

Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland 2022-2027

Creating positive pathways for improved life chances.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Foreword by Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training

Adult learning plays a vital role in helping us to succeed in being the country we want to be – fairer, greener, and more prosperous. As we work towards making Scotland a land of opportunity for everyone this strategy represents an important moment towards ensuring that inclusive and equitable quality education, whether formal or informal, is available to anyone of any age in Scotland. As our first adult learning strategy it has ambitious and bold actions to remove barriers to learning, enabling more adults to begin and continue their learning journeys.

I want adult learning in Scotland to focus on learners' goals and hopes for the future, to build on the strengths, experiences and skills that they already have to improve their life chances.

This strategy sets out the Scottish Government's ambition for creating new and increased positive pathways in collaboration with community-based adult learners. I know that inspirational work already takes place across Scotland to realise aspirations that are important to our adult learners and their communities. I want us to develop this work by working flexibly with adult learners on the pathways that they need to flourish and succeed. To do so, all those involved in creating a more responsive and coherent education system will need to work closely together so that support is provided at each stage of an individual's learning journey to help them achieve their potential.

It is my hope that adult learners furthest from learning and experiencing disadvantage will have more accessible learning opportunities that will help make Scotland a more equal and inclusive society. The strategy outlines important next steps required to create these opportunities and starts further collaboration with adult learners to address and tackle the inequalities that have been made worse by the pandemic.

The Adult Learning Strategy contributes to our national mission to tackle child poverty by ensuring that parents – both in and out of work – are able to access the skills they need to progress in their career. Its actions to increase accredited learning and connect community-based adult learners with employability services will help to increase incomes from work and earnings. I want parents experiencing poverty to have the adult learning opportunities that they need.

Building a wellbeing economy which secures sustainable, inclusive growth for everyone in all parts of Scotland is at the heart of our actions to increase access to accredited learning and strengthen connections with employability services. I want all to play a role in ensuring that adult learners most impacted by the pandemic and existing inequalities can secure good and fair work. This requires sharing and promoting good practice and learning from each other to deliver better outcomes for adult learners.

Foreword by Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training

By working with adult learners to achieve their ambitions and working together across boundaries, the strategy can help to secure an economic recovery which is green and fair with an enduring impact on the lives of adult learners who face inequalities.

There is a lot of work to be done to measure the impact that community-based adult learning has on our adult learners. To move forward with this, the strategy calls on all partners to work collectively to develop coherent and consistent data and measurements for impact. Work will also begin at pace to develop a robust framework to evaluate the implementation of this strategy and the impact of it on adult learners.

I am both delighted and proud to be publishing this strategy and remain grateful to the Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland who have guided the development of the strategy and worked in partnership with us to co-produce it. I want adult learners to be at the centre of the strategy's delivery and the development of a national Adult Learners Advisory Group will ensure that their voices and experiences are forefront in carrying out the strategy's actions and future work.

This strategy will be followed by the Youth Work Strategy, which, in tandem with this one, will continue to strengthen Community Learning and Development in Scotland. I am excited by the implementation of both these strategies that reflect the key role that both Adult Learning and Youth Work, as part of Community Learning and Development, play in developing an equitable and sustainable education system.



Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Hepburn', written over a white rectangular background.

Vision, Ambition, Aims and Principles

Our Vision

Adult learning in Scotland will develop better-skilled, educated, confident and empowered people contributing to connected and inclusive communities.

Our Ambition

New and increased positive pathways will be created in collaboration with community-based adult learners.

Our Aims

Improve life chances for adult learners across Scotland.

Create the conditions for connected adult learning opportunities that link Scotland's communities, local authorities, third sector organisations, colleges and universities around an offer of learning for adults, particularly those furthest from inclusion and experiencing disadvantage.

Ensure that there are accessible opportunities for adults to learn throughout their lives.

Our Principles

The strategy is based on three core principles.

Learning is **lifelong**, beginning in the Early Years and covering the whole age span of post-compulsory education.

Adult learning is **life-wide**. It covers all aspects of life – personal, work, family and community.

Adult learning is **learner-centred**. The educational process builds around the interests and motives of the learner.

The Case for Change

1. In 2020 **324,700** adults in Scotland had low or no qualifications.¹
2. Data from Scotland's Census showed that 7,796 (0.15%) of people aged 18+ did not speak English at all and 46,993 (0.92%) of people aged 18+ did not speak English well.²
3. Evidence from national numeracy surveys suggests while Scotland performs slightly better than average for the UK in terms of adult numeracy skills, there are still around 56% of adults with low numeracy skills. This is the equivalent of 1.9 million working age adults.³
4. Scottish Prison Service data shows that 24% of the Scottish prison population have difficulties in using a computer. 18% of the prison population report difficulties with writing and 17% report difficulties with numeracy.⁴
5. Population projections show that, like many other Western European nations, Scotland has an ageing society.⁵ Adult learning has a key role to play with this changing demographic.
6. [The Adult Learning Statement of Ambition](#), published in 2014, set an ambition for every adult in Scotland to have the right to access learning to meet their educational needs and aspirations. Adult learners have told us that multiple barriers to participation, learning and achievement still exist. These include many systemic barriers including finance and accessibility.
7. There is more work to be done to close the poverty-related attainment gap and existing inequalities have been exacerbated by Covid-19.⁶ Adults who participate in learning are more likely to engage in their children's education, improving outcomes. Intergenerational effects are particularly strong where levels of inequality are high and may accentuate the effects of inequality and exclusions.⁷

1 [Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places and Regions –2020/21](#)

2 [Scotland's Census 2011](#)

3 [Counting on the Recovery](#)

4 [Scottish Prison Survey 17th Prisoner Survey 2019](#)

5 [A Scotland for the future: opportunities and challenges of Scotland's changing population](#)

6 [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#)

7 [OECD Education At A Glance](#)

