



CLD Standards Council Scotland

Submitted Response
to
Scottish Government

Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill

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About Us

The CLD Standards Council Scotland is the professional body for people who work or volunteer in community learning and development (CLD) across Scotland. As member led organisation we have a growing membership of over 2850 members, an executive committee and 3 functional committees which are made up of members from across the sector in Scotland. Our approach and work plan to deliver our core responsibilities are defined by our member committees and based on feedback from the wider membership.

Our core responsibilities are:

- Deliver a professional approvals structure for qualifications, courses, and development opportunities for everyone involved in CLD.
- Maintain a registration system available to practitioners delivering and active in CLD practice.
- Develop and establish a model of supported induction, professional learning, and training opportunities.

Vision

“Our vision is that the communities and people of Scotland are served by CLD practitioners that are recognised as competent, confident and committed to equality, empowerment and life-wide learning for all.”

Mission

“Our mission is to drive high standards of professional practice in the CLD sector by the approval of professional learning, the registration of practitioners and the enabling of professional development, working with our members to be a voice for the profession.”

For further information on the CLD Standards Council please visit our [website](#). If you would like to discuss this response further, please contact us via email on contact@cldstandardscouncil.org.uk

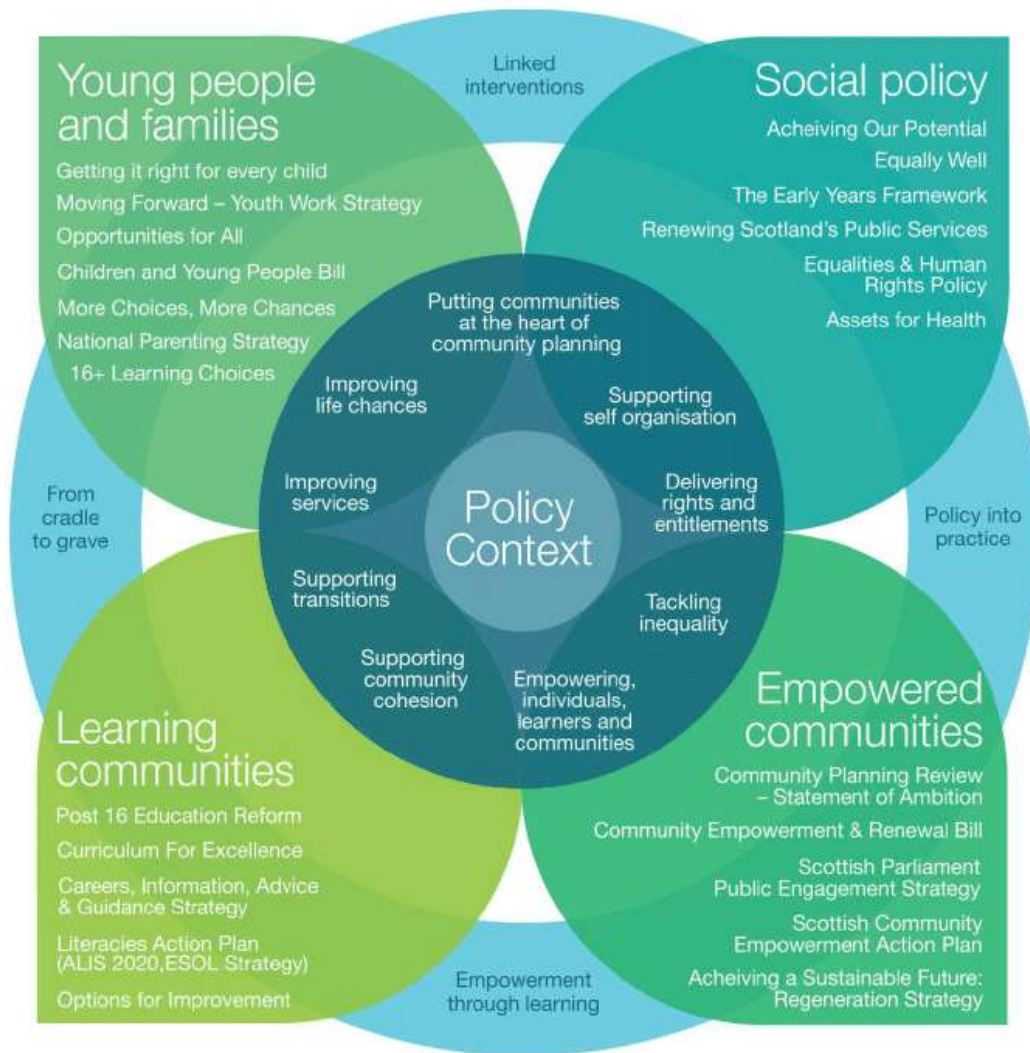
Introduction

CLD is a profession that is critical in the achievement of any policy or legislation that requires community engagement, development, and learning as it supports the learning, growth, empowerment of individuals and communities, as well as supporting the delivery of other services. From community development supporting climate action change, sustainability and protecting our environment, as well as developing neighbourhoods, community empowerment and community support groups, to working with young people and adults regarding enablement and citizenship and improving literacy and numeracy within Scotland's communities which impacts on economy, health, and wellbeing. CLD practice includes examples such as improving opportunities for learning and development in rural areas, supporting learners of all ages to develop confidence, autonomy and skills, literacy, and numeracy support through to community art projects, citizen assemblies, community participatory budgeting initiatives and supporting capacity building of community developments such as foodbanks and credit unions.

CLD enables people across Scotland to identify their own individual and collective goals, to take action to bring about change and through this to achieve these goals. Using a range of formal and informal methods of learning and social development, CLD programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants, working particularly with those most vulnerable in society, and 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.

CLD offers the learning and development opportunities to ensure individuals can thrive in vibrant communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe, to tackling poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally, working collaboratively to make individual's needs, goals and aspirations reality, however it is not recognised or acknowledged for its role and this we would like to see changed.

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



