

Community Learning and Development Workforce Survey

Executive summary



Ensuring decent housing and strong communities across Scotland



The Community Learning and Development Workforce Survey was carried out by Avanté Consulting for Communities Scotland. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Communities Scotland.

Additional copies of this executive summary are available from Learning Connections at the address on the back cover. The full report is available on our website at www.lc.communitiesscotland.gov.uk

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Acknowledgments

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This is the first time that a study of this nature has been attempted; as such there is likely to be considerable debate about its content. It provides invaluable information for those involved in the national Community Learning and Development Performance Information Project and beyond. We hope that those of you who were good enough to participate will find it useful.

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1. Introduction

Scottish Executive policy has set a challenging agenda for the development of the community learning and development (CLD) workforce. Learning Connections, part of Communities Scotland, in partnership with Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland, wishes to establish the extent and nature of the CLD workforce in Scotland. It therefore commissioned this initial survey as part of the work of the Performance Information Project (PIP).

2. Methods

The survey took place between mid-January and the end of March 2006. An electronic questionnaire was distributed widely to CLD managers in local authorities and to a range of voluntary organisations. All recipients were encouraged to 'cascade' the questionnaire to any other organisations engaged in CLD activities. Seventy-nine questionnaires were returned. In addition, 30 completed interviews were undertaken with a range of stakeholders including managers of CLD staff in all sectors. These interviews gathered qualitative information, primarily on the recruitment and retention of staff and on the issues that might affect these.

3. Surveying the CLD workforce: *practical difficulties and implications*

The survey was commissioned partly in order to consider how best to gather information on the CLD workforce in future. Some technical lessons were learned, but more importantly, the pattern of responses raises some fundamental questions about who CLD workers are, where they are employed and how they may be classified.

Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities: Scottish Executive guidance for community learning and development (January 2004) (WALT) was aimed at community planning partnerships (CPPs) and sets out the Scottish Executive's vision for CLD over the coming years. WALT definitions imply that the field should cover not only the whole of community based adult learning and youth work, but also the whole activity of community capacity building.



There are several reasons why a readily identifiable CLD workforce may not yet have fully developed. Indeed there are some influences which are pulling in the opposite direction.

In addition some respondents, especially in local government, found the timescale for the survey too short, and some did not have systems in place for readily retrieving staffing information in the categories requested, or on particular groups such as sessional workers.

The methods used to distribute the survey attempted to reconcile the aims of inviting maximum participation and exploring the partially unknown limits of the sector, whilst ensuring comprehensive coverage of key sectors and avoiding double counting.

The majority of responses were made by local authorities. Only five did not return a response from their major CLD services by the extended deadline. In the majority of cases, where there were multiple responses from a single authority, these came from multiple locations in which CLD workers are employed. Two relatively small examples of double counting were identified.



The extent to which local authority staff outwith major recognised CLD services were included varied considerably, and was not always possible to discover from centralised responses.

Response from sectors other than local authorities was far more limited. We believe that this seriously under-represents the level of CLD activity in these sectors and that this initial survey therefore demonstrates the need for further investigation of them. There was greater difficulty in establishing a definitive list of contacts, and also perhaps differing understandings of CLD held by managers. Communications about the survey within CLD Partnerships have proved ineffective. Interviewees confirmed that there are qualified CLD workers in NHS posts, but no returns were received on them.

It was difficult to reach smaller voluntary organisations that employ CLD workers in one relatively quick trawl.

Though most respondents appear to have been familiar with WALT definitions of CLD workers, some local authority respondents left workers in non-CLD service environments out of the survey purely for practical reasons, and their numbers are probably underestimated. Definitions are probably more fluid in the voluntary sector.

Eleven per cent of the staff listed are defined as 'borderline' cases, 'whose involvement in CLD as a principal responsibility is open to interpretation'. These were a disparate mixture of CLD workers in non-core services, in specialist roles or in administrative and support positions.

Some respondents were very comfortable with classifying their workforce according to WALT priorities, others resisted this. Almost half used a 'generic' category to classify some of their CLD workforce. We suspect that this option was very much open to local interpretation.

It is strongly recommended that there is a need for further research into the location of CLD workers in the voluntary sector, and in the public sector outwith local authorities. A separate approach to surveying these sectors may always be required. A close link to the national activity survey and a clear definition of who is responsible for co-ordinating responses will work best for local authorities. A more exploratory 'snowballing' approach may be required for others.

4. Profile of the CLD workforce

In total, respondents reported on 6,076 individual staff members. Of these, 2,595 were in full-time and part-time jobs, and 3,481 in 'sessional' posts. The 2,595 full and part-time jobs represented a total of 2,258 full-time equivalent positions.

We estimate that the total number of CLD staff working more than 10 hours per week in identifiable CLD services in Scottish local authorities is between 2,500 and 3,000; perhaps around 2,700. This represents around 2,350 full-time equivalent posts. This total would be increased by probably several hundred if more authorities had been more inclusive about reporting on CLD workers scattered in non-core services. It takes no account of any wider adoption of approaches based upon or similar to CLD.

