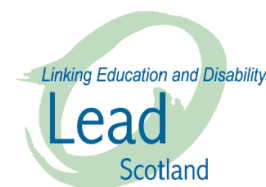


## Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering our ambitions for Post-16 Education



### Response from Lead Scotland (Specialists in Linking Education and Disability)

Lead Scotland is a charity that enables disabled adults and carers to access inclusive learning opportunities. At a local level, we do this by providing direct support to learners<sup>1</sup> through flexible person-centred learning opportunities and individualised guidance and support to help them plan their learning journeys. At a national level, we provide information and advice on the full range of post-school learning and training opportunities, as well as influencing and informing policy development.

### Our response to this consultation

Our response relates specifically to the needs of disabled learners and learners who care for disabled people. Lead Scotland adheres to a social model of disability, therefore we support and represent the interests of any learner who experiences barriers in the educational system, rather than only those with a medical diagnosis of disability or ill-health. Any reference to learners with additional support needs in this response should therefore be taken to include disabled learners and carers as well as other learners who experience barriers in learning.

Many of the issues which affect all learners also affect disabled learners and carers. Our response therefore considers general learner issues as well as those which are likely to specifically affect learners with additional support needs. Our response also takes account of the full range of post-school learning and training opportunities, including college, university, training programmes, and community learning and development (CLD).

Our response has been directly informed by the views of a range of disabled learners and carers, as well as relevant Lead Scotland staff and volunteers.

### General comments

Disabled people and unpaid carers account for a significant proportion of Scotland's population. Around 20% of the working age population in Scotland are disabled, and around 12% are carers. Both groups experience significant inequalities in relation to education, employment and income, and overall life chances. For example:

- **Educational attainment:** disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to have no qualifications. Female carers who work full-time and care for more than 50 hours a week are twice as likely to have no qualifications as non-carers, and men are 1.5 times as likely to have no qualifications.

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<sup>1</sup> We receive local authority funding to directly provide services in Aberdeenshire, Dundee, Fife, Highland, North Lanarkshire, Moray and West Lothian.

- **Employment and income:** only around 50% of disabled adults are in employment, compared to 80% of non-disabled people. Many carers are unable to work as a result of their caring responsibilities. The main carer's benefit is £55.55 per week, equivalent to £1.58 per hour.
- **Health:** people with learning disabilities are 58 times more likely to die before the age of 50 compared to non-disabled people. Carers providing high levels of care are twice as likely to be permanently sick or disabled and 80% of carers say their caring role has damaged their health.

Access to education for both disabled people and carers is therefore **vital** in terms of improving educational attainment and earning potential, reducing reliance on welfare benefits, and facilitating access to life-enhancing experiences. The above statistics clearly indicate that both groups should be specifically targeted in policy developments in terms of improving skills, qualifications and employability.

### **Efficient, flexible learner journeys**

#### **1. How can we ensure delivery of an appropriate place in post-16 learning for all 16-19 year olds? What are the priority actions?**

Lead Scotland commends the Scottish Government's commitment to offer all 16-19 year olds a guaranteed learning or training opportunity. This is likely to be particularly beneficial for disabled learners and carers who often experience significant barriers (both practical and attitudinal) when trying to access post-school learning and training opportunities.

For disabled learners, barriers may include.....

- a more complicated transition from school as a result of coordinating support services from various agencies, such as education, social work and health;
- financial difficulties, particularly for those learners who are unable to take on part-time work as a result of their disability or health condition;
- physical access problems, such as older buildings, inaccessible student accommodation, and difficulty arranging (and securing funding for) transport to and from the learning environment;
- attitudes and discrimination: many disabled learners are subject to negative assumptions about what they can and cannot do.

For learners with caring responsibilities, barriers may include.....

- financial barriers: the majority of carers may be unable to work as a result of their caring responsibilities;
- health and disability: carers providing high levels of care are twice as likely to be permanently sick or disabled, and 80% of carers say their caring role has damaged their health;
- many carers are often restricted in their choice of course as a result of course length and timetables which do not fit around their caring responsibilities.

While these barriers are likely to be experienced by many learners with additional support needs, older learners are likely to be disproportionately affected. This is largely due to the fact that the majority of people are more likely to have become

disabled or taken on caring responsibilities later in life, and many will be further away from the support structures available at school (or just after leaving school).

**Lead Scotland would therefore recommend that the Government's guarantee of a place in learning or training should be extended to those aged 24 years old.** This is vital for learners with additional support needs who may not have been able to make a direct transition from school to post-school learning as a result of some of the barriers noted above. If financial constraints do not allow this guarantee to be extended to all 20-24 year olds, we would recommend that learners with additional support needs aged 20-24 should be included in this guarantee to take account of the additional barriers experienced by this group.

