



Standards Council
Scotland

A Guide to Community Learning & Development

in Scotland

2025



Introduction

Community Learning and Development (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 is a collaborative and inclusive process that involves various stakeholders 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.

Introduction (cont.)

CLD is a field of professional practice that enables people to identify their own individual and collective goals, to engage in learning and take action to bring about change for themselves and their communities.

CLD uses a range of formal and informal methods of learning and social development with individuals and groups in their communities.

CLD programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants, working particularly with those excluded from participation in the decisions and processes that shape their lives.

Through working in these ways, CLD extends the reach of democracy and widens its scope.



Purpose of CLD

The Scottish Government issued Strategic Guidance for Community Planning partnerships: Community learning and development in 2012. The Strategic Guidance sets out what the Scottish Government sees as the purpose of CLD and what it wants CLD to focus on. The purpose is described as follows:

“We see [CLD] as empowering people, individually and collectively, to make positive changes in their lives and in their communities, through learning.”

It further states that

“the purpose and principles [of CLD] are embodied in the competences and ethics for CLD practice as set out by the CLD Standards Council for Scotland”.

The focus of CLD, which the Strategic Guidance puts into the context of the National Performance Framework, is identified as:

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

What does CLD involve?

CLD 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.

This includes (but is not necessarily limited to):

- **Community Development (building the capacity of communities to meet their own needs, engaging with and influencing decision makers)**
- **Youth Work, family learning and other early intervention work with children, young people and families**
- **Community-based Adult Learning, including adult literacies and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)**
- **Learning for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the community, for example, people with disabilities, care leavers or offenders**
- **Working with individuals and communities to improve their health and wellbeing**
- **Volunteer development**
- **Learning support and guidance in the community**

History

CLD has its origins in the welter of change that swept through society in the 18th and 19th centuries. New industries, and changes in science, technology, land use and education dislocated or smashed traditional forms of family and community life.

While wealth through individual enterprise, democratic-decision-making and state provided education promised routes to a brave new world of opportunity for all, these have proven to be strewn with barriers for those bearing the brunt of the down side of change.

Continuing disadvantage has often related to where you were born, your race or gender and has remained embedded in the institutions, such as schools, health services and social work, intended to overcome it.

CLD has its origins in the need to counter the effects of this persistent disadvantage. This can be seen for example in –

- The history of youth work, starting with voluntary action often with a Christian ethic;
- The development of the Workers Educational Association and the National Council of Labour Colleges; and
- The growth of community development as a response to the “rediscovery of poverty” in the 1960s.

History (cont.)

In the post 2nd world war era, the role of the state in the economy and society, including welfare and education grew in scale and complexity. The Alexander Report – Adult Education: the challenge of change (HMSO 1975) was a response to the persistent issues of disadvantage in that context.

In advocating that “Adult education should be regarded as an aspect of community education and should with the youth and community service, be incorporated into a community education service” it brought about the birth of CLD in the form it has grown into in the 21st century.

There have been four key reports influencing the shape of CLD from 1975 to 2025:

- 1975 Alexander Report - The Challenge of Change
- 1998 Communities: Change through Learning
- 2004 Working and Learning Together to build stronger communities
- 2024 Learning: For All. For Life

You can view and download the reports on CLD Standards Council website.



CLD: Key Reports

History (cont.)

“The Making of an Empowering Profession” was first published in 1996, followed by editions in 1997 and 2002. It is a collection of material that outlined and illustrated how the practices that we now describe as Community Learning and Development have been created, analysed, argued over and changed since the mid-1970s.

Influencing Change: CLD in Scotland, 2001-2015 is a companion reader to **The Making of an Empowering Profession** and brings together the key policy and guidance documents across all aspects of CLD. It highlights the ways in which the story of CLD is an integral part of wider social, political and economic developments.



Download
**The Making of an
Empowering Profession
and
Influencing Change: CLD in
Scotland, 2001-2015.**

You can also find a wealth of material on the history of CLD, informal education, social pedagogy, lifelong learning and social action at infed.org, provided by the YMCA George Williams College.

Key Contexts

Adult Learning

Raising standards of achievement in learning for adults through community-based lifelong learning opportunities incorporating the core skills of: literacy, numeracy, communications, working with others, problem-solving, information communications technology (ICT).

