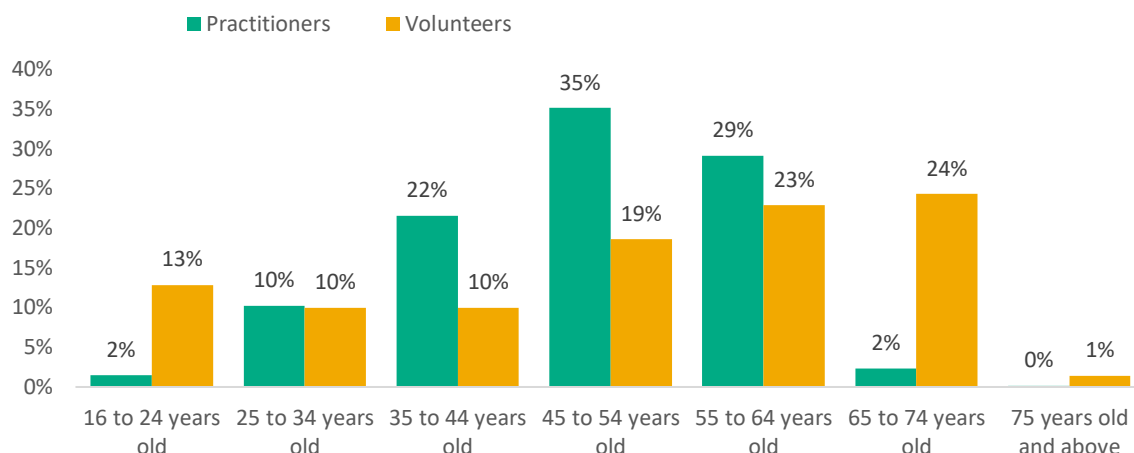
Figure 11 details the age groups of the practitioners and volunteers. Among practitioners, the highest proportion of respondents were 45-54 years old and 55 to 64 years old. For volunteers, the age groups are lot more varied compared to the practitioners; with the highest proportions falling in groups from 45-74 years old.

Reflecting back to the 2018 workforce report, the data suggest the CLD workforce is ageing. Today, around 12% of the paid workforce and 26% of volunteers are aged 34 or younger compared to 15% of the paid workforce, compared to 2018 (the 2018 does not provide a robust age breakdown for volunteers).

2018 findings reported that less than 15% of the workforce is under 35 with more than 45% over 50 years old. The public sector workforce is older than the third sector, with over half of public sector staff aged 50+ compared with around one-third in the third sector. This ageing profile is particularly marked in Adult Learning, where 58% are aged 50 and over, and is linked to likely future workforce loss, with around a quarter of practitioners expecting to retire or leave the profession within the next two to five years

This illustrates that the CLD workforce is ageing.

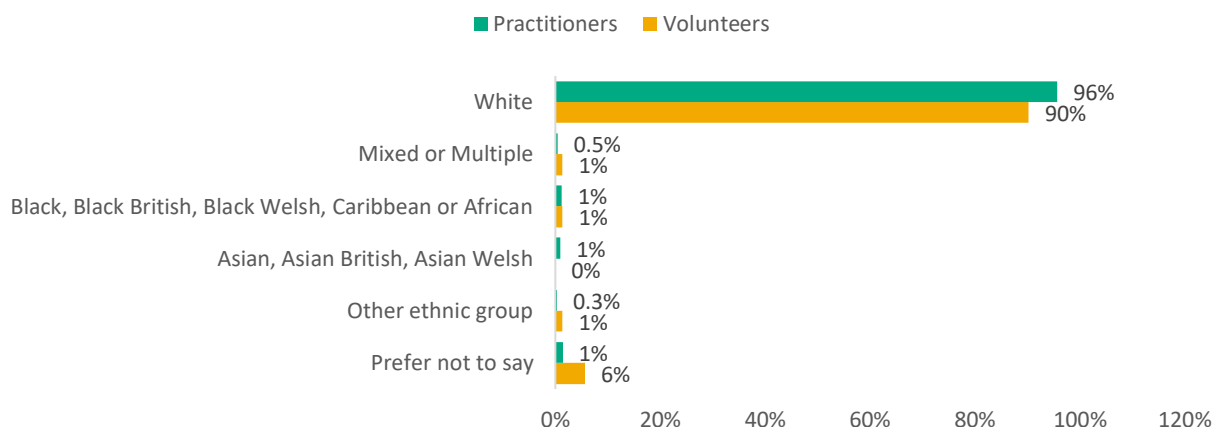
Figure 11: Age groups of practitioners and volunteers



Note: n=598 (Practitioners), n=72 (Volunteers)

Figure 12 highlights that around 3% of practitioners and volunteers are from non-white backgrounds. This is in line with the 2018 findings where 97% of all respondents being White. While this suggests low ethnic diversity, it largely reflects the general make-up of the Scottish population. The census details that Scotland's population is 87.1% White, with minority ethnic groups making up 12.9%, this is an increase since 2011 (8.2%).²³ This suggests that the make-up of the CLD workforce is not representing the Scottish population.

Figure 12: Ethnic groups of practitioners and volunteers



Note: n=72 (Volunteers), n=649 (Practitioners)

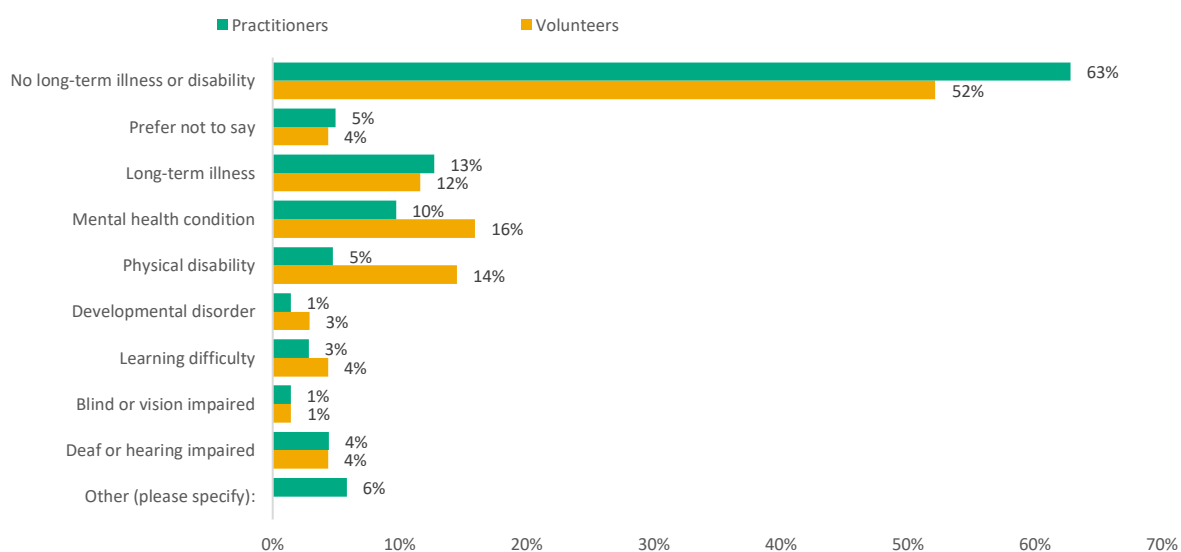
As Figure 13 shows, just over half of volunteers have noted that they do not have a disability or long-term condition (52%), as did around two thirds (63%) of practitioners, while. In 2018, around 76% of practitioners stated they didn't have a form of long-term condition. This suggests the workforce is

²³ Scotland's Census 2022, *National Statistics Publication for Scotland*, (2024). [Link](#)

significantly more likely to have a disability than in 2018. This could be a result of the ageing workforce.

