

State of the Field and Future of CLD in Scotland

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I was asked to provide an input at Moray house on the state of the field of Community, Learning and Development (CLD). This was on 14th June and therefore, before the findings of the review called by the Minister for Higher and Further Education on how the CLD Service offers support and development to learners in Scotland's communities (Scottish Government, 2023a). The following is a slightly amended version of that talk to provide greater reading clarity.

To begin, it worth acknowledging, like any piece of writing, that this input was from my own perspective, or the perspective I held at this time. This is not an academically rigorous, an empirical sound nor a significant contribution to the academic discourse. However, what I hope it does if provide food for thought. It asks reflective questions of us as practitioners and it hopefully begins the conversations and opens up collegiate conversations, no doubt some contradicting ideas and maybe we may even find some commonalities in the sentiments within.

The CLD review was called on 5th December 2023 (Scottish Government, 2023a) and below I will begin to articulate the remit for that review and ask some critical questions about its basis, focus and potential impact. However, it is important to note that this review is not happening in isolation. There has been a wealth of reviews in Scotland concerning education, early years, school education and post-school education over the past four years and many of these have been highlighted in the Scottish Government Terms of Reference. Some selected examples include:

In 2020 there was Review of additional support for learning implementation: report led by Professor Angela Morgan (Scottish Government, 2020a). There was a report from the International Council of Education Advisers including recommendations for education Scotland (Scottish Government, 2020b). In 2021 there was a review of Curriculum for Excellence by the OECD and a review of student assessments (upper-secondary) by Professor Gordon Stobart (OECD, 2021). In 2022, Professor Ken Muir's review of Scottish education – Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education (Scottish Government, 2022) that includes recommendations for a National Discussion and for reform of Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority, as well as a Scottish Government discussion about purpose and principles for post-secondary education and skills development. In 2023 there was an increased amount of reviews as we moved from the height of the COVID pandemic. These included the James' Withers review of post-secondary education and skills development (Scottish Government, 2023b), The National Discussion on the future of Scottish education (led by Professors Carol Campbell and Alma Harris) (Scottish Government, 2023c). There was also an Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment led by Professor Louise Hayward (Scottish Government, 2023d). There was a third report from the International Council of Education Advisers with further recommendations for Scottish government (Scottish Government, 2023e), The Education, Children and Young People Committee of the Scottish Government's current inquiry into Additional Support for Learning (Scottish Parliament, 2023f) and in 2024 a consultation on a proposed Education Bill for components of proposed education reform, including changes to Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (Scottish Government, 2024). As can be seen then, there has been no shortage of reviews and reports, all of which have connections to CLD and which CLD organizations, representatives, groups and individuals have contributed to. However, as can

also be seen none have focused specifically on CLD. It is important to note then that reviews are not unusual and if as a sector we call for parity of professional esteem then maybe we should be reviewed and scrutinised like all other educational sectors. I do not believe that criticising the very nature of there being a review is helpful to anyone.

Initially, it is important to highlight what this specific review set out to do. In the terms of reference and online (Scottish Government, 2023a) it states that - Community Learning and Development (CLD) is a professional practice within education with delivery stretching across all stages of lifelong learning. It states our purpose is- The purpose of CLD is to provide early intervention and prevention to those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, inequality of opportunity within the education and skills system. The review itself said it will:

- consider the skills and career pathways of the CLD sector workforce and hear the views of staff and volunteers who may be directly impacted by any recommended changes to the delivery of CLD
- take account of available evidence related to the provision of CLD services, the impact of these services on learners and international perspectives, where appropriate
- consider how data across the CLD sector is gathered, measured and used to ensure the best possible outcomes for learners
- make connections across the wider policy landscape and Scottish Government priorities whilst considering close alignment of CLD with the [Purpose and principles of post-16 education](#) (Scottish Government, 2023g)

Clearly then the first critique is that this review is against a relatively narrow criterion. It did not from the outset take account of all three strands of our profession (adult education,

community development and youth work), stating in the terms of reference, “The cross-cutting nature of CLD provision means that there is a likelihood of the community development/empowerment element of CLD being raised by stakeholders in the course of the review. Nevertheless, the focus will remain on the educational elements” (Scottish Government, 2023a). The review does discuss the life course but not the 3 areas and so I wonder is this something that we as practitioners and academics are fixed on. I will come back to this discussion below.

