

DELIVERING OUTCOMES IN COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT:

CURRENT ISSUES FOR OUTCOME-FOCUSSED
PRACTICE IN ADULT LEARNING

FULL REPORT

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FULL REPORT

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The views expressed in this report are those of the consultants and do not necessarily represent those of the Lifelong Learning Directorate, or Scottish Ministers.

DELIVERING OUTCOMES IN COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT: Current issues for outcome-focussed practice in adult learning

Learning Connections is part of the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate of the Scottish Government. It carries responsibility for supporting the development and implementation of policy and practice in relation to Community Learning and Development (CLD).

This discussion report is one of three separate reports written as part of the outcome-focussed practice support programme funded by the Scottish Government and delivered to Community Learning and Development Partnerships (CLDPs) from November 2007 to May 2008. The support programme was instigated by Learning Connections in the recognition that, against a backdrop of a national context for outcome based practice, some CLDPs still face challenges in embedding an outcomes focus into their work and that effective outcome-focussed practice in CLD is inconsistent across Scotland.

The programme was delivered by a consortium of Youthlink Scotland, Linked Work And Training Trust (LWTT) and Avanté Consulting, led by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC).

The reports concentrate on each of the three national priorities for community learning and development – achievement through learning for adults, achievement through learning for young people and Achievement through building community capacity. Each report sets out the current context for each area of work, the key challenges and issues facing strategists, managers and practitioners and recommendations for developing effective outcome-focussed practice.

The content of the discussion reports reflects the dialogue between participants at the workshops held throughout the support programme as part of the regional seminars and as part of the local support programme. The recommendations contain some additional reflective commentary by the support agencies - the Scottish Community Development Centre, Youthlink Scotland, Linked Work and Training Trust and Avanté Consulting.

The reports are intended to be used by strategic managers and champions of CLD to reflect on practice, facilitate continued dialogue at a local level and to develop a strategic approach to supporting outcome-focussed practice in CLD.

Current Climate/Context

The scope of adult learning in the community has been recognised as complex. It refers to a wide range of learning activities, providers and agencies and a wide diversity of learners and settings. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that the phrase ‘community based adult learning’ can and does mean different things to different people, with the key characteristics being location, accessibility, client-led approach, individual/ community development, informal approach to learning. In the context of community learning and development (CLD) adult learning is one of the three national priorities.

The general feeling from the discussions was that adult learning is more advanced in setting operational, management and strategic outcomes for practice and in gathering evidence to demonstrate performance than youth work or community capacity building.

While the importance of the ‘soft skills’ achieved through Community Based Adult Learning (CBAL) is receiving greater recognition in terms of its contribution to personal, and community development outcomes, this does not yet translate to resources adequate to deliver the full potential benefits of outcome focussed practice. Linked to this is the capability to do so in a robust, systematic way which is acceptable to investors, service managers and policy makers and which demonstrates the value of adult learning across the range of policies, programmes and topics adult learning addresses.

Adult learning has a good record of performance measurement of outputs and is developing a deeper expertise in the development and evaluation of outcomes. To maximise this there is a need for greater clarity on what outcomes are wanted.

Definition of Adult Learning in the Context of CLD

The five year review of community learning and development in Scotland produced by HMle on the basis of inspections and reviews during the period from 2002 to 2007, described adult learning as:

“Adult learning in the community (including community-based adult learning, literacy and numeracy provision in communities), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) parenting education, and family learning.”

HMle, 2007

It may be helpful in exploring the actions to enhance adult learning to deconstruct this description.

Community-Based Adult Learning

The scope of adult learning in the community has been recognised as complex (Duncan and Gallacher, 2004).

The national priority, achievement through learning for adults, is expected to be addressed through community-based opportunities;

'Raising standards of achievement in learning for adults through community-based lifelong learning opportunities incorporating the core skills of literacy, numeracy, communications, working with others, problem-solving and information communications technology (ICT).'
Scottish Executive, 2004

There is no common agreed definition of CBAL used across all sectors. Local authority and practitioners from voluntary organisations tend to be broader than those given by Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) practitioners. Location, community based, either located in the target community or involving the target community at a location outside, is common to all sectors. There is also a broad agreement between sectors on what is formal, non formal and informal.