The proportion of those with a disability is high in relation to the national average of 24% ([Scotland's Census, 2025](#)). It suggests that the workforce is more than likely than the national average to be disabled. This is important for two main reasons. First, it suggests that the workforce is diverse and includes people with lived experience of physical and mental illness or disability. Second, in terms of workforce planning and support, it suggests a heightened need to ensure people with disabilities are adequately supported in their roles, and a risk of higher-than-average illness in the sector.

Figure 13: Disability status and type of practitioners and volunteers



n=69 (Volunteers), n=567 (Practitioners)

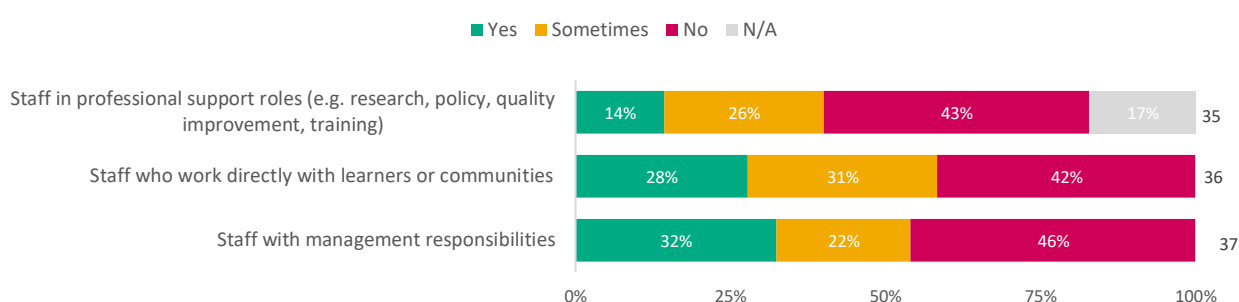
4.4 Survey findings: skills and qualifications levels and gaps

Employers, practitioners and volunteers were asked about required skills and qualifications, gaps, and use of professional development and training resources.

4.4.1 Requirement for specific CLD qualifications

Employers were asked if they typically require specific CLD qualifications for their paid staff. As visible in Figure 14, most employers do not require CLD qualifications for any type of staff.

Figure 14: Employer requirement for specific CLD qualifications for paid staff



Note: n=37

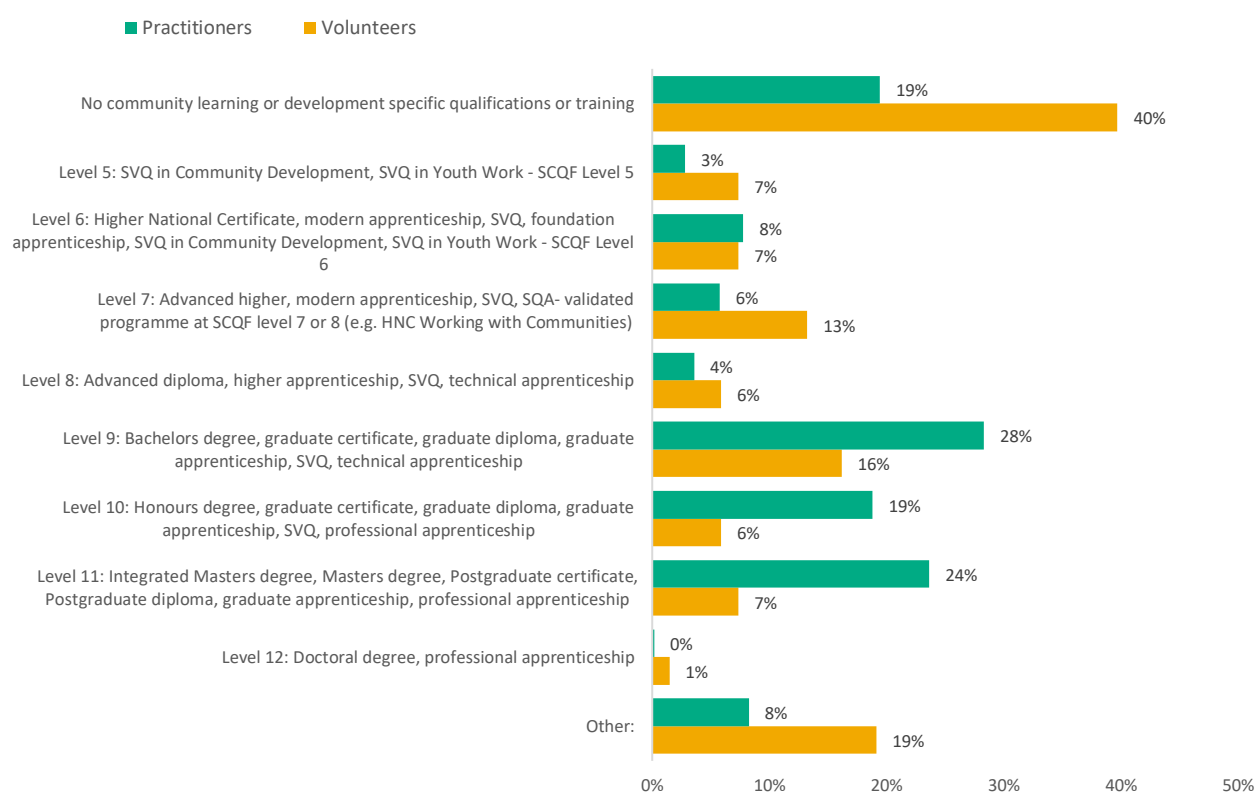
4.4.2 Level and type of qualifications of practitioners

While there are few requirements for CLD-specific qualifications, the CLD workforce are highly educated. As Figure 15 shows, the majority of practitioners (80%) and volunteers (60%) had CLD related qualifications, while 71% of practitioner respondents are educated to SVQ level 9 and above.

Half (50%) of practitioners also had degree-level or higher qualifications in another subject while 30% had professional qualifications in another discipline, majorly education, business and management, and arts and humanities. Similarly, 48% of volunteers had degree-level or higher qualifications in another subject while 28% had professional qualifications in another discipline.

In 2018, CLD workforce was equally high qualified with around half of practitioners possessing both a CLD and other qualification.

Figure 15: CLD-related qualifications held by practitioners and volunteers



Note: n=68 (Volunteers), n=643 (Practitioners); respondents could select multiple options