The review does not clearly take account of the broader purpose of CLD, particularly in relation to our commitment to empowerment, equality and social justice (Community Learning and Development Standards Council for Scotland, 2022a). It likely will not recognise the relational nature of our profession and the time that building those relationships takes. This then raises the question - do we articulate the importance of these things and the broader contextualisation of our work and practice clearly enough? In addition, are we realistic about calling for parity of professional esteem, parity of resources whilst also knowing the need to play the political and policy games and are these mutually exclusive? Let’s explore this in a bit more detail.

I think we need to be very clear that we are three domains of practice and whilst everyone may not agree this the way forward, I want to briefly set out how I believe cohesion and collaboration is just one of our strengths. As we already know we, in Scotland, have three intertwined yet distinct areas of practice- adult education, community development and youth work. With that in mind, one of the key criticisms of the very basis of this review is that it essentially negates community development as part of CLD. Whilst I understand that reviews must have clear and distinct criteria, I believe this is potentially a mistake.

I believe that we are all educationalists. When we discuss our role as CLD practitioners, as adult educators, as community development practitioners and as youth workers I defy anyone to tell me that education is not foundational to the work we do. Of course, what we sometimes do is fall into the trappings of meaning schools when we discuss education or meaning formal certificates and awards. Whilst many a debate can be had here for me, placed based practice, broader community development work, that does not take into account the voice of young people as community members or youth work which does not take into account the young person's community context is potentially negating sources of professional, and practical, collaboration and cohesion. In addition, adult education and lifelong learning is critical to all of that, although arguably is the most overlooked in terms of recognition and resourcing within the three domains. This is not to negate the individual necessity of resourcing each domain but to recognise and reiterate the value of all three. It also does not mean you need to work with all age groups simultaneously. What we need to ensure is that we do not get into unnecessary competition, which has happened in other places in the UK, where one domain of practice becomes the flavour of the month to the detriment of others. How can we support each other, recognise the value whilst also having specialism in a particular area? Do we want to do this? What are our programmes in Higher Education Institutions called? Do we prioritise one domain over the other, does adult education get forgotten about and how do we self-identify as practitioners? Is it as CLD workers? If not, what and how does this feed into our identity as a professional, educational field.

Having worked and researched in a number of areas I have been a part of many debates on terminology and on identity. Work with young people versus youth work; community

development versus community education versus community learning and development; adult education versus lifelong learning. Whilst these are important discussions and debates, what is maybe more important is that we work cohesively to define our practice internally and externally. However, let's not spend so much time in-fighting that we take our eye off the political game and suddenly get written out of being needed.

In response to the review, CLD have articulated CLD as “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. It is a collaborative and inclusive process that involves various stakeholders including learners of all ages, community members, community volunteers, local authorities, voluntary and charity sector organisations, educational institutions, and other organisations across the public and third sectors” (Submission to Review, 2024). Now of course one response to this is- well it is too wide, not clear enough, it works with too many people, adopting too many approaches across too many sectors. But yet, don't other professions? Social work. We are not the same nor would want to be, but we say social work and we know what they do. There are differences of course so I am not comparing uncritically but we know who they work with and who for. And yet, they work across a range of settings, with a range of institutions, in a range of sectors, include various stakeholders and with differing age groups. So, is there a problem with our messaging? Is it our cohesion? Is it the variety of titles and descriptors used for our profession? Or is it that we are not recognised and resourced as a statutory service?

An important point made in engage, educate, connect and empower paper, is the call for “an urgent need for those in the CLD sector to be more coherent in delivery and messaging. While

celebrating the diversity of CLD practice there is a need to celebrate the strength it derives from the shared professional purpose and values, from the synergies between community learning and community development and from work with different age groups” (CLD, 2020). And I wonder are we doing this? Do we want to do this? Or can we be honest and say actually CLD is not for me it is youth work, adult education or community development solely? If this is our stance, can we be clear about the advantages, disadvantages and next steps for the Scotland we want to see? Maybe this is something we should reflect on whilst still advocating for our broader field.

Out of interest, in a report done by CLD standards Council on approving pathways (2022b) they found that Only 11% of respondents explicitly made reference to CLD in the ‘Job Title’ response part. Four colleagues referred to ‘Community Development’ as an alternative. There is a significant variety of descriptions being used to describe the role type. They argue this suggests that there is a need for the sector to collaborate and streamline job descriptions / have a more consistent approach towards the creation of job remits and associated titles where jobs are of similar nature. Out of the 109 provided job titles for this question, there were approximately 92 unique job titles provided (84% of job titles were individualised), suggesting potential inconsistent and over complication of reporting for job role types. I think this may be something we need to think about, or do we believe it is irrelevant?

