

E Brief Text February 2021

1 Introduction

In the past couple of months, our ebrief updates were replaced by reports from Education Scotland and CORRA, which featured WEA success stories from lockdown. Last month highlighted case study updates from the Education Team across Scotland on learner achievements in spite of the challenges of the pandemic.

Writing this article now at the beginning of March 2021, the signs are that at the very worst, we are at the beginning of the end. While we will continue to deliver by digital means alone for some time to come, we are now at least in a position where we can plan for the return of face-to-face learning.

The challenge going forward will be to capitalise and carry forward everything learned in lockdown. We cannot and must not go back to face to face learning as a standalone mode of delivery. We now have the capability to offer a more flexible learning proposition to partners and learners. This will enable the WEA to extend our reach to more people and in turn, provide more and better opportunities for people to improve their life chances through learning.

2 WEA Scotland Learners/Project Updates

2.1 Reach Out Project

The new Reach Out Winter term started on the first of February. The project engages with learners through its Face Book private page, called Reach Out – Out Reach, and its YouTube channel. This terms classes include the Students Forum, delivered via Zoom, the Walking Group, Gardening, Cooking on a Budget, via videos uploaded to the You Tube channel, Art, delivered via Zoom, Lockdown Journal, GTKYD (Get to know your device), delivered via You Tube videos and an IT 'help desk'. All learners also receive additional support through information advice and guidance sessions if required. The breadth of activity in Reach Out is matched only by the diversity of its learners. The current cohort of 36 students have ages ranging from the mid 20's to the early 80's

Despite the longevity of the project, Reach Out continues to innovate and enhance its offer to learners. This term it will pilot the Adult Achievement Awards and is increasing the volume of classes it offers via ZOOM. As many of its classes take place outdoors, the project also plans to offer the Forest Outdoor Learning Award in the near future in partnership with Newbattle Abbey College.

2.2 Book by WEA Colleague in the North East of Scotland

Outlined below is a photo of a recent book written by WEA Scotland Board member: Karen McArdle. Over 150 people attended the on line book launch and Ross Weatherby: the Reach Out Project lead, created a video for the event.

KAREN MCARDLE, SUE BRIGGS, KIRSTY FORRESTER,
ED GARRETT AND CATHERINE MCKAY

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY WORK

HOW TO GATHER EVIDENCE



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2.3 Employability Programme and PA Project in Ayrshire

The latest Employability Programme in Ayrshire concluded in early February with very positive results. Within two weeks of the course completing, 50% of the learners were successful in securing employment. This would be a successful outcome under any circumstances, but in the current climate, this represents an outstanding result.

In a similar vein, the PA Network Scotland Project also continues to grow from strength to strength. Since June 2020 over 220 personal assistants have successfully completed on line qualifications in health and social care. In the last week alone, a further 40 applications for the programme have been received and all the evidence suggests, this trend will continue. This growth in learning of personal assistants is vital to the care profession. It is a crucial element of the government's aspiration to deliver more care in the community, specifically in the case of personal assistants, to deliver this care in the service user's home.

2.4 Employability Case Study Highland and Falkirk Job Clubs

While the success stories from the Ayrshire Employability Programme showcases the success of the programme overall, the two case studies below from Highland and Falkirk provide excellent illustrations of the positive impacts and differences that learning makes to the individual learner. These case studies are unedited and told entirely by the learner.

[Amy Reeve Case Study](#)

[Joe's Story](#)

2.5 Methil History Group

A major feature and benefit of virtual learning during the pandemic has been its contribution to the prevention of social isolation. The Methil History Group have met throughout the pandemic via a telephone conference call discussing diverse topics such as mining, dancing, local connections to the slave trade, the Sailors Rest and Paxton Nursery. Learner feedback consistently reports that while the educational aspects have been interesting and beneficial the continuing social connection is far more important. In the voice of one learner, "without the group, I don't know what I would have done"

3 WEA Scotland ESOL Learner Successes

In almost every WEA in Scotland ESOL, provision makes a life changing contribution to individuals and local communities illustrated in the paragraphs below

3.1 ESOL Glasgow

Across January and February 2021, 60 learners completed courses at both level 2 and level 3 ESOL. This included the WEA's first pilot course in the delivery of SQA accredited National 2 Listening and Speaking Award with eight learners due to receive their SQA certificate. Again, learners describe best what this means for them:-

"In my view the course was worth millions and very useful. By the way I don't have to describe how much our teacher was amazing and my language improved"

In addition to providing general level ESOL, the Glasgow team also enable learners to progress to ESOL Preparing for Work that focuses on ESOL skills for employability. Employment and the opportunity to earn income is a vital first step to becoming an active citizen.

Through the Glasgow ESOL Strategy Fund, WEA colleagues in partnership with Saheliya are also making a positive contribution to black, minority ethnic, asylum seeker, refugee and migrant women and girls in Glasgow. These courses provide skills for everyday life. A similar partnership with Amina provides ESOL language and support to address the key issues and needs of Muslim Women. Finally, a partnership in Maryhill involving the Maryhill Housing Association and a number of referral partners is providing new learning opportunities for local residents and an excellent example of the WEA reaching out to and addressing local community need.

3.2 ESOL North East

ESOL provision in the northeast has grown significantly in the past few months. Despite the challenges of lockdown and no face-to-face delivery, the volume of learning and the number of learners will exceed last year's totals. Between January and March a further two new classes have been added due to the volume of demand. This brings the total number of classes each week to ten.

A further benefit of virtual learning is that the delivery of the classes is not constrained by geography. This means that learners have more choice about the classes they attend, are more likely to find a class perfectly suited to their level of learning. It also means that learners from across both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire can learn as a single group creating different learning dynamics and peer influences

3.3 Highland ESOL

In the past two months, the Highland ESOL Team have been working with their learners to complete their individual and group learning plan evaluations. Changes to the WEA's evaluation methodology means that we are gathering a higher volume and better quality of learner feedback. This means that the team have been able to be much more responsive to learner feedback, make in year changes to feedback received and as a result deliver an enhanced learning experience. The Team report that not only were learners enjoying learning on line and the new skills they had

acquired, but also they actually preferred it to face-to-face teaching. Learners commented that it gave them more flexibility, control and the ability to learn at their own pace. A selection of quotes from Highland learners is below-

"I prefer ZOOM and learning on CANVAS and my computer. I don't want to go back to the classroom"

"I like to study and I like CANVAS. I can study when my children are asleep"

"I enjoy learning English on line. I can use CANVAS to catch up when I miss classes"

4 Conclusion

These quotes helpfully bring this ebrief full circle to the introduction section. Lockdown has been hugely challenging, but also created new opportunities. The response of learners to on line learning has probably surprised many practitioners. It is clear that it is here to stay and must be here to stay. An unintended consequence most certainly but a welcome development opportunity for the WEA in Scotland

Ray McCowan

Director WEA Scotland