In terms of the measures needed to fulfil this commitment, Lead Scotland would recommend the following priority actions:

- firmer monitoring arrangements should be put in place to ensure that schools and local authorities carry out their legal duties<sup>3</sup> regarding transition from school for young people with additional support needs;
- all learners with additional support needs (including those who do not qualify for a guaranteed place) should be entitled to one-to-one support from a lead professional (such as a Skills Development Scotland Key Worker or social worker) to support their transition from school or return to learning;
- as the focus moves towards younger learners, the role of community learning and development (CLD) will become vital for many older learners. Although CLD is funded locally, we would recommend a stronger national focus for CLD to ensure that appropriate provision is available across Scotland for those learners who are not offered a guaranteed place in learning or training.

## **2. In considering the proposed package of measures for improving the learner journey, where should the focus be to improve the pathways for all learners? What actions are required to make progression more coherent for learners?**

Lead Scotland supports the Scottish Government's proposals to promote part-time learning and the use of recognition of prior learning. Part-time learning is often the only learning option available to some disabled people and carers as a result of ill-health, course demands, and time constraints for those with caring responsibilities. Lead Scotland would therefore urge that part-time learning is promoted and encouraged in all types of learning, and that learners receive appropriate financial support to make part-time learning a viable option. In particular, we would recommend that the £500 part-time fee grant should be made available to all learners, as the £200 Individual Learning Account is often not enough to encourage learners taking courses below level 7 to apply for part-time courses.

Recognition of prior learning is particularly valuable for many disabled learners who may have been out of the education system for a significant time. It is very useful for those who may not have any qualifications, as well as those who have not completed courses, as it allows them to reflect on various life, work and learning experiences and consider how these relate to new learning opportunities.

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<sup>3</sup> relating to the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act.

Lead Scotland also supports the current modernisation of careers services, however we would urge that further consideration is given to the way in which learners with additional support needs are supported to ensure they continue to receive appropriate educational and careers guidance. Lead Scotland has recently set up a strategic partnership agreement with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to provide seamless support to shared customers; build capacity in SDS with regard to disabled learners and for SDS to engage in Lead Scotland's co-production programme of services.

### ***Learners aged between 20 and 24***

As noted above, Lead Scotland recommends that the Government's guarantee of a place in learning or training should be extended to those aged up to 24. Many learners between the ages of 20-24 may already have missed out on support and training programmes such as Get Ready for Work or Activity Agreements, and those with additional support needs may have had a negative experience in post-school learning which has resulted in them withdrawing due to lack of appropriate support.

The longer a learner is disengaged from learning the more intensive support is required to fully support them in reconnecting. It is therefore vital to re-engage such learners as soon as possible before they become further disengaged. In the longer-term, such intervention at this stage will be most beneficial in terms of seamless learning journeys, providing relevant learning, job-related and social skills at key life-stages, and encouraging and facilitating independent living.

### ***Older learners (aged 24+)***

While it will not be possible to offer a guaranteed place in learning or training for all learners, Lead Scotland is concerned that the consultation does not adequately consider the needs of older learners.

Many older learners may have been disengaged from learning or employment for a significant time. Others may have moved between various learning, training and employment environments, but progression routes may not have been streamlined or they may not have achieved positive outcomes. One of our learners told us that *"you may not realise what your problems are, and lack the confidence to try learning younger"*. The support such learners require is therefore likely to be very different from that required by younger learners.

Moreover, older learners are likely to find it much more difficult to secure a place in post-school learning or training as they may be competing for places against younger learners. Lead Scotland is concerned that although the intention of a guaranteed place for younger learners is well meant, this could adversely affect older learners by encouraging providers to prioritise younger learners over older learners. As college and training providers' budgets are becoming tighter, places will inevitably be reduced and those who appear to be least likely to achieve positive outcomes (i.e. progression to further learning or employment) will be pushed to the back of the queue. This is a particular issue for learners with additional support needs who may be perceived as being furthest away from the labour market.

