

# Adult Learning Conference

Wednesday 22 May 2019  
Newbattle Abbey College

## Conference Report

## **1. Conference Aims**

The conference celebrated the crucial role of adult learning in Scotland and was designed to help plan its future development. It also reflected successful collaborative practice and partnerships amongst sectors and agencies supporting adults on their learner journey.

This cross-sectoral event was supported by Education Scotland and was designed to:

- explore opportunities for collaborative funding to enable adult learners to progress on their learner journey
- consult delegates on the draft Adult Learning Strategy and the role of the Adult Learning Strategic Forum Scotland
- implement an action plan for adult guidance
- share effective collaborative practice in promoting access and progression
- agree priorities for capacity building across all relevant sectors

## **2. Conference Delegates**

The conference was attended by 100 delegates, drawn from a wide range of sectors, national agencies and stakeholders. These included adult learners, community learning and development services, voluntary organisations, local authorities, colleges, higher education, Scottish Government, Education Scotland, Colleges Scotland, SWAP, Department for Work and Pensions, SQA, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Funding Council, Museums and Galleries Scotland, Scottish Union Learning, Forestry Scotland and adult learning networks. Their participation in and contribution to the event as a whole is warmly acknowledged.

## **3. Plenary Sessions**

### **3.1 Successful Collaborative Funding – What Makes it Work?**

This was presented by: Jane Logue, Team Leader, Adult Learning and Literacies, West Dunbartonshire Council; Fiona McKenzie, Head of Learning Communities, West College Scotland; Jackie Howie, Lead Officer, Learning Link Scotland

The presentation outlined the following:

- the role of Learning Link Scotland in adult learning
- the wider Scottish context for adult education and policy practice
- examples of positive partnership working and cross-sectoral training
- an analysis of successful partnership working between West Dunbartonshire Council and West College Scotland
- results of the partnership and the key benefits of working collaboratively

**See below for the presentation in full:**



### **3.2 Learner Journeys: What helps adult learners achieve their goals?**

Angela Wallace, Newbattle Abbey College Student

Angela, a student on the Access to Higher Education (SWAP) Arts and Social Sciences Course, shared her learner journey and the barriers that she had to overcome. She talked positively about her experience at the college and she described adult learning as a series of small stepping stones each of which give learners the confidence and skills to continue their learner journey into higher education. Angela stressed the importance of guidance and personal support throughout this journey and the empowering and confidence-building aspects of education. Angela has applied to study Scottish Ethnography and English Language at the University of Edinburgh.

**3.3 Keynote Address:** Richard Lochhead, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science

#### **The Minister's presentation included the following:**

- The challenges presented by the changing world within which we live and work
- Issues related to Brexit, digitalisation, automation and demographic changes
- The economic, social and ethical ramifications of these changes
- The importance of providing new opportunities for upskilling and reskilling of adults as well as access to high level vocational skills
- The importance of adult learning to individuals and communities
- The need for an adult learning strategy that allows the sector to demonstrate its value across boundaries and aligned to the many policy areas it supports
- A commitment to improving how the adult learning sector is resourced and supported and that post-25 learning is a key focus for the Scottish Government
- An announcement about the refresh of the National Strategic Forum for Adult Learning, now the Adult Learning Strategic Forum (ALSF) and that the ALSFS will be chaired by the former Principal of West Lothian College, Mhairi Harrington
- The launch of the new Families and Communities Third Sector Fund which can provide funding of up to £16 million pounds per year over the next three years in support of its aims which include youth work, adult learning and community empowerment

- The need to build adult learning networks and greater action on adult guidance. Holistic adult guidance plays a key role in helping adults navigate learning and opportunities alongside their other personal developmental needs
- The focus on active engagement of adults with low skills to be a key part of the new adult learning strategy
- Building on the investment in family learning and engaging adults alongside their children
- Creating new partnerships with colleges and community centres to develop programmes which enable adults to participate in the first steps of learning
- Gratitude to Newbattle Abbey College for developing and sustaining the Adult Achievement Awards

### **3.4 Priorities of the Strategic Adult Learning Forum**

Draft Adult Learning Strategy: Nicola McAndrew, Team Leader CLD Policy, Scottish Government

#### **The presentation reported on the following:**

- The policy move from Education Scotland to Scottish Government in September 2018.
- Scottish Government's commitment to supporting and developing adult learning.
- The new CLD Policy Team's work with the adult learning sector to refresh the Adult Learning Strategic Forum to create the Adult Learning Strategic Forum Scotland [ALSFS].
- What the new Policy team hope to achieve in the adult learning sector.
- The next steps including building on the Statement of Ambition and developing a new Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland, to be launched in spring 2020.
- The timeline for the newly-formed working group to take the Strategy forward.