This leads me to my next question. What are the skills and qualifications we need in delivering positive outcomes? That seems straightforward. Or is it? Is it apprenticeships, is it degree level education, is it Master’s level or is it not academic at all? Does it even matter some people may wonder. What I am fairly clear about is this cannot be a tick-box list of pre-set

criteria with no involvement from those we work alongside. But then have we given enough thought as to how we create opportunities and pathways for practitioners, at every level, to get ready to make positive contributions to our society? But also, when they exist are they resourced to make them strong.

In the UK context where National annual monitoring shows a collapse of CLD education programmes in Higher Education Institutions, with the huge decline in programmes in England (Seal and Smith, 2019), we in Scotland arguably need to work collectively and collaboratively with our education institutions and providers if we want to create future positive outcomes for and from CLD. Some of the programmes that do remain are living a fragile existence within universities due to increasingly metrics based financial calculations on student numbers as opposed to community benefit. The articulation of our benefit, practice and positive outcomes of CLD could ensure pathways for learners continue.

However, we need to remember this is not a one size fits all. Do we believe people have to be qualified to a particular level to be a CLD worker? If not, can anyone do the work? I personally don't believe anyone can be a CLD worker, we are not a 'Jane of all trades' although at times it may feel it. We do have specific values, competencies, underpinning processes and we are clearly committed to an inclusive Scotland. Moreover, we need a clear educational pathway for learners whilst not negating the importance of local activism and community engagement.

Having said all this and I know resourcing is always a huge issue for our field. So, let's look at the local authority figures. Here are the recent figures from the CLD standards council report on Local Authority Budget for the past year (CLD, 2023, p.3).

The total allocation for thirty-one Local Authorities for financial year 2023/24 is £98,072,058.

- In the last year 11 areas increased their budgets, 10 decreased and 2 remained the same, which represents a cut when allowing for the increased rate of inflation.
- A review of the actual figures available indicates a net loss of £973,996 between 2022/2023 – 2023/24.
- The data suggests that the funding landscape CLD is complex, insecure and unstable.
- More than fifty percent of respondents reported budget allocation being dependent and / or augmented by external funding.
- There are a total number of 1057.5 FTE CLD posts across Scotland's Local Authority.

So, the Minister in the announcement of the review noted no additional resources. We can see there have been local cuts and we know that in some areas CLD seem to have been unfairly targeted to sustain alternative provisions. This is our reality.

However, this is not a zero-sum game. Advocating for a clear articulation on skills and employment opportunities should not negate our inherent commitment to social justice and inclusivity. Being aware of our financial context should not stop us being bold in our asks. So, what is it we want? Have we established and clearly articulated the role CLD can have in the future Scotland we envisage? How often do we discuss our emancipatory role? Our approach to community participation, engagement, empowerment? Having said this- how do

we do this whilst being cognisant of the political dynamics, of the need for resourcing, do we want a fully funded statutory service and if so, is this compatible with our underpinning values? I would argue they can be. We know the impact our work. We know the impact our graduates and students and practitioners have every day on the lives of those who are living in the most under-resourced, underserved communities across Scotland. We know that, but do others? I wonder whether we should spend some time articulating what we do, I really want to do a Scotland wide study on where and what our graduates have done. My goodness can you imagine that mapping. They will be changing every aspect of the Scottish society and most for the good!

However, it appears to have become routine at all levels to discuss practice in terms of what and how we do things, rather than to articulate the eradication of inequality as our core purpose (Coburn and Gormally, 2017). Whilst this is understandable, I wonder if we could achieve positive outcomes, articulating what we do and how we do, as well as why we do it. The ‘but why’ question. In striving for a more socially just society where people are valued as full citizens who experience a good quality of life, we need to move beyond analysis of individual capacities, that are heavily linked to development of interventionist strategies seeking to ‘fix’ individual deficiencies or behaviours that are identified as problematic. Despite this and thinking about our societies current and future challenges I believe CLD has a core role. The climate crises, the sustainable development goals, maintaining and progressing a wellbeing economy, addressing poverty, increasing student opportunities and attainment.

Whilst we need to foreground the highlighted difficulties and look closely at these figures, I also think we are at a particular point in time where we should collaboratively, be articulating

and evidencing what we can contribute to the Scotland we want. We should be pulling our capacity, intellect and practice knowledge to not only be contributing to social change but spearheading it.

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