How to best support and encourage career progression amongst local authority CLD practitioners in Scotland?

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This report is based on the results of investigations carried out by myself, is my own composition, and has not previously been presented for a higher degree. The research was carried out under the supervision of Dr Alan Mackie.

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ABSTRACT:

This research study explores attitudes towards career progression amongst CLD practitioners employed in local authorities within a defined area of Scotland, and makes recommendations on how to better support practitioners to plan for their career progression opportunities. The study is based on the results of a small number of degree qualified practitioners, and used both an online survey and in-person interviews with practitioners at the front-line of service delivery, as well as team and service managers, who are responsible for on-going staff development and support. In addition a Senior Manager, responsible for CLD delivery, planning and funding, but without a CLD qualification was also a participant in the research.

The study suggests further areas of potential research that will be of interest and benefit to the CLD sector, and concludes with a set of recommendations for individual practitioners, employers and the sector at large to consider.

KEY WORDS:

Community Learning & Development (CLD)

CLD Standards Council

Career Long Professional Development (CLPD)

Career Development

Career Advancement

Practice Development Support

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the CLD Standards Council, the professional body responsible for the standards and professionalism of Community Learning & Development (CLD) practice in Scotland, published their first professional development strategy for the sector. The strategy sought to embed a culture of continuous learning and development, that would lead to improvements in the quality and impact of CLD practice in any setting or context in which CLD practitioners were working and/or volunteering. A key cornerstone of the strategy, was that employers would make a firm commitment to their CLD workforce (including volunteer practitioners) by developing and implementing a robust continuous professional and career development programme (CLD Standards Council, 2015).

In 2015, the CLD Standards Council issued an update to the strategy detailing the progress that had been made in the 4 years since initial publication. In that time the CLD Standards Council identified that 5 regional networks had been established with a focus on professional learning opportunities for CLD practitioners (including volunteers). One such group is the Tayside & Fife CLD Professional Learning Alliance which brings together CLD managers from across the 4 local authority areas of Angus, Dundee, Fife and Perth & Kinross. The purpose of the Alliance is to coordinate and share CPD resource in order to maximise opportunity for professional learning opportunities (CLD Standards Council, 2015).

In 2012, the Scottish Government issued guidance to all 32 community planning partnerships (CPP) requiring them to publish 3 year action plans outlining how they would ensure adequate provision of CLD activity in their area. This guidance was followed in 2013 by a legal framework through the introduction of 'The Requirements for Community Learning & Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013', (Scottish Government, 2013). During the 2021/24 CLD planning cycle the CLD Standards Council issued a supporting guidance note around the content of the workforce development section as a means of ensuring that this was a key feature of the plans (CLD Standards Council, 2021)

Throughout all of these developments the focus has remained on continuing professional practice and learning to develop new practice styles to support community led responses. Subsequently, there is the potential for a lack of focus around career development opportunities as a means of preparing CLD practitioners for progression into managerial roles where the focus of the job requirements transition from a skills, knowledge and experience base around community action and facilitation into one concerned with strategic planning and leadership, financial planning and people management.

This study will explore in more detail the support available to prepare and encourage CLD practitioners to consider, or successfully transition from, a front line delivery practitioner role to a managerial or leadership position in a local authority context.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The starting point of reviewing literature on the subject area to inform and influence the direction of the research has identified that in relation to community learning & development as a professional career area, there is a limited availability of academic writing. By searching key words and phrases directly associated with community learning and development most results focused on the emerging priorities or current areas for front-line practice specific to the 3 domains of CLD practice – community development, community based adult learning and/or youth work (appendix 4).

In their article, 'A service, a 'way of working', or a profession? A discourse analysis of community education/community learning and development in Scotland', Mackie et al (2012) bring together the founding theory and governmental policy papers that led to the creation of the community education profession as practiced in Scotland. This paper charts the introduction of the competence based framework that was built around the skills, knowledge and experiences that practitioners of Community Education would be required to demonstrate in order to be accredited as competent in the field . The paper itself fails to make any reference to the strategic management, or direction setting, of the community education profession and offers no insight to the areas of competence required by those charged with leading and developing the profession since its introduction in 1978. (Mackie et al, 2012:402)

In the book, 'The Making of An Empowering Profession (3rd Edition)' published in 2002 the editor, Charlie McConnell, also charts the formation and early years of the Community Education profession in Scotland. McConnell highlights that in 1984 the then Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC), commissioned a study by Geoffrey Drought, into community education training. The subsequent report 'Training for Change' (Drought, 1984) explored the contexts in which community education practice in Scotland was being delivered and concluded that *a generic training relevant to the community education process as a whole* (McConnell: 2002:217) for those wanting to practice was required. The same report goes on to highlight that there is a need for management-based training to be included as an option for the voluntary sector. There is no evident correlation within local authorities that a similar management-based training requirement existed. (McConnell, 2002:223)

As McConnell (2002) continues to explore the professions maturing identity, they refrain from exploring, or indeed commenting on, the requirements of managers in terms of their skills, knowledge or experiences. This gap, with regards the training for those leading and guiding the management of community education, as well as on-going career requirements to progress into leadership roles, may in part explain why there is a lack of materials around career progression pathways today. If ensuring the professional competence of the strategic leaders and operational delivery managers of a new profession was not considered a priority by those responsible for its introduction and establishment, then that view may well be one of the key reasons for the perceived lack of on-going career long professional development (CLPD) for practitioners today.

In the 2011 paper 'Effective curriculum design for successful transition from being a community learning and development student to practitioner' Naulty and Jindal-Snape (2011) discuss curriculum developments that support students to effectively transition from that role to one of a professionally qualified CLD practitioner. This article explores the personal character traits required around emotional resilience and changes to behaviours and attitudes when moving from a student to a qualified practitioner. The study also explores activities taken to ensure developing professional confidence and competence is such that graduates are able to fully articulate the difference in their status and the expectations that follow their status change from student to qualified practitioner.

The Naulty and Jindal-Snape (2011) paper focuses on the early stages of career establishment and development as a CLD practitioner and does not discern what on-going skills, knowledge and experiential developments are required to support transition from front-line practitioner into a leadership or managerial role. In considering the areas of transition outlined in the article, it is possible to relate these to the process of transition from front-line delivery practitioner to a promoted position of a leadership or managerial role. Where the challenge for this research rests is that the articulation of the skills, knowledge and experiences from practitioners and employers is not considered in the context of career progression, or indeed, for managing CLD services and/or organisations.

Whilst the focus for this article was early career establishment, the apparent lack of any further work in the area of CLD career development and progression is interesting in itself when considered against similar professional practice areas. This poses questions around the support or motivation that CLD practitioners who are ambitious in their career plans, or employers who are keen to develop talent within their organisations, are afforded to develop career long progression pathways for CLD

practitioners that seek to enhance leadership and management skills, within the context of the CLD professional competence framework.

An online search using the key phrases of Community Education and Community Learning & Development, demonstrated the availability of books and reference materials that explore the specific professional practice domains of community development, community based adult education and youth work. This indicates that as an area of interest the practice approach of community learning and development as a means of addressing social issues, and social change, is of significance for researchers and academics. As a result the theoretical and evidence based support available to shape curriculum content and work with students and early career undergraduates is undeniable, but as careers become more established and career ambitions begin to form and take root, the need to upskill and develop strong understandings of strategic planning, people management and finance move more to the fore. Without any evident programme of support being in place to support these career ambitions, are we as a profession saying that the competence areas that drive CLD are not being understood, recognised or desired in promoted or alternative leadership roles?

A broader search of career progression (see appendix 5), career development or career advancement leads to more availability of academic writing focused in specific areas of career guidance for school leavers or undergraduates. The journals and books are concerned with the early stages of entering the world of work in key sectors such as finance, business administration or tech-focused industries and the early steps that new employees can take, in order to establish themselves on the career progression pathway within those specific industries.

Expanding the career progression key word search to include ‘community education’ or ‘community learning and development’ did not yield any additional journal articles or books. But by targeting other professions such as teaching, the volume of articles, journals and research papers increased. This provides a richer source of reading materials which not only explore early career periods but also cover mid-career support and provide insights to the professional learning programmes that are in place to support career progression and advancement. Whilst there are recognised distinctions between the professional practice areas of teaching and CLD, there are also areas of overlap which provides informative background to this area of academic study.

The article by Booth et al (2021) titled ‘Mid-Career Teachers: A Mixed Methods Scoping Study of Professional Development, Career Progression and Retention’ explores the issue of teacher retention

rates against the support for mid-career development. The article begins by defining the term 'mid-career' and indicates that there is no formal agreement by scholars or employers but recognises that the period 8 - 23 years of practice experience moves the teacher into a phase of their career where their teaching practice is both competent and confident and will begin to experiment more with new approaches and consider their career ambitions and pathways in more detail. (Booth et al, 2021:8). An interesting feature of this article is the exploration of mid-career progression as a linear route, or one based upon an interest to develop specialist skills to better support the learners they are responsible for. The study highlights that this may not build the practice experience to enable classroom teachers to move into higher level positions in a school or education service. The development of specialist skills is still considered by those teachers who have taken that route as career development or advancement, as it has improved their competence and confidence in an area of teaching that they were not adequately prepared for when they graduated and first moved into a teaching role. This is an interesting area to consider in the professional field of CLD where the nature of the work allows for more specialist areas of practice with marginalised communities, or individuals, and may be a career development route that CLD practitioners find more readily available, as opposed to the challenge of identifying pathways of support for career progression into higher grade job roles.