One of our learners told us that he didn't think it was fair that younger learners would be given priority:

*“I am over 30, have a brain injury and have been able to work my way up from basic to advanced computing and I now volunteer helping others. Without a college place, this would not have happened.”*

To address these issues, Lead Scotland would recommend that:

- guaranteed places for younger learners should be funded from a separate budget to prevent learning providers from prioritising younger learners over older learners;
- positive outcomes should take account of factors such as development of key skills including literacy, numeracy, communication, independent living, self-confidence, and job-readiness, etc;
- the role of CLD should be strengthened and more closely aligned with other types of learning to ensure that those learners who cannot access college or training opportunities (or for whom this type of learning is not appropriate) are not excluded. However, Lead Scotland would recommend that this is done in a way which does not pigeon-hole older learners or those with additional support needs into CLD without considering whether or not a college or training programme may be more appropriate;
- all Jobcentre Plus staff should undertake training on the needs of adults with additional support needs to ensure that they are given appropriate advice about learning and training opportunities and the support available to them.

### **3. What more can the Government and its partners do to encourage more articulation between colleges and universities?**

Articulation is likely to be a particularly attractive route for disabled learners for various reasons. Many disabled people develop their impairment/s later in life and may therefore need to retrain for an alternative career. Articulation can be an effective means of entry to a degree course for such learners, as they can use existing credits for Higher National courses (or equivalent) as entry qualifications.

In addition, colleges are generally considered to be a more supportive environment than university for disabled learners, given that support is normally provided by the college directly, rather than through the Disabled Students Allowance. Thus for some learners, beginning their academic journey at college may provide a more manageable route into degree-level education.

Priority action for disabled learners:

- the range of relevant articulation subject groups should be expanded to include a wide range of both vocational and non-vocational subjects;
- improved pre-entry support for learners, e.g. summer schools, preparatory or awareness-raising classes at college, making the Disabled Students Allowance available before the course start date;
- extend the geographical provision of articulation routes so that learners from across the country can access universities which offer articulation routes.

### **4. What scope is there to make the transition from school to university more effective for learners, while reducing unnecessary duplication?**

From our experience, many schools, local authorities and universities are unaware that the transition aspects of the Additional Support for Learning Act apply to

learners making the transition to university. This legislation specifically requires schools/education authorities to:

- start planning the support that young people with additional support needs need around one year before they expect to leave school;
- pass on information about the young person to any of the agencies who may be working them (e.g. universities) after they leave school. This must be done at least 6 months before the young person leaves school;
- involve the young person in decisions about their post-school learning and the support available to them.

Even in those cases where school and universities are working together to support young people during transition to university, we are aware of many cases where the relevant information has not been passed to the university in time. This inevitably makes it difficult for disabled learners to make a smooth transition as the support is often not available in time for the start of the course.

Lead Scotland therefore recommends that universities and education authorities are encouraged to work together more closely to prepare for transition. This might include providing information about the kind of additional support available, information on accessible accommodation, who to contact regarding reasonable adjustments or special coursework arrangements. Education authorities and universities should also develop more effective relationships with social work and health boards to ensure that the personal and healthcare needs of learners are considered as part of a streamlined process. We are aware of many learners trying to arrange a place at university who need to navigate their way through a complex support structure consisting of various different people and organisations. This can be particularly difficult for learners moving to different local authority areas.

### **Widening access to post-16 learning**

#### **5. What do we need to do to ensure the Government's commitment to post-16 education and training for all 16-19 year olds is delivered to more vulnerable young people? What are the priority actions?**

Young people with additional support needs are a particularly vulnerable group. Such young people often experience significant barriers in accessing post-school education, training and employment, and are more likely to become disengaged with learning as a result of low self-confidence and lack of appropriate support.

We have listed five key groups below who are likely to need targeted support in order to effectively re-engage them in learning.

##### ***(i) Learners who are not ready to take part in mainstream learning***

Many learners with additional support needs may have had a negative experience at school or college, and may not have the confidence to return to mainstream learning. The role of CLD is therefore vital for many of these learners due to its flexible nature. This can be particularly important for those who may find it difficult to cope with the demands of a more formal learning environment. Many CLD opportunities are specifically designed to meet the needs of specific groups (including disabled people), and often offer a less daunting and competitive learning environment.

However, Lead Scotland is aware that many learners with additional support needs are not aware of CLD opportunities as an alternative to mainstream learning. There also seems to be a perception among many educational professionals (particularly in the formal learning sector) that CLD is of poorer quality than provision in colleges and universities, or that it is only used as a means of progressing to formal learning. While some learners may take part in CLD to help them to progress to further learning, for others participation in CLD is a significant benefit in itself.

**Priority action for this group:**

Lead Scotland therefore recommends that information, advice and guidance regarding CLD is improved, and that CLD opportunities are promoted as being of equal value as other types of learning.