Formal learning; learning that takes place in recognised institutional learning settings, like schools, colleges and universities, nearly always following a set curriculum and with some form of recognised qualification.

Informal learning; learning which isn't intentional. You just learn while you're doing things, like your job or taking part in an activity in your community.

Non-formal learning; learning that takes place outside the formal learning sector but which is intentional and the result of explicit, planned learning opportunities.

Much of CLD is non-formal learning. Communities Scotland (2003) in their report on the impact of CBAL in Scotland also highlighted the key role of community based provision:

"Informal and community-based learning plays a crucial role in supporting people to engage in or to return to learning and can often be a first step back into more formal further or higher education for people who have become disengaged from learning."
Scottish Executive, 2003

There can be differences between local authority and voluntary sector CLD and the FE and HE sector understanding of CBALs. Traditionally FE and HE have been physically and culturally based in an institution and focussed on academic and vocational learning and qualifications. For most of them CBAL is about widening access to disadvantaged and disengaged learners to FE and HE opportunities. CLD practitioners in local authorities and voluntary organisations take a wider view. CBAL is about engaging disadvantaged people and communities in non-formal learning where the learner to a great extent sets the learning agenda.

Those individuals and learning providers involved in CBAL have long expressed the need for greater recognition of the contribution which CBAL makes. It is particularly important therefore to develop a strong outcome-focussed practice which both delivers on the strategy and clearly through robust evidence demonstrates the value of that delivery.

While CBAL lacks a commonly accepted definition, adult literacy and numeracy was defined in *Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland (ALNIS)* (2001) as:

“The ability to read, write and use numeracy, to handle information, to express ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners.”
Scottish Executive, 2001

HMIe’s 2006 report, *Improving Scottish Education 2002-2005*, concluded that – ‘*literacies programmes are making important contributions to individuals’ sense of self-worth and self-confidence. They are making a significant difference to participants’ capacity to contribute within the family, at work and in the community.*’ The report also concluded that the initial assessment of learners, the use of learning plans and quality assurance could be improved and that the main emphasis has been on literacy, and attention should be given to developing numeracy skills. This was prior to any meaningful impact of the ‘*Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework*’ which addresses assessment, planning and quality issues.

Family learning and English for speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) are two other important strands of CBAL. ESOL has grown with the ‘Fresh Talent Initiative’ to attract people from outwith Scotland to live, study and work here. Changes in immigration rules and regulation within the EEC making migration, particularly from Eastern European countries, asylum seekers and refugees have all contributed to a greater need for ESOL programmes.

The response from ESOL providers as noted in the *Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2007) has been for the FE sector to expand the provision of English language classes particularly in the Central Belt and outside the Central Belt, where there has been a marked influx of new migrant workers from the EU expansion states, CLD and ALN partnerships have delivered the majority of ESOL provision.

Cross-cutting Issues

Although there are some policy and practice issues pertinent only to community capacity building, youth work, or adult learning it was evident that there are some issues which cut across all three themes.

Confusion about terminology and ability to measure outcomes

Participants felt that there is now an ‘outcome industry’ (not just within CLD) which makes outcome-focused practice more complicated and confusing than necessary. Outcomes/outputs/milestones/ impact: just some of the myriad of terms which are often used interchangeably but with different meanings in different contexts. A lack of consistency is apparent in how outcomes are measured. This is partly due to a range of stakeholders such as HMIe, CLD Partnerships and funders asking for different information.

Working within an 'output' culture

Within the majority of organisations there is still a culture of focussing on outputs and not outcomes. Many staff are working to output driven work plans through the process of Best Value Reviews and are under pressure from elected members for quantifiable results.