Even allowing for underestimation of sessional staff, it seems likely that the total hours they contribute cannot amount to more than 1,000 full-time equivalent posts, which represents perhaps between one quarter and one third of the total CLD effort in local authorities.

Total numbers in other sectors cannot be estimated accurately from this survey.

The average number of full-time and part-time workers reported by local authorities was 96, and of all workers, including sessional, 211. Responses from other sectors showed a range of much smaller workforces.

Though 57 per cent of all reported staff were sessional, full-timers outnumbered part-timers by 2:1 amongst the remainder, or 3:1 when converted to full-time equivalents.

Just over three-quarters of organisations said that there were no time periods in the year when they hired either more or fewer staff. Those that did showed a balance of term time and holiday increases.

The following table gives a summary profile of the staff in the survey.

Category	Total full-time equivalent numbers (excl. sessional)	Part time (%FT/PT posts)	Sessional (% all posts)	Qualified (%FT/PT posts)	Pay £20,500+ (%FT/PT posts)	Fixed term contracts (%FT/PT posts)
Adult learning	593	45%	62%	54%	66%	33%
Youth work	582	34%	73%	49%	35%	30%
Capacity building	310	21%	26%	56%	77%	26%
Generic	433	9%	7%	86%	67%	6%

Darker purple cells represent the highest values within each vertical column and white the lowest. Categories two per cent or less apart are treated as equal.

Adult learning is a relatively heavy user of part-time and sessional staff. Youth work is the heaviest user of sessional workers, with a ratio of 3.3 sessional posts to each full-time equivalent position. Capacity building and ‘generic’ work are much less likely to use either part-time or sessional staff.

‘Qualifications’ were defined as ‘community or adult education, youth or community development qualifications at degree or post-graduate level endorsed by Community Education Validation and Endorsement committee (CeVe) (or non-Scottish qualifications recognised as an alternative)’. Just over half (54 per cent) of staff (not including sessional) have qualifications. Seventy per cent of full-time staff are qualified, as compared to only 20 per cent of part-time staff.

A majority of adult learning and community work staff are qualified, and the overwhelming majority of ‘generic’ staff. Just under half of youth work staff are qualified. Ninety per cent of part-time youth workers are unqualified.

Many interviewees commented on the prevalence of limited term funding in CLD. We asked respondents to distinguish staff in posts whose funding was ‘permanent or open-ended’ from those posts that were guaranteed only for the ‘duration of funding’. Twenty-four per cent of local authority posts were on such a ‘fixed term’ basis, and 41 per cent of posts in the voluntary sector.

Fixed term funding was most prevalent in adult learning, where it applied to almost one-third of staff. Generic workers were most likely to be 'permanent'. They often appear to represent the more established element in the profession.

CLD staff working in adult learning, community work, and generic CLD are predominantly paid at local authority scale AP4 or above (£20,500+). Staff working in youth work are more evenly spread across all categories, but nearly 20 per cent are paid at the lowest range up to £13,000 per annum.



The lowest paid group of sessional staff, who are paid less than £7.50 per hour, include about a quarter of those in youth work and a third of the small group of community work sessional workers.

Only a small minority carried out any specific monitoring of the CLD workforce in terms of gender, ethnic origin, disability or age. A majority stated that although equalities monitoring was carried out in their organisation, it was done on a whole workforce basis.

Nevertheless a surprisingly large number provided some breakdowns of their workforce. These must in large part represent personal judgement and do not include the whole workforce. They suggest that two thirds of staff are female and 95.4 per cent are white, and based on even lower numbers, eight per cent have disabilities.

Interviewees were asked about whether they felt that their workforce was balanced and appropriate to the communities it serves. There was some pessimism about the ability to recruit an appropriate number of black and minority ethnic workers. Impressions of the incidence of employees with disabilities were rather vague. Some felt that the workforce was currently imbalanced in favour of women. Many saw an ageing workforce as a problem, though youth workers were said to be generally younger.

5. Recruitment and retention of staff

A total of 242.61 full-time equivalent positions were reported to be available and unfilled. This represents a vacancy rate of 9.7 per cent. Vacancy rates were highest in 'generic' work at 11.8 per cent with adult learning and youth work not far behind. In community work they were significantly lower at 7.2 per cent.

Just over half of vacancies definitely required staff to have relevant qualifications. The proportion was close to average in adult learning and generic posts, but much lower in youth work (36 per cent) and much higher in community work (79 per cent).

In each category, the proportions of vacancies for short-term contract posts were fairly close to the equivalent proportions of filled posts, except in youth work where they were substantially less likely to be short-term than were filled posts.

