

E Brief June 2020

1 Introduction

The last ebrief was written in the days immediately preceding lockdown. In the last hundred days, the world has changed: perhaps forever. It has taken time, but slowly and surely, WEA Scotland is beginning to find a new normal in maintaining continuity of learning and support for learners. This has taken a huge amount of effort by all staff tutors and volunteers across Scotland. I would like to thank everyone for their incredible efforts in these most challenging of times.

I would also like to pay tribute to our learners many who are adapting to new ways of learning through CANVAS, ZOOM or through social media outlets. It has been great to hear how they have coped with and managed these changes. It has also been wonderful to read about their success stories and we have tried to capture some of them later in this brief.

Finally, I would like to thank all the partners' stakeholders' funders and supporters of WEA Scotland. Many of our partners have been incredibly supportive in the plans to move from face to face to virtual learning. WEA Scotland are also very grateful to those partners who have continued to fund us in these challenging times and have renewed or extended their funding in the current climate. On a personal note, I am grateful for the contributions and support I have received from the WEA Scotland Board whose advice and guidance has: as ever, been invaluable.

At the moment, none of us knows how long lockdown will last what our new normal will look like or when we might get back to normal. Meantime I hope everyone reading this brief: and their family and friends remain healthy and I hope you enjoy reading about these WEA learner successes.

2 WEA Scotland Learner Stories

2.1 Highland ESOL

Despite what many people might have feared the transition from face to face to virtual, learning has had a number of real success stories. In the Highland Syrian Re-Settlement Project, we have seen excellent levels of engagement this month as learners become increasingly confident with using Zoom and studying online. Some learners with very low levels of literacy are now engaged in regular classes and are thoroughly enjoying their lessons.

There has been an increase in the number of requests for courses coming from learners this month and four new short-term courses have been developed to respond to learner need. These include Intermediate Literacies, Job Application Support, HGV Driving License Test Support and Business English. Our current model of online delivery has meant that we can respond quickly to these requests and learners have been delighted by the additional stimulation and utilizing their free time at home during lockdown. Tutors are also reporting that they now feel they are

“in the flow” of teaching online and that, the quality of sessions and learner experience is improving day by day.

The Education Coordinator for this programme: Angharad Murray made a report to COSLA recently talking about the transition the WEA has made from face to face to virtual learning. A number of people hearing this report seemed to be of the belief that online delivery was not possible/ would not work and reported great difficulty in getting learners engaged. In contrast, Angharad was able to share our approach and positive experience and was also able to pass on to colleagues tips and advice from ours tutors. While not claiming to have got everything right, it’s great to share and celebrate moments like this as it really emphasises how well the WEA has adapted and more importantly what this has meant for the people we serve.

2.2 ESOL in Glasgow

After a huge effort from project staff and the wider WEA Scotland team, the AMIF ESOL Project has moved online and is now performing at pre-lockdown levels. This large EU project, in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council, is designed to assist new Refugees in Glasgow with their fundamental English language skills, as well as building confidence and reducing isolation by bringing people together. The project also provides pathways to volunteering opportunities and college progression routes.

To give you an idea of the scale of the move online, we now have 5 x 40hour classes running at any one time. That equates to 10 sessions per week. We have around 50 enrolled students in these programmes and the frontline staff involved include 6 sessional tutors, a Lead Tutor, an Education Support Assistant and an Education Co-ordinator. All have taken part in training and are now utilising Zoom as a classroom and Canvas, our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE.)

Worth particular attention is our success with the move to online initial English language assessments for our learners. This process allows us to place refugee clients in the level of class which is right for them and also allows them to progress to the relevant college class after their 10 weeks with the WEA. Before lockdown, these were done in person on a fortnightly basis. It was generally acknowledged that an online process would be extremely difficult if not impossible, due to the language needs of our learners. However, Lead Tutor, Emma Williamson and the team devised a process which has enabled a transition to an assessment model using ‘cloud’ based resources for reading and writing and ‘Microsoft Forms’ and Zoom or telephone calls for speaking and listening skills.

The success of the project both pre-lockdown and since has already resulted in a one year extension to the projects funding until September 2021. We await the outcome of a further extension until September 2022 and should know the result in mid-July.

Our community ESOL project in Glasgow has had similar results in the move to online provision. Despite the challenges of contacting, enrolling and then getting people registered and utilising online systems, our sessional tutors have shown real fortitude in doing just that. We have 45 students enrolled in 5 ESOL programmes.

These range from the British Red Cross 'Chrysalis' project, for unaccompanied young asylum seekers and refugees, to Saheliya, an organisation working with BAME women who are surviving gender based violence. These classes provide a lifeline for some of the most vulnerable in our society. During this period of uncertainty and anxiety, our learners tell us that our classes have allowed them to feel less isolated and to hold on to some sense of normality.

To ensure that our tutors are supported in as many ways as possible, we recently launched an ESOL tutor peer support group in Glasgow. This is in addition to the support that tutors receive from their line managers and the WEA team. The peer support email group and Zoom calls commenced a few weeks ago and have had good participation and success. The last session included some tutors from other areas in Scotland and we hope that it will become a model of practice across the country.

2.3 PA [Personal Assistants] Network Scotland

Lockdown resulted in all planned events across Scotland in March-July being cancelled and currently there is little opportunity to reschedule face-to-face events to engage PAs and grow our reach. However, we have piloted the use of Zoom for our informal sessions and have 8 events scheduled across the next 4 weeks in Fife, East Dunbartonshire, Glasgow, Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire, Moray, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire.

In addition to the above ZOOM events, we have rolled out an online learning offer, which enables Personal Assistants to gain free accredited certificates in 6 key modules. This has been running for around 3 weeks and the uptake has been positive with around 70+ enrolments and 45 who have completed the training and received certification.

Support being given to PAs (and to a smaller extent employers and support organisations) via phone and email has seen a significant rise during the Covid-19 time as uncertainty around key worker status, access to PPE and many contractual issues have arisen. Activity on our social media pages has seen a slight increase as people are seeking information and advice around their own situations.

The WEA has also been involved in feeding into both the Guidance documentation issued by Scottish Government for Self Directed Support Options 1 & 2 during Covid-19 and the follow up FAQs document jointly issued by Scottish Government, COSLA and Social Work Scotland.

2.4 Reach Out Project

The Reach Out Project has been maintaining continuity of learning by slightly different means other than by CANVAS and ZOOM. Because of the experiential nature of some Reach Out programmes, they do lots of work in different settings. In previous briefs, we have shared Steve Murieson delivering art lessons via You Tube.

In the links below, Ross Weatherby is braving the elements to show his learners how to start a fire and how to build shelters when outdoors. If you open the attached links and go to the You Tube site, then you will also be able to see a number of other You Tube activity videos the Reach out Team have posted. The levels of engagement with these videos has been really high. For many Reach Out learners: who are incredibly vulnerable, this engagement via You Tube, together with the pastoral care Ross Kev and Steve provide makes a real difference to their wellbeing and mental health.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGT_TV3v1cA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-jDezC80nU>