

# **Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland 2022-27**

**Fairer Scotland Duty**

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**Scottish Government**  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
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<b>Title of Policy, Strategy, Programme etc</b>	Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland
<b>Summary of aims and expected outcomes of strategy, proposal, programme or policy</b>	<p>The purpose of creating the Adult Learning Strategy is to remove barriers to learning for the most marginalised people within society. The strategy's vision is that adult learning in Scotland will develop better skilled, educated, confident and empowered people contributing to connected and inclusive communities. Its aim is to create the conditions for connected adult learning opportunities that link Scotland's communities, local authorities, third sector organisations, colleges and universities around an offer of learning for adults, particularly those furthest from inclusion and experiencing disadvantage.</p> <p>The strategy aims to bring about systemic change to how learners can access and progress through learning to reach their goals. Intended impacts and outcomes are that the strategy will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deliver better outcomes for learners and make a positive impact to adult learners' lives and their life chances.</li> <li>• remove the barriers that prevent adults participating in learning or that adversely affect their levels of participation.</li> <li>• aim specifically to support those who are not engaging in learning and create clear accessible first steps that enable the most marginalised and excluded adults to begin their learning journey.</li> <li>• clarify and simplify how learners who have taken their first steps into or back into learning can progress.</li> <li>• ensure that all learning is recognised and is given the due credit and recognition that the learners' efforts deserve.</li> <li>• ensure that those furthest from formal mainstream education have parity of learning opportunities.</li> </ul>
<b>Summary of evidence</b>	<p>There are no national data sets for community based adult learners and therefore limited evidence on how community based adult learning can impact on people with different protected characteristics. However, there is a reliable evidence base about the wider context within which Community Learning and Development operates:</p>

- People from the most deprived communities (SIMD20) are underrepresented at universities.<sup>1</sup> In 2019/20, 16.4% of all Scottish domiciled entrants to a full-time first degree course came from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland. Over the past 5 years, this proportion has increased from 13.9% in 2014/15. The interim target to reach 16% by 2021 of the Commissioner for Fair Access has been met ahead of schedule.<sup>2</sup> Evidence also shows that advantaged households living in deprived neighbourhoods benefit from widening participation schemes in these areas, thus furthering advantages.<sup>3</sup> Whilst benefits of widening access schemes are evident for disadvantaged students in deprived areas, they do not increase participation for those experiencing disadvantage who do not live in deprived areas.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2019/20, 34.2% of Scottish domiciled enrolments in full-time Further Education came from the 20% most deprived areas. This is a drop from 34.7% in 2018/19.<sup>5</sup>
- The largest proportion of 16 to 19 year olds who are 'not participating' in education, training or employment are concentrated in the most deprived areas; 40.7% of those 'unemployed seeking' and 39.4% of those 'unemployed not seeking' live in the 20% most deprived areas.<sup>6</sup>
- Children from deprived backgrounds leave school earlier. Low levels of attainment has long term effects on their employability.<sup>7</sup>
- 9.7% (324,700 ) of the population aged 16-64 years have 'low or no qualifications' (SCQF level 4 or below).<sup>8</sup> There is regional variation across Scotland in the proportion of the population with low or no qualifications. West Dunbartonshire (15.8%), Inverclyde and North Lanarkshire (14.6%) and Glasgow City (13.5%), had the highest proportion of people aged 16-64 years old with low or no qualifications.<sup>9</sup> The proportion with low or no

<sup>1</sup> [The Impact of COVID-19 on Fair Access to Higher Education \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

<sup>2</sup> [Report on Widening Access 2019-20 \(sfc.ac.uk\)](http://sfc.ac.uk)

<sup>3</sup> [The use of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation as an indicator to evaluate the impact of policy on widening access to higher education](#)

<sup>4</sup> [The use of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation as an indicator to evaluate the impact of policy on widening access to higher education](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Report on Widening Access 2019-20 \(sfc.ac.uk\)](http://sfc.ac.uk)

<sup>6</sup> [Annual Participation Measure 2021 | Skills Development Scotland](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places and Regions –2020/21](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places and Regions –2020/21](#)

qualifications is highest in the most deprived quintile and decreases as the level of deprivation decreases.<sup>10</sup>

### Engagement in learning

Evidence shows that social class is a key predictor of engagement in learning, with people from higher socio-economic groups being more likely to be engaged in adult learning and the likelihood of engagement being shaped by income, levels of qualification, employment status and parents' education levels.<sup>11</sup> Learners who have had earlier successful experiences of learning are more likely to continue learning as adults.<sup>12</sup>

The Adult Learning Strategy has been developed to remove barriers to learning for the most marginalised people within society, specifically aiming to address inequalities of outcome. It aims to build on [The Adult Learning Statement of Ambition's](#) principle that everyone in Scotland has the right to access learning to meet their educational needs and aspirations. The strategy, therefore, has the potential to impact positively on adult learners from lower socio-economic groups by removing barriers to learning and increasing access to adult learning opportunities for those who have had negative experiences of learning.