The Case for Change

8. As a result of COVID-19 the national 2026 target of 18% of University entrants from SIMD20 areas may be more challenging.⁸ Community-based adult learning often takes place in our most vulnerable communities and offers a first step back into learning before progressing through the education system.
9. Covid-19 has had a profound negative effect on mental health.⁹ Lower income groups are at greater risk of suffering from depression, anxiety and loneliness¹⁰ and a high proportion of disabled people reported that they were worried about isolation during the pandemic.¹¹ Participation in lifelong learning can impact positively on wellbeing, recovery from mental health difficulties and social integration.¹²
10. Many groups continue to face challenges in the labour market.¹³ Current data suggests that employees from minority ethnic groups are more likely than other workers to have found themselves out of work as a result of the pandemic.¹⁴ Evidence has shown disabled people tend to experience greater social impacts from Covid-19 than non-disabled people which could have impacts on their employability longer-term.¹⁵ Consultation on this strategy highlighted the important role that community-based adult learning can play in linking with employability services so no one is left behind.
11. During the pandemic almost all learning moved online and digital acceleration is likely to continue. Online learning has created challenges, especially for more vulnerable adult learners. Access to online learning is challenging for a number of practical reasons, including access to equipment and data, digital literacy levels and general literacy. Digital exclusion can have a negative impact on outcomes such as health, education, social isolation, finances and employment.¹⁶
- 8 [The Impact of COVID-19 on Fair Access to Higher Education](#)
- 9 [Scotland's Wellbeing: The Impact of COVID-19](#)
- 10 [Covid-19 Social Study](#)
- 11 [Supercharged: A Human Catastrophe](#)
- 12 [Impacts of lifelong learning upon emotional resilience, psychological and mental health](#)
- 13 [No One Left Behind: Delivery Plan](#)
- 14 [Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups at greater risk of problem debt since Covid-19](#)
- 15 [Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain](#)
- 16 [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact on equality](#)

The Case for Change

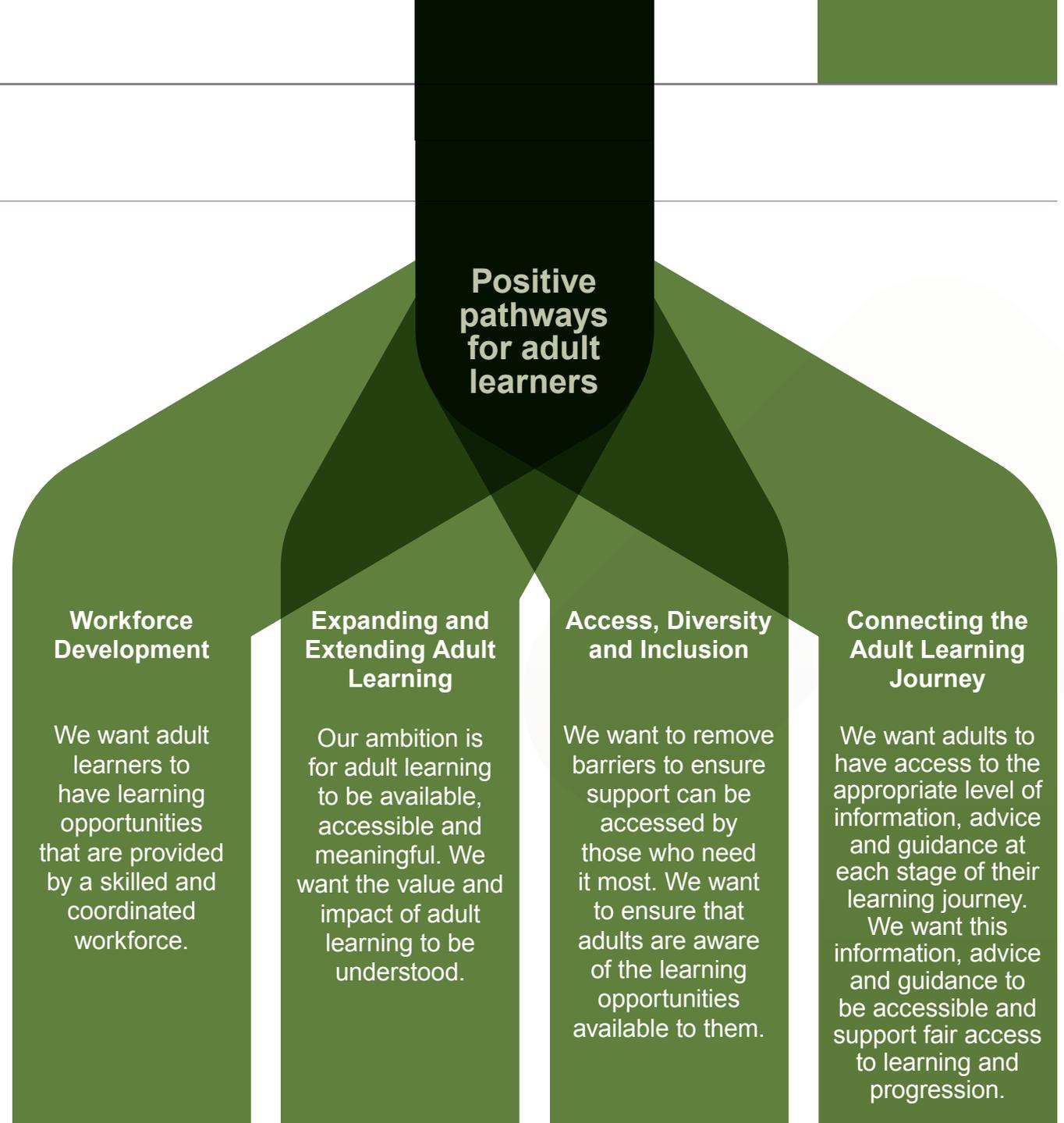
12. Adult learning practitioners have told us that to provide digital learning for learners and to become digitally agile they need to develop new skills. They have also told us that to best support learners they need a coordinated approach to their development.
13. Research and engagement in the development of this strategy has highlighted a persistent lack of understanding of the value and impact of community-based adult learning. The current system of mainstream formal education provision in Scotland is long established and understood. Schools, colleges and universities all have clearly defined roles within the system. The benefits from their programmes of learning and the impact they will make for learners are generally clear. Learner pathways and progression between schools colleges and universities are also familiar to most of the population. In contrast, the adult learning landscape is less clear and it can be challenging for prospective learners looking to access provision or progress from one provider to another.
14. [The SFC Review](#) highlights the need for a whole-system view of coherence and the role of colleges and universities as anchor institutions. There are opportunities to strengthen connections between colleges, universities and community-based adult learning.
15. In 2015 Scotland signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals. To ensure we are taking action to make us a more successful country, and at the forefront of this international agenda, it is vital that we ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
16. Ethnic diversity is low in the Community Learning and Development workforce and there is an ageing workforce, with 25% of practitioners stating in 2018 that they intended to leave in the next two to five years. There is a gender pay gap affecting women in the workforce and male workers are underrepresented in the sector overall.¹⁷

