

## **E Brief Text September 2020**

### **1 Introduction**

As schools, colleges and universities currently wrestle with the challenges of their students returning to classes, the WEA and WEA Scotland are making similar plans for their learners. Conversations are taking place with many of our partners and funders on how best to maintain continuity of learning and what that balance between face-to-face and virtual learning might look like.

To date the staff and tutors at WEA Scotland have demonstrated great adaptability and resilience in their support for learners. Partners and funders too have been very flexible in enabling learning to continue in different ways and methods from what they originally envisaged. I am personally grateful for the extraordinary efforts of everyone to support learners and learning. I am sure it has made a massive difference to many individuals and communities across Scotland and mitigated some of the adverse impacts of the pandemic that might otherwise have occurred. This ebrief highlights again the effort and successes of staff, tutors and partners to maintain services and make a difference to the lives of our learners.

### **2 WEA Scotland Tackling the Digital Poverty Gap**

A new £250,000 programme has been launched as part of an ongoing effort to digitally connect the most vulnerable members of our communities. This Digital Inclusion Fund will be used to facilitate the purchase of laptops tablets and other devices in order to promote digital inclusion and connectivity.

COVID 19 has highlighted the stark digital divide that exists in Scotland. For some months the WEA has been working with Scottish Government, Youthlink Scotland and LEAD Scotland to secure funds that would reach those who could benefit the most from support to access digital equipment and the internet. This Digital Inclusion Fund will hopefully be one-step towards closing the digital poverty gap.

#### **Richard Lochhead, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science said:**

“The Scottish Government is committed to doing everything we can to help bridge the digital divide”.

“I hope this £250,000 Digital Fund being created by YouthLink will go some way in helping hundreds of young adult learners have the means to digitally connect, feeling able to participate in online learning and access the services they need to support them to reach their ambitions.”

#### **Tim Frew, CEO YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work said:**

“All steps to mitigate the impact of coronavirus are very welcome. This fund will address the digital barriers faced by many young learners in the community and

promote digital inclusion. We are delighted to be working with CLD partners, Lead Scotland and WEA in getting this resource to where the need is greatest.”

**Ray McCowan, Director, WEA Scotland said:**

“WEA Scotland is delighted to be working with YouthLink Scotland, LEAD Scotland and Scottish Government to address the challenges of digital poverty. This fund will enable prospective learners to access the resources they need to participate in the many digital learning opportunities currently available, improve their engagement to the wider community and make a vast difference to many individuals and their families across Scotland.”

**Emma Whitelock, CEO Lead Scotland said:**

“COVID-19 brings the digital divide and associated digital poverty sharply into focus. This fund will provide accessible technology and support for many community-based disabled learners across Scotland to be able to connect, flourish and progress. We are delighted to be part of this partnership effort with YouthLink Scotland and WEA Scotland.”

### **3 WEA Scotland Learner Success Stories**

#### **3.1 Highland ESOL: Syrian Resettlement Programme**

The end of the summer holidays marked the launch of WEA’s new-levelled ESOL classes. This was previously not possible in Highland due to the geographical challenges of face-to-face provision. Through virtual learning, we can now provide lessons tailored to the appropriate level for learners, resulting in a better experience for learners and tutors all round. Early feedback has suggested that learners are enjoying the new format of ESOL classes and engagement has increased overall.

Towards the end of August, the WEA in Highland facilitated the first national ESOL CPD session for tutors that was accessible to tutors from other parts of Scotland. The session went well and we had some helpful feedback from attendees. Subsequent sessions have been planned and are almost at capacity only days after being announced.

The uptake for these sessions has been encouraging and there is clearly a real appetite for ongoing CPD opportunities for ESOL tutors. Future session will focus on enhancing the capacity and capability of tutors to deliver virtual learning including adapting resources for on line delivery improving learner’s digital skills and working with literacies learners.

The ESOL programme in Highland has also recruited a new tutor in the past month. What really came through during the interviews was the impressive range of skills and experience that our WEA tutors possess. Many had a real enthusiasm for teaching online and shared wonderfully creative ideas they had used for engaging learners via Zoom and Canvas. This represents a step change for the WEA and despite the short term challenges will be of lasting benefit in the future learning offer we will be able to provide.