With these vacancy rates it is perhaps surprising that more interviewees did not see vacancies and turnover as more of a problem. Many of them dismissed the issue. Several in the local authority sector suggested that there had been an improvement in the relatively recent past. Many interviewees stressed that the typical delay in filling a post was only what was necessary for the practical steps needed. Restructuring or savings exercises may help to explain why there were significant vacancy rates recorded in spite of some perceptions of low turnover.

Descriptions of actual recruitment were much more divided. Some claimed that they had few problems with recruitment. Others reported difficulties, though in varying areas: core or sessional, youth or generic.



A typical recruitment strategy in local government is to recruit to basic grades externally and to fill senior posts internally. Voluntary organisations more rarely have the opportunity to appoint internally.

One recurring factor is geography. Rural and non-central belt local authorities often felt that they faced particular difficulties in recruitment; some of this being related to the proximity of training establishments as well as other more specific locality issues.

All shades of opinion on whether current pay and conditions attracted the right calibre of applicants were represented, but many argued that lower salary levels in comparison to professions such as teachers and social workers were a problem. Some authorities feel that they cannot compete with others who offer better packages for CLD workers, and there is far less consistency in pay levels within the voluntary and other sectors.

The voluntary sector is seen by several interviewees from various sectors as sometimes paying less and in particular offering poorer career paths.

Irregular hours and fixed term contracts were not considered a major disincentive by most, though some disagreed.

The general skills and suitability of the people in and entering CLD work attracted a great deal of comment, mostly of a general nature, such as commenting upon motivations and personal skills, rather than training. A few felt that training at all levels does not reflect the current enhanced role of the profession.

Several areas are seeking to recruit by training unqualified staff and other local people, partly because they feel that suitably mature and experienced people are not being supplied by current training. Others take this approach because of the difficulty of attracting outside applicants to more remote areas.

There was a sense of discontent that what managers saw as a challenging profession, with some specific and at times highly complex personal and professional skills and attributes required, was not necessarily well understood by others. Currently it appears not to attract the right range and calibre of entrants, or those with the potential of being promoted into supervisory or managerial positions. Indistinct and inaccurate public perceptions of the profession lead to inappropriate applications.

Though continuing professional development did not attract much comment, some did stress its importance. Some also commented that the study, while welcome, could use the opportunity to highlight the need to address the issues of quality in the planning and delivery of CLD.

Those who singled out particular sectors of the workforce as most likely to leave, varied between some that pointed to turnover at junior level and others who noted a tendency to lose more experienced people. The most commonly cited reasons for leaving involved promotion or progression within CLD rather than a drift away from the profession.

Others factors mentioned were the ending of fixed term contracts, the geographical difficulties that lead to a lack of opportunities in some areas, and a trend for people with CLD skills to be sought after in a number of other fields, which might pay more.

We asked about the single most important factor or factors that impacted on ability to either recruit or retain staff. These can be summed up under the headings of image, change and quality of management.

Image is important both for the profession as a whole and for individual employers. Some see a general image problem for CLD. Either the content of the work or its funding and prospects may be seen as having a poor reputation.

Organisational change is said to affect recruitment in local government, and in the NHS and related areas of the voluntary sector.

Management development is important from at least three points of view. Firstly it can improve the career prospects for CLD workers individually, especially in local government. Secondly, the quality of management is a significant factor in retention of staff. This was particularly raised in the voluntary sector. Some observers see an overall weakness in leadership in CLD.

This relates to the third view, which sees the importance of strong management located in strategic positions as crucial in securing a positive profile for the contribution of CLD work. Effective and well respected managers playing a central part in key partnerships and agency structures, were seen as essential in being able to articulate the benefits of CLD as well as identify the role it can play alongside others. It was noted that when this role was performed well, staff are more likely to feel valued, motivated and able to operate in a complex environment.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The survey was an initial attempt to map a workforce, which is relatively easy to identify in CLD services and units in local authorities. But the relationship between these workers and other types of CLD worker raises questions about the extent to which at present there is a coherent and identifiable CLD workforce. Further research and consultation with the sector may be needed on the extent of the workforce to be included in any future surveys.

Future surveys, using broadly similar methods to those used in this study, could be used to obtain detailed information on the workforce in CLD services. A number of specific practical points have been identified that can be straightforwardly addressed.

But this must be accompanied or perhaps preceded by a survey or surveys in the voluntary sector, other public services and perhaps non-core services within local authorities, using a different kind of approach to that used in this study. This must involve a first phase involving consultation rather than formal research, to secure more 'buy-in' from the sectors involved; wider involvement and commitment to a continued 'cascade' approach to contacting possible respondents, carried out over a longer period; and flexibility in the categorisation of staff to types of CLD.

Finally, the study has highlighted possible areas for priority attention and action to support training, recruitment and retention of an effective CLD workforce, by bodies such as Learning Connections, CLD Managers Scotland, the new standards council and all employers of CLD workers. This includes the need to consider issues of quality.





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