17 [Working with Scotland's Communities](#)

Our Actions

The evidence shows us that we need to take action to develop better-skilled, educated, confident and empowered people in Scotland. This action will require collaboration across the education system, and working across boundaries to develop new approaches. While the focus of this strategy is on community-based adult learning, to improve the life chances of all adult learners as they progress in their lifelong learning journey, we need to ensure that there is a strong, well-understood, well-connected and well-resourced system of adult learning in Scotland. For this to be achieved all relevant agencies must play an active role in ensuring the aims of this strategy are met.

Through extensive consultation four themes have been developed to bring about systemic change and drive improvements in the learning experience for adults in Scotland, with a particular focus on increasing the availability of community-based learning opportunities. All four themes align to develop more positive pathways in collaboration with adult learners.



Our Actions

Positive pathways for adult learners are based around individual and group needs. They can include, but are not limited to:

- **Developing relationships and networks**
- **Improving mental wellbeing**
- **Improving health and wellbeing**
- **Developing cultural awareness**
- **Improving communication skills**
- **Improving language skills**
- **Developing creative skills**
- **Improving confidence**
- **Improving financial literacy**

To bring about systemic change to how learners can access and progress through learning to reach their goals and improve their outcomes this strategy will:

- **deliver better outcomes for learners, and make a positive impact to adult learners' lives and their life chances.**
- **remove the barriers that prevent adults participating in learning or that adversely affect their levels of participation.**
- **aim specifically to support those who are not engaging in learning and create clear accessible first steps that enable the most marginalised and excluded adults to begin their learning journey.**
- **clarify and simplify how learners who have taken their first steps into or back into learning can progress.**
- **ensure that all learning is recognised and is given the due credit and recognition that the learners' efforts deserve.**
- **ensure that those furthest from formal mainstream education have parity of learning opportunities.**

Our Actions

Strategic Action Plan

Our strategic action plan sets out important next steps in creating the conditions for connected adult learning opportunities.

The plan will be dynamic, actions will be refreshed as we work towards removing barriers to learning.

We will work across and outside traditional boundaries with a specific focus on increasing the role of community-based adult learning across policy areas including education, employability, health, social isolation, poverty reduction and justice.

The strategic action plan supports achieving Scotland's vision for recovery from the pandemic. It will:

- **address the systematic inequalities made worse by Covid** by removing barriers to learning.
- **make progress towards a wellbeing economy** by increasing opportunities for adults with no or low qualifications and connecting community-based adult learners with employability services.
- **accelerate inclusive person-centred public services** by ensuring community-based adult learners are involved in the planning and delivery of their learning.

Governance and Monitoring Progress

The Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training will have oversight of the plan. Its implementation and evaluation will be guided by The **Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland**. The Forum advises the Scottish Government on strategic matters of direction, performance and planning in relation to adult learning. It brings together key national stakeholders and decision makers to:

- **provide advice and scrutiny.**
- **support and share ways of making improvements in practice.**
- **coordinate and support whole system approaches.**
- **promote the goals and successes of adult learning.**

Members of the Forum will use their connections to identify opportunities for cross-sector work and support the work of the Forum through their organisations and networks.

Our Actions

The forum will establish four working groups. These are aligned to our themes and the actions noted throughout this strategy will be taken forward by working groups focussed on:

- **Expanding and extending adult learning**
- **Connecting the adult learning journey**
- **Access, diversity and inclusion**
- **Workforce development**

The remit of each working group will be to ensure that actions are being delivered effectively and that any key risks and issues which could threaten the delivery of actions are identified and mitigations are put in place. Workforce development actions will be taken forward by the CLD Standards Council who will lead the workforce development working group. Each working group will report progress to the Forum who will in turn report progress to the Minister.

Minister for Higher Education, Further Education,
Youth Employment and Training



Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland



Thematic Working Groups

Governance arrangements will be revised as the strategic action plan is implemented.

The Forum will develop a framework to monitor our performance against each of the actions in the Strategic Action Plan. As we develop our framework we will decide on a process for monitoring the achievement of positive pathways and set an ambitious target around this.

HM Inspectors of Education will develop proposals for how they could carry out independent external evaluation of the implementation of the strategy and its impact on adult learners.

The Forum will incorporate new actions into the plan as progress is made and new actions emerge. The Forum will review the action plan annually and regular forum meetings will provide an opportunity to learn from the success of the delivery of actions and drive continuous improvement.