#### **See below for the presentation in full:**

## **An Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland**

**Nicola McAndrew**  
CLD Policy Team Leader



### **3.5 Adult Guidance Action Plan:** Marian Docherty: Principal, Newbattle Abbey College

#### **The presentation highlighted the following:**

The key priorities of the Adult Guidance Action plan produced by delegates at the 2018 Adult Learning Conference at Newbattle and endorsed by the Adult Learning Strategic Forum in 2108:

- audit adult guidance services across Scotland
- disseminate good practice
- develop cross-sectoral adult guidance networks
- update local directories for learners and providers
- establish a national adult guidance hub
- develop adult guidance qualifications at SCQF Levels 5-6

She also reported progress on the above priorities, including:

- **Adult Guidance Award (SCQF Levels 5-6) being developed by Newbattle**
  - to develop knowledge and understanding of key principles of adult guidance
  - to develop skills required in offering guidance
  - to develop signposting and referral guidance
  - flexible delivery with self-directed study
- **Adult Learning Strategic Forum**
  - Access and Participation Sub Group to focus on adult guidance qualifications
  - members will pilot Adult Guidance Award
- **Careers Strategy Steering Group**
  - Workstream 1: Ensuring Equity of Access to a Personalised Service at Point of Need
  - will include lifelong learning
  - will contribute to national strategy for careers guidance

#### 4. Discussion Group Sessions

Delegates participated in discussion sessions and were asked to reflect on the following questions:

*What do you see as the main priorities for Adult Learning in Scotland?*

*What are the key priorities for the development of adult guidance services?*

- *locally*
- *nationally*

Overall views are summarised below.

##### 4.1 What do you see as the main priorities for Adult Learning in Scotland?

- The importance of raising the profile of adult learning in Scotland
- Ensure that the learner is at the heart of it
- Investing in learning to give adults a voice
- Need to work together cross-sectorally – pool resources/avoid duplication.
- Recognising that changes in careers i.e. redundancy/ongoing workplace learning require adult learning input
- Dealing with increasing demand with decreasing resources (diminished workforce)
- Ensuring it is properly funded

- Ensure that access and resources are available locally (use libraries to signpost learners)
- The need to work collaboratively and in formal partnerships
- Bring together CLD, ESOL, family and digital (one strategy)
- Long-term plan required (properly funded) not short-term strategy
- Make stronger links from community to college
- Ensure that community learning and outreach services are properly resourced (ring-fenced money from local authorities)
- Use community networking to pool learning
- Co-produce a strategy by involving service users
- The importance of offering qualifications at lower levels (removing barriers/stigma of adult literacies)
- Ensuring that the Adult Achievement Awards are a key part of the strategy so that CLD and third sector organisations can connect with people colleges can't reach.
- Making social reform and social impact key priorities for 'the good of society'.
- Ensure that the overall strategy reflects the range of specialist areas.
- Ensure parity of professions involved in adult literacy
- Address the barrier of English language fluency (pre-cursor to adult learning)
- Use case studies/personalities to promote adult learning (promote via local radio)
- Use an adult learning storyline in River City

#### **4.2 What are the key priorities for the development of adult guidance services (locally and nationally)?**

- Address the perception that guidance ends with school
- Define what we mean by guidance i.e. CPD, employability, education
- Public campaign to raise awareness required
- Need to raise the profile of impartial adult guidance services
- Provide a cross-sector network (national signposting (web/phone) but local face-to-face advice essential)
- Need to get to 'hard-to-reach' people and build relationships.
- Ensure that guidance is flexible and co-produced (involving users to develop/build strategy)
- Skills Development Scotland (SDS) not perceived as being for adults
- SDS and employers should be part of the development strategy
- Guidance qualification at SCQF level 5 and 6 required to deal with needs e.g. mental health/disabilities
- Provide a directory of guidance/local services in each authority
- Tap into well-used community resources, such as libraries, GP surgeries and community centres to signpost learners
- Ensure there are clear guidance pathways in place for lifelong learning.
- Need for collaboration in providing guidance services
- Share data and information systems to refer across different agencies
- Produce information sharing portal online and a pathfinder website for learners.
- Offer Freephone helpline as first port of call
- Use trained body of volunteers to offer advice/mentoring role

## **5. Workshops**

Delegates took part in workshops identifying good practice in adult learning and consulting on the draft Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland.

See Appendix.1 for details of all workshops.

## **6. Conference Evaluation**

See Appendix 2 for feedback and overall comments.