Capacity

The issue of capacity was raised frequently – capacity in terms of numbers of staff and capacity in terms of skills and resources. It was noted that pre and post qualifying training does not equip CLD staff to enter into practice with a developed understanding and/or ability to engage in outcome-focussed practice. The make-up of the Youth Work profession being mostly volunteers and sessional staff at delivery level, makes outcome based practice a particular challenge. Within the theme of capacity building it was highlighted that there is a need to 'Build the capacity of the capacity builders'.

Working within new national and local outcomes frameworks

Participants generally welcomed the establishment of the national performance framework and the Concordat between Scottish Government and local authorities and viewed this as positive for CLD in terms of being able to identify and set strategic local outcomes more effectively. Community Capacity Builders, Youth Workers and Adult Literacy and Numeracy practitioners could identify clear links to one or more of the national outcomes but Community Based Adult Learning (CBAL) staff were concerned that CBAL did not fit directly with any of the 15 national outcomes. It was agreed that CLDPs should continue to work strategically as key members of Community Planning Partnerships, promoting the place of CLD outcomes as key elements of community planning and contributors to Single Outcome Agreements.

The core values of CLD

It was highlighted throughout the support programme that CLDPs should ensure that the focus, conduct and outcomes of CLD are developed in a manner that is compatible its core values, in particular its commitment to equalities and social justice.

Adult Learning

The issues pertinent to the theme of adult learning in CLD are outlined as follows:

How do we better integrate adult learning across local authority, voluntary sector, FE and HE?

Practice links

There was a strong feeling that the practice links between local authority, voluntary sector, FE and HE had improved. There were examples of collaboration and joint working on particular projects and initiatives and local learning partnerships, adult learning forums, adult guidance networks and other mechanisms formal and informal, were felt to be contributory factors. Having said that a number of concerns were identified which people felt required action to better integrate adult learning across local authority, voluntary sector, FE and HE.

Tracking learning journeys

More learners were thought to be making the transition from community based adult learning projects and groups supported by local authority and voluntary sector workers, to FE and HE certificated and accredited courses. However, there were no examples of detailed tracking of the learners' journey from the start, through this transition, to the end outcome of their FE/HE course.

Sharing management and practice information

There was a general feeling that by improving the flow of management and practice information between providers both the quality of practice and the planning and evaluation of outcomes would be enhanced. Examples were cited where partnerships, forums and networks do this effectively but it is not universal and those that did attested to the value of sharing information in a more systematic way.

Developing common practice outcomes

Each CLD Partnership should include the main providers of CLD and all should help to shape the strategic outcomes. Practice outcomes tend to be developed specifically by each provider internally. With the increase in formal and non-formal practice partnerships, it was felt that it would be beneficial to not only strengthen the links among agencies regarding their practice outcomes, but also move towards sharing agreed practice outcomes.

Developing an agreed definition for CBAL across sectors

It has already been noted that there is no single definition for CBAL across sectors and that more commonly FE and HE have a narrower description of CBAL. This can have the effect of re-enforcing differences and divisions rather than encouraging partnership and integrated learning. Developing a single common definition which covers all sectors would not only encourage more integrated practice but it gives a common starting point for the development of outcome focussed practice. As one participant commented:

“Our understanding of CBAL = our outcomes. Their understanding = their outcomes. One understanding = common outcomes and better more integrated practice.”

How do we relate our practice more effectively to Single Outcome Agreement Outcomes and to the National Outcomes?

Some participants in the events expressed concern that apart from adult literacy and numeracy there was no specific National Outcome or Indicator which relates to adult learning. The National Indicator specific to adult literacy and numeracy is:

“Reduce the number of working age people with severe literacy and numeracy problems.”