### Adult Learning, Tackling Child Poverty and Employability

A review of evidence suggests that adult learning can substantially reduce poverty by enhancing employment prospects.<sup>13</sup> Evidence also shows that economically inactive people who participate in lifelong learning, especially those who are unemployed, are more likely than those in employment to gain qualifications through lifelong learning opportunities.<sup>14</sup> University of Warwick research into adult education highlights that international evidence shows that adult learning can help contribute to equality of opportunity for those who are economically and socially disadvantaged.<sup>15</sup>

A key strategic action is to increase access to and support for accredited learning, so that more opportunities are available for adult learners with few or no qualifications.

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<sup>10</sup> [National Indicator Performance | National Performance Framework](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>13</sup> [The Impact of Lifelong Learning on Poverty Reduction](#)

<sup>14</sup> [The Relationship between Adult Learning and Wellbeing: Evidence from the 1958 National Child Development Study](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Adult Education: Important for Health and Well-Being](#)

The strategy therefore has the potential to impact positively on adult learners experiencing poverty and inequality by improving employability through the achievement of qualifications.

Six priority family types have been identified as being at highest risk of child poverty: lone parent families, minority ethnic families, families with a disabled adult or child, families with a younger mother (under 25), families with a child under 1, and larger families (3+ children).

Interventions that address poverty in these groups are crucial in ensuring that we eradicate child poverty.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report "Poverty in Scotland 2021", the biggest risk factor for pulling a child into poverty is to live in a household where no one works, with over half (54%) of those in workless families being in relative poverty.<sup>16</sup> An initial action in the strategy, "increase access to and support for accredited learning", influences a key driver of child poverty reduction; increasing incomes from work and earnings. To further include additional actions and deliver on our national mission to tackle and reduce child poverty, a new action was developed; "connect community-based adult learning with careers and employability services to create positive pathways for learners who face significant barriers to accessing work". This will focus on a targeted approach to supporting priority families and delivering specific key programmes and services based on local needs.

Details of investment in the strategy are still to be worked through. To further address inequalities, the decision was taken that investment in Community Learning and Development will consider how the delivery of the Adult Learning Strategy can focus on maximising the impact of community learning and development interventions with parents and priority families.

The pandemic has impacted household incomes due to people being made redundant, put on furlough, or having their wages or hours reduced. This has caused unprecedented levels of hardship especially for those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.<sup>17</sup> Research suggests that households in the lowest fifth of incomes saw a more substantial decline in their pre-COVID earnings than other groups.<sup>18</sup> People who are self-employed and living in the most deprived areas of Scotland were more likely to report their income was

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<sup>16</sup> [Poverty in Scotland](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Scotland's Wellbeing: The Impact of COVID-19](#)

<sup>18</sup> [COVID-19 Survey](#)

lower.<sup>19</sup> Connecting community-based adult learning to employability services therefore also further addresses inequalities associated with living in vulnerable communities. A detailed action in the strategy to create stronger connections between community-based adult learning and employability services is *to increase CLD membership on Local Employability Partnerships*. This work will enable alignment between CLD and employability services based on local need and priorities. The addition of this new strategic action following the pandemic also reflects feedback from adult learners who told us that they hoped to improve their work life/employability through their current learning.

### Health and Wellbeing

28.1% of respondents report feeling lonely in the most deprived communities in comparison with 15.4% in the least deprived.<sup>20</sup> 46.9% of those living in most deprived areas reported lower average mental wellbeing, compared to 51.5% of those living in the least deprived areas.<sup>21</sup>

Evidence suggests participation in lifelong learning can have a range of positive impacts on learners. There are documented health and wellbeing benefits, with evidence showing that participation in non-accredited learning has greater impacts on individual wellbeing compared to participation in accredited learning.<sup>22</sup> Lifelong learning can also impact upon recovery from mental health difficulties, resilience in the face of challenging circumstances, and social integration.<sup>23</sup> A review of evidence found that particular health benefits of adult learning for people experiencing poverty are health literacy and numeracy, which increases knowledge of individuals own health and their health care rights<sup>24</sup>.