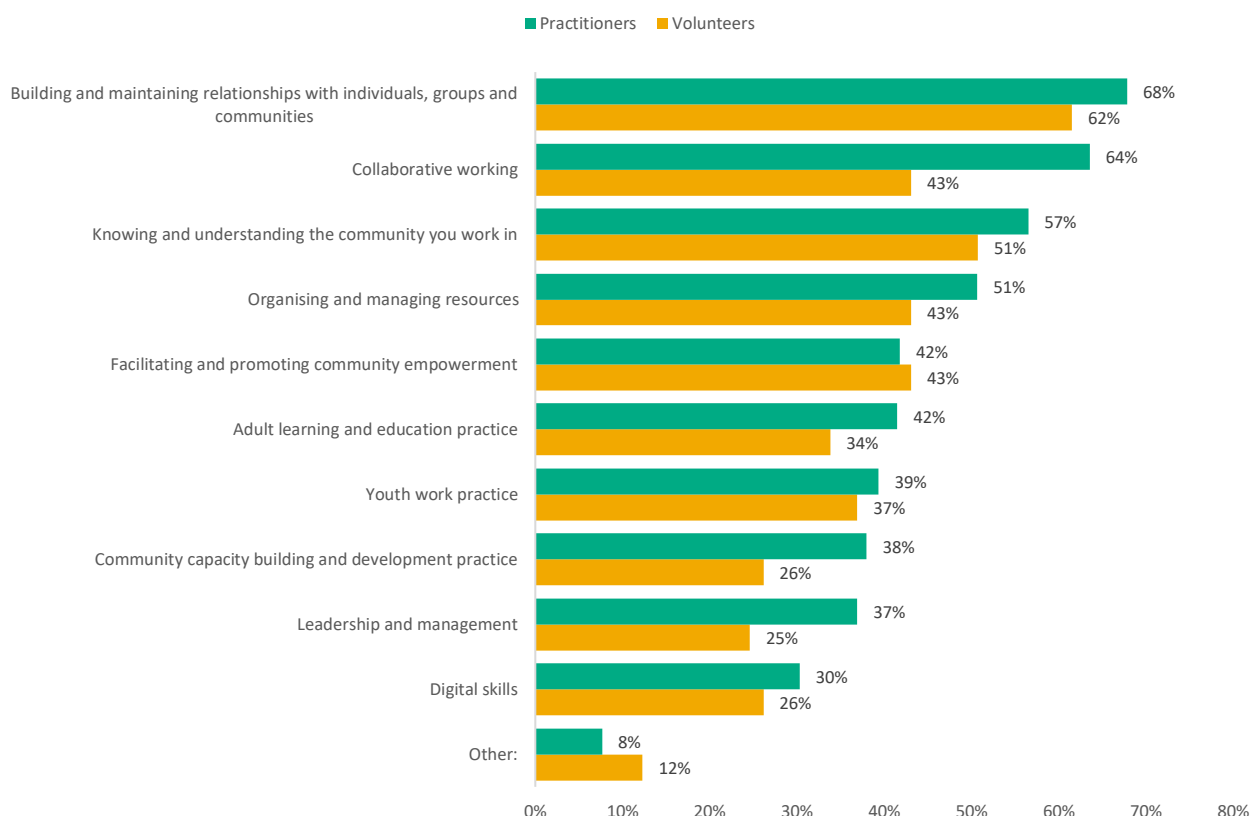
Practitioners were also asked if they are working and studying simultaneously, and working towards a recognised CLD qualification. The responses show that 88% (n=510) of practitioners were not working towards a recognised CLD qualification simultaneously with work.

4.4.3 Professional development needs of CLD staff

Practitioners and volunteers were asked about the current focus for learning and development in their organisations. As shown in Figure 16,

- practitioners highlighted relationship building (68%), collaborative working (64%), knowing and understanding the community of interest (57%), and organising and managing resources (51%) as the main areas of focus.
- 62% of volunteers highlighted relationship building while just over half of volunteers (51%) highlighted understanding of community of work as current focus of their organisation's learning and development activities.

Figure 16: Current focus of learning and development activities for practitioners and volunteers



Note: n=653 (Practitioners), 65 (Volunteers); respondents could select multiple options

Employers were asked if their staff in community learning and development roles have any development needs that they feel unable to address in the next 12 months. As visible from Figure 17,

- 2 in 5 employers (40%) reported no unmet developmental needs.
- For those reporting needs, evaluative skills (29%) are most in demand, and at least 1 in 5 noting challenges meeting leadership and management, community capacity building and development practice, digital skills, training and assessment skills, and organising and managing resources.
- There are fewer unmet needs around collaboration and relationship building.

Figure 17: Development needs reported by employers



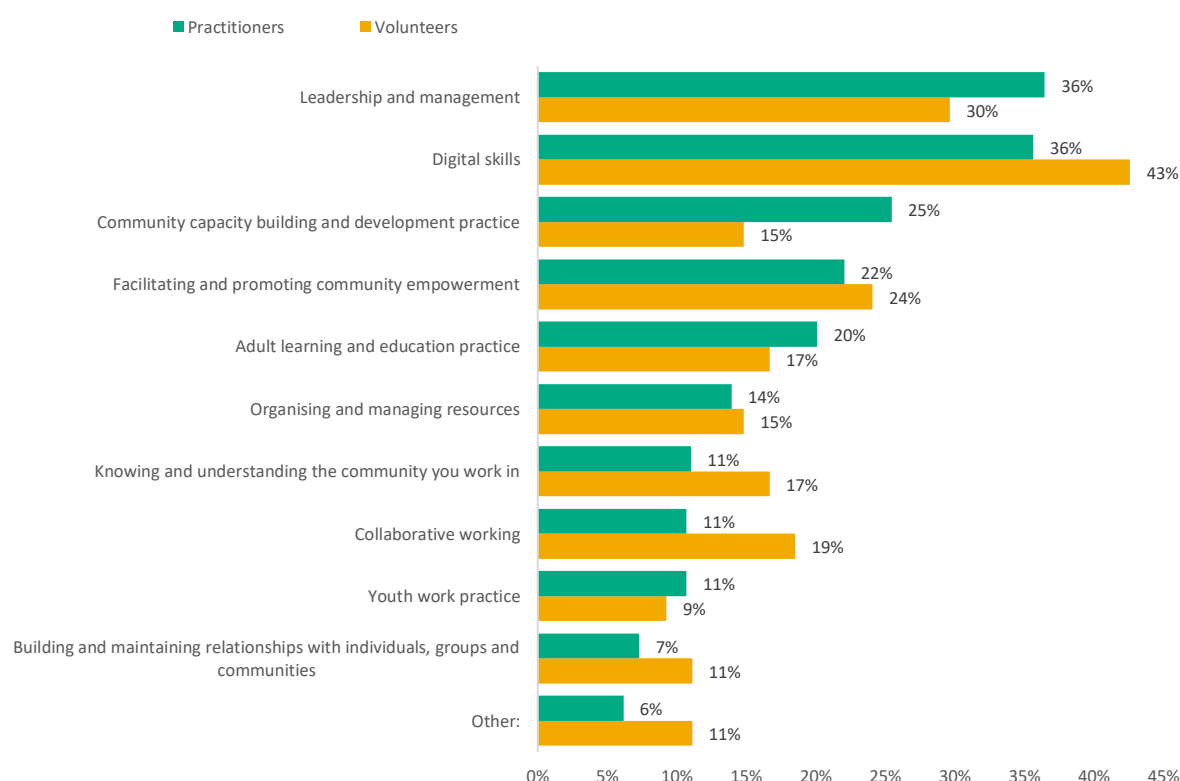
Note: n=35; respondents could select multiple options

For employers unable or unconfident to meet the needs, a lack of resources or funding for staff development and training (68%, n=31) and lack of staff time to attend professional learning programmes or take up development opportunities (61%) are the primary reasons. Around a third (35%) of employers also selected a lack of available professional learning programmes to address the development area, while 10% have a lack of commitment from their organisation to address developmental needs of staff.

In terms of development needs, as shown in Figure 18, a larger proportion of volunteers (43%) and practitioners (36%) highlight digital skills and leadership and management (36% for practitioners) skills as areas of development needs.

Volunteers were asked about confidence in their employers meeting their development needs. 84% (n=70) of volunteers reported that they are confident that their organisation will help them with their development. Similarly, 82% (n=648) of practitioners reported that they are confident that their organisation will help them with their development.