National Indicator

This is countered by the majority of participants who felt that the intermediary outcomes of adult learning could be linked to a number of national outcomes depending on the particular project, group or programme. For example:

- “We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people.
 - We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation.
 - We live longer, healthier lives.
 - We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society.
 - We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk.
 - We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger.
 - We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.
 - We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.
 - We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production.
 - Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people’s needs.”
- National Outcomes

Adult learning initiatives on family learning, community based ESOL, IT, health, environment and employment, for example, can be linked to multiple National Outcomes. The challenge identified was gathering evidence and linking the initiative outcome demonstrably to these.

The concern with Single Outcome Agreements which provide the direct link between local services and the National Outcomes is that very few of the participants had any involvement with the process of preparing the Single Outcome Agreements. At best CLD managers had asked to comment on a final draft. The outcome of this is that it is expected that few Single Outcome Agreements will directly reflect the outcomes of adult learning which are being developed.

There was a general acceptance among participants that given the tight timescale the best course of action was to monitor this round of Single Outcome Agreements and prepare to engage more productively in the preparation of the next.

How adequate are the resources and commitment for Adult Learning?

There was a feeling at the events that to some extent adult learning is suffering from both a lack of resources and, despite the political commitment nationally to outcome-focussed practice, investment in adult learning is still too dependent on outputs. For example, the first action in the Adult ESOL Strategy which was published only last year, relates to 4,000 additional places by June 2008 and an increase in the number of teachers trained in ESOL.

All sectors in reporting on programmes and initiatives are, as one participant put it, 'still to a certain extent stuck being asked about places on courses'. This goes against the development of effective outcome focussed practice if the questions are, how many? how much? how often? instead of what difference has it made?

There were felt to be a number of contributory factors to this:

- Developing robust outcomes, for management purposes and strategically, at operational level is only practical if institutions and agencies have management information systems which are designed to handle outcome-focussed information, and not only on the basis of outputs. Too many agencies and institutions requiring management and performance information still want outputs or outcomes which are based on hard skills. However, with the support of Learning Connections and HMle, CLD adult learning practice was felt to be increasingly outcome-focussed.
- While there was a reported improvement in developing outcomes in the main this is in relation to intermediate outcomes and there is still a gap between clearly demonstrating and evidencing the contribution to broader end outcomes. This was felt to inhibit investment in adult learning.
- The outcomes which CLD practitioners are interested in, for example, engaging disadvantaged individuals and communities in learning, sometimes do not relate directly to the specific outcomes of topic based policy and investment programmes.

- Those involved in adult learning need to get better at demonstrating and evidencing the links between outcome-focussed practice and the end and topic outcomes of policy makers, investors and funders.

How do we link better and evidence the links, with the range of policies and programmes to which adult learning contributes?

Generally those involved in adult learning were positive about the range of tools; *LEAP*, *HGIOCLD*, *Delivering Change*, the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework* to assist in planning, monitoring and evaluating outcome focussed practice. There are a number of other resources to support practice, such as the *Learning in Regeneration Skills Pack* produced by the Scottish Centre for Regeneration. The concern is not the number of resources or their quality, but some more guidance about their applicability and use is required.

A particular concern, which was discussed, was evidencing the links with the range of policies and programmes to which adult learning contributes. In this respect, the concept of intermediate outcomes and end outcomes, as described in *Delivering Change*, was generally agreed to be particularly helpful.

An identified problem was the changing face of policy and resultant programmes as it was difficult to keep informed and understand the implications and opportunities each presents.

How are we measuring adult learning?

The measurement of adult learning was seen to be particularly important at this time. The general consensus from the discussions was that adult learning has been historically strong at measuring outputs and the discipline of collecting information should position it well to measure outcomes.

The issue that was raised was not one of the ability to collect appropriate information, rather what information and evidence needs to be collected and analysed to effectively demonstrate performance against outcomes. This links directly to the development of agreed, useful outcomes, that clearly show what difference adult learning is making. The issue therefore is more what outcomes do we want from adult learning?

The lack of a cross sectoral definition of community based adult learning only adds to the problem. If there is inconsistency across providers then there will be inconsistency across outcomes.

Are our outcomes good enough?

