

# **Raising the Standard in Scotland: A Report on Perspectives of Practitioners, Trainers and Students on Qualifying Training in Community Learning and Development**

## **Summary**

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## **SUMMARY**

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

This research was commissioned by Learning Connections and carried out by the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education at the University of Dundee between April and July 2007.

The objectives of this project were to:

- 1) Analyse the existing curricula for CLD training against policy developments since 1995;
- 2) Identify and arrange a number of focus groups, involving people engaged in a range of CLD practice and settings;
- 3) Apply the methodology with the focus groups, and,
- 4) Report the findings of the focus groups in relation to the revision of the qualifying guidelines to include:
  - a) The effectiveness of the current training programmes;
  - b) What a practitioner needs to know before employment at a range of levels and what an employer expects of them, and
  - c) What needs to be included in the new guidelines.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The project employed a multiple phase design collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Documentary analysis was used to collect qualitative data to set the context for this research. Primarily quantitative data, complemented with some qualitative data, was then collected from stakeholders using questionnaires. On the basis of issues and themes emerging from the questionnaires, focus groups were used to collect in-depth qualitative data from an even wider group of stakeholders. A total of 63 respondents completed questionnaires and a further 39 participated in the focus groups. The phases and sample have been described in full in the report.

## **RESULTS AND CONCLUSION**

All training providers are operating within the current CeVe Guidelines (CeVe, 1995) with variations between providers in terms of the scope and range of particular curricula and emphasis on relevant social policy and where they sit within the content of programmes. The documentary analysis suggested that the priority given to teaching social policy varies between programmes. Most emphasis is on applied social policy, however, there is variation

in the documentation in the extent to which applied social policy includes an international dimension. Some items recorded on our policy grid were located in electives which means that by definition not all students will study these. According to the documents, some areas, notably 'community planning', 'community safety', 'community health' and 'health and safety' (including child protection) were not as evident in some current qualifying programmes.

Adoption of 'Community Learning & Development' in curricula appears to be uneven and is not necessarily related to the year of endorsement of the programme. Most practice-based participants preferred the qualification title to reflect current government policy and direction, and therefore preferred CLD in the title. However, some respondents, particularly training providers, felt that the training qualification should remain associated with education, in recognition of historical development and continuity of identity with the public and other professional sectors.

All participants believed that the role of the CLD practitioner was to work with people to meet their identified needs through purposeful community engagement as critically competent practitioners. The key attributes and abilities were divided into hard and soft skills and knowledge base areas. Some of the key hard skills highlighted were organisational, evaluation and research, partnership and team working, group work and, in terms of knowledge, an understanding of relevant policy, sociology, learning theory and project management. The key soft skills emphasised were honesty, flexibility, adaptability and empathy, optimism, motivation, good communication skills and being ethical. The voluntary sector employers surveyed were thinking of fitness for practice predominantly at a local level and the CLD managers also included national and policy levels. There was a feeling that newly qualified CLD practitioners were well prepared for employment. Newly qualified practitioners felt that qualified training has provided them with a good professional knowledge and skills base.

More CLD managers considered CLD approved qualifications to be essential than the voluntary sector employers. Generally the view was that there should be an articulated and progressive framework for CLD training that affords practice-led opportunities in professional education and development from pre-qualifying to post-qualifying CLD training. There was general support for the current ratio of practice to training institution based learning and mixed feeling about whether qualifying training should be at honours level and if so the possibility of a practice and inquiry-led fourth year.

Current modes of qualifying training delivery were all considered to be beneficial as they give access to a variety of training opportunities and parity across these modes needs to be assured. However it was emphasised that all training modes should follow the previously mentioned framework and be progressive within a common articulated framework.

Respondents cautioned that certain modes of training, e.g., workplace-based were dependent on the availability of staff development budgets and a more equitable funding model needs to be developed.

There was also a question raised about the supply and demand of placements and for this to be considered at the national level in line with student teachers' school placements (organised with local authorities) or the consortia arrangements in effect within Social Work.

Employers expressed a view that practice based learning and assessment relies on quality supervision. They suggested that there was a need for the development of supervision training as part of CPD and registration requirements.

There was a view that given the current range of professional settings that the content of training needs to be widened to reflect the growing diversity of the context within which CLD practice finds itself.

Most participants felt that the competency approach was appropriate for professional development. However, the current array of competences should be refreshed in light of developments to take into account the growing diversity of CLD practice. Inter-professional and Partnership Working were two areas highlighted. Further, training providers felt that the competences should be aligned with the SCQF level statements and other relevant frameworks [e.g., *LLUK Occupational Standards for CLD*].

It is important to recognise the contribution that the CLD practitioners make in partnership working. There was a view that the profession needs a stronger identity and parity with related professions and the need to raise its academic and professional profile through the development of the new Standards Council for Community Learning and Development in Scotland.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Specific to guidelines*

- In line with the current guidelines, there would appear to be differences in the structure and content of the programmes examined. This is not in itself problematic or undesirable. The professional guidelines should however consider how respective training providers (Higher Education and Further Education) might be encouraged to coordinate and develop programme content collectively.
- The new guidelines should provide a clear statement regarding the title of the qualification.
- The new guidelines should recognise the different demands within the broad field of CLD and the competences should reflect the balance of soft and hard skills and knowledge base. Therefore, the new guidelines need to also recognise a set of process skills. It is further recommended that more research needs to be conducted within this area.
- In the new guidelines consideration should be given to providing training within a progressive framework that takes into account both the pre- and post-qualifying training requirements from undergraduate to postgraduate levels with the appropriate balance of practice to training institution based learning. Again further research should be carried out on this matter as well as implementing an Honours year.
- The guidelines should consider supervision training and practice as part of the CLD registration and CPD requirements.
- Changes in curriculum should be reflected in the approval of programmes. Periodic reporting from training providers to the national body responsible for CLD training should be strengthened, to monitor changes in the programme content and delivery within the professional approval period.
- The current competency framework and array of competences should be reviewed and refreshed in light of changes and developments within the broadening field of CLD. Further development and research needs to be done.

### *Other recommendations*

- Further consideration should be given to how professional training in CLD articulates with relevant frameworks at the Scottish (such as SCQF), UK (CLD Occupational Standards) and European level.
- The new Standards Council should be able to give the profession a stronger identity, both within the broad field of CLD, and with other professions and professional bodies through the provision of continuous professional development and registration.
- The new Standards Council should consider at a national level the strategic supply and demand of student placements in CLD and what its role should be in this respect. Further research and development would be required to explore this matter, and also how it is to be managed and by whom.

- Discussion should take place between the new Standards Council with the Scottish Funding Council on CLD pre- and post-qualifying training to develop a more equitable funding model to take account of developments in training provision. The work of the Scottish Community Learning and Development Work-based and Part-time Training Consortium should be referred to in this respect.