Figure 18: Development needs as reported by practitioners and volunteers

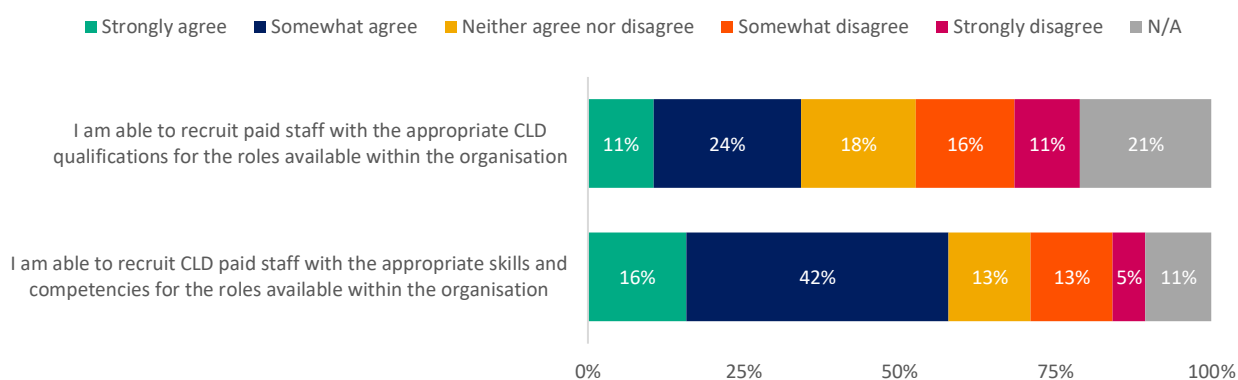


Note: n=617 (Practitioners), n=54 (Volunteers); respondents could select multiple options

4.4.4 Skills and qualifications gaps in recruitment

In terms of recruitment of paid into CLD roles, most employers (58%) agreed that they are able to recruit paid staff with the appropriate skills and competencies. However, just over a third (35%) agreed that they can recruit CLD paid staff with the necessary qualifications.

Figure 19: Employer perspectives on ease of recruitment in CLD



Note: n=38

Employers were asked about the specific skills that they struggle to find when recruiting staff for CLD roles. As shown in Figure 20, evaluative skills are the biggest gap (39%) among CLD applicants. However, 31% of employers mentioned that they don't struggle to find any skill gaps.

Figure 20: Skills employers struggle to find when recruiting CLD staff



Note: n=36; respondents could select multiple options

When asked about development needs encountered when recruiting for volunteers, a 32% also highlighted evaluative skills, adult learning and education practice, relationship building, and facilitating and promoting community empowerment as gaps.

4.4.5 How staff training and development is planned and funded

Employers were asked about how their organisation or service gathers and uses information about professional/workforce development for paid staff in CLD roles.

- 60% reported that their organisation/service regularly gathers information about the professional development and training needs of staff (e.g. through surveys or performance appraisals)
- 57% report that staff are expected to have a personal learning or development plans
- 32% stated that their organisation/service has a written professional/workforce development plan
- 19% have other plans in place.
- Just 13% have a CLD specific plan.

4.4.6 Use of training resources and platforms

In terms of how training resources and platforms are used:

- **i-develop:** around one third of employers (38%) note that their staff and volunteers use i-develop while another third (32%) were not aware. This is reflected in use by practitioners

and volunteers, 39% of practitioners and 25% of volunteers use i-develop, while 41% of practitioners and 43% of volunteers do not.

- [Education Scotland's National Improvement Hub](#): similarly, around a third (34%) of employers report that the National Improvement Hub is used, as do 30% of practitioners. Just 17% of volunteers use the National Improvement Hub.
- 51% of employers mention that staff/volunteers use other professional learning resources.
 - Practitioners noted that they used: local authority or council learning platforms, Youth Link Scotland, Education Scotland resources, Youth Scotland, Open Learn/Open University, and NHS or health training platforms
 - Volunteers use CIPD, Open University/Open Learn.
 - Employers didn't have consistent use across other resources, but there are mentions of Turas, NATECLA, and Open Learn.

4.5 Survey findings: perspectives on the CLD workforce

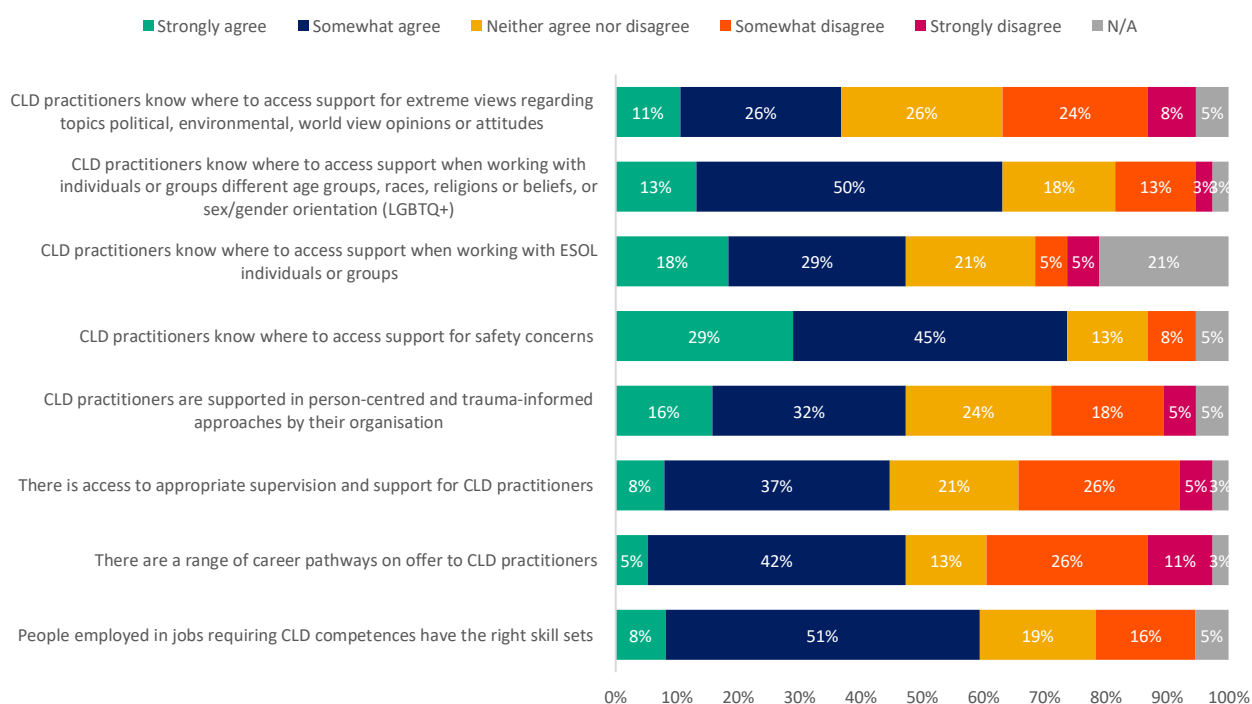
The survey explored views from the different groups about key aspects of the CLD workforce. These views are useful to further consider threats and opportunities.

4.5.1 Perspectives on the workforce strengths and challenges

Employers and practitioners expressed broadly similar positive views about the value of CLD roles.

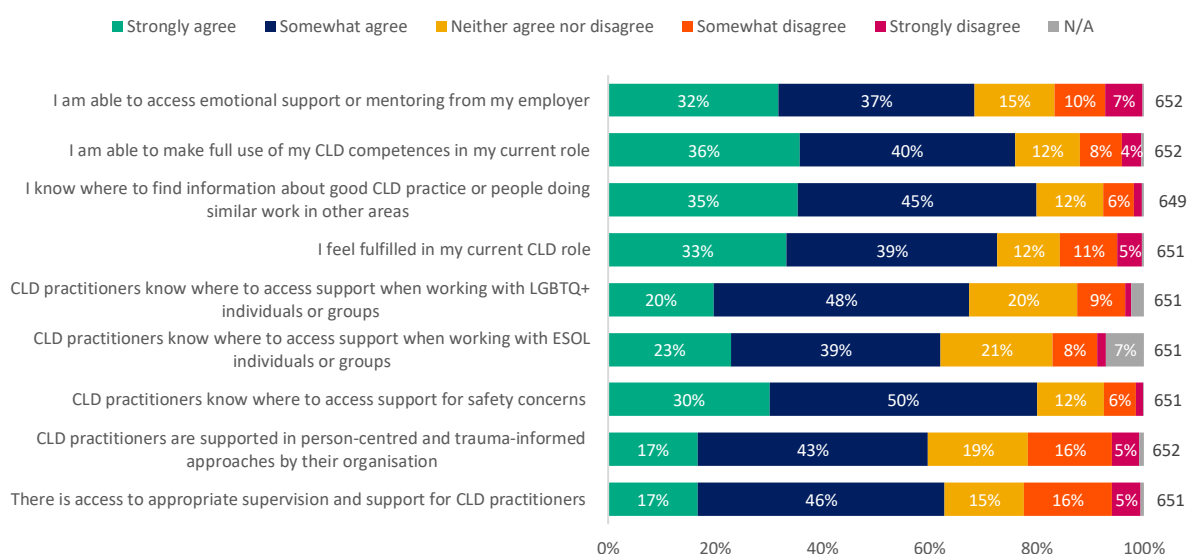
- 87% of employers (Figure 21) agreed that CLD posts provide useful work experience and skills, and most agreed that there are many volunteering opportunities (63%), and that a long-term career in CLD is achievable (60%).
- Practitioners (Figure 22) reported similar or stronger agreement: 85% said CLD roles build valuable experience and skills, 78% highlighted the availability of volunteering opportunities, and 84% believed a long-term career is possible.