**(ii) Learners with profound and complex needs: college provision**

For many learners with profound and complex needs, learning in a mainstream setting is often not appropriate. Many of these learners may therefore choose to take part in college courses which are specifically designed for learners with additional support needs, such as Life Skills or Independent Living courses. However, quality of provision of these programmes is highly variable. Although in the majority of colleges, such programmes offer valuable learning experiences, some programmes offer very little value for the learner. In 2006, the report of the Scottish Parliament's Inquiry into Disability<sup>4</sup> noted its concerns around so-called 'pretend' courses, which are seen by many as alternatives to day centres:

*The Committee heard evidence which suggested that there are some disabled people who repeat college courses year after year or who are on courses with little or no educational or vocational outcomes.*

Although many colleges have improved the range and quality of such programmes since this report was published, Lead Scotland is aware that many colleges have made little improvement in this area.

**Priority action for this group:**

Lead Scotland recommends that there should be clear learning outcomes and progression routes (where appropriate) for all learning programmes, with a specific focus on those specifically designed for learners with additional support needs.

**(iii) Learners with profound and complex needs: specialist residential provision**

Lead Scotland has spoken to numerous families whose son or daughter's needs can only be met in specialist residential provision. As this type of provision is not available in Scotland, and the majority of local authorities in Scotland are unable to pay for learners to attend specialist colleges outwith Scotland, many young people are unable to take part in any type of learning. Although many of these young people may never go on to employment, Lead Scotland is concerned that this consultation is primarily concerned with progression to employment, and therefore does not consider the needs of this group of learners.

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<sup>4</sup> Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee, *Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities* (2<sup>nd</sup> Report, 2006, Session 2)

**Priority action for this group:**

We recommend that existing provision for this group is improved and expanded within Scotland. In line with the regionalisation proposals, each region must plan to meet the needs of such learners. This can either be achieved by putting in place adequate provision within the region (facilitated by all key partners, e.g. colleges, CLD providers, social work, careers and health), or facilitating access to other regions. This is likely to be more appropriate and affordable than establishing new specialist residential provision, as well as utilising existing expertise within Scotland.

**(iv) Young people in special schools**

Lead Scotland works closely with Enquire<sup>5</sup>, who have told us that many young people in special schools often need to stay on at school beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday as no suitable post-school learning opportunity has been identified. This often occurs as a result of school, careers and social work staff lacking the knowledge required to identify appropriate opportunities, as well as poor (or no) information-sharing among the various agencies supporting the young person. In cases where the transition partners are aware of (and appropriately plan for) post-school opportunities, it is often the case that a full support package cannot be put in place for the young person which can make it very difficult to take part in further learning.

**Priority action for this group:**

Lead Scotland recommends that guidance and monitoring around the transition aspects of the ASL Act should be strengthened to ensure that transition planning takes place within the statutory timescales (at least one year before the young person plans to leave school) and that information-sharing protocols are understood and adhered to. Learners should be fully involved in this process to ensure they are able to choose the most appropriate learning opportunity, whether this is staying on at school, moving on to college or university, taking part in CLD, or into employment.

**Example of good practice: Lead Scotland case study**

John is 18 and is currently attending a special residential school in Aberdeenshire. He is ready for transition and should have progressed from school before he was 18, but no suitable accommodation could be found in the local area. John requires 2 full-time carers with him at all times.

John was referred to Lead Scotland with a view to supporting and continuing his education. He is at the very extreme end of the autistic spectrum and has no verbal language. He enjoys using an iPod and loves watching YouTube, therefore the Lead Scotland Learning Coordinator felt that ICT and mobile technology would be useful tools with which to engage his learning. John has several partners involved in his transition, including NHS Grampian, Social Services, Advocacy North East, and Lead Scotland.

Moving forward, John now successfully received a place through Autism Initiatives at Auchenhuive House, and should be fully in transition in the next few months. This will allow John to settle and the team to continue with his development in a positive relaxed environment.

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<sup>5</sup> Enquire operates a helpline for young people with additional support needs at school.



### **(v) Young carers**

Research commissioned by Carers UK found that young carers experience a range of educational difficulties as a result of caring, including:

- absence and lateness at school
- tiredness and lack of concentration
- anxiety and behavioural problems
- poor quality homework, or homework which is not submitted on time or at all
- poor attainment: around ¼ of young carers leave school with no qualifications.

As many of these difficulties are likely to continue into post-school learning, it is inevitable that many young carers are likely to become disengaged with learning at an early age. It is therefore vital that support for this group is specifically targeted and tailored around young carers' individual needs and circumstances.