## Appendix 1 - Workshops

Workshop	Workshop	Organisation
A	<p><b>Developing an Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland</b></p> <p>This workshop will provide an opportunity to meet members of the Adult Learning Strategic Forum working group tasked with the development of a new strategy for adult learning in Scotland. Participants will be invited to discuss the key priorities for adult learning that should guide the strategy and share ideas on what will be needed to make the strategy successful. The workshop will be interactive with opportunities to shape and influence this policy at an early stage of its development.</p>	<p><b>Scottish Government</b></p>
B	<p><b>Digital Skills for Adult Learning</b></p> <p>This workshop will look at how digital technology can support and develop adult learning. It will provide an opportunity for the participants to discuss their own digital skills and how they might make the most of digital resources available to them. We will also share experiences and have a look at how others in the field of adult learning are using technologies.</p>	<p><b>Learning Link Scotland</b></p>
C	<p><b>Glasgow's Learning Partnership Collaborative Working in Community-Based Adult Learning</b></p> <p>This workshop will look at how collaborative working in Glasgow supports learner access, progression and support. This includes an exploration of how ESOL learner pathways are supported through partnership approaches throughout the learning journey from marketing and promotion, initial assessment, placing learners in provision, sharing resources and progression into college. We will also highlight other examples of where collaborations are supporting and enhancing learning experiences in digital and literacies.</p>	<p><b>Glasgow Life</b></p>
D	<p><b>Adult Achievement Awards</b></p> <p>Learners will describe their experience of participating in the Adult Achievement Awards and subsequent opportunities they have undertaken. Some of these learners are now part of the Douglas Health Issues in the Community Group and will perform a play which raises awareness of one aspect of mental health - self-harm. This will be followed by a question and answer session.</p>	<p><b>Newbattle Abbey College</b></p>
E	<p><b>Pooling Resources to Deliver Outcomes for Learners: West College Scotland and West Dunbartonshire Council Community-Based Certificated Programme</b></p> <p>The workshop will describe the programme, what drives it, the roles and responsibilities of partners and who participates. We will present examples of impacts and show how we evaluate outcomes. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss the programme and contribute questions, comments and suggestions.</p>	<p><b>West College Scotland and West Dunbartonshire Council</b></p>

## Appendix 2

### Adult Learning Conference 2019

#### Evaluation

55 evaluation forms were returned.

How well did the conference meet the following aims:

<b>Aim 1:</b>	To explore opportunities for collaborative funding:			
		<b>Very well</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>Partly</b>
<b>Forms:</b>		12	26	17
<b>%</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Aim 2:</b>	To agree priorities for the development of adult guidance services:			
		<b>Very well</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>Partly</b>
<b>Forms:</b>		32	17	5
<b>%</b>		<b>58</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Aim 3:</b>	To consult delegates on the draft Adult Learning Strategy			
		<b>Very well</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>Partly</b>
<b>Forms:</b>		44	5	4
<b>%</b>		<b>80</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Aim 4:</b>	To share successful collaborative practice in access and progression:			
		<b>Very well</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>Partly</b>
<b>Forms:</b>		25	27	3
<b>%</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>5</b>

#### Evaluation – General Comments

- A day very well spent. Great balance of quality input, opportunities for sharing and networking. Congratulations to catering staff, front of house and ICT – all a credit to Newbattle Abbey College – as well of course to your exceptional student Angela. Well done to all involved!
- Well run, great workshops, great networking. Fab setting! More practitioners could get an invitation.
- Good to feel valued in part of the strategy process. Felt listened to. Very good presentations. Informative and efficient running of event. Fabby hospitality.
- Enjoyable day and very good opportunity to meet other CLD workers to share information and experience. Felt the day gave us a chance as workers to re-evaluate our work and appreciate the importance of it to our learners and communities. Hopefully this will be highlighted and prioritised in the new Adult Learning Strategy document.

- Great discussion groups. Well-organised event. So pleased to see Gaelic signage and recognition. Only one negative - PA system, sound not clear enough.
- Good mix discussion and presentations. Could we not start a little later next year – 9.30?
- Workshop of AAA was fab. Going to take this further, hopefully and sign up! Feel this was a conference that gave us an opportunity to contribute but in a very time limited way. Enjoyed meeting people from other areas of Scotland.
- Great catering! Could be more sustainable at future events.
- No real gripes except maybe more seating at reception area for less able/mobile learners attending.
- Enthusiastic leadership and a 'can do' attitude to taking on opportunities to develop ideas in partnership working to achieve goals.
- Good mix of adult learning backgrounds. Made to feel very welcome from the minute I walked through the door until the moment I left. Thank you to all staff.
- Worth exploring where recognition of prior learning in the whole adult guidance development. Some work already having been done on this through the refugee integration strategy.
- Being at cutting edge of new strategies and course information is really useful to inform future practice.
- Great mix of talks and workshops. As with all events such as these, I would have liked more time for questions in the workshops.
- There was a lot of talk about learner centeredness, which is great! Maybe more discussion on adult educators (and volunteers) would also be useful.
- A more enjoyable day to take part in. Loved all the inputs and the AAA and ALS workshops.
- Great organisation of conference.
- Excellent inspiring venue. Very ably chaired by the Principal. Workshop on strategy particularly good and well-structured and facilitated.
- Great venue, great food. Appreciate getting involved with CLD colleagues.