The article suggests that whilst initial teacher trainer programmes provide a theoretical and practice-based under-pinning, on-going professional development for mid-career teachers needs to be more tailored to the individual to better reflect the *needs and issues at different stages of their professional lives* (Booth et al, 2021:10). The authors go on to highlight that teachers in the early stages of their teaching career valued CLPD with a classroom management focus, with later phase teachers seeking management based CLPD routes, where-as mid-career teachers were seeking CLPD that developed their understanding and competence in *coaching, mentoring and curriculum development,* (Booth et al, 2021:10). This reflective style of building CLPD awareness and planning, reflects the mid-career period which centres around learning, using new concepts and approaches and challenging your own professional practice, ensuring you are receiving maximum satisfaction and enjoyment from the job, (Booth et al, 2021:13).

In the context of CLD practice there are many strong similarities with Booth's description of the career phases. These are easily transferrable to reflect the career trajectory of CLD practitioners. If we consider mid-career CLD practitioners to reflect the teaching career pathway, this would indicate less demand from CLD practitioners in the areas of service management and leadership, and more demand or expectation in the area of career support directly related to improving the learner benefit and

experience. This then links us back to the earlier literature search where there is more focus on professional practice than on career transition.

In the 2006 book, 'Being an Effective Headteacher' written by Trevor Male, we begin to understand more around the change in skills set that is required when moving from a classroom teacher role into a headteacher role. Male argues that effective *headteachers achieve the right balance between leadership, management and administration both in terms of their personal engagement and the overall balance of those three operational aspects within the school.* (Male, 2006:3). Male (2006) goes on to explain that effective leadership is about making decisions, management is concerned with enforcing the decisions and administration makes the implementation of the decision a reality. This contrasts with a classroom-based role where the focus is very much on the direct teaching of the learning curriculum and requires the practitioner to use their knowledge and skills in relation to communicating the learning outcomes, addressing the various learning styles of the individual learners and translating subject material into informative and interactive lesson plans, (Male, 2006:4). We can begin to see similarities between this view of the teaching profession and where the earlier literature with regards community learning and development can become interchangeable, with CLD practitioners in a front-line delivery role being more concerned with the micro-decisions required to develop and deliver effective learning outcomes for the individuals, groups and communities being worked with, rather than concentrating on the larger macro-decisions and interventions that need to be taken to keep CLD services resourced, functioning and achieving. This is where the available literature begins to demonstrate that CLD practitioners are lacking in opportunity to develop the leadership, management and administrative skills that are required in order to move into higher grade job roles.

Male (2006) goes onto suggest that in transitioning from a classroom teacher to a headteacher the process is insufficient in preparing the practitioner for the new duties and responsibilities of the promoted post. Male cites examples where respondents highlight that *no amount of training prepares you for the actual total responsibility of the job* (Male, 2006:19). He goes on to detail the requirements of the headteacher to become familiar with the *legal, systemic and societal demands* (Male, 2006:19) of the job and highlights that because of these new areas of responsibility there is a greater recognition of the requirement for accountability – to themselves as the headteacher, the staff team, the pupils, the education service, the parents and the community at large. (Male, 2006:20). This reflects the earlier work noted in this literature review by Naulty and Jindal-Snape around the character traits identified when transitioning from student to practitioner in that again we can see that the areas of emotional

resilience, behaviour and attitude change are as equally applicable to the transition from practitioner to leader or manager, as they are from student to practitioner.

Simmie et al, in their 2017 article highlight the work done by *Cochrane-Smith and Lytle in 1999*, who identified three distinct approaches to professional learning within the teaching profession, labelling them as *knowledge-for-practice, knowledge-in-practice and knowledge-of-practice* (Simmie et al, 2017:506). Simmie et al (2017) go on to describe the differing ways in which the teacher is able to develop that new knowledge through expert led inputs, reflective practice and self and peer led approaches. The article suggests that induction programmes that concentrate on professional practice, are a cornerstone in supporting teachers with their ongoing professional learning activity. This can be linked back to the work of Male (2006) when highlighting the requirements that the newly promoted headteacher faces in understanding the job and the new learning and support needs they identify, and that they feel under-prepared for. This begins to suggest the importance of an effective induction as the initial point of preparation for any job role.

An exploration of the 'CLD Competence Framework' (CLD, 2023a) provides background understanding on the knowledge, skills and characteristics that CLD practitioners should demonstrate in their every-day practice. The framework focuses in on the 7 key areas of competence concerned with how CLD practitioners encourage, empower and enable individuals or communities to effect positive change for themselves and the communities in which they work. As an example, Competence A is concerned with *'*Know and understand the community in which we work' and has been identified and included in the competence framework *so that practitioners can work with individuals and communities to identify and plan action based on knowledge of some of the internal and external influences at work.* (CLD, 2023b). Throughout the framework the language used in the descriptors of the 7 competence statements, is concerned with front-line delivery practice to generate an understanding of the skills, knowledge and experience expected. The competences as stated in the CLD framework, provide a foundation upon which career skills, experiences and knowledge are to be built and shaped. As we can see from the study conducted by Male (2006), when transitioning from a classroom teacher to a promoted post a new set of skills and competences are required to work alongside these initial foundation building areas. It appears from the literature search that this is a potential gap area within the CLD profession.

To further illustrate this point, a review of the website of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS, 2023) the professional body responsible for the standards, professionalism and regulation of practicing teachers in Scotland, indicates that there are evident career progression pathways and

supporting programmes in place to enable career promotion and progression. There are 2 'Standards' identified around leadership that are aimed at supporting career progression into promoted job roles. These are the 'Standard for Middle Leadership' (GTCS, 2021a) and 'Standard for Headship' (GTCS, 2021b) and are designed to encourage and support a seamless transition from classroom practitioner to school leader.

As a result of these two standards, Education Scotland (Scotland's national government agency responsible for quality and improvement in Scottish education – including CLD) has developed and published a suite of professional learning programmes aimed at classroom teachers who have career ambitions to progress into a school-based leadership role. Currently the professional learning pages of the Education Scotland website promote 4 programmes that can be directly attributed to career progression into promoted job roles, but also highlights a range of additional in-job professional learning programmes designed to ensure classroom teachers, middle leaders and headteachers are continually upskilling and developing their skills, knowledge and experiences to demonstrate high levels of competence and lead improvement in the learner and employee journey. This demonstrates a commitment to career progression for teaching practitioners by the national education agency, it also highlights the gap in similar support being made available to support CLD practitioners to develop the necessary management and leadership skills to support their upward career progression.

The programme – Into Headship – *aims to ensure aspiring headteachers are supported to develop and continue to build the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding required of senior leaders …* (Education Scotland a). The programme is aligned with the 'Standard for Headship' as required by the General Teaching Council for Scotland, to secure a headteacher role in a Scottish school. The programme content is very much concerned with raising awareness of what is meant by strategic practice in a school setting and seeks to build the confidence and competence of those aspiring to move into promoted positions, with the skills, knowledge and understanding required of the headteacher role. These include building leadership capacity in the teaching staff team, working in partnership with other statutory agencies to ensure child wellbeing and protection systems and procedures are in place and being followed, establish and sustain a positive learning culture and ethos across the school community (including with parents/carers) and lead positive systems change work to improve school efficiency. (GTCS, 2021b:5) The programme of learning is supported through university based learning and tutor support, as well as the allocation of an existing headteacher who provides mentoring support, (Education Scotland a).

The issue of mentoring or coaching, as an effective tool to support teachers progress into promoted posts is also highlighted by Tony Bush (2013) in his article 'Preparing Headteachers in England: Professional Certification, not Academic Learning'. The article refers to work done by Hobson and Sharp (2005) that *found that all major studies of formal mentoring programmes for new heads reported that such programmes have been effective,* (Bush, 2013:457). If we consider the support on offer to aspiring headteachers and consider this in the context of CLD practitioners, we can begin to understand how practical solutions such as mentoring or coaching could be a means of supporting CLD practitioners to develop and strengthen their skills, knowledge and experience in tasks/scenarios related to a management type role, that they will not be exposed to in their day to day practice.