This report provides analysis of the feedback received from CLD workers and volunteers across the sector. Specifically, feedback was gathered to explore how CLD Standards Council members can input and support the development of this Scottish Government strategy for the benefit of CLD practitioners, our communities and of the individual learners it works with.

It was compiled following consultation with members of the CLD Standards Council, partner organisations and stakeholders. We facilitated a consultation event with members on 26th March. We also gathered members views using an online questionnaire, as well as having dialogue with individual members and the CLD Standards Council staff team.

Assumptions:

It is important to recognise that this CLD Standards Council response provides an insight into the views and experiences based on the those mentioned above. The data gathered has provided a valuable insight into the experiences based on the views of the member participants. This response is not representative of the entire CLD sector across Scotland or the full CLD Standards Council membership.

Response from the CLD Standards Council to Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergent Strategy Consultation

Statutory Requirements

As stated in the consultation guidance, there is currently no formal or legislative requirement for national or local strategies specifically aimed at neurodivergent conditions or learning disabilities.

We asked our members which of the following suggested statutory requirements should be included.

- Require the Scottish Government to produce a national strategy.
- Require public bodies, such as health and social care partnerships and local authorities, to produce local strategies.
- Produce guidance for national and local strategies.
- Ensure strategies are reviewed on a regular basis.
- Make sure that people with lived experience are involved.
- Consider whether any new accountability mechanism introduced by the Bill should include a duty to review national and local strategies and their effectiveness.

Over 83% responded that all six suggestions should be included as it was felt that they are critically important to ensure the strategy is written well, and has the power and influence required, to make significant changes to the way we support people with learning disabilities, autism and are neurodivergent.

Mandatory Training on Neurodivergence, Learning Disabilities, and Autism

Under the specific theme of Health and Wellbeing there is a proposal to introduce mandatory training on Neurodivergence, Learning Disabilities, and Autism, for health and social care staff, which would be following the same as legislation that is in England. We welcome this proposal as a large percentage of the population are neurodivergent and we should be removing barriers for them to accessing services by changing our practice. We feel there is a need to recognise the greater benefit from widening the range of professions who should undertake the training as mandatory as well as others who may be offered the training on an opt in basis.

It is strongly felt that the requirement to undertake this mandatory training should be expanded to include other services who interact and impact on the lives of people on a daily basis. Families and individuals we work with and support tell us of the barriers they face daily, and they significant detrimental impact from consistently explaining their needs, explaining someone has autism and behaviours are different etc, and how difficult it is to overcome the defensive hostility from people who are not equipped to recognise or understand the approaches required to engage, communicate and support people with learning disabilities, autism and who are neurodivergent.