Figure 21: Employer views on CLD practitioner job experience and career pathways



Note: n= 38

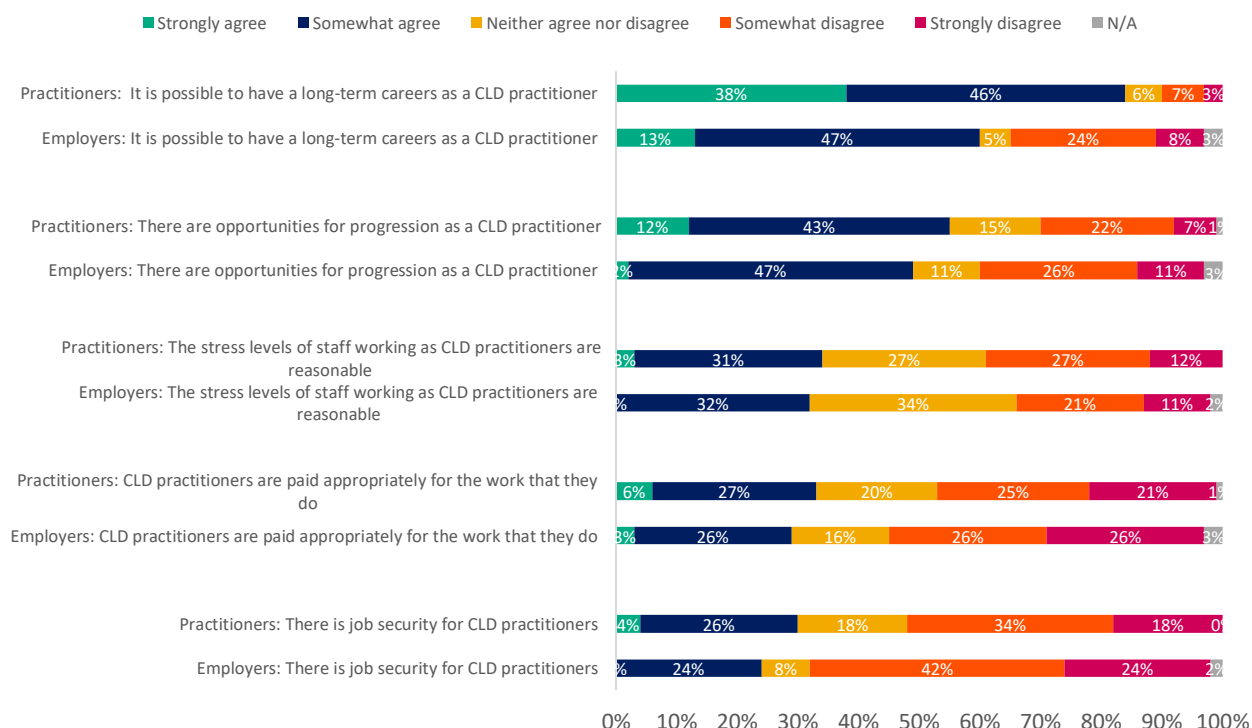
Figure 22: Practitioner views on CLD practitioner job experience and career pathways



Note: n= 652

However, concerns emerge around job security and conditions. Two thirds of employers (66%) and over half of practitioners (52%) disagreed that CLD roles offer job security. There was also consistent agreement across all groups that CLD practitioners are not paid appropriately for their work.

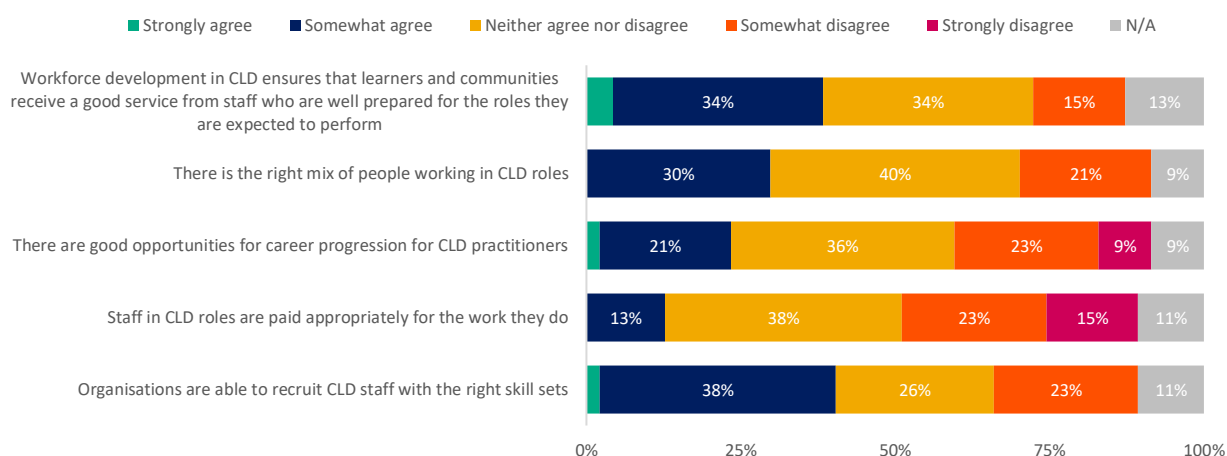
Figure 23: Employer and practitioner views on the CLD workforce



Note: employers n= 38; practitioners n=653

Around one-third of stakeholders further indicated that pay is low and career progression opportunities are limited.

Figure 24: Stakeholder views on the CLD workforce

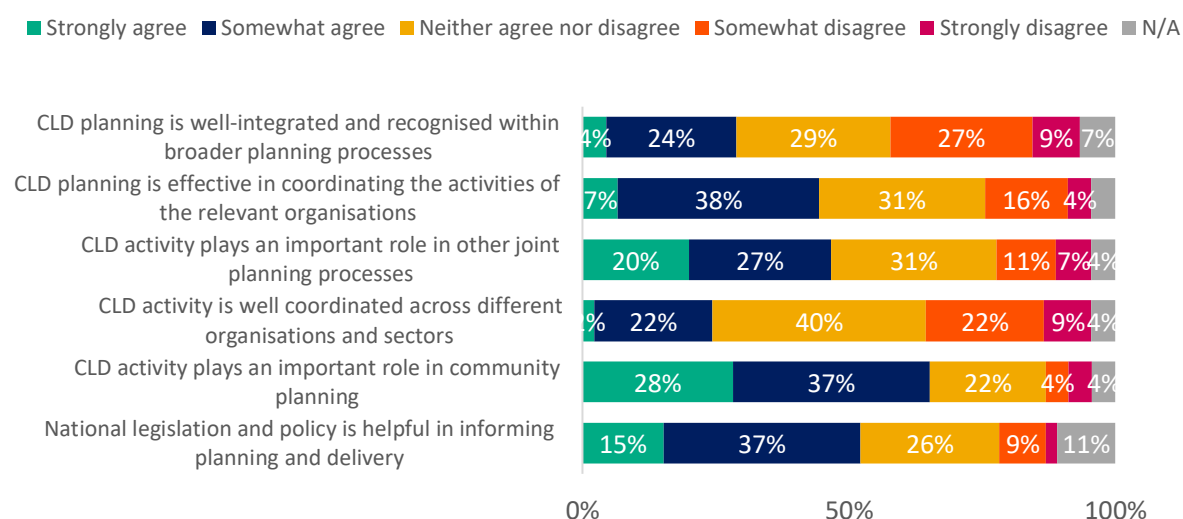


Note: n= 47

4.5.2 Stakeholder views of the importance of CLD

In regard to stakeholders' broader perceptions on CLD activities, Figure 25 shows, most agreed that CLD activities play an important role in community planning (63%) and that national legislation and policy is helpful in informing planning and delivery (52%). However, stakeholders worry CLD is not well coordinated across sectors.