Further exploration of the Education Scotland brochure for Professional Learning (Education Scotland, 2023/24) confirms that no alternative or similar suite of professional learning programmes for CLD practitioners exists, but does highlight the 'Leading CLD' professional learning programme. The programme descriptor highlights that it is aimed primarily at *senior local authority managers responsible for CLD services … (this includes managers with no, or little previous experience of CLD; …),* (Education Scotland b)

An internet search of leadership programmes for the community learning and development sector, identified a previously delivered programme by Education Scotland, dated 2016 and titled 'Community Learning: Developing Leaders for the Future'. The course aims are detailed as being to *Develop your knowledge of leadership roles and theories. Understand and reflect on your leadership role. Gain clarity about key concepts and behaviours involved in leadership.* (Education Scotland, 2016). In addition the programme offered participants the opportunity to gain accreditation through the ILM Award in Leadership. On further exploration of the target audience for this learning and development programme, the information material states that it is offered to *nominated senior leaders in CLD to develop their abilities and enhance their confidence to work as senior leaders and partners within the sector.* (Education Scotland, 2016)

Both these examples suggest that there remains a gap in professional learning support and pathways, for those practicing CLD workers seeking to progress into a managerial or leadership post, as both examples are clearly aimed at those already in promoted posts. It also begins to pose a question around the use of language between the two professions with CLD referring to competences, whilst teaching refers to standards. Jane Underwood, of Underwood Associates, explores this further in her 2007 discussion paper for the Public Health Agency of Canada. This discussion paper notes that *competency*

describes an activity that a public health professional engages in to meet a standard or standards. (Underwood, 2007). This would suggest that in order to meet the standards expected, investment needs to be in the areas of professional competence for practitioners. Therefore the identified gap in CLPD for CLD practitioners to continue to build their competence is significant.

A broader search exploring the leadership and/or management skills for the future in a local government context identified several policy and/or discussion papers written by government departments or publicly funded think-tanks. These papers, whilst not of an academic nature, do provide interesting insight from a U.K. perspective on the challenges facing local government because of significant political, financial and social change over the past 10 years. Contained within the papers are indications as to the changes that these challenges may bring to the future delivery structures and requirements for local government. For example the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) have published several papers in this area. The first one 'Flying High – A new look at local government leadership, transformation and the power of conversation.' Involves 1 – 1 interviews with 30 Chief Executives of local authorities across the U.K. with the aim of charting the changing skills and requirements of the job roles required of managers in local government, (SOLACE, 2019). SOLACE have also published a 'storybook' bringing together a collection of personal accounts of what it means to be a public servant in the 21st century. The book titled 'Walk Tall – Being a 21st Century Public Servant' was published in 2016. The accounts from the public servants in the book conclude that as we continue to evolve the role and understanding of what it means to be a public servant there are certain character traits that are core.

> *The 21st century public servant is loyal to their locality, understand what local people need, sees things from their perspective, thinks about people and place rather than focusing on services, has a kind of civic pride.* (Solace, 2016:1)

Both these papers explore competence areas and behaviours that Chief Executives or local authority managers of the future will be required to evidence. Comparisons can be made with the CLD Competence Framework and the areas outlined in these discussion papers. For example the 'Flying High' paper highlights *self-awareness, role awareness and political awareness*' and defines role awareness as having an "*understanding of what is expected or needed from you …. a belief in the abilities of others …* (Pitt:19). Within the CLD Competence area of 'Know and understand the community in which we work' we can begin to identify similar behaviours around working directly with *individuals and communities to identify and plan action based on knowledge of some of the internal and external influences at work.*

This competence provides indicators that support the practitioner to demonstrate competence in this area and these include consideration of the *political, economic and social context of the community,* (CLD, 2023a). Whilst the level of understanding and depth of skill base will vary significantly between the job roles of CLD practitioner and Local Authority Chief Executive, we can see from the example here that within the CLD field of practice, knowing the community expectation and what the community and/or individual learners need from the learning and development based interventions, is vital to good quality CLD practice, but is also emerging as a competency area that future local authority leaders will require to have experience of.

Earlier in the literature review it was noted that there was the potential that CLD practitioners did not see career progression into promoted posts as central to the field of CLD practice, with the potential being that their preference could be to consider further study in specialised practice areas being a more established career development route. However, both reference materials from SOLACE begin to suggest where the CLD competences can be considered as foundation building competences to support and enable promotion-based career routes. The emerging challenge continues to be the lack of evident pathways to support CLD practitioners and employers to make these pathways a reality.

Similarly in the U.K. government policy report 'Understanding current and future skills needs' published in May 2022 by the Skills and Productivity Board, we again see direct reference to the skills identified as being in high demand both at present, and in the future, amongst key sections of the general workforce, including management level positions. The findings of the report conclude that there are *core transferable skills* that can be grouped under 5 distinct category headings of *communication skills, Digital and data skills, Application of knowledge skills, People skills and Mental processes,* (Skills & Productivity Board, 2022:11).

The recently published Hayward Review (2023), 'It's Our Future: Report of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment' commissioned by the Scottish Government, to determine the relevance of the current qualifications and assessment frameworks for Scottish Education, draws on the recommendations of the World Economic Forum who identified the skills that employers are considering as skills for the future. Again we can begin to see cross-over with the CLD competency areas with *critical thinking and analysis, problem-solving, skills in self-management and resilience …* (Hayward, 2023:18) coming to the fore.

As with the previous papers from SOLACE, the U.K. Government and the Hayward (2023) report, we can see avenues of read across with the CLD competence framework. For example in the skills area 'People skills' the description states this is about *relationship management, including establishing relationships, and training others.* (Skills & Productivity Board, 2022:11). What we can determine from these papers is the skills required by future local authority leaders and managers are evident within the skills-set of the front-line CLD practitioners. However, as the literature review is highlighting, there is a gap in support available to enable those practitioners to use them as the foundations to build upon.

Further into this policy paper there is recognition that the core transferable skills provide a solid basis for building and developing skills and knowledge but also recognises that *designing education and training programmes that develop the more specialist or occupation-specific skills …alongside core transferable skills may therefore be a good compromise, …* (Skills & Productivity Board, 2022:19). We can link the findings of this policy paper to the article by Ruth Bridgstock (2009) where she states *A wide range of employability skills than just generic competencies, encompassing notions of career and self-management, can be seen to have positive effects …* (Bridgstock, 2009:39) this supports the view that core skills developed through initial practitioner training are required to be supported by additional role specific skills, knowledge and experience based training, in order to support successful career progression for CLD practitioners in a local authority context.

By undertaking this literature review it has become evident that the CLD competence framework has the potential to be a springboard for career progression into promoted positions as the competence areas are reflective of the skills and knowledge required to be an effective local authority manager. The requirement is to develop the practitioners, and employers, understanding of how those skills, knowledge and experience areas can be translated into the requirements of the job role, and to support practitioners to access appropriate career progression support to build their confidence and deepen their understanding of those skills, knowledge and experience areas.

Like the teaching profession there is a recognition within the professional field of CLD of the foundations that the professional competence framework provides to those early stages of the career journey, but unlike the teaching profession there is little recognition beyond the front-line practice element and an obvious gap in any learning and development pathway to encourage and support career progression for CLD practitioners who are at the mid-point in their career journey.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

With the literature review having identified that there is an inconsistency in the professional learning support for progression into management roles for CLD practitioners. This research project has the key aim of developing an understanding of the barriers (perceived or actual) as well as the skills, knowledge and experience that CLD practitioners will need to demonstrate to secure promoted positions as future managers within Scottish local authorities.

The research focus will be led by the guiding research question of **How to best support and encourage career progression amongst local authority CLD practitioners in Scotland?**

By concentrating the research work around this question there are three objectives to be explored in more detail:

1. The identification of current career long development programmes offered to CLD practitioners employed in Scottish local authorities and how effective these are considered to be.
2. The identification of the future skills, knowledge and experience gaps that CLD practitioners will have to address in order to meet the requirements of future leadership positions within Scottish local authorities.
3. The identification of perceived, or acknowledged, barriers restricting career-progression amongst CLD practitioners.

Consideration has been given to the process of undertaking the research activities to generate data for analysis of findings and formulation of recommendations. This led to the conclusion that an empirical or qualitative research methodology, that is a methodology that gathers evidence through actual or lived experience of the research participants, will work best for this research project to yield a richer source of data for analysis and interpretation, (Bell and Waters, 2018).

Qualitative research is an umbrella term that groups together a variety of research methods that seek *to understand individuals perceptions of the world.* (Bell & Waters, 2018:24). For example in the 1994 book 'Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods' edited by Janice M. Morse we learn about the Phenomenology movement advocated by the German Philosopher, Edmund Husserl and the Hermeneutics movement advocated by the German Philosopher Martin Heidegger. Both these theories of research are concerned with how we view and experience the world around us, but they differ in how those views and experiences are understood. The Phenomenological approach is concerned with a shared understanding of reality and is therefore reflective of the Ontological aspects of philosophy.

Whereas Heidegger's use of Hermeneutics, based on interpretation and interacting with others to make sense of their world, is more readily aligned with the Epistemological aspects of philosophy. (Morse, 1994:137). Researchers using the Phenomenological or Hermeneutical approaches tend to gather their data and information using semi-structured or unstructured interviews, (Reeves et al, 2008:631).

Expanding on these theories further, the use of a Constructivist research methodology, one that is reliant on not only assuming a shared understanding of a reality (Ontology) but also brings in the epistemological approach that the respondents lived experience makes sense of their world, allowing the researcher and respondents to collectively construct a shared understanding of the situation being explored (Western Governors University, 2020), has been used as a planning tool for this research study.