#### **Priority action for this group:**

Schools and education authorities are required to provide additional support for young carers under the ASL Act, as well as supporting them before and during the transition from school. As with other learners, Lead Scotland recommends that transition planning for this group is improved, and that part-time provision in all types of learning is extended and promoted to allow young carers with significant caring responsibilities to engage in learning at a suitable pace.

### **6. What more could the Government and its delivery partners do to improve retention and progression, building on Opportunities for All?**

Many learners with additional support needs may be less likely to complete learning programmes as a result of health problems, lack of appropriate support for disability-specific needs, intensive course demands, or caring responsibilities. In addition, these barriers often make it harder for such learners to take on part-time work to supplement their income, putting many in difficult financial situations.

To improve retention and progression for such learners, Lead Scotland would therefore recommend that:

- part-time and flexible learning opportunities (e.g. distance learning) are further promoted and adequately funded in all types of learning
- financial support for part-time learners should be improved\*. Specifically, we would recommend that:
  - in community learning, the former ILA 500 should be available at all learning levels (not just SCQF level 7 and above)
  - in further education, learners who are unable to work due to additional support needs, should be entitled to a full bursary (which should not take into account disability-related benefits)
  - in higher education, learners who are unable to work should be entitled to a student loan (which should not take into account disability-related benefits)
- learning providers should work with their partners to implement tracking procedures for learners with additional support needs to monitor and support those who are likely to become not in education, employment or training

\* Although we recognise that financial constraints may not allow for any additional student support funding, Lead Scotland would suggest that this should be seen as

preventative funding in terms of reducing the likelihood that these learners will become long-term unemployed and therefore rely on welfare benefits.

### **7. How can we maximise the contribution of Community CLD to widening access? What examples of good practice can we build on?**

CLD opportunities are often particularly valuable for disabled learners and carers due to the flexible nature of provision. As the focus moves towards younger learners, the role and contribution of this sector will inevitably need to increase to ensure there is adequate provision for older learners as well as those for whom formal education is not appropriate.

To summarise the recommendations we have already made regarding CLD (as well as other recommendations), Lead Scotland recommends that:

#### ***The Government should consider a stronger national focus for CLD***

At present, CLD providers in both the voluntary and local authority sectors receive funding and guidance from a mixture of local and national sources. As a result, provision and quality can be variable across the country, and learners are likely to experience a different learning opportunity depending on where they live. Lead Scotland is a member of Learning Link Scotland, and supports its recommendation that there should be a consistent national framework for CLD to ensure parity of provision for all groups (as well as between geographical areas). We believe this would help to facilitate standardisation of learning, and establish clearer progression routes between different types of learning (as well as within CLD).

#### ***CLD should be more closely aligned with other types of learning***

The position of CLD within the portfolio of the Minister for Children and Young People inevitably segregates this type of learning with other post-16 learning provision, and perhaps implies that it is unclear at a national level where CLD fits in the wider learning environment.

Lead Scotland would therefore recommend that responsibility for CLD should be transferred to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. We believe that this is likely to lead to the following benefits:

- policy issues regarding CLD would be considered alongside other types of post-16 learning, as well as in developments regarding widening access;
- a more coherent focus would be given to progression between CLD and other types of learning (as well as progression within CLD);
- encouraging more effective partnership working and sharing of good practice between CLD, further and higher education, and training programmes;
- a more integrated support environment for learners with additional support needs. In particular, the partners identified in the Government's Partnership Matters guidance are likely to have more of an understanding of the way in which the different learning sectors can work together to support learners with additional support needs;
- the proposed regionalisation of the college sector is likely to be more effective, as the different learning partners in each region will be more closely aligned at a national as well as local level.

### **Information, advice and guidance regarding CLD is improved**

As noted earlier, we are aware that many learners with additional support needs (and those who support them) are not aware of CLD opportunities as an alternative to mainstream learning, and that many perceive CLD to be of poorer quality than other types of learning.

Lead Scotland therefore recommends that information, advice and guidance regarding CLD is improved, and that CLD opportunities are promoted as being of equal value as other types of learning.

### **Further development work regarding accreditation and SCQF alignment**

CLD currently includes a mixture of accredited and non-accredited provision, some of which incorporate clear progression routes to further learning and some which do not. Although some types of accredited provision can be easily aligned to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), this can be difficult for certain courses. In addition, for those course/programmes which can be aligned to the SCQF, practice in doing so can be inconsistent between different CLD providers.

Lead Scotland therefore recommends that further development work regarding accreditation and SCQF alignment should be carried out. This is likely to improve consistency between CLD providers, as well as making it easier for learners to see how their learning achievements relate to other types of learning and help towards planning their learning progression.