Our Actions

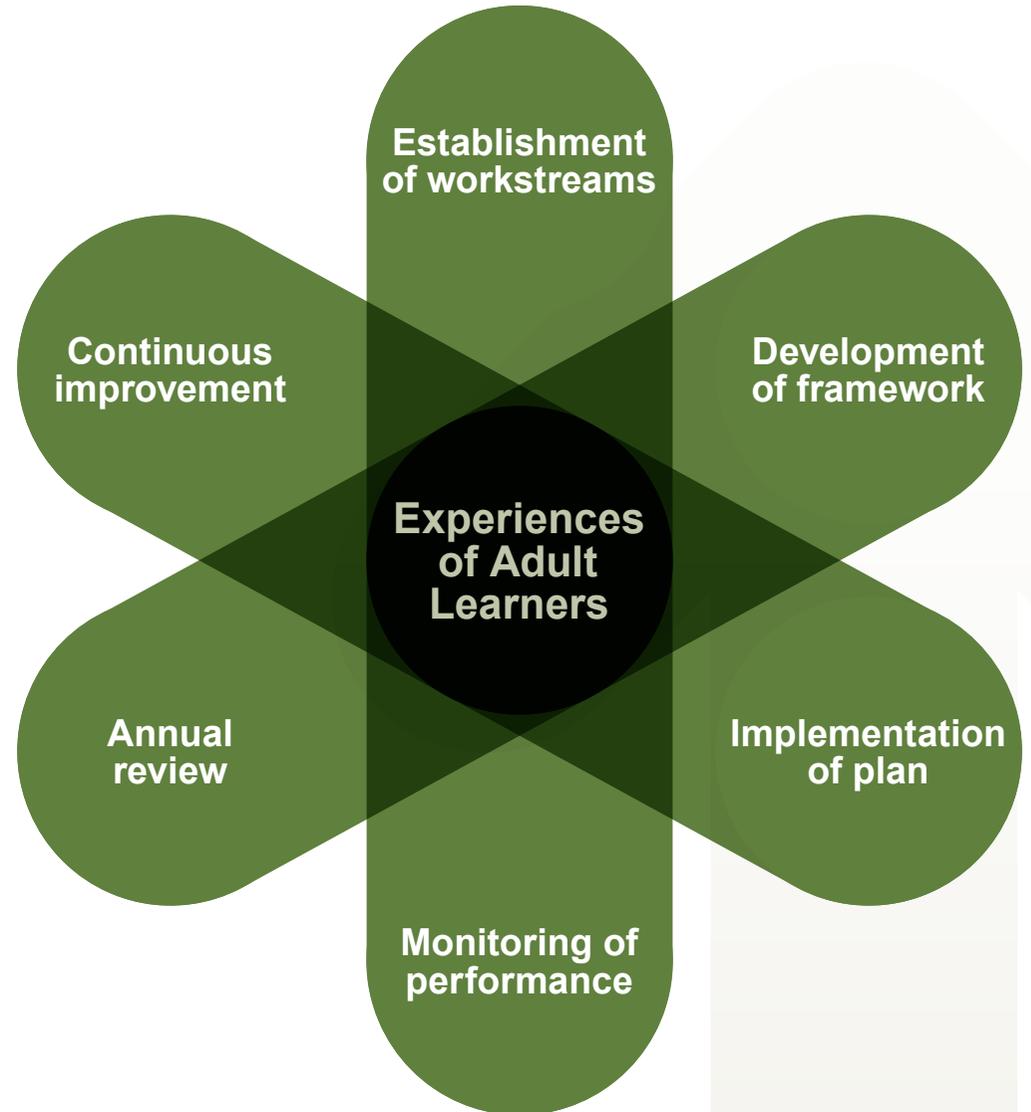
Adult Learners Advisory Group

We want the voice and experiences of adult learners to be at the heart of what we do. A national **Adult Learners Advisory Group** will be developed to work alongside the Forum so it can respond to the needs of adult learners throughout the implementation and ongoing development of the action plan.

We will establish and develop a national Adult Learners Advisory Group, reflecting the diversity of community-based adult learners, to inform the development and delivery of the strategy.

To help all adult learners participate in the ongoing development of the action plan we will create accessible and translated consultation documents and materials.

The diagram opposite sets out the key process that the Forum will apply to the implementation and delivery of the Strategic Action Plan.



The National Performance Framework and Understanding the Impact of Community-Based Adult Learning

The National Performance Framework

The National Performance Framework sets out a vision of national wellbeing for Scotland and charts progress towards this through a range of social, environmental and economic outcomes which are measured by indicators. Our vision that adult learning in Scotland will develop better-skilled, educated, confident and empowered people contributing to connected and inclusive communities reflects our values as a nation and the aspirations we hold for our future. Central to the National Performance Framework, and our strategic action plan, are the aims to create a more successful country, give opportunities to all people living in Scotland, and reduce inequalities.

There are four outcomes in particular within the National Performance Framework that are fundamental to our ambition to create new and increased positive pathways in collaboration with adult learners. These focus on education, tackling poverty, health and the importance of inclusive communities.

- **We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society.**
- **We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally.**
- **We are healthy and active.**
- **We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.**



The National Performance Framework and Understanding the Impact of Community-Based Adult Learning

Understanding the Impact of Community-Based Adult Learning

In support of the national performance outcomes, we recognise that community-based adult learning improves much more than educational outcomes for those who participate. Learning that starts in the community contributes to a range of positive outcomes for the learner, their family and their wider community.

We have heard from adult learners across Scotland. They have told us about their journeys into or back into learning. Regardless of what they are learning, their motivation has been based on making a positive change in their lives, whether that is improved physical or mental health, to be able to better support their family, to improve their employability or career prospects, or to connect with others in their community. They have told us how adult learning has empowered them and built their confidence. They described how adult learning has been a transformative experience for them.



It's not just the subjects being taught, it's the effect the process of learning has on my mental health."

Learner

Community-based adult learner

The National Performance Framework and Understanding the Impact of Community-Based Adult Learning

Demonstrating and Communicating Impact

Despite learners, partners and practitioners being able to describe the contribution of community-based adult learning in Scotland, there is currently no consistent way of measuring its impact. This prevents a collective understanding of the value that it adds to a number of policy areas. Providers tell us that communicating the value of adult learning to stakeholders, partners, funders and key decision makers would encourage more collaborative working which would benefit learners.

We will develop coherent and consistent data and measurements for the impact of community-based adult learning based on methods being used across Scotland.

We will increase cross policy support for the role of community-based based adult learning in improving outcomes across policy areas including education, employability, health, social isolation, poverty reduction and justice.

The potential benefits of learning in a community setting are less widely understood and recognised than mainstream education. Throughout the development of this strategy we have heard that the lack of understanding of the benefits of adult learning impacts on the resources available to support adult learners.

Community-based adult learning should be valued as part of the wider education system and as complementary to other options and, as such, should be given equal status and stability in its funding. When discussing funding, people said that flexible funding that allowed vulnerable communities to access learning and empowering learners to determine their own learning was essential.

The need for greater understanding of the benefits of community-based adult learning can also impact on uptake of learning opportunities. Adult learners told us that they are not often aware of the learning opportunities that are available to them. We want to remove this barrier and promote the wide benefits that are achieved through community-based adult learning to adults.

We will evaluate the suitability and levels of funding arrangements for adult learning, assessing how these arrangements identify and meet demand, support progression, and how adult learners are included in decision making processes.