In their 2018 book 'Doing your research project – a guide for first time researchers', Bell and Waters provide a useful table detailing the advantages and disadvantages of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Can explore theory of behaviour in the 'field' • Study of more culturally based or inter-personal topics possible • Can provide data about emotions, beliefs and personality characteristics • Allows you to reflect on your own experience as a researcher as part of the process • Usual to restrict research to a small number of participants • Allows the use of an 'insider' perspective • Can be used to identify how people define constructs, such as anxiety, which are hard to quantify • Focus of study can be changed in the middle of the study if necessary	• May lead to unanticipated results or results that contradict the hypothesis • Ethics of participants' permissions can be time-consuming • Research process can be more complicated and time-consuming • Findings cannot be tested with statistical significance • Findings cannot be generalised to whole populations • Less statistical power than large-scale studies • Greater risk of researcher bias affecting the results

(Bell & Waters, 2018:26)

The table highlights that the advantages of a qualitative approach include a *study of more culturally based or inter-personal topics* and *allows you to reflect on your own experience as a researcher as part of the process.* (Bell & Waters, 2018:26) When we consider these advantages against the research

objectives to 'identify' perceived or actual barriers, the effectiveness of CLPD programmes and the future skills required for leadership posts, the strengths of using a qualitative approach become evident. To be able to identify the areas outlined, the researcher needs to interact with the respondents to a greater degree using questioning, probing, challenging and reflective discussions. These are not evident tools within a quantitative approach to research, with the table on quantitative research methods stating as a disadvantage that it does not *take account of human thoughts and feelings.* (Bell & Waters, 2018:25). This links us back to the earlier works of Husserl and Heidegger and their use of the Phenomenology and Hermeneutics to understand and question the world in which the respondents exist.

Martyn Denscombe in his 2008 paper, 'Communities of Practice: A Research Paradigm for the Mixed Methods Approach' (Denscombe, 2008) discusses the emergence of a third research paradigm that blends use of both the quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

> *… we currently are in a three methodological or research paradigm world, with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research all thriving and co-existing.* (Denscombe, 2008:271).

In the paper, the mixed-method approach is considered as having its own unique set of identifying characteristics that are evident in how the approach is used;

- *quantitative (QUAN) and qualitative (QUAL) methods within the same research project,*
- *a research design that clearly specifies the sequencing priority that is given to the QUAN and QUAL elements of data collection and analysis,*
- *an explicit account of the manner in which the QUAN and QUAL aspects of the research relate to each other, with heightened emphasis on the manner in which triangulation is used, and pragmatism as the philosophical underpinning for the research.*
  (Denscombe, 2008:272)

There does exist a view that the Mixed Method approach is not singularly restricted to a blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches. For example O'Reilly et al in their 2020 paper, make the point that this approach could be referred to as *inter-paradigm* and therefore another form of mixed methodology, based upon the use of mixed data collection methods within either a qualitative or quantitative approach can be identified, that of an *intra-paradigm* approach, (O'Reilly et al. 2020:66).

Linking back to the research question there is a direct correlation to using a qualitative approach, with 2 data collection tools, to not only engage respondents in sharing their experiences as a practitioner to support the identification of career progression pathways and barriers, but also to begin to co-create a shared understanding of what an effective learning and development pathway that supports career long progression would consist of. One that is based on the experiences of the researcher and respondents as front-line practitioners, as well as the experiences of transitioning into a leadership or managerial role. The mixed-method qualitative approach will not only open dialogue and provide rich seams of data for analysis but will lend credibility and value to the final recommendations. (Morris & Paris, 2022:100)

By applying an intra-paradigm mixed method qualitative approach (O'Relly et al, 2020:66) it has afforded the researcher the opportunity to benefit from being able to use both an online survey as well as directly interact with respondents to explore and learn from their lived experience as a CLD practitioner, their involvement with career development opportunities and their thoughts on career progression pathways. This will be beneficial in allowing for a deeper level exploration of the key research objectives by being able to probe more directly with interview respondents about the themes that are identified as a result of the online survey. As well as follow up quickly on statements or comments they make as part of the 1 – 1 interviews.

The table highlighted earlier by Bell and Waters (2018), identifies key disadvantages of the qualitative approach such as *Greater risk of researcher bias affecting the results* and *May lead to unanticipated results or results that contradict the hypothesis*, (Bell & waters, 2018: 26). These are key areas to highlight and considerations to be kept to the fore as part of the survey construction and the 1- 1 interviews. Firstly, the issue of research bias is important. The subject area being researched is one that has been identified through a personal viewpoint that has led to the research project being undertaken. Therefore does come with a particular bias towards there being an issue in relation to support and preparation for CLD practitioners to secure an upwards career promotion.

As a practitioner of CLD there is the opportunity for the researcher to consider their own career trajectory and the support (or otherwise) as they transitioned from a front-line practitioner into a leadership role then into a service management role. Both these factors – the perception of a lack of a supporting and developmental pathway, as well as using their own experiences of career progression - could lead the researcher to focus on that outcome, as opposed to allowing the responses generated through the survey work and 1 -1 interviews to tell their own story. This brings in the second disadvantage area, in that the respondents will be sharing their own lived experience of CLD practice

and career ambitions, these will differ from response to response and as a result, there is the potential that collectively the stories being told, and experiences being shared, will lead the research findings and recommendations in a way that is not reflective of the feelings or viewpoint of the researcher. It will be important to the research project to acknowledge that a personal bias does exist. This will be addressed in how the data analysis is approached to ensure that common areas, or similar themes/patterns across the interviews and online survey are being identified and reported. This recognition of personal bias, whilst considered an area of concern can also be considered as a strength to the process as it gives a further insight into the experiences being shared by the respondents and helps with the understanding of the data and what the data analysis is highlighting. (Western Governors University, 2020)

Research Planning

A letter, detailing the purpose of the research project and outlining the ask of CLD practitioners and managers across the 4 local authority areas of the Tayside and Fife CLD Professional Learning Alliance, was distributed in March of 2023 to the CLD service managers and CLD Partnership leads. This area of Scotland was selected as the researcher was aware that they were keen to support research around improving the CLPD offer available to practitioners across the 4 local authority areas. This also meant the researcher had a detailed knowledge of the CLPD programmes they had in place and were developing, had good contacts with the team managers and practitioners in each local authority, and had a high degree of awareness and knowledge of one local authorities CLD service through their previous employment with them. It was hoped that from this initial contact that a total of 16 frontline CLD practitioners, from across the 4 local authorities, would complete the online survey, (appendix 1). The survey had been prepared using the Jisc Online Survey tool offered through the University library.

As a result of the initial contact letter being sent, Seventeen frontline practitioners went on to complete and submit the online survey. Five from a management job role contacted the researcher direct with an offer to participate in 1 – 1 interviews without completing the online survey.

The online survey (appendix 1) was shared with respondents during April 2023. The purpose of the online survey was to explore experiences of, and views upon, the current CLPD offer for CLD practitioners as well as determine attitudes towards career progression. Respondents were asked to consider their experience of and/or their views on 10 questions, in 3 category areas of Career Ambitions, Professional Learning and Future Skills. Exploring attitudes towards career progression was important to this research project to explore the challenge of ensuring practitioners are afforded opportunities to prepare to successfully transition from a practice role, to a leadership or managerial

role. This enabled the researcher to consider the areas outlined by Bridgstock (2009), highlighted in the Literature Review.

The results of the online survey were then used to inform and influence the focus and structure of the 1 -1 interviews, by providing clarity to the views and suppositions of the researcher around the limited, or lack of, support on offer for career long progression for CLD practitioners (or indeed, to counter or rebut those suppositions). As well as identifying further areas for exploration and consideration that were linked, or aligned, to the research question and objectives. The results of the online survey also highlighted some areas of additional interest that could then be explored further through the research activity, if time permitted, or could be considered as further areas of research/study that the Tayside & Fife CLD Alliance, or the broader CLD sector, could look to undertake. These additional areas could be considered as a disadvantage to the qualitative approach as detailed by Bell & Waters (2018), as they could be considered unintended outcomes or consequences of this research methodology, by allowing the respondents to share their own lived experiences and views on the research subject.

Equally, they could be viewed by the researcher as advantages to the approach taken as they provide a deeper understanding of the issue and the impact on practitioners views on support for, and challenges to, career progression.

Research Ethics

As part of the online survey, respondents were given the opportunity to email separately to the researcher to express their willingness to be involved in a 1 – 1 interview, where the research subject would be explored in more detail over a 90-minute semi-structured interview. The reason for including this option as part of the introduction statement to the online survey, and repeating the offer again at the end of the survey, was a means of further enforcing to the respondents that the online survey was anonymous, so that they would feel more confident providing greater detail to their responses in the knowledge that there was no requirement to provide any identifying information. The nature of the research meant that respondents were being asked to consider and critique their employers approach to career development and support. This could cause some uncertainty or apprehension. The researcher therefore wanted to not only include a statement on the confidential nature of the survey work, but also reinforce to the respondents that identifying information was not being collected. The initial letter to the CLD managers was also an opportunity to ensure that from the outset, the employers knew that there was the potential for respondents to disclose some potentially controversial or sensitive information relating to their experiences of being able to access appropriate CPD, or their

experiences to date of being unsuccessful in securing a promoted position within the organisation, which may be reflected in the final report. (Oliver, 2003:29/30).