### **Longer-term funding for CLD providers**

Many CLD providers find it difficult to operate and plan effectively as a result of short-term funding arrangements. As a result, many learners may not be able to secure a learning place until very shortly before the course begins, making it very difficult (or impossible) to arrange the support needed by disabled learners in time. Lead Scotland therefore suggests that funding should be allocated on a longer-term basis, such as every three to five years.

#### **Example of good practice: Lead Scotland case study**

Mary is a 42 year old learner who was referred to us by the Dundee Partnership Literacy Outreach programme. She has mild learning difficulties and low self-confidence which has prevented her from taking part in formal education or employment since leaving school.

All Lead learners meet with our Learning Coordinators who discuss their individual needs and help the learner plan their learning journey. They are then matched with a Lead volunteer who supports the learner throughout the programme and helps them achieve their learning goals. When Mary first came to us, she wouldn't speak to our staff as she was very nervous and didn't know how to communicate with people she hadn't met before. *“I was scared and unsure. I didn't speak to Steve (a Lead volunteer). I would call him Mr Man because I didn't know what to say to him.”*

After meeting with Linda informally a few more times, our LC used a Catching Confidence tool (a NIACE tool for capturing changes in learners' confidence schools) to discuss how Mary was feeling and what she would like to learn. They

discussed the things she liked and disliked, and what learning style would be best for her. Mary decided that she would like to try the ECDL Equal Skills computing course.

She was then introduced to Steve again, who worked with Mary on a one-to-one basis for the next few months. When asked how she felt about learning with Steve now she told us *it's great, very enjoyable. He is very kind and patient and we have a good laugh as well as working. He got me through my computer course, but I'm still waiting for the certificate!*"

Mary is currently working with Lead to find a volunteer placement with a local charity (something she admits she would never have had the confidence to do before learning with Lead). In the longer term, she is hoping to find a supported employment opportunity.

### **Aligning non-advanced learning and skills with jobs and growth**

#### **8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of prioritising investment in learning and skills which support jobs in key and high participation sectors?**

Although there are clear advantages in terms of improving long-term employability and earning potential, we are concerned that this will have a detrimental impact on learners who may not progress to employment or those who may need to take non-vocational programmes as a stepping stone to job-related courses.

This is a particular issue for learners with profound and complex needs who are unlikely to move into employment, but nevertheless acquire significant life-enhancing benefits from participating in learning. For many learners, this includes:

- building self-confidence and social skills (which for some can help facilitate independent living)
- improving physical and mental health and well-being
- developing and encouraging aspirations to progress further
- facilitating progression to further learning
- improving family relations.

Appropriate provision for this group of learners should therefore be regarded as preventative intervention, in terms of reducing long-term likelihood of ill-health, mental health problems, family breakdown and welfare dependency.

This proposal could also adversely affect certain learners with additional support needs who want to progress to employment but who may experience barriers in accessing certain industries. Some learners may also lack the confidence to seek careers in competitive industries, particularly if they feel that employers are more likely to recruit people with no identifiable support needs.

Lead Scotland therefore recommends that while it is possible to prioritise investment in certain learning and skills areas, it is vital to ensure that there is an adequate range and level of remaining non-priority learning areas. This would be in line with the Government's commitment to put learners at the centre by ensuring that individual freedom to choose courses is not eroded. We also recommend that learners with additional support needs are supported during the transition to employment. Although the legal duties regarding transition under the ASL Act only

relate to transition from school, we would recommend that this is extended to cover transition from post-school learning into employment.

### **9. How can we maximise the contribution of community learning and development to improving people's job prospects? What examples of good practice can we build on?**

Many types of CLD already improve participants' job prospects by building self-confidence and developing relevant employability and job-ready skills. Lead Scotland believes the contribution of CLD in this area can be maximised further by:

- aligning CLD more closely with other types of learning (vocational) and establishing clearer progression routes (see earlier comments); and
- aligning CLD provision with the SCQF to improve employers' understanding of individual CLD qualifications (whether taken as a stand-alone course or as a progression route to further learning).

#### **Example of good practice: Lead Scotland case study**

Gordon is a 26 year old learner from Fife. He attended college for a brief period after leaving school, but various health problems made it difficult for him to commit to formal education. He has very low self-confidence and a poor experience at college made him worried about reapplying.

When our staff first met Gordon, he was keen to return to learning to allow him to pursue his ambition of working in IT. *"I was really low and had low self-confidence, but I was determined to do something. I was bored with doing nothing and wanted to do something worthwhile"*.