The Adult Learning Strategy has a particular focus on increasing community based adult learning opportunities. Community-based adult learning is delivered with and for adults in their communities. It is not usually determined through a curriculum. Instead *The Social Practice* model is widely used to respond to learners' goals and aspirations. Learning can involve specific health and well-being interventions based on the needs of learners, such as

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<sup>19</sup> [The Impact of COVID-19 on wellbeing in Scotland: work and finances, neighbourhood support, personal wellbeing, and behaviour changes \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Scottish household survey 2018: annual report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Scottish Health Survey 2019](#)

<sup>22</sup> [The Relationship between Adult Learning and Wellbeing: Evidence from the 1958 National Child Development Study](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Impacts of lifelong learning upon emotional resilience, psychological and mental health](#)

<sup>24</sup> [The Impact of Lifelong Learning on Poverty Reduction](#)

gaining a broad awareness of health inequalities and improving health and well-being. The strategy therefore has the potential to impact positively on people experiencing poverty by providing learning opportunities that improve wellbeing.

### Barriers to Learning

Research funded by the UK's Department for Education and conducted by the Learning and Work Institute explored the barriers that adults faced in their learning by conducting qualitative interviews with adults with demographic characteristics associated with lower participation, including people in receipt of benefits, people with low incomes, single parents, disabled people and people with health conditions<sup>25</sup>. Interviewees included those who had not participated in learning for at least three years in addition to those who were currently learning and had recent experience of learning. The financial costs associated with learning was a substantial barrier for adults on low incomes and emerged as an interrelated barrier with childcare, with respondents citing limited support with childcare costs and provision.<sup>26</sup> Respondents with higher levels of qualifications were less likely to mention dispositional barriers that related to their attitudes, perceptions and expectations such as low confidence and motivation.<sup>27</sup> Adults who mentioned dispositional barriers were more likely to be unemployed and experiencing combinations of disadvantage that reduce their chances of work.<sup>28</sup> Adults furthest from employment were also more likely to mention institutional barriers such as a lack of flexibility in provision and indifference from educational institutions.<sup>29</sup> Adults who mentioned situational barriers, such as time pressures, were less likely to be experiencing combinations of disadvantage that reduce their chances of work and have higher levels of qualification.<sup>30</sup> The most disadvantaged adult learners interviewed described the cumulative effect of multiple, interrelated and multi-layered barriers to learning including costs, self-belief, previous learning experiences and caring responsibilities.<sup>31</sup> The research also found that dispositional barriers for disadvantaged adult learners

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<sup>25</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

such as a lack of confidence had developed from institutional and situational barriers such as insufficient support from institutions and finances.<sup>32</sup> Research found that adults not engaging in learning seemed to experience the most complex barriers and that these barriers prolonged feelings of powerlessness.<sup>33</sup>

This research suggests that the strategy's wide ranging approach to remove barriers to learning and its intended approach to not focus solely on addressing specific types of barriers will have a positive impact on people experiencing disadvantage as their barriers are often interrelated and connected. The strategy's aim is to take a holistic approach to removing situational, dispositional and institutional barriers throughout its lifespan to enable the most disadvantaged adults to participate in learning. A high-level strategic action is "to collaborate with adult learners and equality groups to explore, define and remove barriers to learning". This will entail working with adult learners experiencing disadvantage to further explore how barriers within their communities and across the country can be removed. Recommendations will be incorporated into the strategy's dynamic action plan. This work will also entail consulting with those not engaging in learning to remove barriers to learning.

Respondents to the Learning and Work Institute's research, particularly those without recent experience of learning, stated that a barrier to learning was a lack of awareness of what learning opportunities were available to them.<sup>34</sup> The research also showed that advice was not always tailored to make it accessible to learners with different experiences, language abilities and cultures.<sup>35</sup>

An intended outcome of The Adult Learning Strategy is that adult learners are aware of the learning opportunities available and how to access them. It aims to achieve this through a strategic action; "increase public awareness of adult learning opportunities, guidance and support nationally and locally through joined up and accessible messaging."

Another intended outcome of the strategy is that adult learners have access to the appropriate level of information, advice guidance and support at each stage of their learning journey and that their experiences are recognised throughout their lives to support their progression. It aims to achieve these outcomes through the following strategic actions; "strengthen partnership arrangements which identify and meet the advice,

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<sup>32</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)



guidance and support needs of adult learners and evaluate the effectiveness of existing systems for Recognition of Prior Learning to ensure a coordinated national Recognised Prior Learning process that takes into account qualifications gained overseas and a diverse range of needs including language and additional learning needs.”