We will increase public awareness of adult learning opportunities, guidance and support nationally and locally through joined up and accessible messaging.

The National Performance Framework and Understanding the Impact of Community-Based Adult Learning

Raising Attainment Through Family Learning

Family learning has an impact on the whole family. It encourages families to learn together and activities can be designed to help adults learn how to support their children's learning. Adults supporting their children's learning can help impact on raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. We want to make sure that there are more opportunities for family learning.

We will increase availability of, access to, and support for family learning.

Reviewing The Impact of ESOL and Literacies

Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020 was developed to ensure that all Scottish residents for whom English is not a first language have the opportunity to access high-quality English language provision so that they can acquire the language skills to enable them to participate in Scottish life.

Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020 set out that by 2020 Scotland's society and economy will be stronger because more of its adults are able to read, write and use numbers effectively in order to handle information, communicate with others, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners.

In the development of this new Adult Learning Strategy there is an opportunity to focus on the needs of ESOL and literacies learners in a wider context by reviewing the impact of both these strategies.

We will undertake a review, with learners and practitioners, on the impact of 'Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020' and 'Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020' to produce recommendations on next steps for these specialisms within the context of the adult learning strategy.

Learning does these things: it gets me out of the house, it's good for my mental health, it's good for my brain, I meet new people, I increase my social circle, it improves employment opportunities and generally gives me better mental wellbeing."

Learner
English for Speakers of
Other Languages Learner

The National Performance Framework and Understanding the Impact of Community-Based Adult Learning

Case study on the impact of community-based adult learning

“Just under three years ago I was introduced to a Family Learning CLD Worker who would help me take back control of not just my emotional self but my life too. My emotional state of mind was having a negative effect on my young daughter and we are eternally grateful to her. She told me about a course that I was a perfect candidate for. She then introduced me to an Adult Learning CLD Worker, who would show me the way forward on the ‘Steps to Excellence’ course. **This was the make or break choice for me that would change the course of my life.** I have to say here that my initial reaction was I don’t want to do it, but felt compelled to as I don’t like to let anyone down. **Since then I haven’t looked back.**

To say I am a different person is an understatement. Although adopting a new thought process wasn’t the easiest thing I’ve ever had to do, it certainly is the best. Through the steps course I became interested in metaphysics, which is the mind-body-spirit connection, and from there was born a deep-seated want to learn. Later that year I became temporarily employed. While there, I realized this was not where I wanted to be, there was something more awaiting me. I decided to go for a complete change in my working life but had no idea of what I wanted to do. **The thought of college had been going around my head for some time** and I felt I was ready to go back to full-time education to find out just what I was capable of.

I have excelled in achieving what I set out to do. I now know through all that has happened since attending CLD classes what direction I want my life to go in.

I would love to help others in similar situations to mine, to understand and accept there is indeed more to them than they could ever imagine.

I never thought during that very anxious and turbulent time I would be where I am today. My daughter has made huge progress in learning how to deal with her emotions too and I am in a position of knowing how to help her by what I’ve learned through ‘Understanding Your Child’s Behaviour’, and ‘Solihull’ courses and the homework club at the school. All of this through Community Learning and Development with the two most inspirational women I have ever met to guide and support me. It isn’t just what I’ve learned that has made the biggest difference; it’s what **learning has given me, a deep sense of worth, making my confidence soar.** This is what was lacking for so long and I now know the sky is most definitely the limit. **I can, I will, I am.”**

Adult Learner

Community-Based Adult Learning and a Connected System

Community-based adult learning is delivered with and for adults in their communities. It is not usually determined through a curriculum. Instead The Social Practice model is widely used to respond to learners' goals and aspirations. This model acknowledges that adult learners bring skills, experiences and assets to be built on. Community-based adult learning opportunities include, but aren't limited to:

- **Adult Literacies**
- **ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)**
- **Family Learning**
- **Employability**
- **Citizenship**
- **Gaelic**

Pathways and Partnerships for Lifelong and Life-Wide Learning

Community-based adult learning is part of Community Learning and Development (CLD) practice and is delivered by local authorities, colleges and third sector organisations. The focus of CLD is:

- **improved life chances for people of all ages through learning, personal development and active citizenship.**
- **stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities.**

Community-based adult learning is often the first step back into education for many adult learners and offers pathways to Scotland's further and higher education system.

To strengthen and develop these pathways we need to build better connections between community-based adult learning and mainstream education. The SFC Review provides an opportunity to work collaboratively to develop these connections as part of a coherent tertiary education system.

We will collaborate to act on recommendations in the SFC Review to build accessible, integrated and positive pathways for learners over their lifetimes.

Community-based learning also offers pathways to employment and volunteering opportunities. Consultation on this strategy highlighted the importance of building stronger links between community-based adult learning provision and employability services so that no one is left behind. These links will help Scotland build a strong sustainable economy as we recover from the pandemic.

We will connect community-based adult learning with careers and employability services to create positive pathways for learners who face significant barriers to accessing work.

Community-based Adult Learning and a Connected System

Partnerships could be improved. Awareness of learners of what's available. Also awareness of other partners of what's available and what each partner's offer is."

Adult Learning Practitioner

Community-based adult learning often takes place in schools and colleges. Partnership working like this is key to ensuring that adults have inclusive learner pathways and access to learning facilities that meet their educational needs. The requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013 stipulate that each local authority has to develop a three-year plan that outlines how CLD will be delivered. Local authorities have to consult with learners and partners to develop these plans and evidence the assessment of need. Colleges are an important partner in the creation and delivery of the CLD plan for their local area and third sector organisations have a key contribution to make.

Closer partnership working is required to ensure that adult learning is learner-centred, available and accessible. To recover from the pandemic all partners need to help the people of Scotland to live better, healthier, happier and more prosperous lives. To do so we need to provide genuine opportunities to involve, consult and engage learners in the planning and delivery of their learning. We also want to build on the successes of local adult learning partnerships and national partnerships to make them more effective.

We will provide support and recognition for structured partnerships to ensure the needs of adult learners are at the heart of the decision making process locally, regionally and nationally.