### **3.2 Extension to Asylum Migration and Integration Fund**

The WEA in Glasgow are delighted to announce the extension of their innovative ESOL project to support refugee integration in Scotland for a further 27 months. The WEA team has had excellent success over the last two years in assisting over 300 refugees build their language skills, utilising our 'Survival English' programme, which includes an initial language assessment and progression routes to further learning opportunities. As part of the extension the project will welcome Queen Margaret University on-board as an academic research partner, allowing detailed and evidence based analysis to of the impacts and differences the project is making.

The continuation of this EU AMIF (Asylum & Migration Integration Fund) initiative is entirely due to the efforts of all the project partners'. Led by the Scottish Refugee Council, a number of partners including WEA Scotland provide language training and a range of support services to migrants and refugees. This enables these "New Scots" to integrate into local communities and build a new life in Scotland. The extension to this fund means that for at least the next two years, we will continue to have the ability to welcome and support many more New Scots.

### **3.3 Successful Integration of New Scots in North Ayrshire**

A number of Syrian and Afghan "New Scots" are also being successful in their integration to the North Ayrshire Community. Following language classes and one to one direct support from WEA Scotland, five learners have managed to secure part time work in local shops and restaurants. A number of other learners are also making college applications at present with WEA Scotland support to maximise the likelihood of them securing a place in the course of their choice. These steps into employment and to further study are a massive achievement for the "New Scots" and move them significantly closer to economic independence and active citizenship.

### **3.4 Personal Assistants Network**

Although August is traditionally a quiet month for the events and programmes in the Personal Assistants Network, this year there has been more activity than normal. Support to personal assistants has continued across the summer period via phone, email and online. There has also been a small but steady increase in the numbers of PAs accessing the online learning opportunities on offer. Over 118 personal assistants have enrolled on these on line programmes and of these, 98 have now gained accredited certification.

Zoom drop in events for personal assistants are planned throughout late August and September as a means of continuing to engage with personal assistants and to provide support at both a local and national level.

WEA Scotland continue to advocate for and represent the personal assistants workforce with a range of different partners and stakeholders including SDS the Scottish Personal Assistants Employers Network and with Scottish Government. Our

most recent work with Scottish Government is assisting them to gain feedback from PAs around the impact of Covid-19 on their roles. The aim is to find out what can be done better or different in the future that will improve the sector, help the personal assistants and of course, benefit the service users. WEA Scotland are currently issuing the Scottish Government survey across all its members and social media channels. The results of this survey will be reported in future e briefs.

### **3.5 Edinburgh ESOL Online**

WEA recently delivered four highly successful online ESOL courses for learners in Edinburgh. Using Zoom for virtual classroom delivery and Canvas Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) courses were delivered to meet the needs of learners in terms of their language skills for the Workplace and Employability and also Health and Wellbeing. These courses had originally been scheduled to be delivered on site at various workplaces across the capital but Covid—19 resulted in these having to be cancelled and delivered online.

Many of the learners came from the Hotel and Tourism sector, which has been so adversely affected by the recent pandemic. Management and HR teams at the hotels were delighted WEA were able to support their staff at this most difficult of times and very much appreciated our flexible approach and willingness to adapt to their needs and those of their staff, the vast majority of whom were on furlough. The learners thoroughly enjoyed the classes and the opportunity to connect with others in similar circumstances.

### **3.6 Moving Learning On Line for Trade Unions**

Covid 19 has also accounted for a shift in how WEA Scotland delivers learning to its trade union partners. A Moving Learning On Line course has recently been devised for two substantial cohorts of learners. One from the Educational Institute for Scotland [the teachers union] and the other for key STUC staff. Both courses were due to be delivered face to face but instead, were delivered on line and have been attended by delegates from across Scotland. As well as exploring ways to enhance their own practices, delegates are also supporting each other through on line technology. The feedback from both trade unions has been very positive and has already generated interest from other unions facing similar challenges.