### Digital Learning

During the pandemic almost all learning moved online and digital acceleration is likely to continue. Online learning has created challenges, especially for more vulnerable adult learners. Evidence shows that households or individuals who are most likely to be digitally excluded are the same households who are also most likely to be identified as disadvantaged or excluded according to a range of other socioeconomic indicators, including living in the most deprived communities (SIMD20) .<sup>36</sup> The percentage of adults who do not use the internet was higher for those living in the 20% most deprived areas than for those in the 20% least deprived areas in Scotland.<sup>37</sup> Research shows that there is likely to be a greater reliance on digital technologies in the future that will shine a greater spotlight on digital exclusion.<sup>38</sup> Following the pandemic, a high level action was added to the strategic action plan to *increase availability of, access to, and support for, online learning options for adult learners with a detailed action increase access to digital devices and connectivity for adult learning* in order to help address inequalities and tackle digital exclusion.

### Family Learning

Feedback on the consultation draft of the strategy highlighted the role that the inclusion of family learning in the Adult Learning Strategy could take in reaching the most disadvantaged communities and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Family learning helps close the attainment gap by breaking inter-generational cycles of deprivation and low attainment.<sup>39</sup> It supports children to achieve high standards, reduces inequity and makes a large difference to the confidence and skills of parents.<sup>40</sup> To strengthen the strategy’s impact on inequalities of outcome and help impact on raising attainment and

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<sup>36</sup> [Digital Participation and Social Justice in Scotland](#)

<sup>37</sup> [scotlands-people-annual-report-2019.pdf](#)

<sup>38</sup> [NPF\\_Impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_December\\_2020.pdf](#) (nationalperformance.gov.scot)

<sup>39</sup> [Review of Family Learning](#)

<sup>40</sup> [Review of Family Learning](#)

	<p>closing the poverty-related attainment gap, a new strategic action was developed in this area ; <i>increase availability of, access to, and support for family learning.</i></p>
<p><b>Summary of assessment findings</b></p>	<p>Evidence showed that removing only situational and institutional barriers to learning will not enable those most experiencing disadvantage to engage in learning.<sup>41</sup> As barriers are often interrelated and cumulative,<sup>42</sup> policy interventions that focus on the removal of specific barriers are not yet detailed to allow for further work to be conducted into how systemic change can be brought about to how adult learners can access and progress through learning. These interventions will be informed by evidence gathered throughout the strategy’s development and further consultation with adult learners. A high-level strategic action is <i>to collaborate with adult learners and equality groups to explore, define and remove barriers to learning.</i> This will entail working with adult learners experiencing disadvantage to further explore how barriers within their communities and across the country can be removed. Recommendations will be incorporated into the strategy’s dynamic action plan. Further policy interventions that are identified throughout the lifespan of the strategy and the ongoing development of its action plan will play due regard to meeting the Fairer Scotland Duty and assessments will be conducted accordingly.</p> <p>The overall policy intention of the strategy aims to reduce inequalities of opportunity, with a particular focus on adult learners experiencing disadvantage. Changes and refinements have been made throughout the development of the strategy to reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage. To further improve the strategy’s impact on reducing poverty, an additional strategic action was developed to <i>connect community-based adult learning with careers and employability services.</i> The expected outcome of this is that adult learners from the six priority family types at highest risk of child poverty will have more opportunities to increase their incomes from work and earnings. Another expected outcome of this action, which was also created in response to feedback from adult learners, is that adult learners living in vulnerable communities access to, and support from, employability services will improve. A further improvement to working with families experiencing disadvantage was the addition of a strategic</p>

<sup>41</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups](#)

	<p>action to <i>increase availability of, access to, and support for family learning</i> following feedback on the consultation draft. The expected outcome of this is that increased family learning will help close the poverty-related attainment gap. The impact of the pandemic on learning and teaching methods led to an increased focus on digital learning. Our assessment is that this additional action will also help address inequalities by tackling digital exclusion by increasing access to digital devices and connectivity. To best maximise the impact of community learning and development on tackling child poverty, it was decided that investment decisions for the strategy will consider how its delivery can focus on interventions with parents and priority families.</p>
<b>Sign off</b>	<p><b>Name: Craig Robertson</b></p> <p><b>Job title: Interim Deputy Director, Advanced Learning &amp; Science</b></p>



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