The semi-structured interviews were scheduled over a 6-week period from April 2023 to early June. The five managers who contacted the researcher direct, expressing a willingness to take part in an interview consisted of - three team managers and three senior managers. Five of whom were CLD qualified. In addition a further four front-line CLD practitioners, who had completed the online survey offered to participate in a 1- 1 interview. All interviews were conducted in-person and recorded using a digital voice recorder. Interview transcripts were then produced and these were saved securely on the University One Drive, (appendix 2 & 3).

Underpinning all the data collection methodology were the ethical considerations and requirements to ensure that the research was undertaken in a moral and supportive manner. By placing the research purpose at the heart of the research planning and linking all aspects of the research process back to the over-riding purpose, there was a firm commitment that the findings and recommendations would be used to inform improvements in the support on offer to CLD practitioners. It also reinforced to the research respondents, and to other interested parties, that the research was being conducted to identify and resolve a specific area of challenge for CLD practitioners. This planning commitment was essential to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical and impartial manner. Implementation of an instrumentally good research approach (Oliver, 2003:11) ensured that the end results of the research are intended to continue and to be used to lead discussion with policy-makers, decision-takers as well as other influencers across the CLD sector in Scotland, around how we shape, implement and resource a career progression pathway for practitioners. The alternative would be for the completed research to be considered as having been intrinsically good (Oliver, 2003:11) in terms of being admirable or commendable in exploring the issue, but with no follow-up action or intent that would bring real and lasting benefit to mid-career CLD practitioners or the professional field of CLD practice. (Oliver, 2003:11).

One of the main challenges was the use of language that was being used throughout the research project, from the initial letter advising of the research project, in the construction of the online survey, the formation of the questions for the semi-structured interviews, in the reporting of the findings and in how the recommendations were expressed. The researcher has been particularly diligent to reduce or remove any language, or descriptive narrative, that could lead to uncertainty or offense. Consideration was given in advance to the personal interactions, how to lead and structure these meetings so that

they were positive experiences for the respondents, and that they were conducted in such a way so as not to make light of the challenges and disappointments that respondents may have had to contend with in their career progression journeys, (Oliver 2003:13).

As a stated earlier in this chapter, it is important that the conclusions that the research activity has generated, are of practical use and value to the professional field. Therefore in considering the sharing and dissemination of the findings, the use of language and also the presentation style have had to be considered carefully so that the research outline, findings and recommendations are presented using language that is accessible and concise. In addition to the considerations around use of language and presentation style, when sharing the research findings and recommendations with others, any quotes or statements that the respondents have made in the course of the semi-structured interviews, must not be able to identify them to their colleagues or managers. Therefore the presentation content has to be cleansed of any identifying markers in order to protect the integrity of both the respondents and the research process.

Thought has also been given to the theory of Insider-Outsider research issues highlighted in the Bell and Waters (2018) table and identified by Sherif, in their 2001 Qualitative Inquiry Journal article. In this article Sherif explores how the personal experiences and bias of the researcher effect all aspects of the research process. Furthermore Sherif highlights the challenges for the researcher when being perceived to be part of the 'community' being researched, but also trying to retain an objective, part removed position where the research respondents view you as being outside the community. (Sherif, 2001:440). This is an area of research also highlighted by Mackie in their 2019 dissertation.

Mackie describes their desire to 'give back' to the organisation where the young people identified as research respondents were members. But by doing so, Mackie identifies that this presented challenges in how those young people responded to the research questions. Having taken the time to develop a 'youth work' relationship some were open in their responses, others were more guarded in how they reacted. Mackie notes this as a behaviour change for these young people which was not consistent in how they interacted with Mackie in the general activities of the programme. (Mackie, 2019:136).

	Benefits	Challenges
Insider	• Better Understanding of Group's culture • Ability to interact more naturally with members • Greater relational intimacy • Greater 'legitimacy' with participants • More rapid acceptance from participants • Affords access with potential groups	• Loss of 'objectivity' • Making erroneous assumptions based on prior knowledge • Blurring of boundaries between roles • Informants may assume researcher knows answers
Outsider	• Greater 'objectivity' • Researcher role clearly defined • Participants will have clearer understanding of researcher role	• Identified by participants as a 'voyeur' • Difficulty in grasping culture of those investigated • Takes time to break down barriers with interviewees • Takes more time to access potential participants • Impinge on people's time and space

(Mackie, 2019:135)

Having worked closely with CLD colleagues at all levels across the 4 authority areas of the Tayside and Fife Alliance, this theory of Insider/Outsider is of particular relevance, and one that has meant the preparation required before each 1 – 1 interview had to be more considered in order to establish from the outset, the optimum interview environment, where the level of trust of the research respondent has in the researcher is high, along with the interactions being genuine and honest so as to ensure responses are open and reflective of the respondents situation. Techniques such as questioning assumptions on knowledge of the situation were important, as was ensuring objectivity of the process. Having considered the theories and philosophies of good quality research methodology, the research project has been planned and conducted drawing upon the influences outlined above, and being fully aware of the personal bias that the researcher potentially brings to the process. The researcher built in to the research timeline the required time to reflect and question the analysis to identify the themes and patterns.

Throughout the research process there has been a reliance on the support of the Tayside & Fife CLD Alliance members for access to practitioners as well as identifying them as a potential lead in the development of the recommendations into practical learning for practitioners. It is therefore of importance that this group are made aware of the findings and recommendations before a wider sharing with the sector as a whole is undertaken.

Limitations of the Research Project

During the undertaking of this research project a number of limitations have emerged which the researcher did not take into account early into the planning stages. The design of the online surveys did not require respondents to provide any identifying information including their postcode or local authority area. From the collated results the researcher has no indication as to geographic coverage, so potentially all respondents could be from the same local authority area.

In the design of the in-person interviews, through a reliance on the sector expressing an interest in participating in the study, all but two of the respondents were male and not from a front-line practitioner job role. The data generated through the in-person interviews does not provide a male perspective on career progression support from a front-line practitioner's perspective.

Because this study was a small scale, time limited research project, the researcher has been unable to confirm the number of respondents against the size of the local authority CLD workforce across Tayside & Fife area. The numbers who took part in the research activity will not be a representative sample size for the geographic area being considered.

All of the 1 – 1 interview respondents were from the same local authority area and therefore does not provide a perspective from authorities with different service structures, job roles and CLPD offers. This limits an understanding of how different local authorities view support for CLD practitioners, but begins to open the area of research for more critical debate and discussion in the professional field which has the potential to lead to change and improvement.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

From the analysis of the data generated as a result of the semi-structured interviews and online survey, it has become apparent that across all 3 staffing levels – front-line practitioner, team manager, senior manager – that there are common areas of concern and consideration in relation to support for career

progression as a CLD practitioner in a local authority. These can be directly aligned with the 3 research objectives detailed in the earlier Methodology chapter.

Throughout this chapter IR01 to IR10 refers to Interview Respondent. OSR1 – OSR17 refers to Online Survey Respondent. Direct quotes from respondents are used with quotation marks in the following chapters. This is intentional and designed to differentiate respondent provided quotes, from the academic or written quotes placed in italics, throughout chapters two and three.

1. **The identification of perceived, or acknowledged, barriers restricting career-progression amongst CLD practitioners.**

6 respondents discussed how well prepared, or otherwise, they felt on graduating from university and taking up their initial front-line CLD practitioner role. In all of those interviews the respondents highlighted challenges around the practical application of management responsibilities in relation to staff and volunteer management, financial management and building management. The respondents all felt that this was a significant gap in their learning and not an area that the university programmes, through the academic or placement inputs, allowed them to develop competence and confidence in. However, employers expected them to be able to undertake these duties and subsequently there were limited opportunities made available by the employers, to the practitioners, to build their skills, knowledge and experiences in these critical aspects of the job role.

> "When I went to my first CLD post I really didn't feel like I knew what I was meant to be doing to be honest. At that point the Community Education Workers had a centre management responsibility as well as staff management. So looking back I don't know if I was prepared for it and all the different aspects of it." (IR01)

For the respondents who then progressed into team manager or service manager job roles, they again stated that the job tasks and responsibilities they had as a front-line practitioner or a CLD team manager, did not fully prepare them for the transition into their new job role.

> "I spent the first 2 years literally role playing at team meetings and thinking this lot are going to see through me. I'm no sure if I can do this … suffering Imposter syndrome. Luckily there were lots of people about me … that reassured me that I could do it." (IR04)

These respondents also noted that on undertaking that transition there was limited scope to undertake CLPD opportunities on the job, to support them with that adjustment. They therefore had to rely heavily on their own resilience as a practitioner to learn as they practiced, or to rely on the support of their peers for advice and guidance.

> "So when I first started as team manager I was fortunate enough to have a peer in that cohort, in that group, that was somebody I was able to go to and just get that peer support. From a management perspective that wasn't there. It wasn't part of the induction, it wasn't part of any processes that we got." (IR04)

One of the respondents discussed this challenge in greater detail and highlighted that a potential resolution would be to consider an action learning set approach to the learning and development. This would involve practitioners working with peers at a regional or national level, with an appointed 'coach' or 'mentor' to facilitate learning based on scenario's relevant to the skills, knowledge or experience theme to be explored. Through the peer approach the group would suggest and explore potential responses to the scenario, then reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of the approach they selected.