Adult learning practitioners are also lifelong learners. To continue to learn new skills that benefit their learners and to build stronger connections between different parts of the education system, we want there to be more opportunities for collaborative working and to exchange expertise and ideas.

We will strengthen cross sectoral professional learning opportunities available for staff and volunteers, supporting the use of the SCQF framework to underpin learning.

Community-based Adult Learning and a Connected System

Supporting and Empowering Communities and Learners

Throughout the pandemic CLD services were agile and they adapted to provide essential lifelines and support to adults, families and communities. Key to this support has been practitioners' access and knowledge of local community networks and the ability to form trusted relationships with those who are vulnerable. Some of the ways that they adapted include:

- **contribution in responding to food emergency work and medicine delivery.**
- **developing community hubs and being the first point of contact for vulnerable communities.**
- **addressing emerging issues around mental health and wellbeing.**
- **continuing to be a front line presence in the most vulnerable of communities.**
- **moving services online and providing digital engagement and learning.**

The shift to online learning has enhanced the need for a more digitally competent workforce. We want practitioners to be able to support adult learners in their online learning.

We will explore and support training for practitioners to ensure adequate digital skills as technology advances, resulting in a digitally agile workforce.

Practitioners told us that they need greater clarity on current opportunities, clearer professional pathways and for their learning to be accessible. Practitioners have also told us that their lifelong learning journey could be better supported by dedicated national occupational standards.

As a hugely valued part of the CLD workforce, volunteers bring important skills and an understanding of adult learners' communities. Their lifelong learning journey needs to be supported so they can develop and progress.

Many practitioners work with both adult learners and young people. To help them meet the needs of all learners in Scotland's communities we are publishing a Youth Work Strategy that will enhance a structured professional learning offer across both strategies.

We will ensure appropriate and accessible professional learning opportunities and pathways.

We will explore the development of national occupational standards for community-based adult learning.

We will increase development opportunities for adult learning volunteers and those who support them.

Community-based Adult Learning and a Connected System

Empowered adults are the keystone of a civic society. Community-based adult learning helps adult learners to actively participate in their communities and influence decisions that affect their lives.

We want more opportunities for adult learners to develop knowledge and influence change in areas such as community-led climate change and human rights.

We will increase learning activity that supports democratic involvement and community empowerment so adult learners can access and create opportunities that meet their needs.

Guidance and Progression for Lifelong and Life-Wide Learning

When developing the strategy we heard that it was often unclear how adults could access community learning. How adults progressed from one community provider to another and from community-based adult learning to mainstream education was also highlighted as being unclear. Adult learners and practitioners have told us that improved guidance is needed to support adults at each stage of their learning journey. We want information, advice and guidance to be accessible and to support fair access to learning and progression.

We will strengthen partnership arrangements which identify and meet the advice, guidance and support needs of adult learners.

Adults come to learning with a variety of skills and qualifications gained from previous experiences throughout their lives. Recognition, accreditation and validation of skills, experiences and qualifications is essential for a seamless learning journey and pathways into employment. For adult learners who have migrated to Scotland, including asylum seekers and refugees, the lack of a coordinated system for recognition of prior learning can limit inclusion, career development and social and economic integration.

We will evaluate the effectiveness of existing systems for Recognition of Prior Learning to ensure a coordinated national Recognised Prior Learning process that takes into account qualifications gained overseas and a diverse range of needs including additional learning needs.

Creating Positive Pathways and Removing Barriers

Creating Positive Pathways

This strategy has been developed by listening to adult learners and those who are committed to working with them to create positive pathways. The lifelong learning journey of adult learners is not linear. Learning is revisited throughout adults' lives. The pathways that adult learners need change to reflect their personal, family and work circumstances and the communities in which they live.

Community-based adult learners told us that they wanted to progress in their learning by gaining accreditation and to improve their work life and employability. We want to support this and create more opportunities for Scotland's adults with few or no qualifications. These enhanced opportunities will give community-based adult learners more chances to access and progress into employment and contribute towards economic growth and recovery.

The adoption of online learning since the beginning of the pandemic has highlighted the need for more options and choice for community-based adult learners. Throughout the development of this strategy we have been told that community-based adult learners have experienced disproportionate impact to their learning in comparison with other adult learners due to community venues being unable to resume face-to-face learning at the same pace as mainstream education providers. We want community-based adult learners to have more digital learning opportunities and to build resilience in community-based adult learning practice.

We will increase access to and support for accredited learning underpinned by the SCQF, where appropriate, for community-based adult learning to support positive pathways for adult learners.

We will increase availability of, access to, and support for, online learning options for adult learners.

Creating Positive Pathways and Removing Barriers

Removing Barriers

There are a number of barriers that adult learners face throughout their lifelong learning journeys. Difficulties in accessing learning are often made more challenging for those living in poverty or experiencing exclusion. Scotland's communities have been hugely impacted by Covid-19 and, within disadvantaged communities, the impact is being felt disproportionately.

Adult learners are often balancing work and care responsibilities with their learning and a lack of viable childcare options is a significant barrier. Geographical differences in community-based adult learning provision and a lack of provision in some areas can be a barrier to adult learners accessing the learning that they need.

Some of the other barriers we heard were:

- **Transport costs**
- **Health**
- **Past experiences of learning discouraging further learning**
- **Confidence**
- **Digital poverty and poor connectivity to participate online**
- **Food poverty**
- **Language**

For community-based adult learners who require additional support to access and engage in learning activities there is a lack of clarity about their rights and entitlements to additional support arrangements and equipment when compared to the experiences of adult learners in colleges and universities.

We want to build on [The Adult Learning Statement of Ambition's](#) principle that everyone in Scotland has the right to access learning to meet their educational needs and aspirations. We also want to address the systemic inequalities that have been made worse by the pandemic.

We will do this by working alongside community-based adult learners to remove barriers to learning and to promote inclusion and equality.

We want to ensure that learning and support can be accessed by those who need it most and for community-based adult learners to be at the centre of planning for accessible learning provision.

We will collaborate with adult learners and equality groups to explore, define and remove barriers to learning.

We will ensure consistent and appropriate use of Impact Assessments to plan accessible provision which reduces the persistent inequalities experienced by people with protected characteristics.