This question followed on from, and is linked to, the previous one. Discussions started with a strong feeling that Community Based Adult learning Practice has got better at developing appropriate outcomes to demonstrate the difference being made 'on the ground' with individual learners in terms of 'soft' and 'hard' skills. Examples were given of greater confidence, better and sustained relationships with peers, family, friends, better coping and problem solving skills. In addition, examples were also given of the outcomes adult learning programmes and groups were having on communities.

These were linked to planned and resulting changes which participants and communities sought. Where there was felt to be a weakness was in reconciling these with agency and organisational outcomes, to which adult learning is expected to contribute or demonstrate a link, in order to evidence the value of the service and its performance.

Responding to the Issues

This final section highlights some of the key messages that came from the discussions. The responsibility for responding to the issues lies with strategists and managers at both national and local levels.

Recommended actions for Community Learning and Development Partnerships

The three main contributors to adult learning who were involved in the discussions were local authority, voluntary sector and FE/HE. While there was evidence of increasing collaboration and co-operation, outcome focussed practice in adult learning would benefit from a more integrated approach. Partnerships, forums and networks have contributed to a better understanding but more needs to be done to realise a common approach and culture within CBAL.

Given the expressed concern about the lack of articulation of strategic outcomes with practice outcomes, Community Learning and Development Partnerships should engage with agencies and organisations and start a dialogue about the setting of outcomes which recognise, value and enable CBAL practice outcomes to be more robustly linked.

Recommended actions for CLD Managers

Practitioners need further support in exploring how best to shape outcome-focussed practice to more effectively contribute to National Outcomes and to Single Outcome Agreements. In terms of evidencing the difference adult learning is making, it is important to contribute to the development of future Single Outcome Agreements to ensure adult learning is recognised and valued and also to demonstrate links to the existing National Outcomes and Single Outcome Agreements.

CLD managers should revisit practice outcomes and, where appropriate, reshape to better articulate learner and community adult learning outcomes with agency and organisational outcomes.

Recommended Actions for Policy Makers

A number of participants identified the Learning Connections publication *Inside Policy: Update A guide to Scottish Executive Policy for People Working in Community Learning and Development* (January 2007) as a particularly useful tool in making policy links for outcome focussed practice. While it is felt that it is too soon for a new version, a short update which includes the Skills For Scotland Strategy, Concordat and ESOL strategy would assist those engaged in CLD to identify and focus on links.

Blurring the distinctions and divisions between sectors to achieve better integrated practice would benefit from having common practice outcomes and a single common understanding and definition of CBAL. There are a number of resources available to support outcome focussed practice and the need identified through the discussions was guidance on best use of these resources. The work which SCDC has just completed for Learning Connections on community capacity building which has resulted in the publication of a guide, *Building Community Capacity: Resources for Community Learning and Development Practice*, defines community capacity building, its outcomes and the resources available. It is suggested that a similar exercise should be completed for CBAL.

Further information on the support programme

The support programme took the form of six regional events with an allocation of places for each CLDP weighted according to the size of the partnership area. The events were followed up with the offer of an allocation of support days for each area.

The outcomes of the support programme were identified as follows:

To have identified and supported influential champions of outcome-focussed practice.

To have established shared understanding of the dimension of the issues to be tackled.

To have established connections between champions that will enable those people to continue to network with one another and promote learning exchange.