This approach would build confidence of the practitioners in the theme area by exposing them to potential practice challenge areas. This would be reflective of the *Into Headship* (Education Scotland a) model discussed in the earlier Literature Review chapter, with the appointment of a mentor who is practising at present, as well as access to academic support around learning based inputs on the theory behind the theme, for example people management, conflict resolution or business planning.

> "The only other time I have kind of seen it in a more regular context is those action learning sets where you are working through …. what ostensibly most of the time are professional issues that you are encountering, with other professional managers who are not allowed to tell you the solution, they are asking questions, they are using that sort of coaching approach to actually doing it." (IR05)

If we consider this against the work reviewed by Bush (2013) and Naulty and Jindal-Snape (2011) in relation to the successful transition from learner to practitioner, we can see alignment with the challenges for professional practice that arise as a result of a failure to prepare practitioners in their

early career stages, to be able to make the move into more higher level job roles, through a mentor/mentee development route.

Induction

The respondents in 4 of the interviews all highlighted the challenge of having received no, or a very limited induction from their employer. Where any induction was offered it was concerned with the organisational risk management and mitigation requirements. What the respondents have highlighted as lacking in the induction programme was an opportunity to learn more about the practical application of their professional practice against the job requirements and expectations, as well as the support on offer in relation to continuing professional practice support and career development. This view from the respondents is reflected in the article by Simmie et al (2017) highlighted in the Literature Review, that supports the requirement for an effective professional induction programme as a means of building commitment to ongoing professional and career development, as well as reinforcing the view of Bush (2013) to be the importance of a mentoring approach.

In addition, when making the transition into other job roles within the same employer, there was no further induction sessions made available to respondents in order to discuss the changing job requirements and expectations, or indeed the CLPD support, that would be available to them to evolve their practice and thinking to meet the requirements of the new job.

> "I never had one. I just got told that I was moving. When I first went to [neighbourhood] I had just come back from maternity leave and there was a vacancy there. The move from that community to [neighbourhood] that was my request, and then the move to here ... I was asked to come here. But no, I never had an induction for any of those moves." (IR06)

The lack of a recognised induction process, or framework, around professional practice development opportunities, against the requirements of the job role, suggests that from the outset of the practitioner journey there is a gap in how well practitioners are encouraged and supported to consider their practice development needs against the requirements of their current and potential future job roles. This may begin to evidence a lack of promotion of a professional learning culture within the management of local authority CLD services. This was noted in the earlier Literature Review as part of the Standards for Headship (GTCS, 2021b) as being key to the promoted job role, and as an ambition of the Growing the Learning Culture strategy, (CLD Standards Council, 2015).

Henderson and Noble (2015), discuss the importance of professional induction as a means of supporting the individual to build a new discourse and see themselves in their professional role, as well as build their knowledge and understanding of what that professional role demands of them. They argue that induction is as much a part of ongoing professional learning as latter stage development programmes. They advocate for an induction model that

> *develops the capabilities of pre-service educators to 'be' teachers, to understand themselves as belonging to the education profession, and to become educators who are able to cope with the dynamic nature of today's educational world.* (Henderson & Noble, 2015:19)

This model, whilst aimed at the teaching profession, can easily be transferred to the CLD profession and reinforces the respondents views of the importance of an effective induction framework that is focused on professional requirements and expectations, not purely the risk mitigation of the employer.

When considering the responses to both the interviews and the online survey, we can begin to see an area of correlation between the reduced encouragement of the practitioner to plan an appropriate development pathway for career progression from day 1, and the initial views of the online respondents when asked if they, as a newly qualified practitioner had thought about their ongoing career progression.

From the responses to questions concerning career ambitions as a newly qualified CLD practitioner, only 3 provided an indication that they were at that point considering their career ambitions beyond their initial job role. For example;

> "To work for 2 years and then move into a more strategic position within the local authority" (OSR06).

Respondents were asked to comment on any changes to their initial career ambitions now that they have been in a front-line CLD job role for a number of years since graduating. Of those respondents who had stated that they held career ambitions beyond a front-line role, one stated that they had achieved this, "Achieved, but I had to look out with my local authority to secure promotion and access a career path" (OSR06) and the remaining 2 have stated that they have changed their position and are happy to continue in a front-line role.

Of the remaining online respondents, an additional three stated that they have changed their position, with 1 highlighting they would now consider a more strategic focused role within their employing local authority, the other two have highlighted an interest in moving onto a national role where they can influence thinking and policy on CLD practice, or within a university context teaching on a CLD study programme,

> "I have an ambition to potentially become involved in either teaching within the profession at university, to get more involved in practice research for the field or work at a national organisation." (OSR16).

What this collated data is highlighting is that for many who enter the CLD field, they do so mainly to secure a position working directly with local communities and individuals in order to build on their desire to be supportive and bring about positive change, few of these practitioners in their university days, or into their early career stages, consider or plan for a promotion pathway. Therefore the lack of any tailored induction that enables discussion on continued CLPD to build the skills, knowledge and experiences required to progress upwards in the organisation, is perhaps something that has not been considered as important to the practitioner at that starting point in their career journey. This presents similarities to the review of the McConnell (2002) book, where the competence requirements beyond front-line CLD practice were never specified when the profession was being established.

However, as has been evidenced in the work of Simmie et al (2015) in relation to successful career progression, from the outset of the journey it is important to establish a culture of continuous and supportive CLPD, tailored to both the practice requirements of the job being undertaken, but also with an evident pathway to support career progression in terms of alignment with the requirements of promoted posts in the profession or organisation, should the practitioner choose to follow that path, (Bridgstock, 2009).

Support & Supervision

Within the interviews, respondents also discussed the support and supervision framework that their employer used. There were attempts highlighted by the respondents at service or team manager level to include space in the support and supervision discussions for the practitioner to discuss their wellbeing, their professional achievements and the areas for CLPD that they had identified for themselves. However this was not a consistent approach and was very much dependent on the individual manager.

"RM: Tell me about that 1-1 process that you use with your staff team. Is that a set process from the organisation or one you have developed?

IR10: It is one I have put into place and I think it works for me. Whether or not the staff will agree with me I don't know, …"

Where there was an attempt at providing a regular and structured opportunity for the practitioner and their manager to spend time reviewing work plans, work achievements and considering emerging work tasks, there was limited opportunity to explore appropriate CLPD to support these areas and none of the respondents were able to confirm that the discussion around CLPD requirements, or a review of performance, linked back to the CLD competence framework requirements.

"RM: Within that support and supervision approach, is there a formal part of that discussion that concentrates on the CLD competence framework, that allows you as the manager and the employee as the practitioner to talk about their competence across the framework?

IR09: I would say no there isn't."

What this data suggests is that the CLD competence framework is not considered as a post-qualifying reference tool used regularly by practitioners and employers. Throughout the interviews when respondents were asked about use of the framework the consistent messaging was that practitioners only referred to it, when they were supervising students. Beyond that experience, the CLD Competence framework was not a tool used to guide, support or develop career progression planning.

"RM: The competence framework guides our profession. How often do you revisit that framework?

IR02: When I have a student. Dead honest, when I have a student."

When taken with the earlier analysis around induction and corporately mandated CLPD requirements, the lack of reference to, or use of, the professional competence framework for CLD practice by employers as a career development tool, or a support and supervision tool, we can identify a strengthening evidence base that confirms the lack of a recognised professional learning culture and

ethos within local authority CLD services. This begins to contradict the ambitions of the CLD Standards Council's workforce development strategy, *'Growing the Learning Culture, (2015)'* which sought to embed a culture of continuous professional learning and development within CLD employers.

Interview respondents also highlighted that it is their view that the CLD professional competence framework and the requirements of CLD Standards Council registration are not widely known or recognised by the local authority HR service. On exploring this further respondents were able to identify that this could be perceived as a barrier to supporting career progression, by highlighting that the HR team are responsible for the development and review of the corporate support and supervision approach as well as the development and delivery of the corporate CLPD opportunities. Therefore, if HR services were more aware of the CLD competences and the need for practitioners to maintain competence in these areas, and the requirement to evidence 35 hours per annum (pro-rata) CLPD to maintain CLD Standards Council membership, then this may mean a more tailored approach reflective of professional CLD practice requirements as part of the service specific support and supervision procedures. Respondents felt this would also lead to investment in appropriate practice focused CLPD to maintain competence and confidence in professional practice.

> "… they need to know the broad principles of the framework, so that when we are looking at how we support people's professional learning and development, progression within the organisation or we are trying to link it into those staff review processes that are HR led, then I think they need to know." (IR09)

This is a significant issue with regards to supporting career progression for CLD practitioners as it demonstrates that practitioners within this particular local authority context, are not being encouraged, supported or required to assess themselves against the professional competences and as a result are at risk of, if not in fact failing, to maintain their professional competence across all 7 areas. In relation to career progression this begins to support the practitioner view that they lack the confidence and competence in key areas to enable them to transition into promoted level posts.