Strategic Action Plan

The plan sets out the 23 actions outlined throughout the strategy alongside the outcomes expected as we work towards achieving our vision. It sets out detailed actions that members of the Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland will carry out and aligns them to the four thematic workgroups that will be established to ensure that actions are being delivered effectively.

| Theme 1 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|--|--|---|--|
| Expanding and Extending Adult Learning | 1. Establish and develop a national Adult Learners Advisory Group, reflecting the diversity of community-based adult learners, to inform the development and delivery of the strategy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a training and support programme for the Adult Learners Advisory Group Organise an event to share best practice in learner-centred learning and policy making Publish an annual review of the strategy co-produced by the Adult Learners Advisory Group | The experiences of adult learners are at the heart of what we are doing to create the conditions for connected adult learning opportunities. |
| | 2. Develop coherent and consistent data and measurements for the impact of community-based adult learning based on methods being used across Scotland. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake research to determine data for key indicators that will be the basis for measuring progress Agree on national impact measurements Support partners to collect data and measure impact Publish a national Adult Learning Impact Report for Scotland | Policy and decision-makers understand the impact of adult learning on learners and communities. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 1 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|---|--|--|---|
| Expanding and Extending Adult Learning | 3. Evaluate the suitability and levels of funding arrangements for adult learning, assessing how these arrangements identify and meet demand, support progression, and how adult learners are included in decision making processes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage across the sector to ensure the views of adult learners, providers and practitioners are taken into account • Recommend improvements to funding arrangements and incorporate recommendations as this strategic action plan develops • Support and strengthen partnership working between colleges and CLD partners • Establish a baseline for current cross-sectoral investment in adult learning and set goals for future funding levels required | Appropriate levels of funding are available to engage and support adult learners across Scotland to meet their needs. |
| | 4. Undertake a review, with learners and practitioners, on the impact of 'Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020' and 'Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020' to produce recommendations on next steps for these specialisms within the context of the adult learning strategy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an expert panel comprised of learners, practitioners and providers • Incorporate review recommendations into the Adult Learning Strategy as this strategic action plan develops | The Adult Learning Strategy will build on and develop the outcomes from the review of the ESOL Strategy 2015-2020 and Literacies in Scotland Strategy 2020. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 1 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|---|--|--|--|
| Expanding and Extending Adult Learning | 5. Increase access to and support for accredited learning underpinned by the SCQF, where appropriate, for community-based adult learning to support positive pathways for adult learners. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Map and promote current accredited learning opportunities• Identify gaps in and availability of provision and respond by supporting the development of new opportunities• Support providers to deliver credit-rated and accredited learning by delivering cross-sector training and sharing resources• Support and strengthen partnership working between colleges and community-based adult learning providers to deliver accredited learning in the community | More opportunities are created and available for adult learners with few or no qualifications. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 1 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|
| Expanding and Extending Adult Learning | 6. Increase availability of, access to, and support for, online learning options for adult learners. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to increase access to digital devices and connectivity for adult learning • Embed up-to-date cyber resilience and cyber security messaging within digital learning opportunities • Map and promote current online learning options • Support the development and promotion of SpeakGaelic resources • Identify gaps in and availability of provision and respond by supporting the development of new opportunities • Deliver sector-wide training and share resources to support practitioners to provide secure digital learning • Produce an options appraisal for a national platform for adult learning | More digital learning opportunities are created and available for adult learners. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 1 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|--|--|--|---|
| Expanding and Extending Adult Learning | 7. Increase learning activity that supports democratic involvement and community empowerment so adult learners can access and create opportunities that meet their needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate and promote the ways in which community-based adult learning promotes democratic involvement and community empowerment • Identify gaps in and availability of provision and respond by supporting the development of new opportunities • Develop an engagement plan with communities and providers • Co-produce learning materials based on key legislation and policy with learners | Adult learners become empowered and influence the decisions that affect their lives. |
| | 8. Increase cross-policy support for the role of community-based adult learning in improving outcomes across policy areas including education, employability, health, social isolation, poverty reduction and justice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a research project to analyse the contribution CLD makes to achieving National Outcomes and to key policy areas • Organise an event to share findings and develop new local and national connections • Publish a national Adult Learning Impact Report for Scotland • Continue to work at local and national level to improve the connectivity between adult learning and other provision | Policy and decision-makers understand the impact of adult learning on learners and communities. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 1 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|---|---|--|--|
| Expanding and Extending Adult Learning | 9. Increase availability of, access to, and support for family learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase professional learning opportunities that are responsive to local need • Support the delivery of family learning by sharing practice and resources | Family learning is available and accessible to help impact on raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. |
| Theme 2 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
| Connecting the Adult Learning Journey | 10. Collaborate to act on recommendations in the SFC Review to build accessible, integrated and positive pathways for learners over their lifetimes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share findings from Pathfinders to support CLD providers to learn from integrated tertiary approaches • Explore how adult learning providers can deliver micro-credentials as part of the development of a national framework • Create alignment between the development of standards for online learning for colleges and universities with the development of CLD digital competences • Support and strengthen cross-sector partnership working to plan for provision that meets local and regional need to aid economic recovery | Community-based adult learners are part of a more responsive and coherent education system. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 2 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|--|--|---|---|
| Connecting the Adult Learning Journey | 11. Connect community-based adult learning with careers and employability services to create positive pathways for learners who face significant barriers to accessing work. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote Skills Development Scotland's careers services to learners and providers Build capacity with adult learning practitioners by delivering training on Skills Development Scotland services and resources Work to increase CLD membership on Local Employability Partnerships to align and integrate with local priorities Explore how to embed the No One Left Behind approach and emerging employability policies and practices within adult learning provision | Adult learners have access to the appropriate level of information, advice, guidance and support at each stage of their learning journey. |
| | 12. Provide support and recognition for structured partnerships to ensure the needs of adult learners are at the heart of the decision making process locally, regionally and nationally. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create guidance on building and strengthening partnerships Share exemplars of successful partnerships to promote best practice Co-produce a good practice guide to support organisations to ensure that learners are at the heart of their decision making | Partners effectively contribute to planning for community based adult learning to ensure adult learning is learner-centred, available and accessible. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 2 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|--|--|---|--|
| Connecting the Adult Learning Journey | 13. Strengthen partnership arrangements which identify and meet the advice, guidance and support needs of adult learners. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a professional guidance network with the aim of creating a more cohesive lifelong learning journey • Share exemplars of successful partnerships to promote best practice • Support the development of qualifications in adult guidance • Support the development of progression routes for Gaelic learning • Create and promote opportunities for guidance professionals to upskill and for adult learning practitioners to build knowledge and skills • Explore how to best integrate information, advice and guidance for adult learning in national guidance systems and services | Adult learners have access to the appropriate level of information, advice guidance and support at each stage of their learning journey. |
| | 14. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing systems for Recognition of Prior Learning to ensure a coordinated national Recognised Prior Learning process that takes into account qualifications gained overseas and a diverse range of needs including language and additional learning needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an evaluation panel with the Adult Learners Advisory Group • Engage across the sector to ensure the views of adult learners, providers and practitioners are taken into account • Develop and agree on a national process | Adult learners' experiences are recognised throughout their lives to support their progression. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 3 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|--|---|---|--|
| Access, Diversity and Inclusion | 15. Collaborate with adult learners and equality groups to explore, define and remove barriers to learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the Adult Learners Advisory Group to advise strategy working groups on the actions needed to remove barriers to learning Incorporate recommendations from the Adult Learners Advisory Group as this strategic action plan develops | Barriers to learning are removed in collaboration with adult learners. |
| | 16. Ensure consistent and appropriate use of Impact Assessments to plan accessible provision which reduces the persistent inequalities experienced by people with protected characteristics. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-produce guidance for involving people with protected characteristics in the co-production of impact assessments Deliver sector-wide training and share resources to support the use of impact assessments Promote the embedding of impact assessments in plans and evaluations | Barriers to learning are removed in collaboration with adult learners. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 3 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for Forum Members | Outcome |
|--|---|--|--|
| Access, Diversity and Inclusion | 17. Increase public awareness of adult learning opportunities, guidance and support nationally and locally through joined up and accessible messaging. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively promote opportunities using forum members' existing channels • Promote Gaelic learning opportunities to increase the use and visibility of Gaelic • Consult with adult learners and those not engaging in learning on the most effective and inclusive communication methods • Develop a collaborative Communications and Marketing Action plan • Co-produce adaptable marketing materials in a range of formats to promote the benefits of adult learning • Explore how to best integrate information, advice and guidance for adult learning in national guidance systems and services | Adult learners are aware of the learning opportunities available and how to access them. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 4 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for the CLD Standards Council to lead on | Outcome |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Workforce Development actions will be taken forward by the CLD Standards Council who will lead the Workforce Development working group and report progress to the Adult Learning Strategic Forum</p> | | | |
| <p>Workforce Development</p> | <p>18. Ensure appropriate and accessible professional learning opportunities and pathways.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update work undertaken in the CLD Standard's Council Review of Career Pathways to map qualifications and uptake to develop a cohesive professional learning framework • Support the development of new entry level qualifications | <p>Adult learners will benefit from a skilled and coordinated workforce that has clear professional pathways.</p> |
| | <p>19. Strengthen cross-sectoral professional learning opportunities available for staff and volunteers, supporting the use of the SCQF framework to underpin learning.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map and promote relevant existing cross-sector opportunities • Conduct a training needs analysis to identify needs and gaps • Plan and deliver a programme of cross-sectoral opportunities • Work with colleges to provide opportunities for community-based adult learning practitioners | <p>Adult learners across Scotland have learning opportunities delivered by a workforce enhancing their knowledge and skills through professional learning.</p> |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 4 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for the CLD Standards Council to lead on | Outcome |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Workforce Development | 20. Explore the development of national occupational standards for community-based adult learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage across the sector to ensure the views of adult learners, providers and practitioners are taken into account Produce recommendations on next steps | Adult learners across Scotland have learning opportunities that are provided by a workforce with high standards of performance. |
| | 21. Increase development opportunities for adult learning volunteers and those who support them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support and promote use of the Volunteering in CLD resources on i-develop Support the sector to embed the Volunteering for All framework Share best practice examples from across the sector Promote the use of quality frameworks such as Volunteer Friendly Award and Investing in Volunteers Develop a community of practice for community-based adult learning volunteers | Adult learners across Scotland have learning opportunities that are supported by skilled and confident volunteers. |