Figure 25: Stakeholder perceptions on CLD planning



Note: n=45

4.6 Survey findings: changes in the sector

All those surveyed were asked to reflect on changes to the sector over recent years.

4.6.1 Funding for the CLD sector

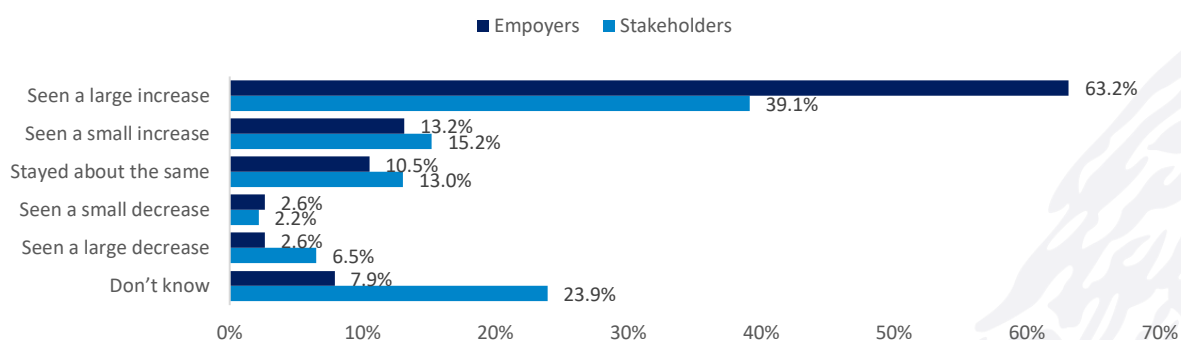
In terms of funding, the majority (69%, n=36) of employers agree that funding appears to be more difficult to get in some areas of CLD than others. Additionally, 31% agree that funders and number of funding options appear to change. None of the employers agreed that funding appears to be evenly distributed.

In terms of how professional development is funded, 70% (n=37) of employers reported that their organisation's core budget is used for professional development/training needs. 30% use other external funding and 22% of employers local external funding (Local Authority, Community Planning Partnership) or Scottish government external funding. On the other hand, 16% do not have access to funding for professional development/training for paid CLD staff.

In terms of budget, just over half of employers (55%, n=70) report that since 2018, the CLD budget has seen a decrease, while 18% remain unsure of the change.

As shown in Figure 26, in terms of change in demand, the majority of employers 76% and stakeholder (54%) respondents felt that the demand for CLD services has seen an increase. Similarly, 69% (n=644) of practitioners and 51.5% (n=70) of volunteers also reported increase in demand for CLD services.

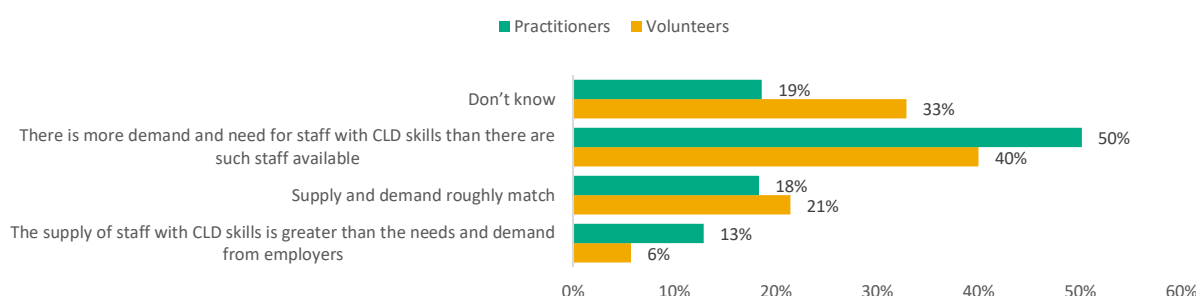
Figure 26: Employer and stakeholder perceptions on the change in demand



Note: n=37 (Employers), n= 46 (Stakeholders)

Employers were asked about their perception of supply and demand for CLD services. Over three quarters (81%) of employer respondents mentioned that there is more demand for CLD services than there is available while only 5.4% state that there are more services than demanded. Similarly, as visible in Figure 27, about half of practitioner respondents and 40% of volunteer respondents report that there is more demand for CLD services than supply.

Figure 27: Practitioner and volunteer perspectives on demand and supply in CLD



Note: n=644 (Practitioners), n=70 (Volunteers)

Employers were also asked about the extent to which the Community Learning and Development Guidance 2024-2027 inform the CLD work of their organisation. A majority of employer respondents (52.6%, n=38) mentioned that the CLD guidance informs their work to some extent while 8% mentioned that it is influenced by a great extent. However, 21% of respondents mentioned that they are not aware of CLD guidance.

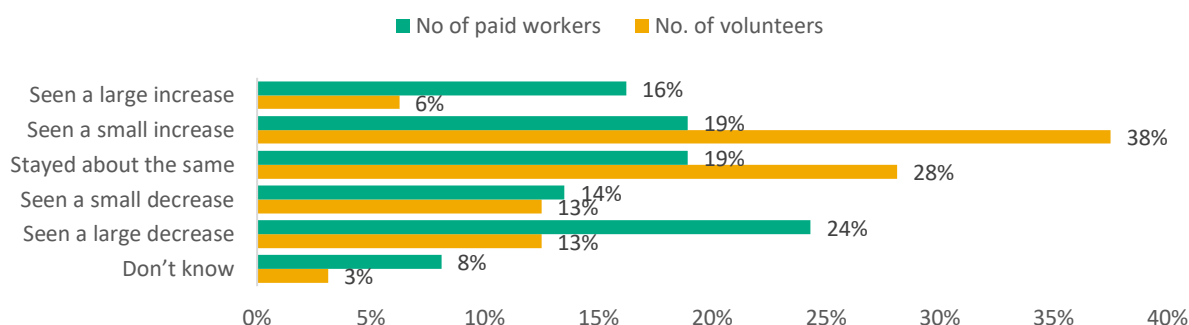
4.6.2 Staff resources

Employers were asked if they were able to see a change in number of paid staff volunteers in their organisation since 2018. As visible in Figure 28:

- Almost half (44%) of employer respondents reported an increase in the number of volunteers, with 26% reporting a decrease.
- 38% of employers agreed that the number of paid workers has decreased in contrast to 35% reporting an increase.

This suggests that in some places, a reduction in paid roles may have used volunteers to fill gaps. This should be explored via qualitative engagement to better understand if this is the case.