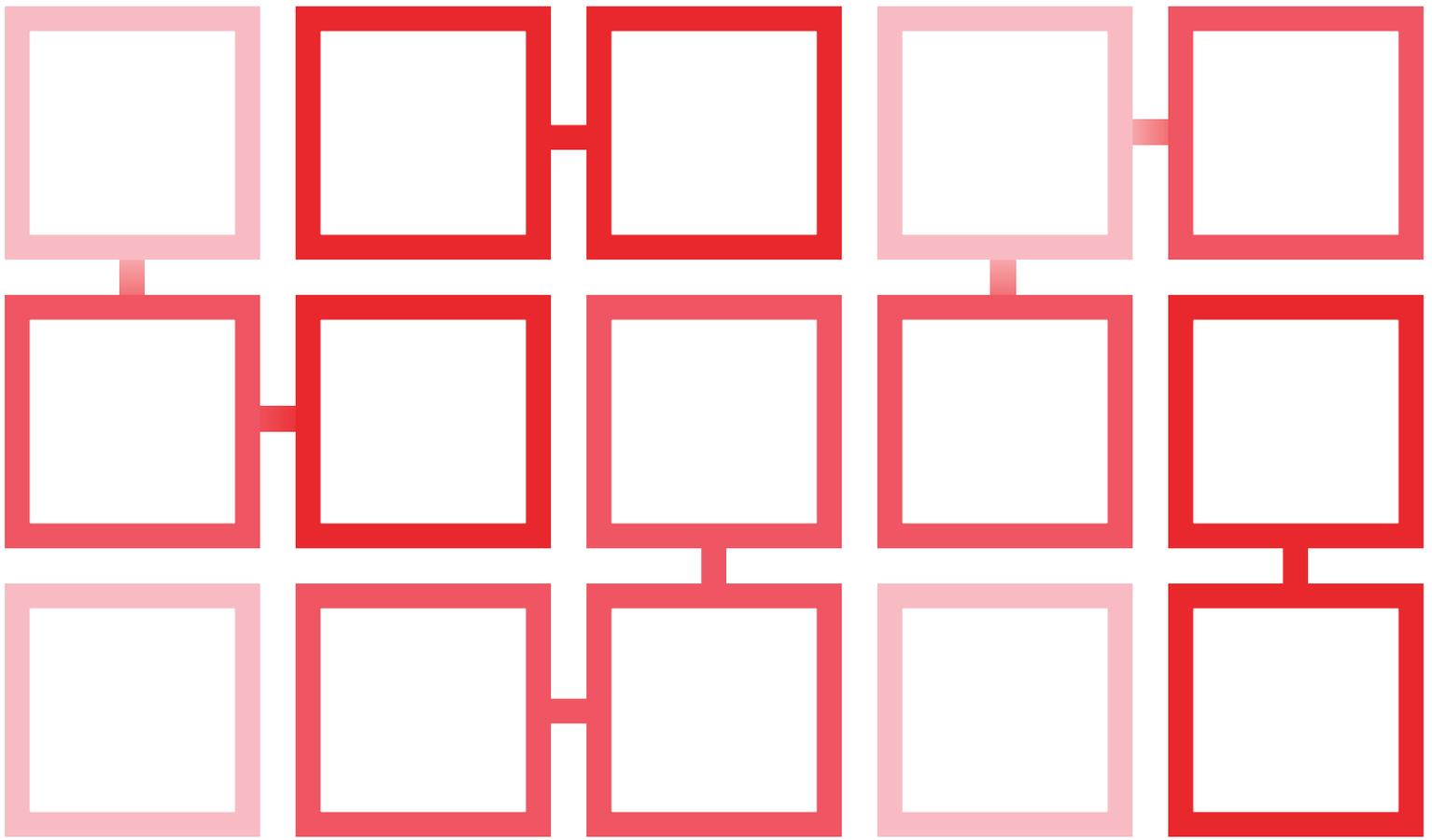
Where local actions are already being undertaken, to have added value to these initiatives by supporting critical reflection and providing further ideas and information.

Where local actions are not being taken to have motivated commitment to a process of local activity that seeks to enhance understanding and competence.

It was acknowledged that the factors underlying the need for a support programme present challenges that require to be addressed over a longer timescale and that the support programme for 2007/8 would establish a baseline for further development.

The focus for the regional seminars was not to deal directly with the issues affecting outcome based practice but to engage in dialogue about the dimensions of the issues and how they might best be tackled with key leaders and practitioners.

The follow-up support provided the opportunity to address the issues on a practical level by providing training and facilitated discussion.



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