

## E Brief Text October 2020

### 1 Introduction

Over the past four weeks, the much talked about “second wave” of COVID appears to have taken hold of both Scotland and England. It is now clear that the arrangements that the WEA put in place to manage the first wave will continue for much longer than any of us probably anticipated. If there is any positive to come from this, it is that, everyone at the WEA has much more knowledge skills and experience to deal with it. Staff tutors volunteers, members have proven incredibly adaptable and resilient, and we now have the capacity and capability to deliver our services differently.

With another six months of tiered or national lockdowns potentially ahead, this continuity of service will be more important than ever to our learners who clearly depend on us in these most challenging of times. Our partners and funders need our support too. They have invested scarce resources with the WEA to meet the needs of individuals and communities. We must continue to ensure they are content with our offer and that we are doing everything we can to meet their needs.

Finally, to all our staff and tutors, a big thank you. None of this would happen but for the efforts, you make every day on behalf of our learners. These efforts are perfectly reflected in the sections that follow.

### 2 WEA Scotland Learners/Project Updates

#### **Scottish Union Learning**

WEA continues to grow its partnership with Scottish Union Learning. In addition to a large number of course continuing to be delivered for unions in the central belt, a welcome emerging development through COVID has been the growth of on line workplace learning in the Highlands and Islands. This includes courses developed “cross union”. This involves delegates from several unions attending the same course. The challenges of geography that might otherwise exist have also been overcome through this on line mode of learning. Delegates have participated from across the Highlands and Islands including the Western Isles and Orkney.

The provision on offer to date is wide ranging and includes modules on Working from Home at Your Best, Managing Conflict at Work, Making Fairer Workplaces, Creative Wellbeing for Teachers, Employability Skills for Young Workers and Hidden Disabilities at Work.

#### **Reach Out Update**

Many learners on the Reach Out programme are among the most disadvantaged in Scotland. Some of the learners also have particularly challenging personal circumstances or health issues. Continuity of learning is vital to this group of learners

but their personal circumstances also mean that there are significantly more issues to address to enable them to participate.

Over the last few months of COVID, learners have attended virtual classes in environmental art and gardening and participated in a socially distanced walking group. The last course enabled several learners to achieve their John Muir Discovery Award. These episodes of learning have progressively increased the learner's confidence to a point where some are now ready to embrace learning via digital technology. The next few weeks will see the launch of an on line Reach Out Student Forum via ZOOM and a new beginners ICT course: "Getting to Know Your Digital Device". While these may appear to be relatively small steps, for this learner group it represents transformational change and a potentially life changing opportunity.

### **Kilmarnock Employability Skills Hub and Lloyds Banking Group**

For several years, the Falkirk Job Clubs have provided intensive one to one personal and employability support to individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage. In spite of the incredible challenges, many of the learners have successfully progressed into work or secured places at their local college.

The issues at the Falkirk Job Club are clearly not just confined to this region but regrettably exist across Scotland. As a result, it has always been an aim to scale up the Falkirk Job Club Model and establish similar programmes elsewhere in Scotland. The success of the Falkirk Job Club was the inspiration for a recent application to the Lloyds Banking Group to establish a Job Club in Kilmarnock. In the past few weeks, Lloyds Banking Group agreed to provide £10,000 to support this holistic service, which will support unemployed people in the region to build job seeking skills and apply for work

This model of provision for Kilmarnock was developed in partnership with a number of community stakeholders including the Community Action Plan Committee. The programme plans to reduce poverty increase local pride and develop the skills knowledge and confidence of the learner participants. The aim is to raise individual aspirations and education levels and at the same time build community resilience and capacity by encouraging participants to volunteer. For some learners this might be the first significant step towards or back to work.

### **North Ayrshire New Scots Employability Programme**

The New Scots Programme in North Ayrshire provides employability support to individuals and families from Syria and Afghanistan who are relatively new arrivals to the UK and are living in North Ayrshire. Despite the language and community, integration challenges these families face, learning has continued during lockdown through video calls and What's App. There has been some limited delivery of learning by ZOOM and weekly welfare checks conducted for all the individuals and families.

The partnership work in region has been very effective and continues to deliver excellent results. Of the 22 most recent participants on the programme, 8 learners have progressed to work and a further 10 have secured places at the local college. In terms of cultural development and wider community integration, a welcome sign has been the number of Syrian and Afghan women beginning to engage in learning. In this latest cohort 6 of the 22 learners were women. It is and will be a major priority for this programme to ensure equality of access to these learning opportunities.

### **ESOL and Employability in WEA Highland**

Despite the challenges of COVID a significant amount of activity is taking place in Highland ESOL, with 25 hours of ESOL/employability input each week. In addition to the formal activity for learners, there is wider engagement activity too. In recent weeks, there has been a Language Awareness training course delivered to volunteers to enable them to better assist tutors and learners in classes. CPD programmes have been held to upskill tutors. The WEA also hosted a meeting of third sector partners to facilitate more cohesive complementary working across the region. The team have also successfully secured digital devices for a number of their learners and are currently upskilling their learner's digital skills so they can optimise their access to the digital learning opportunities on offer.

All these different interventions are being reflected in positive impacts and differences for learners. Attendance levels on programmes is very high and a number of learners are making significant progress. Some learners are combining their study at the WEA with full time college study. Another learner has passed his driving test, while a few learners have achieved external awards and certificates.

### **ESOL Learning in the North East**

ESOL classes in the northeast are equally vibrant and successful. On line classes have learners attending from seven different locations across the region. This enriches the learning experience as learners talk about the different life experiences and exchange information about life in their local areas. Such an interaction would not be possible in a single location face-to-face class.

Attendance at all classes is very high with many learners now returning for additional ESOL input progressing from classes taken previously. Both continuing learners and those new to the WEA appear to be embracing the digital technology with some reporting that this is their new normal. A number of continuing learners have also achieved the SQA National 2 Literacy 2 award and are now progressing to further study with our CLD partners.

We are also in the process of developing some new partnerships that will enhance our practice and the experience for learners. North East Solidarity and Teaching [NEST] is a student led project at Newcastle University Students Union. NEST empowers the asylum seeking community and refugees through a variety of on line

ESOL classes. NEST have invited WEA learners to participate in these free on line learning classes. In turn, our local Friends of Amal Group have invited some of the NEST learners to join their women's only group meetings. It is hoped that this will encourage the sharing of practice and experiences, exchanges of culture and provide a network of mutual support