Figure 28: Employer perspectives on the change in number of paid workers and volunteers in organisation since 2018



Note: n= 37 (for Q on no. of paid volunteers), n=32 (for Q on no. of volunteers)

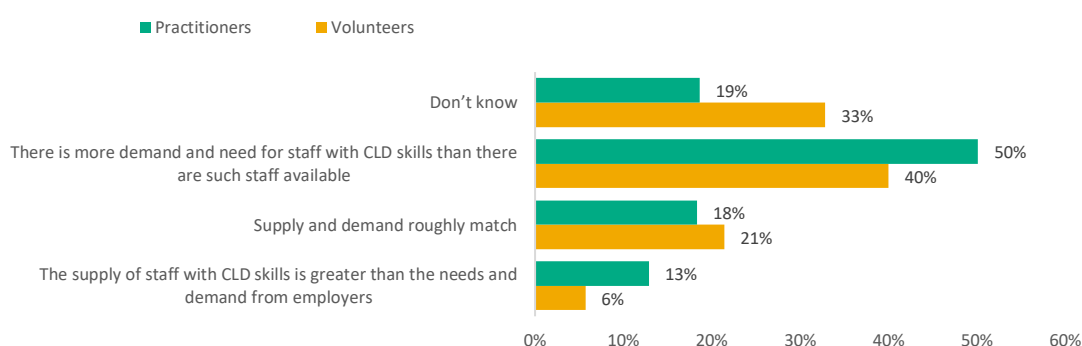
Employers felt that there are too few resources across all aspects- youth work (88%, n=37), community development and/or community capacity building (83%), family learning (76%), adult learning (71%), Welfare support (67%), and Employability (57%).

Similarly, stakeholder respondents (n=22) also believe that there are too few services/resources to meet demand for support in the community for all aspects- Adult learning (95%), Community development and/or community capacity building (91%), Family learning (73%), Youth work (73%), and Employability (59%).

In terms of staff demand and supply, as visible in

Figure 29, practitioners (50%) and volunteers (40%) tend to think that there is more demand for CLD staff than supply.

Figure 29: Practitioner and volunteer perceptions on demand and supply of staff



Note: n=644 (Practitioners), n=70 (Volunteers)

Volunteers were asked about perception of recognition of CLD roles, 49.2% (n=63) of volunteers feel that there is more recognition since 2018, while 14.3% of volunteers feel like there is less recognition. For stakeholders 39% (n=49) believe that CLD roles have more recognition, while 26.5% feel that there has been less recognition.

4.6.3 Organisational relationships

Employers were asked their perspectives on multiple aspects of organisational relationships with community and other stakeholders. As shown in Figure 30, nearly all employer respondents (97%) agreed that partnership working between organisations active in CLD is important while 69% agree that national policy is helpful in informing their work.

Figure 30: Employer perspectives on organisational relationships since 2018



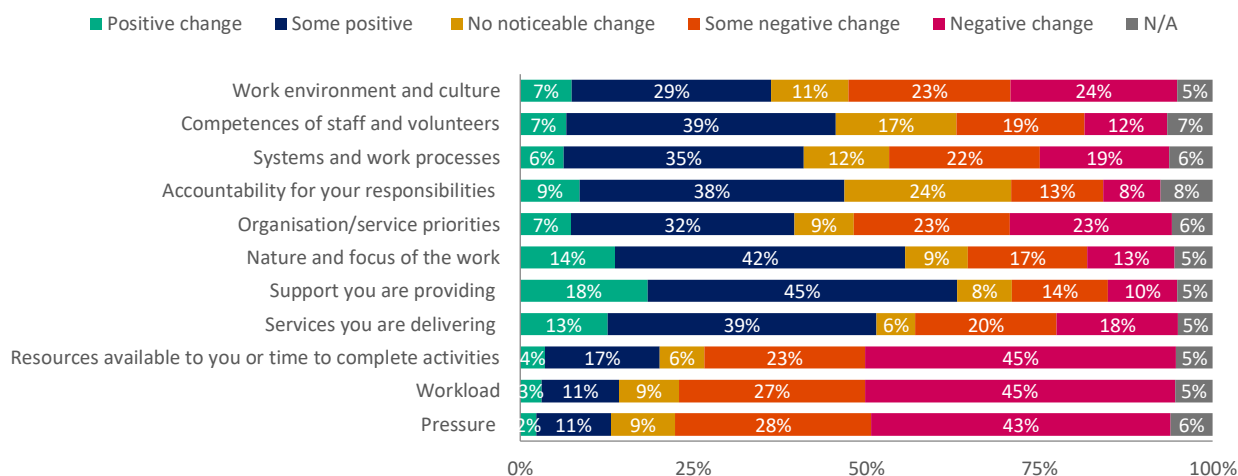
Note: n=38

4.6.4 Workforce pressures

As Figure 31 shows while practitioners believe the nature of work is changing.

- Just over half of respondents reported positive changes across the support they are providing (63%) and the nature and focus of work (56%)
- 71% feel pressure has increased, and that there has been a negative change in workload (70%) and the availability of resources available (68%).

Figure 31: Changes noted in nature of CLD work for practitioners



Volunteers, were more positive than practitioners, but also identified workload, pressure, and resources available as the areas where there has been the most negative change.

5. Discussion

5.1 What the results mean for the CLD policy landscape

The survey highlights a policy environment in which Community Learning and Development (CLD) is expected to deliver across an expanding range of priorities, despite increasingly constrained and unstable capacity.

This points to a growing gap between policy ambition and delivery reality, suggesting that the next phase of policy must move beyond recognising CLD's value towards enabling it through stronger systems of planning, funding, workforce development, and accountability.

A central issue is the widening gap between rising demand and declining capacity. Demand for CLD services is increasing, while budgets are perceived to be falling and provision is struggling to keep pace. This raises concerns that CLD is being relied upon to address complex social challenges without the necessary investment, reinforcing the need to position it as essential infrastructure supported by clearer national funding expectations.

Workforce sustainability is also emerging as a critical policy concern. An ageing workforce, reductions in paid roles, and increased reliance on volunteers indicate fragility in long-term capacity. This underlines the need for a coordinated national workforce plan that strengthens entry pathways, supports retention and wellbeing, and ensures leadership development and succession.

At the same time, inconsistent approaches to professional registration point to a broader governance challenge. While many practitioners are registered, employer expectations vary significantly, suggesting that professional standards are not yet embedded at an organisational level. This supports the case for clearer expectations linked to funding and commissioning, alongside more consistent approaches to professional standards.

Skills development needs are closely aligned with current policy demands, particularly in areas such as digital capability, leadership, and evaluation. However, these are not yet being fully supported. If CLD is expected to demonstrate impact against national outcomes, this must be matched with investment in professional learning, including accessible training and protected time for development.

The findings also highlight the challenges around equality and representation, with the workforce remaining over 90% White, higher than the national census figures (87% White). This suggests that broader equality ambitions will be difficult to achieve without targeted action on recruitment, progression, and inclusive practice, alongside stronger pathways from communities into CLD roles.

Finally, issues relating to local structures and visibility persist. Variability in how CLD is positioned within local authority systems risks fragmentation and reduced impact. This reinforces the need for greater consistency in how CLD is planned, funded, and reported, ensuring it remains visible and coherent within local governance arrangements rather than dispersed across service areas.

5.2 The need for a national CLD workforce plan

The findings strongly support Recommendation 5.2 of the Independent Review of CLD (2024), which calls for the development of a national CLD Workforce Plan. Evidence of rising demand alongside declining capacity highlights the need for a coordinated, system-wide approach to workforce planning rather than fragmented local responses.

The analysis also identifies key workforce challenges—including ageing staff, recruitment and retention pressures, skills gaps, and inconsistent professional standards—which align directly with the priorities such a plan would need to address. These issues demonstrate that workforce development is not solely an operational concern but a strategic policy issue requiring national leadership.

Overall, the findings reinforce that without a clear, evidence-based workforce plan, wider CLD policy ambitions will be difficult to achieve. This underlines the importance of Recommendation 5.2 in establishing a sustainable, skilled, and appropriately supported workforce capable of meeting current and future demand.