We are aware that expanding the offer of mandatory training to other professions would knowingly create an increase on the demand, and this may not seem achievable due to resourcing and logistics etc, we suggest a tiered or phased approach to rolling this out until inclusion of the training becomes embedded into the required specialised development for these professions:

Mandatory First Tier:

- Health and Social Care
- Fire Service
- Police Service
- Educators (Teachers, Early Years Practitioners, CLD Practitioners, Further and Higher Education)

Mandatory Second Tier:

- Library and Museum Staff
- All front facing service delivery Local Authority employees.
- Travel workers (taxi drivers, bus, and train staff)

Mandatory Third Tier:

- Community Councils
- Citizens Advice and other Advocacy Agencies
- Skills Development Scotland and Careers Advisors

Opt In Forth Tier:

- BAME Community Groups
- Gypsy/Travelling Community
- Retail Sector
- Hospitality Sector
- Leisure Sector
- Voluntary and Charitable Organisations

Inclusive Communication and Participation

This is set out as an overarching theme in the proposal, and it states *“Inclusive communication means sharing and receiving information in a way that everybody can understand. The use of inclusive communication is vital in allowing neurodivergent people and people with learning disabilities to know and exercise their rights, to live independently and to participate fully in life.”*

As previously mentioned, CLD supports the most vulnerable individuals and communities to learn, grow and develop through a range of engagement and learning activities, this also includes assisting those far from the workplace to access volunteering as a way to increase self-esteem, diminish social isolation and raise self-worth whilst learning new skills to take with them into the workplace when ready. Volunteering within communities is often used as a vehicle to support vulnerable individuals to gain the skills, confidence and experience required to realise potential and live independent, vibrant, active, and fulfilling lives.

Support offered by CLD practitioners to individuals to access volunteering also aids the achievement of Scotland's national performance framework and outcomes. A recent review of community development during the pandemic was carried out by [HM Inspectors \(Responsive, supportive and resilient communities\)](#) and shows the range of work and support offered through the CLD profession and its approaches, including training and supporting volunteers and those most vulnerable in supporting communities to deal with the cost-of-living crisis, through transition periods, or support the increasing numbers of refugees arriving in the country.

Participation is a fundamental human rights principle and therefore it is crucial that key stakeholders who can support individuals to access and benefit from meaningful participation, such as CLD, are recognised and stated in this strategy. CLD uses a person-centred approach, providing learning and development opportunities that are accessible and responsive to individual and community priorities, listening to learners and communities' voices and being led by them. From our professional experience, participation is all about people's voices, those experiences being heard and being taken into account, their voices being taken seriously and then transparency and follow through as their voices are seen to inform and change what happens. We feel strongly that LDAN individuals and communities' participation and voice needs to be shown as valued and transparent throughout this strategy, ensuring co-production of this legislation, and should be clearly stipulated in the purpose, the monitoring and reporting processes and in the evaluation and review stages.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation stipulated in a [paper on poverty](#), inequality and human rights that *"Communities affected by poverty that have asserted their right to participate in decision-making have generated practical and cost effective policy solutions"* evidencing the integrable part those voices played in not only making decisions but shaping sustainable solutions. This applies to those individuals, families and communities who will be impacted by this new strategy. It is about participation, change and solution focused guidance, which offer legislation that individuals and groups should be at the core of. Recognition and understanding of barriers to participation is also essential and, as evidenced later in this report through some examples of programmes delivered by CLD, our professional workforce is best placed to support this.

It is essential to acknowledge that CLD practitioners already play a crucial role in supporting community groups and vulnerable people to gain and access the information, skills and learning needed to respond to emerging and often challenging need. This was highly evident during the [Covid 19 Pandemic](#), [Community, COVID-19, challenge and change – Policy Scotland](#), [Engage, Educate, Connect, Empower: CLD, Resilience and Recovery - July 2020](#). CLD practitioners offer professional, high quality learning, guidance and skills needed for not only the development, progress and governance of community organisations, but also in supporting the operational delivery of community-based services, for communities, groups and individuals, empowering them to have a greater stake in the communities in which they live and work, and in turn, Scotland's wellbeing economy which includes just transition to Net Zero. CLD practitioners are qualified in and implementing all of the tools and techniques of good community education and development work. It is essential we all understand each other's strengths and collaborate. We strongly believe that the CLD sector and CLD as a practice needs to be given a legitimate place and role in this process.