Strategic Action Plan

| Theme 4 | High-Level Action | Detailed Actions for the CLD Standards Council to lead on | Outcome |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Workforce Development | 22. Explore and support training for practitioners to ensure adequate digital skills as technology advances, resulting in a digitally agile workforce. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed newly developed digital competences for CLD within community-based adult learning • Develop a coordinated and sustainable programme of digital professional learning to support community-based adult learning practitioners • Share and promote digital learning opportunities | More adult learners are digitally confident and skilled, supported by a digitally agile, competent workforce. |
| | 23. Collaborate to improve diversity and remove barriers in the workforce. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a workforce survey and analyse data • Develop a diversity action plan in collaboration with the CLD Standard's Council's Equalities Group, learners, practitioners and providers • Incorporate actions from the diversity action plan as this strategic action plan develops | Adult learners across Scotland will have access to and will be supported by a diverse workforce who reflect their life experiences. |

Appendix: The Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland

Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland Membership

Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
City of Glasgow College
CLD Managers Scotland – Adult Learning
CLD Standards Council
College Development Network
Colleges Scotland
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Education Scotland
Inverness College
LEAD Scotland
Learning Link Scotland
Newbattle Abbey College
NHS Education for Scotland
Open University
Robertson Trust
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig
Scottish Community Development Centre
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
Scottish Funding Council
Scottish Government
Scottish Libraries
Scottish Prison Service
Scottish Union Learning
Skills Development Scotland
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Scotland)
Universities Scotland
Volunteer Scotland
Workers Education Association

Adult Learning Strategy Writing Group Membership

City of Glasgow College
CLD Managers Scotland – Adult Learning
CLD Standards Council
Education Scotland
LEAD Scotland
Learning Link Scotland
Newbattle Abbey College
Scottish Government
South Ayrshire Council Adult Literacies/ESOL
Workers Education Association

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