Job Roles and Structures

Respondents were asked to consider how job roles and expectations had changed for CLD practitioners in a local authority context. All of the respondents highlighted that the employing services where CLD practitioners were located in their employing local authority had underwent significant change and

redesign over a sustained period of time. The results being a much flatter hierarchical structure with managements posts in the main being removed or merged.

> "Not very – flatter structures and reduction in services so staff lack opportunity for things like acting up roles, secondments, promoted posts, being part of national groups." (ORS08).

It was the view of respondents that promoted posts are now much broader in scope and no longer solely focused on CLD practice or delivery. As a result there are now considerably less CLD specific management posts available for practitioners to aspire to. The result being that team and service managers, with CLD delivery in their portfolio areas, are no longer required to have a CLD qualification. The earlier literature review confirms that this is not the case in relatable professions such as Teaching.

> "Professional qualifications in CLD are not a requirement for managerial levels. Limited availability and recognition of CLD qualifications compared to other educational professions limits career paths." (OSR06).

This was reflected in the interviews with all 10 respondents noting that there were now fewer progression opportunities within local authorities for CLD practitioners to progress into team manager or service manager roles, and the breadth of the job roles at those levels had also changed considerably.

> "I think what I've watched over the years is CLD Managers becoming more involved in much more than CLD. Or becoming more involved in the wider Council agenda." (IR07)

Front-line practitioners in particular highlighted that they now struggled to see explicit evidence and linkage of the CLD competences in those promoted level job roles.

> "Because I don't think that you would be allowed to work to a CLD way, I don't think it is because they don't want to work to a CLD approach, they are restricted from doing that because the job is much broader and others expect team managers to work differently." (IR06).

The removal of the CLD qualification as an essential job criteria for the role of team manager was also an area of concern that was discussed in the interviews. 9 of the 10 interview respondents, and 4 online respondents felt that this was a factor in limiting CLD practitioner progression. This decision was also

considered as a factor in the limited CLPD offer that practitioners could access through their local authority employer, in relation to continued professional development and maintenance of practice standards and association with the CLD Competences.

> "… you don't need the CLD qualification to do this job though. That's the other thing, but I think you do. As soon as you are dealing with community workers you need to know and understand where they are coming from professionally." (IR10)

2. The identification of current career development programmes offered to CLD practitioners employed in Scottish local authorities and how effective these are considered to be.

The discussions around the importance and value of a tailored induction programme for practitioners, also suggests that from the early stages of a CLD practitioners career in a local authority there is limited, perhaps even no, professional practice CLPD framework that can be drawn upon in order to support them to address gaps in their skills, knowledge and learning. Again, respondents in the interviews were able to highlight that within their organisation there are a number of e-modules or in-person training programmes available for completion, but as with the focus of the induction, these are in the main made available in order to support employees, and the employer, to meet the legal requirements placed upon them.

> "Trying to think what's the CPD I've done. … That is all very much driven by the needs of the organisation to understandably tick a box that says all our staff have done X, Y and Z" (IR02)

> "Oh they are there because they have to be. A lot of them are corporate opportunities you know your COVID stuff, your anti-terrorism, fire safety. …. when anything comes up that is career opportunity or career development opportunity they are usually out with the authority." (IR03)

Respondents were also asked to comment on the CLPD opportunities that have been made available to them by their local authority employer, again we can see a direct reflection between the online and in-person responses, with the majority of online respondents highlighting corporate training themes as being the main areas of CLPD they have participated in as provided by their employer. These themes include child and adult protection, health & safety, HR related matters and corporate systems.

CLPD Opportunities Currently Available

Across both methods of data collection, the respondents have discussed CLPD they have undertaken in relation to improving their understanding of aspects of their job role, not necessarily linked to the CLD competence framework or to support their career progression, but as a means of being able to better support their learners and communities. These CLPD opportunities are in addition to the mandatory requirements of the organisation and as they are linked more to practice developments they are often, if not always, undertaken through sign-up with external agencies or organisations.

> "so things like 7 Habits, working with young people who had perhaps been abused or sexual exploitation and looking at how you worked with young people around coercion and relationships. … it was offered by Health Promotions, Zero Tolerance and other people like YouthLink. But to say it was offered by your employer is a bit of a push." (IR07)

The online survey asked respondents to identify what organisations they looked to as providers of CLPD opportunities and/or where they sought information on the availability of CLPD opportunities they could participate in. All 17 online respondents stated their employer was a source of information on CLPD opportunities offered by community planning partners or central government agencies. In addition to this, 11 stated through nationally funded voluntary sector organisations, or local CLD partnership members, with the most common national agencies cited being the CLD Standards Council, YouthLink Scotland and Education Scotland,

Local partners included Health Promotion teams, Third Sector Interface (TSI) and local voluntary sector organisations. 4 respondents highlighted universities or local colleges, 1 respondent stated the regional group responsible for planning and delivering upskilling and/or CLPD opportunities for CLD practitioners. Other sources of information on relevant areas of interest to their practice included social media platforms, professional journals and colleagues.

For most of the respondents, their CLPD journey was based on their job interests at that time, not a longer term plan around their career development.

> "it is ad-hoc so when an interest comes up you think where can I go, what's the best one to look for. So I have done stuff through university, YouthLink Scotland, Youth Scotland so it is ad-hoc and you look based on what your interest is ... the subject matter is." (IR06)

Respondents were asked to consider how they determine if the CLPD opportunities they participate in are relevant to their job role and/or their career ambitions. Again the respondents provide a variety of reasons that they considered or undertook CLPD opportunities as a means of progressing their career ambitions. 8 respondents stated that they considered CLPD opportunities due to relevance to their existing job role requirements in order to improve or enhance their current practice,

> "I decide if the opportunity is relevant to the work I am doing via the outcomes of the CLPD; the delivering body; the added value it would bring to my knowledge base and delivery." (OSR02),

2 respondents stated that they considered it as a means to address gaps in their knowledge/skills-set, 1 stated that they considered it against their key work objectives and 4 stated that they considered CLPD against their areas of professional or personal interest.

The analysis of the data around the reasoning for practitioners to seek out CLPD opportunities is reflective of the work highlighted in the literature review by Booth et al (2021). When taken in conjunction with the earlier analysis around the gaps within the induction process in relation to the culture of CLPD support, planning and participation for career progression, we can begin to identify that local authority managers responsible for CLD services are less likely to have in place a supportive CLPD framework to support changing job requirements and expectations. Again this alludes to the potential for a lack of a recognised professional learning and development culture in a local authority context in relation to the professional practice requirements of CLD. Instead practitioners are looking to other organisations to provide opportunities for skills, knowledge and experience development in order to enable them to meet their existing job requirements and expectations, not to progress their careers into promoted posts.

3. The identification of the future skills, knowledge and experience gaps that CLD practitioners will have to address in order to meet the requirements of future leadership positions within Scottish local authorities.

With promoted posts responsible for managing and leading CLD services in local authorities now more likely to be held by non-CLD qualified post-holders, there is a potential that CLPD and career progression pathways were less likely to recognise the foundation building aspects of the CLD competence framework, within the skills requirements of team and service manager level roles. Throughout the

interviews and online survey, it was evident that respondents understood that the skills, knowledge and experience that they would be required to demonstrate at interview for a promoted post. These include

Positive Management Approaches – it was noted that front-line practitioners may not always be considered by the local authority as having manager status. As a result they were less likely to have access to CLPD programmes designed to support managers in areas such as financial management, financial forecasting, having difficult conversations, providing performance related feedback, role modelling positive behaviours and supporting staff with health and welfare issues. In addition it was also discussed during the interviews that there was a difference in managing part time youth work staff or adult learning tutors who were on minimal hours contracts and had no professional practice requirements to maintain, as opposed to managing full time, professionally qualified staff teams.

Interview respondents often discussed leadership and management in the same context, but when pushed to define them both began to identify where there were differences. Front-line practitioners recognised themselves as leaders based on their professional practice approach and value base, but readily admitted that they were less confident in their management skills, knowledge and experiences, on the basis that they were able to access CLPD on the negative aspects of management – grievance procedures, attendance management. Where they struggled were around the traits and skills of being a positive manager – building on their leadership skills and behaviours, but introducing a more formal style around decision-making and resource allocation as examples.

> "So I think absolutely first line management and what good management outside of CLD looks like that we can replicate and as I said earlier about how you then take those models of management from the rest of the world and add our values etc to them, so that you can have difficult conversations with integrity." (IR02)

Armstrong and Stephens (2005) confirm that there are differences between management and leadership approaches and describe management as being;

> *concerned with achieving results by effectively obtaining, deploying, utilising and controlling all the resources required, namely people, money, facilities, plant and equipment, information and knowledge.* (Armstrong & Stephens, 2005:5)

From this definition we can begin to identify the concerns being raised by the respondents around the lack of CLPD as well as their concerns around their own competence in areas of financial and people management, strategic planning and building responsibilities. Areas very definitely associated with a management level role.

Communication – interview respondents highlighted that it was important that as your career progressed you developed your communication skills in order to be able to communicate effectively with individuals, groups and communities at differing levels. This differed from a front-line practitioner role in that the job requirements were around learning and development based communication, whereas in higher level posts the communication requirements became more formal and the messaging became more important in terms of tone, style and outcome.