Significant and inclusive participation requires a fully funded and committed resource to enable capacity building and support. The CLD workforce across Scotland are trained in co-production, community engagement and development so would be best placed as a sector to support this.

Currently CLD workforce both in local authority and within the third sector are constantly facing funding cuts.

To ensure meaningful engagement from those most vulnerable, it is essential that the language used within this strategy and its guidance is accessible and understandable to all who may be impacted by it and may want to use it. The [Adult learning strategy](#) was published by Scottish Government in 2022 and informs us that over 324,000 adults in Scotland have low or no qualifications, and the [National Literacy Trust](#) report that 1 in 4 adults in Scotland experience challenges due to their lack of literacy skills and Scotland has the highest percentage across all of the four nations. We suggest that the draft strategy and any guidance should be taken to focus groups of LDAN community members who are perhaps not normally involved in these stages of legislation and policy development to check its accessibility and levels of language. This would enable Scottish Government to see how well it is understood and that there is no misinterpretation of words, phrases or intent. We all have a duty of responsibility to ensure we get it right in terms of communities' involvement within this process, therefore we need to make sure that language being used is understandable and that people are not being overwhelmed by jargon and therefore disengaging with discussions or unable to access information on their rights.

There was a call for further recognition of the importance of opportunities for socialising and being active. Agreement was had on the need to foster and encourage individual contact within communities to support learning, development, as well as mental health and wellbeing. Community events, whilst can be a difficult environment, can help combat isolation as well as engage mental stimulation, as well as the added benefits from seeing friends and family, having face to face contact and physical contact. Discussions were had around the difficulties to reach some LDAN individuals whose health and wellbeing literacy levels are lower, therefore can be more anxious to engage with practitioners. It was agreed that CLD practitioners are a great stepping stone service for people to build confidence again, as well as having the ability to offer learning around health literacy and building resilience. Being active was a commonality in regard to having positive impact on mental health and wellbeing, independence, and social integration, with examples of gardening, being in nature, outdoor swimming, walking the dog and playing sports being top of the list.

Statements offering examples of CLD inclusion, training, and opportunities from our members:

- MECOPP Gypsy/Traveller Support Service with community development and capacity building projects with the women of the communities, and engagement & participation with the wider community in consultations with Scot Gov, LA's & service providers. A large number of community members have literacy, numeracy, and digital learning issues. We use a variety of methods & support within this area of need and have implemented things like accessing funding to provide laptops and Wi-Fi dongles to those most isolated and with mental health issues and/or a disability of any kind.
- Designated CLD digital worker to support recipients of new IT devices to learn how to use them and get online. Adapted our website to have 'easy read' info, developed use of symbols instead of just words, and audio options to click on an icon and listen to info instead of having to read it.

- CLD officers in my locality are incredibly supportive. There is no discrimination, and it has always been a positive outlook and positive support. We offer literacy, numeracy, and digital skills support within small groups or 1:1. Using a social practice model we tailor the learning and the experience to suit individuals.
- Within our CLD team accessibility training is provided to CLD staff, including clerical staff.
- Our CLD service offers a cooking and numbers through our literacies project, which encourages the use of numbers in practical cooking.
- At least half the staff team has lived experience of disability and so our organisation is built on clear and inclusive communication that values a variety of learning styles. We are a really small team (9 members of staff, FT PT and sessional with a membership of over one thousand members) but we provide easy read as often as possible, captions for photos/posts on social media and have frequent conversations about inclusive and accessible ways to share information. One of our projects at the moment is around accessible climate change, in partnership with Dynamic Earth.
- We continually adapt our offer and engage with agencies who are more experienced in supporting LDAN individuals and communities, to check our offer is suitable.
- In our CLD Adult Learning we have a fair number of people coming forward for help. We take time to form relationships with learners, make sure they feel comfortable and safe, take into account their needs and preferences and work with them at their pace rather than trying to take the lead. On one occasion we had a young man who would not take his coat off, we never commented and as the weeks went on and he felt safe his coat came off. That's development.
- A literacy learning programme for language acquisition to support independent advocacy.
- Youth groups where the staff have an understanding and tailor programmes based on needs. Example is "Agents for change" which runs in the Jack Kane Community Centre and explores social justice and action through groupwork.
- IT Development Programme, using Connecting Scotland initiative. Aberdeenshire Council CLD identify demand for laptops and tablets for vulnerable people who do not have access to a computer or tablet at home or do not have digital access. Follow up training and support is given to help individuals develop skills to use the technology, reduce social isolation and enable them to access online learning if more suited.
- Our organisation adapts and creates materials that can be used by people with various needs and range of abilities. We offer to scribe, we use symbols, words, and images, we break down jargon and use coloured paper, different fonts etc for whatever is required.
- All CLD provision in Girvan includes Supported Employment clients as well as families and clients with ASN. The groups are always selected and created to help all support needs. There is great communication with CLD regarding how to adapt groups and help clients and learners.
- Our CLD service works with Neurodivergent people and people with learning disabilities on core skills qualifications and Adult Achievement Awards.
- We offer one to one adult learning opportunities and if appropriate, group learning settings for people with additional needs, learning difficulties.
- Throughout our CLD service we ensure there is no discrimination within activities and learning, making sure special requirements are met and accessible to all. Our programmes in community centres run by youth workers who are supportive to all young people with or without additional needs.
- Yes, consistent, and lifelong learning is offered to our staff with lived experience. I work with staff to deliver training/events/workshops based on their own learning. We offer skill shares which I coordinate and deliver alongside ambassadors or partners, and they