Robust data will inform a targeted strategy to meet the professional learning needs of the CLD sector. This includes generating intelligence on current and future demand from both employers and practitioners, enabling more responsive, evidence-based planning of training and development provision.

5.3 Uneven registration of the CLD workforce and low membership to the CLD Standards Council

The survey findings suggest that professional registration is unevenly embedded across the workforce: while 76.2% of practitioners report being registered members or registered associate members, the proportion is lower among volunteers (47.8%), and employer expectations are mixed, with 53% of employer respondents neither requiring, expecting nor encouraging registration. This indicates that registration is often driven by individual professional identity rather than being systematically supported through organisational policy, commissioning or workforce planning.

A more comprehensive approach to registration and membership would support several policy aims highlighted elsewhere in this report: strengthening professional standards; improving the visibility and coherence of CLD across settings; and enabling better workforce intelligence for a national workforce plan. In practice, this points to a need for coordinated action by national partners, employers and the CLD Standards Council to reduce barriers and make expectations clearer.

Implications for policy and practice

- **Clarify expectations and incentives:** consider aligning registration expectations with commissioning, partnership agreements and funding conditions (where appropriate), so that professional standards are consistently recognised across local authorities, third sector organisations and partner providers.
- **Make membership more accessible:** address practical barriers for volunteers and sessional staff (e.g., cost, time, evidence requirements) and strengthen the offer by clearly communicating benefits such as professional recognition, support networks, CPD and guidance.
- **Support employers to embed standards:** develop simple employer-facing guidance and templates (e.g., induction, supervision, CPD planning, role profiles) that link job roles to CLD values, ethics and competencies.
- **Strengthen pathways into registration:** use entry routes (volunteering, modern apprenticeships, workplace learning, and HE/FE provision) to create clearer progression to membership and registration, supporting recruitment and retention.
- **Improve workforce intelligence:** use strengthened registration and membership data (with appropriate safeguards) as one element of a wider national evidence base to support workforce planning, identify skills gaps, and monitor equality and representation.

Taken together, these steps would help shift registration from being an individual choice to a more consistently supported professional norm, while still recognising the diversity of CLD roles and organisational contexts.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Summary of key insights

Participation and composition

- 849 total respondents: 80% practitioners, 9% volunteers, 7% stakeholders, 5% employers (lower overall response than 2018).
- Awareness of CLD is very high (97.8%).

Where CLD activity is focused

- Employer-reported organisational focus spans all three areas, with strongest emphasis on community development (55%), then youth work (52%) and adult learning (45%) (small employer base: n=42).

Registration and professional identity

- 76.2% of practitioners and 47.8% of volunteers report being registered members/associate members of the CLD Standards Council.
- Among employers, just under half (53%) neither require/expect/encourage staff registration, suggesting inconsistent organisational expectations.
- Most practitioners (76%) use the term CLD to describe their job; a sizeable minority avoid it to reduce complexity and use more specific role labels.

Workforce profile and sustainability

- The workforce appears ageing: practitioner responses cluster in 45–64 age bands, consistent with 2018's finding of a limited under-35 pipeline.
- Practitioners are mostly in permanent roles (73.5%), but employers report mixed trends since 2018: paid staff decreasing for 38%, while volunteering increased for 44%—suggesting pressure is being absorbed partly through volunteers.

Diversity and inclusion

- A notable minority report long-term conditions; volunteers reporting disability/long-term condition is high relative to the national average cited; strengthening the case for inclusive practice and support.
- Ethnic diversity remains low: over 90% White (similar to 2018's 97%, and Scotland's census 87%).

Skills, CPD and recruitment pinch points

- Most cited development needs: digital skills (both practitioners and volunteers) and leadership/management (especially practitioners).
- Employers most commonly struggle to recruit evaluative skills; resource/time constraints are major barriers to meeting development needs (funding and staff time are repeatedly highlighted).
- Evaluative skills are the biggest unmet need for employers providing support, and is the biggest skills gap in recruitment.

Demand, resourcing and funding context

- Strong perception of increasing demand for CLD services (employers 76%, stakeholders 54%, practitioners 69%).
- Many report demand exceeding supply (81% of employers; about half of practitioners/volunteers).
- Employers report budget decreases since 2018 (55%), aligning with the narrative of tightening resources alongside rising need.

6.2 Recommendations

The workforce survey and qualitative stakeholder engagement have highlighted 13 priority recommendations that should be taken forward to ensure the CLD workforce is better supported and future-proofed.

Ideally, and as recommended in the Independent Review, the CLD Standards Council should work to develop a CLD Workforce Plan (for consideration by the Strategic Leadership Group) to support these recommendations.

Theme	Recommendation	Rationale
Workforce sustainability & wellbeing	1. Reduce workload pressures through improved resourcing, clearer prioritisation, and organisational capacity reviews.	Practitioners reported negative changes in workload, pressure, and resourcing, signalling sustainability issues.
	2. Support staff health and wellbeing through targeted policies and supervision.	High proportions of practitioners and volunteers report disabilities or long-term health conditions.
Workforce diversity & inclusion	3. Develop targeted recruitment strategies to improve the pipeline of young people into the sector.	The sector is aging
	4. Strengthen inclusive employment practices for staff with disabilities and long-term health conditions.	Significant proportions of practitioners and volunteers report disabilities or long-term illness.
Skills development & progression pathways	5. Prioritise development in digital skills, leadership, and management.	Digital skills and leadership/management are the most commonly cited development needs.
	6. Develop training and resources around evaluative techniques so staff and potential staff can be better trained.	Evaluative techniques are a large gap in current resources and a challenge in recruitment.
	7. Enhance clear pathways into and through the CLD profession, including access to opportunities to gain qualifications.	Practitioners predominantly hold SCQF Level 9+ qualifications, and volunteers show growing interest in CLD qualifications.

Theme	Recommendation	Rationale
Recruitment, retention & workforce planning	8. Strengthen long-term workforce planning to address demand exceeding supply.	50% of practitioners and 40% of volunteers report that demand for CLD skills exceeds supply.
	9. Target priority groups such as young people and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.	Ensure a more representative workforce.
Raising the profile & value of CLD	10. Build public and partner awareness of CLD's contribution to community empowerment, learning, and wellbeing.	It appears likely that many individuals in CLD related roles, may not identify with the term, and are harder to engage.
	11. Improve visibility of CLD career pathways and the impact of the sector.	High levels of commitment to staying in CLD suggest appetite for progression and visibility.
	12. Begin a progressive requirement for all those working or volunteering in CLD roles to be members of the CLD Standards Council.	Supports better workforce management, engagement and understanding on a national level.
Budgets and funding	13. Funding should be consistent and better clarified.	Many budget holders do not have CLD backgrounds and may not understand what funding is about.

The survey findings and resulting recommendations also support several recommendations from the Independent Review of CLD²⁴ including:

- **Budgets and funding:** The Independent Review recommended that the Scottish Government should “undertake an urgent and overdue reassessment of the current balance of spending across all dimensions of learning in Scotland”. In addition, specific recommendations were made that the Scottish Government and CoSLA should “work together to identify indicative allocations for Local Authority spend on CLD” and that “wherever possible, funding should be part of core budgets rather than project related”) but noting that if this is not possible to provide project funding over a multi-year period.
- **‘Developing the Workforce and Standards’:** standards would help address the reported skills development needs (for digital and leadership/management skills) and enhance pathways in and through the CLD profession (including opportunities to gain qualifications), and would strengthen long-term workforce planning. These areas for action

²⁴ Learning: For All. For Life. A report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD), *Scottish Government*, (2024). [Link](#)

could potentially feed into any development of the long-term recommendations in the independent review for the Scottish Government to appoint a Chief Adviser on CLD.



About Rocket Science

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