> "Communication …. that …. widening that right out. You need to be able to have difficult conversations, the ability to kind of relate at all levels, you need to understand the … what's going on round about us nationally, locally and very locally." (IR03)

Strategic Planning – Being able to see the bigger picture, communicate the shared vision and bring the right stakeholders together to plan, deliver and review. Front-line practitioners noted they were more likely to be part of a group that was working to pre-defined strategic goals and feeding in local intelligence to inform strategic planning, as opposed to being on the receiving end of that intelligence and having to analyse, consider and distil in order to set the relevant strategic priorities and direction.

> "it's not just that though, you need to be able to operate, think in strategic ways which means you need to think wider than just the team you have. You need to think how does what your doing fit in or contributes to what other services are doing .. what's the challenges, or opportunities there and that's the bit you don't necessarily do out with your immediate area as a community worker." (IR07)

Digital Engagement skills – Interview respondents noted that digital developments were having an impact on delivery styles. As the technology continues to develop and improve it is important that practitioners and managers use this to support community engagement and activity. Interview respondents were critical of the under-investment in digital resourcing across CLD services in local authorities, and as such practitioner confidence and competence was low.

> "that community development perspective of how communities can start to envision what they want their communities to look like and how they can engage with that, can you imagine using digital AI and virtual reality and that to do more of that stuff?" (IR05)

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The over-arching research question that this study aimed to explore was "**How to best support and encourage career progression amongst local authority CLD practitioners in Scotland?**". Initially the focus for the research was on mid-career practitioners but as the data collection gathered pace and the views of more respondents were heard, it became evident that the perceived or actual barriers that practitioners were identifying had their roots not in challenges associated with mid-career practice, but could be tracked back to the very initial period of career commencement in a post-qualifying context.

As can be seen from the analysis of the data in the Findings chapter, there is an apparent gap in the area of effective and professionally tailored induction for new graduates entering into their first post-qualifying position with a local authority. But equally, for staff moving around the service into different geographic area teams, or into a role where the practice area is different, for example moving from a predominantly youth work role into a predominantly community development role, there was equally an apparent lack of an effective or professionally tailored induction on offer. This was also evident in the Literature Chapter with both Simmie et al (2017) and Henderson & Noble (2015) promoting the need for a professional induction programme to be in place as part of the professional and career development programme offered by employers.

The impact of this being that the local authority practitioner, from the outset of their career journey, finds themselves in a team or service where there is not an evident approach that actively supports the maintenance and development of high quality CLD practice. Discussion around CLD competence and practice standards is not the focus for support and supervision or CLPD, and the priority is the protection of the organisation in terms of risk mitigations. This can be considered as a barrier to supporting career progression and a lack of an explicit commitment to practice development and career planning pathways.

In addition the lack of an effective and professionally tailored induction framework goes on to suggest that there is more likely to be a gap with regards a suitable support and supervision approach that encourages and enables the practitioner and their manager to regularly review effective performance, explore levels of competence and confidence against the professional CLD practice competence areas

and discuss future career goals, ambitions and pathways. Again the analysis of the data confirms that to be the case, but suggests that some managers are attempting to include in their approach to practitioner support the opportunity for more person centred discussions around wellbeing and CLPD. However as these are not consistent and there lacks any formal recognition within their service, or HR service, of the need for a structured and enabling practitioner support and supervision framework, specific to the CLD competence and practice standards as well as the tasks and challenges of the job role being undertaken, attempts by managers to introduce this approach are hindered and are ineffective. Hindered because there is no obvious route for professional practice focused CLPD within the local authority to support any CLD competence-based practice development, nor to offer tailored learning or development opportunities that would allow for skills, knowledge and experience development required for successful transition into higher grade posts. Again, we can begin to see that this can also be considered as a barrier to supporting career progression opportunities.

> "When I moved from the Community Education Worker role up to the Team Manager role there was nothing there. There was a gap. Nothing was in place for me to help me consider how I would get into a promoted position." (IR01)

The analysis of the data also highlighted the emerging gap in CLPD in relation to requirements to maintain and enhance professional practice standards, against the increasing demands of the local authority sector in terms of risk mitigation. As a result respondents were able to quite clearly identify learning they have been required to undertake around protection and staff wellbeing, digital security and anti-terrorism work. Respondents were less likely to be able to discuss and agree CLPD with their line manager as being relevant to the professional competence areas, or to support their career progression ambitions. The CLPD that was of interest, or held relevance, to aspects of the current job requirements of the respondents was also less likely to be available through the employing local authority direct, with respondents stating that they looked outside their employer, to the wider CLD sector and in particular national CLD organisations. In addition, the challenges faced when researching the available literature in this area demonstrates that career and professional development has not been a priority area for academic or practice research within the field of professional CLD practice. This further evidences the lack of a learning culture that is integral to the strategic planning for, and of, CLD services within local authorities.

As a practitioner, the combined factors of a limited programme of induction, a lack of a professionally focused support and supervision framework and a shift to corporate risk mitigation CLPD by the

employer and the removal of CLD specific promoted positions, will impact not only on how the practitioner considers and views their career ambitions, with that employer, but also by not being able to identify and secure the support or opportunities to participate in appropriate CLPD that will nurture and develop the skills, knowledge, experience and confidence required to successfully navigate a career progression pathway, it is likely that ambitious and competent practitioners will look external to the employing local authority for career progression opportunities.

The findings demonstrate that respondents are mindful of the changing context in which local authorities are being asked to deliver and as a result, they can identify the skills, knowledge and experience areas that will be required of future local authority managers. These skills, knowledge and experience areas are difficult for front-line CLD practitioners to evidence as changes to local authority CLD services and corporate management systems, now mean that what may have previously been considered as management type functions that CLD practitioners undertook, are now viewed as supervisory. This is resulting in the limiting of access to CLPD opportunities that would have enabled development of the appropriate managerial skills and knowledge. Without exposure to these opportunities along with ongoing changes to the priorities for CLD delivery and flattening hierarchical structures across local authorities, then front-line practitioners are experiencing a reduction in the opportunities for career progression and support for discussion on planning for career progression.

An interesting area that this study has highlighted has been in the use of action-learning based development approaches. Further exploration and consideration on the practical application of this approach, as a means of offering practitioners an opportunity to learn and develop skills and knowledge in the key areas future managers will be required to evidence, is of real importance for the sector, for practitioners and for employers. This approach opens up the potential for practitioners to develop their confidence and competence in these areas, something that respondents feel they were unable to achieve as part of their placement experiences and as part of their day to day CLD practice.

The recommendations from this research study can be divided into 3 areas and targeted at Practitioners, Employers and the national CLD agencies.

Recommendation	Aimed At	Impact
Prepare in advance for support and supervision sessions as a means of building for dialogue on professional appraisal, CLD competence areas and career development pathways.	Practitioners	Allows practitioners to lead the support & supervision agenda to include opportunity for critical discussion on competence, practice standards and career pathways.
Register with the CLD Standards Council as a means of maintaining a personal link to the professional competence framework and a commitment to professional standards and ongoing professional development.	Practitioners	Serves both as a personal commitment to CLPD and as a point of pressure on the employer to support access to, and participation in practice based CLPD.
Introduce an appropriate induction process, at all points of entry and transition, as well as a structured support & supervision framework that covers corporate requirements, job requirements and professional appraisal and development opportunities and linked to the CLD Competence Framework and career development pathways.	Employers	Viewed by current, and future practitioners, as a demonstration of the positive employment approaches in place by the employer.
Development of a new national CLPD strategy for CLD practitioners and endorsed by employers.	The CLD Standards Council Education Scotland	Demonstrates a shared commitment by employers, practitioners and the CLD Standards Council to improving practice standards, maintaining professional competence and delivering high quality CLD programmes and opportunities.
Introduction of practitioner learning sets as part of a national CLPD framework for practitioners.	The CLD Standards Council Education Scotland	Enables practitioners to develop skills, knowledge and experience in a safe and supportive environment using a blended learning approach consisting of academic study and scenario based coaching approaches.

There has been a significant level of data generated throughout this research process, some of which is not as relevant to this area of study, but nonetheless is important to note. The analysis of the data gathered, suggests that future study areas for the profession, could be in the areas of

- The effectiveness of the qualifying CLD programmes and placement opportunities in preparing and equipping students for the reality of CLD practice.
- The theoretical and practice differences between community engagement approaches and that of community development.

Overall, this research study has identified a strong evidence base to confirm that practitioners are facing difficulties in being able to consider and realise their career progression pathways. The lack of a national, regional or employer specific CLPD framework that takes account of professional CLD competences and encourages practitioners to consider their career options is having a negative impact on the confidence of front-line practitioners to look beyond their day to day job role and identify their skills-set, knowledge base, professional competence and experience in the job requirements of team managers and service managers responsible for the planning and delivery of CLD services in a local authority.

The data generated by the study does begin to suggest realistic and supportive approaches that the CLD sector should seek to establish that would, if delivered and resourced appropriately at a national level, enable practitioners to better equip and prepare themselves for a successful career progression pathway. Implementation of the recommendations in part, or in full, will require investment, not always financial, and a long term commitment from a number of stakeholders.

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