provide a space for members and staff with lived experience to improve life skills and access informal education amongst peers. All staff are offered supervisions every 6-8 weeks.

- We support families with neurodivergent children, we look at parenting in the home.
- Out team works with a group from our local ARC centre. All of them have varying level of need. I was using resources from 'Maths on Toast' (sadly no longer available), where we teach Maths but on a fun basis using arts and crafts and using relevant maths language to encourage them. It was an extraordinarily successful session.
- All our CLD activity aims to support all learners to achieve and therefore supporting anyone who is willing to learn and commits to an activity, at any skill level.

Members noted these key points to offer insight into some of the barriers to improving or increasing provision and support for neurodivergent people and people with learning disabilities.

- Declining lack of any drive, motivation and understanding from budget holders and senior management to support resources needed.
- Needs to be seen as a “whole organisation” approach, not just CLD as budgets to carry out this work has been decimated and it doesn’t seem a priority.
- Continual cuts in funding and diminishing numbers in CLD workforce/staff minimalizes the number of supported learning opportunities available.
- Insecure employment, with zero hours or 6/12-month contracts means organisations struggling to employ qualified and experienced practitioners.
- Funding and priority: Been waiting seven years for my organisation (which is a public body) to put in place neurodivergent packages which was outlined in my occupational health assessment. No accountability or legislative requirements.

It is important to ensure neurodivergent people and people with learning disabilities know what their rights are, and they are communicated with in a way that is inclusive and accessible to help them to not only secure their rights, but to access support when needed, including independent advocacy. Practitioners responded unanimously that CLD is a key player in supporting these human rights aims, as social justice, autonomy, human agency and person centred learning is at the core of our profession, and at the heart of our professional [competencies](#), [ethics](#) and [values](#).

Members felt that all three of the following points should be achieved to support advocacy and independence:

1. provide a power in the Bill that allows us to make regulations around the provision of independent advocacy for neurodivergent people and people with learning disabilities whilst further discussions take place about how to improve this.
2. include a provision in the Bill that places a duty on all public bodies to ensure that all neurodivergent people and people with learning disabilities are given information about advocacy and how to appoint their own independent advocate to support them.

3. identify and gather evidence on specific circumstances where a right to independent advocacy could make a difference. For example, we know that there are some circumstances where additional support could help, as follows: where women with a learning disability have been subject to gender-based violence; and access to good-quality, accessible advice and advocacy when discussing housing options.

There was a call for the strategy, guidance documentation and training to all recognise the importance of understanding intersectionality. The concept of intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, and other forms of discrimination “intersect” to create unique dynamics and effects. The Oxford Dictionary defines intersectionality as “*the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage*”. Neurodivergent people and people with learning disabilities across Scotland can experience other prejudice or discrimination and can come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and communities. We strongly urge that this strategy acknowledges this and draws attention to the importance of consideration of intersectionality. For inclusion and equity, it is critical all support services understands everyone has their own unique experiences of life, as well a barriers to progression, and we must consider everything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc when supporting individuals to become independent, to access learning and skills development, and when they are transitioning though important stages of life or dealing with barriers and exclusion themselves.

