

Scotland e-brief

Part 1: By location

- Scotland national
 - Glasgow
 - o Digital exclusion in Glasgow
 - North Ayrshire
 - o Syrian Report
 - Aberdeen
 - o City ESOL Classes
 - Highlands
 - o Women in the Highlands
 - North East
 - o Learner feedback
-

Part 2: Communities of Practice

- ESOL
 - Employability
 - Health
-

Part 3: Spotlight – Learner residential experience

Scotland

Personal Assistants (PA) Network Scotland

We are being asked to take part in a steering group led by Scottish Government and Social Work Scotland. Our role will be to provide guidance and to support their response to the recent report into 'Self Directed Support' across Scotland, particularly around how this should be improved moving forward. This is great for the profile of WEA and our project.

The board will have its first meeting on the 10th August and probably monthly thereafter. This should improve things greatly for PAs as they have often previously felt that their concerns and views weren't listened to.

Our PA Learning offer is still proving popular with PAs and year to date (1st April - 21st July) 197 new certified qualifications have been registered. This has quietened down over the last couple of weeks but this is no surprise as it's the holiday period. I intend to give this another promotional push once the school holidays are over.

We also received a thank you letter from the Scottish Government Health Minister Kevin Stewart for our work to date on this project.

Employability programme

As many colleagues will be aware, the latest Skills Development Scotland figures show that the WEA has a 60% successful outcome rate for the past year and this will rise further - as we have submitted one more outcome since then and have two more to be claimed before

the end of July. This will mean the success rate of the Employability courses is much higher than in previous years.

However, we had an Employability course planned to start on the 22nd June, but it had to be postponed due to a low number of referrals, this will be rearranged to take place after the school holidays.

Elementary ESOL Online

We continue to deliver a broad range of ESOL in Edinburgh, through Scottish Government funding. Due to the current situation our courses are again being delivered online this year utilising Zoom and Canvas.

Our Elementary ESOL online course is one of four courses currently being delivered. Each course concentrates on improving the skills profile of the learners and helping them progress. The majority of learners have no relevant qualifications or if they do the qualifications are from their home countries. Improving their English and communication skills is key for them to progress.

This online Elementary ESOL course has been very well attended by a broad range of people from different nationalities – including Bengali, Turkish, Chinese, Syrian and Polish to name but a few.

Learners have been taught a number of tenses and given the opportunity to use these in conversations with other learners and their tutor. At the start of each session, the tutor asks the learners to ask each other what they did that week and what they plan to do in the week ahead. This has given the learners much needed 'talk time' to increase their confidence in communicating with others in a safe and non-judgemental space.

Homework has also been given regularly; worksheets and Wordwall activities, but also questions relating to the individual learner. Online learning has given the tutor greater scope to use a wider range of resources; Wordwall activities, live worksheets, YouTube videos along with the standard grammar resources and tutor developed worksheets.

Feedback on this course to date has been very positive. Learners are becoming more confident in imagining a brighter future where they can utilise skills and qualifications gained in their own countries. The Elementary learners have said they particularly like the tutor asking about their lives and their daily routines and the friendly and fun environment that has been created.

Glasgow

ESOL delivery in July

We have been able to open the following courses through the Glasgow Communities Fund in July:

- 1) Level 2 ESOL extension, which serves 12 students (4 new and 8 existing) over 6 weeks. The course totals 24 hours.

- 2) Saheliya Group 5, which serves 13 students over 8 weeks and 32 hours. (In addition, Saheliya Group 4 finished mid-July).
- 3) Level 3 Summer Intensive course serves 14 students (7 new and 7 existing) over 5 week and 30 hours
- 4) Non-teaching – 2 x online ILA testing training session for Glasgow tutors

Income Generation – Queens Cross Housing Association

- 1) QCHA Family Friendly ESOL Pilot – 15 new students mostly from the ESOL register. 6 weeks, 24 hours. QCHA have already asked to extend the course beyond the pilot.

Community graduate college referrals scheme

11 students were referred to City of Glasgow College

13 students were referred to Glasgow Clyde College

Learner feedback

Below is just a snapshot of the feedback we received from learners on our ESOL courses in Glasgow.

Level 2 ESOL (extended)

“The course builds my confidence and raises my awareness of speaking English.”

“Thanks WEA. The lesson arrangement was very interesting and useful, can widen your vision, and improve your English skill as well. Our teacher Barry explains very well. My rating is 10 out of 10. Very good courses.”

Level 3 ESOL (ended 1 July)

“I really like this course. It’s so different from my college course. It’s important for me to enjoy my English learning. I enjoy my course with the WEA and I really want to do another course with you”.

“I don’t love my English. I adore my English class!”- Mohammed 18/05/21

“I have never heard of this word ‘chillax’. This is what I do when I come back from work. I chillax. I love this new word. I will definitely use it again.”

Combatting the Digital Exclusion of Refugee ESOL Learners in Glasgow

During the course of the pandemic, many of our learners have faced considerable barriers to online learning due to lack of access to data and/or suitable devices. A number of successful applications have enabled us to extend an online lifeline to these members of our society. This includes:

- The ‘Glasgow Digital Inclusion Fund’ allowed us to provide 10 learners with devices and Mi-Fi
- Provisional award of 10 refurbished Smartphones with data through the ‘Community Calling’ project

- To date 5 learners have accessed the Lloyds Banking Group 'We Are Digital' project, providing tablets and data as well as digital support

The WEA AMIF (Asylum, Migration & Integration Fund) team in Glasgow has facilitated further innovation by re-purposing project funds to provide data to learners with no current access to the internet. To fully participate in Zoom classes and access Canvas a large amount of data is needed and weekly top ups are impractical, so when a learner with no/limited internet access is due to start a WEA ESOL course, we deliver a SIM with data to their home address.