When asked why he chose to come to Lead rather than go straight back to college, he told us *"I liked that I could do things at my own pace. It did things differently and was not so demanding"*.

After meeting with a Lead Learning Coordinator, Gordon decided that he wanted to work with a Lead volunteer to take the ECDL Equal Skills computer course. The volunteer worked with Gordon on a one-to-one basis, provided him with an adapted computer and trained him in how to use the specialist software he needed. When asked how he felt when he passed the course, he said *"I was brimming. It made me want to get more certificates, I wanted to aim for 3 or 4"*.

Gordon then worked with Lead staff to apply for the next level of the ECDL course at his local college for a couple of days a week. The Lead Learning Coordinator liaised with the college support staff to discuss and put in place the support Gordon needed on his course. Gordon has recently moved into his first flat, and is well on his way to completing the full ECDL programme.

#### **Example of good practice: Lead Scotland case study**

Kate is 19 and has Aspergers Syndrome. She was happy at primary school, but when she progressed to secondary school where the students knew she was different, she felt bullied and singled out. When she was 13 she attempted suicide, and was subsequently referred to a specialist unit where she stayed for 2 years.

When Kate was integrated back in secondary education this was not wholly successful, although the school staff helped her receive an exceptional entry place at Aberdeen College to study an access course. Kate completed this course and subsequently achieved a Visual Communication and Photography certificate at Intermediate level 2.

After college, Kate became isolated and was unable to find a job. Her confidence dipped, and she sought support from Skills Development Scotland. Her careers adviser suggested an Aberdeen University course called %Breakthrough+. This programme is for anyone recovering from mental illness who wants to return to work, education or training. The course encourages a variety of skills, including CV writing, assertiveness and interview skills. Although Kate enjoyed this course, she felt it was not right for her and a bad transport experience left her feeling afraid to return.

Kate was referred to Lead by Skills Development Scotland where she has fully engaged. She meets with the Lead Learning Coordinator every week and takes part in 2 different learning programmes. She wants to share her skills and experience with others, and is now about to volunteer with Lead and hopes to achieve her Millennium Volunteering Award. Kate is now travelling independently again and can see a positive way forward. Kate says: *“Before I got in contact with Lead, I was at home 24/7, did not feel like I fitted in anywhere, and I was unable to get out and achieve what other 19 year olds around me could. After the Learning Coordinator got me into activities and meetings that they have, I feel like a new option has been opened for me. I have come out of my shell more around others and have gotten enough confidence to sign up as a volunteer for Lead to help others like me get the lifeline I was thrown. There is still a long road ahead of me and many areas where I lack confidence to improve, but I know that with the support network that Lead has set up for me, I know I can achieve it”.*

### **Fair and affordable student support arrangements**

**10. Given the financial constraints, should we prioritise an entitlement-based approach or the level of payment each student receives? What other options are there?**

#### ***Further education***

Lead Scotland believes that it is unfair that higher education student support is an entitlement, whereas further education students are only eligible for financial support. We would therefore recommend that all students who meet the relevant eligibility criteria, regardless of level of study, should be entitled to financial support. This will create consistency for all students across the country, as well as removing barriers to participation.

In particular, we would recommend that funding arrangements for transport costs for learners with additional support needs are clarified and strengthened in official guidance. At present, further education students may receive funding from the Additional Support Needs for Learning Allowance to pay for the extra travel costs associated with disability, as well as other disability-related costs. However, this allowance often does not cover many learners' full transport costs

(making it difficult or impossible to attend college), or in some cases is not provided by the college. Although the Partnership Matters guidance suggests that colleges, social work departments and NHS Boards should work together to meet the transport needs of learners with additional support needs, Lead Scotland is aware that this is often not the case and many learners end up with no financial support.

Unlike other learners, support towards transport costs for many disabled learners is vital (particularly those who need specialist transport or human support). Without such support many learners are physically unable to attend college.

Lead Scotland therefore recommends that support towards transport costs should be an entitlement for learners with additional support needs, and that the Government should clarify guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies involved in supporting learners with additional support needs.

### **Higher education**

Lead Scotland supports the Government's proposals to consider a minimum income guarantee for the lowest income students. Evidence suggests that disabled people are twice as likely to be living in poverty than non-disabled people<sup>6</sup>. It is therefore likely that disabled students are likely to experience more acute financial problems than non-disabled students, and would therefore significantly benefit from proposals to introduce a minimum income level for students.

On average, disabled people's day-to-day living costs are around 25% higher than those of non-disabled people<sup>7</sup>. For disabled students, this might include:

- higher heating costs for those who are unable to leave home regularly, such as those studying by distance learning
- additional costs of social care services
- adapted accommodation and mobility aids
- higher fuel costs for students who cannot use public transport because of the nature of their impairment.