Members offered the following suggestions and recommendations on how CLD and other LDAN support services can further develop learning opportunities for Neurodivergent people and people with learning disabilities.

- Ensure workforce are trained and have the time and space to process learning and training.
- Recognition of the importance in the development of this strategy and relevant guidance documentation, in involving people with lived experience in the writing and facilitating of trainings and other related processes
- Support processes to ensure more job opportunities for LDAN with employers, through developing further research to have greater understanding of LDAN and what that looks like for, and how it affects, employees and employers.
- Systemic change needed within current institutions such as schools, FE and HE, so people with LDAN have equality and equity when in employment or education, therefore being able to continue job or studies and release unlocked and often prohibited potential.
- Further develop knowledge and skills, including systems and processes to ensure access and ability to use accommodations, extra time, headphones, coloured paper, accessible language, and communication tools, or ensure the flexibility to have a conversation around anything a person might need to use to be able to learn. Make additional needs “adaptions” non additional, ensure they are part of normal processes.
- Statutory requirement for front facing services to use clear broken down and simple language used for instructions, directions, or information, along with the time and consideration for individuals to be allowed and enabled to ask as many questions as needed.

- Include in the mandatory training, modules on different learning styles and the understanding that not everyone learns or thinks the same way or same speed so finding out and working with the person to figure out the best style.
- Physical environments: Build into planning and engagement processes the support needed to enquire on buildings, place layouts, accessibility of locations, flexible use of assets in a building (furniture, rooms, services).
- Formal, non-formal and informal learning environments need to ensure they have spaces that are quiet and not overstimulating areas to work or learn in. Current systems used in schools; colleges follow traditional Victorian processes that are not fit for modern day learning requirements. Need for more online, smaller groups, quiet spaces.

Additional

We request that the development of this urgently required strategy and its supporting guidance references and relates to and is supported by other Scottish Government legislation and strategies which impact vulnerable individuals and communities, including:

- [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- [Human Rights Bill](#)
- [UNCRC British Sign Language \(BSL\): national plan 2023 to 2029 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- [Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland](#)
- [Adult Learning Strategy](#)
- [Delivering Excellence and Equality in Scottish Education](#)
- [Digital Strategy for Scotland](#)
- [National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults](#)

CLD practitioners raised concerns around the increased demand for mental health and wellbeing support and interventions, and the compounding detrimental impact that has on service users and providers, including CLD practitioners. Services across Scotland are already overwhelmed and there is an ever-increasing need for CLD practitioners to encourage community led self-prescribing and developing people's health literacies to help combat this. It is vital that the support services across all sectors are reviewed and increased funding and resources offered where possible to meet and lower this growing demand through early intervention from professional CLD practitioners.

Conclusion

Fundamental to the practice of CLD across all settings are these values which have been identified by the CLD Standards Council:

- Self-determination – respecting the individual and valuing the right of people to make their own choices.
- Inclusion – valuing equality of both opportunity and outcome, and challenging discriminatory practice.
- Empowerment – increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence issues that affect them and their communities through individual and/ or collective action.
- Working collaboratively – maximising collaborative working relationships in partnerships between the many agencies which contribute to CLD, including collaborative work with participants, learners, and communities.
- 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.

Community engagement, an inter-woven discipline within professional CLD (Community Learning and Development) practice, is an approach to achieving transformative individual and social change. It is action taken through building relationships for developing learning and power with individuals and within communities, in order to promote democracy, sustainable development, equality, and social justice. CLD supports individuals to become empowered, it builds learning and skills, community capacity and influence by enabling people to develop the confidence, understanding and skills required to influence decision making and service delivery in their lives and their communities.

The CLD sector as a profession should be reflected throughout this strategy and supporting guidance as a one of the key stakeholders to support and implement its ambitions. The aims and approaches suggested throughout this consultation align with CLD value-based practice as mentioned previously. These values adopted by the CLD Standards Council underpin CLD practice, and the CLD competences provide a framework for practice. How we practice as a profession is directly informed by why we are doing it – the CLD Code of Ethics provides the means for us to make this connection.