More information about national community based adult learning policy can be found in the Adult Learning Strategy 2022-2027 on the Scottish Government website or at Learning Link Scotland, the national intermediary for voluntary sector adult learning organisations in Scotland.



[Adult learning strategy
2022-2027](#)



[Learning Link Scotland](#)

Key Contexts

Community Development

Building community capacity and influence by enabling people to develop the confidence, understanding and skills required to influence decision making and service delivery.

More information about capacity building can be found in the section of the [Scottish Government website](#) dealing with community engagement/empowerment.

Find out more about Community Development by visiting the websites below.



[Scottish Centre for
Community
Development](#)



[Community
Development Alliance
Scotland](#)

Key Contexts

Youth Work

Engaging with young people to facilitate their personal, social and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence and a place in society.

More information about national youth work policy, legislation, research, networks and practice can be found in the Working with young people, children and families section of the Education Scotland website and at YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work in Scotland.



[YouthLink Scotland](#)

CLD practice across diverse settings

Maintaining a standard of practice across settings means that participants experience consistency of practice based on common values whether they are involved in youth work activities, community based adult learning or building community capacity.

A key context for successful CLD is that it is planned for and delivered in partnership with all the main local stakeholders. Local partnerships will vary in membership depending on local needs and circumstances. Most CLD Partnerships have representation from local authorities, the police, FE colleges, health boards and the voluntary sector.

This reflects the breadth of CLD's contribution to developing lifelong learning opportunities, improving the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities and promoting safe and vibrant communities.

The Values, Code of Ethics and Competences, or aspects of them, also often inform the work of other practitioners, professions and individuals.

Values, Ethics and Competences



CLD is a value-based practice.

The **Values, Code of Ethics and Competences** provide the basis for CLD professional practice that happens in varied settings across the public and third sectors.

Values



CLD professionals commit themselves to the values which are fundamental to the practice of CLD across all of its settings.

Self-determination

Respecting the individual and valuing the right of people to make their own choices.

Valuing equality of both opportunity and outcome, and challenging discriminatory practice.

Inclusion

Empowerment

Increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence issues that affect them and their communities through individual and/or collective action.

Maximising collaborative working relationships in partnerships between the many agencies which contribute to CLD, including collaborative work with participants, learners and communities.

Working Collaboratively

Promotion of learning as a lifelong activity

Ensuring that individuals are aware of a range of learning opportunities and are able to access relevant options at any stage of their life.

These values have been identified by the CLD Standards Council.

Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics is part of a foundation for our profession, together with our values and principles, the Competences for CLD and the national professional learning strategy. It has a central role in defining and communicating what CLD work is.

- 1 Primary client
- 2 Confidentiality
- 3 Social context
- 4 Co-operation
- 5 Equity
- 6 Professional Learning

- 7 Empowerment
- 8 Self-awareness
- 9 Duty of Care
- 10 Boundaries
- 11 Transparency
- 12 Self-care

Ethical Practice - Competent Practitioners



A learning resource developed to assist CLD practitioners and everyone with an interest in CLD to use the Code of Ethics to inform, develop and challenge practice and to promote the use of the Code in their organisation (and with partners).



Competences

The Competence Framework brings together the knowledge, skills and personal characteristics that make up competence in CLD practice. The Framework is used by practitioners, training providers and employers to reflect on, develop and strengthen practice.

The Framework comprises the 7 competences, 5 key attributes and the definition of a competent practitioner.



Statutory Basis

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.

The National Performance Framework sets out the Scottish Government's Purpose, high-level targets related to this, Strategic Objectives, National Outcomes and National Indicators.

All CLD work will relate to one or more of these National Outcomes



The main statutory basis for CLD is provided by The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013.

Other relevant legislation includes the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, 2015

For up to date details on strategies and legislation relating directly to specific aspects of CLD, please visit the CLD Standards Council's Policy webpage.



Why employers need professionally qualified CLD practitioners

The CLD Standards Council continually promotes the essential role of professional CLD practitioners, and this is all the more important as resources get ever-scarcer.

We've produced a paper that sets out the ways in which professional CLD practitioners are not just valuable but indispensable, and are making this available for members to use in your own context. 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.

[Access the Paper](#)





Contact Information

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