Given that the disabled population already experience significantly lower employment rates than non-disabled people, any measures to make higher education more financially viable are particularly welcomed by Lead Scotland. This would be particularly beneficial for students whose welfare benefit entitlement is affected by student loan eligibility.

### **11. How can FE bursaries be targeted fairly and more effectively?**

As noted above, part-time learning is often the only viable option for many disabled learners as a result of health issues or caring commitments. Part-time learning is therefore a key means of widening participation to learning for vulnerable groups.

Bursaries are rarely available to part-time learners as they are awarded at the college's discretion. Lead Scotland believes that this approach adversely affects learners with additional support needs, as it assumes that those who study part-time

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<sup>6</sup> Disability Poverty in the UK Leonard Cheshire (2008)

<sup>7</sup> Disability Poverty in the UK Leonard Cheshire (2008)

will be working part-time. As many disabled learners and carers are unable to work to supplement their income, they are likely to have a very low income to meet their living costs (which will be similar to the costs incurred by full-time students).

### **Effective and sustainable delivery**

#### **12. What are the pros and cons of our proposals for the regionalisation of colleges? Are there other criteria we should consider in determining the optimal region structure?**

Please see our response to the specific consultation on this issue.

#### **13. What more could the Government and its delivery partners do to improve collaboration between post-16 learning, including CLD and employment support services?**

The report of the Beattie Committee<sup>8</sup>, which made a number of recommendations regarding inclusiveness in the post-school sector, recommended the creation of a National Support Fund to assist all the providers of post-school education and training to access funds for additional support needs. Such an approach would be based on an assessment of the learner's needs, rather than where they participated in learning and funding would come from a flexible central pot which could be used for college, CLD providers, and other learning providers.

Lead Scotland would recommend that fresh consideration is given to the creation of such a fund in order to ensure that all learners with additional support needs can access the same level of support regardless of where they choose to learn.

### **Simplification of the funding system and income generation**

#### **14. What are the pros and cons of the proposed needs-based regional commission model for colleges?**

Please see our response to the separate consultation on this issue.

### **Other comments**

In relation to the policy proposals set out in the consultation, Lead Scotland would urge that the Scottish Government carries out a full equality impact assessment to determine how these proposals are likely to affect disabled people and other protected characteristics<sup>9</sup>. This is a legal requirement for all public authorities under the Public Sector Equality Duty as part of their duties to ensure they are giving due regard to the need to promote equality and foster good relations. Lead Scotland has extensive experience in this area, and would be pleased to offer further assistance regarding impact assessments.

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<sup>8</sup> The Beattie Committee Report: *Implementing Inclusiveness, Realising Potential* (Scottish Executive, 1999)

<sup>9</sup> As detailed in the Equality Act (2010).



## **Summary of Lead Scotland's key recommendations:**

### *Guaranteed places in learning and training.....*

- guaranteed places should be extended to those up to the age of 24 years;
- guaranteed places for 16-19 year olds should be funded from a separate budget to prevent learning providers from prioritising younger learners;

### *Transitions planning.....*

- firmer guidance and monitoring around the transition aspects of the ASL Act should be strengthened to ensure that transition planning takes place within the statutory timescales and that information-sharing protocols and understood and adhered to;
- the ASL Act should be extended to cover transition from post-school learning into employment.

### *Community learning and development.....*

- there should be a stronger national focus for CLD, including a consistent national framework;
- CLD should be more closely aligned with other types of learning and included in the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning;
- information, advice and guidance regarding CLD should be improved, and CLD promoted as being of equal value as other types of learning;
- further development work regarding accreditation and SCQF alignment;
- funding for CLD should be allocated on a longer-term basis

### *Role of other agencies.....*

- All Jobcentre Plus staff should undertake training on the needs of adults with additional support needs;
- the Government should clarify guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved in supporting learners with additional support needs.

### *Range of learning provision.....*

- existing provision for learners with profound and complex needs should be improved and expanded.

### *Student support funding.....*

- support towards transport costs should be an entitlement for learners with additional support needs;
- bursaries should be available to all part-time learners with additional support costs who meet the usual eligibility criteria;
- the former ILA 500 should be available at all learning levels;
- HE learners who are unable to work should be entitled to a student loan.

Lead Scotland has significant expertise in supporting disabled learners and carers, and would be pleased to assist the Scottish Government in further policy and planning in this area.

**Lead Scotland  
December 2011**