For an Initial Language Assessment (a one off meeting to establish a learner's English language level before placing them in a suitable class) we provide a credit top up if required.

To ensure that we share our knowledge with the refugee support sector, we created reference guidance for partner organisations, such as the Scottish Refugee Council, of the processes and cost of the provision of data.

These actions have made a huge difference to our learners who would previously have been unable to access WEA ESOL classes and other essential online services.

North Ayrshire

North Ayrshire Syrian Report June 2021

This month we are pleased to report that we have been able to get back out and meeting with families again (whilst adhering to all safety procedures). This has been going really well with positive outcomes.

Number of clients registered:

26

20 registered to date that we are actively working with, **6** have been moved on to employment.

Referrals:

There have been **7** new referrals made this month all are now registered to receive employability support. These referrals have come from the task force group and DWP this has proven to be good link working with partners within the pipeline.

Employment:

To date there are **6** people working between 8/16 hours per week. These job roles are all restaurant and takeaway based. It should be noted that due to the restrictions with Covid, employability for this client groups choice of work was limited.

Good progress has been made however with local employers JD pierce contractors have accepted **5** CV's with guaranteed interviews. This company is very keen to continue working with us. Full training is provided, but the only barrier is that the applicants need to speak good English to understand the health and safety due to the nature of the work.

Student success: Howie's garage in Kilwinning has also accepted one of our learners, Hussein, for work experience as he is too old for an apprenticeship. Hussein will be working in the garage through our training programme 2 days per week at 14 hours and paid through

the national wage limit. This will be supported through the WEA budget for 3 months. Start date has not been given as yet.

Training:

As an update, the team has made good links with CEIS. The team has taken part in training with them to refer clients on directly to allow individuals to build a training portfolio online.

4 places have been secured for 4 of the men who have been keen to take part in the CSCS card training, they have all had an ITA (individual training account) made up to allow them to be registered on this course with costs covered. We are currently awaiting a start date for the training.

Student success:

- Hannan successfully completed her care at home training however she has now moved to London.
- Rouwayda has also successfully completed her care at home training modules however her poor commitment to timescales has now delayed her interview, as more commitment needs to be shown from her to move her on to the interview stages.

Partnership working:

We continue to work closely with CLD (Callum) to develop learner's language skills with one to one support currently being looked at to allow opportunity in the employment/training front.

Derrick and Firas continue to support with welfare visits/translation when we need them to and we have all built close working relationships to prevent any duplication of work.

Callum has set myself and Bernadette up with live access to NA system to enable myself, Bernadette and Derrick access to a live spreadsheet which will show levels of employment, ESOL, housing etc.

CEIS continue to facilitate training.

DWP have undergone various changes to job coaches and management however they still continue to work well in referring clients over.

New staff:

CLD have recruited new link workers which will have a great impact on supporting social inclusion and integration, no start date has been issued as yet.

Bernadette has been a great addition to the WEA as the admin assistant, she has very good community links and contacts within the community which have given easier links to accessing local businesses.

Bernadette has also completed her YETI training with NA to allow all registrations to be put directly onto the pipeline employability system.

Aberdeen

Aberdeen City ESOL Classes

Reach Out Project: CLD Report

The WEA has delivered three ESOL classes to residents of Aberdeen City for several years now. Pre-pandemic, the classes were delivered in Sunnybank Community Centre, however when lockdown occurred, the WEA were quick to train their tutors to deliver classes online in May 2020. These classes have continued to run following school term times, with approximately 10 learners in each class.

The WEA also introduced Canvas as a virtual learning environment; expanding the learner's experience of interacting with different digital tools via a new online platform.

The classes delivered this term will be ending soon but will be offered again in August. We expect that online learning will continue for the autumn term, but then a blended model of learning will follow.

The WEA Reach Out project works with people with substance misuse or mental health issues, and those going through the criminal justice system.

We haven't missed a term since the start of Covid and have continued to offer courses online, in an environment students were happy and comfortable with.

Over the last month we have had over 40 different students engaging with our blended offer of both outdoor and online activities, some taking part in more than one activity, giving us a total of over 80 enrolments.

The impact of offering a blended learning experience during these uncertain times has been invaluable to our students. Having an online private space where they can help and support each other, share interests and their learning experiences, has proven to be a great success.

Two students have also been able to engage with the Adult Achievement Awards, through Newbattle Abbey, and both have achieved a level 3 Certificate. We also have a residential booked for July where we will be taking 6 students away for 4 days to Newbattle Abbey. The focus will be the outdoors and raising awareness of the college itself, as we hope participants will engage with online accreditation through Newbattle in the near future.

Here are comments from some of our learners:

"I love meeting other learners from other countries."

"I can speak better with my doctor now and make appointments with GP, nurse and dentist."

"My English has improved and I can speak with my child's nursery teacher."

"Thanks to this class, we have the opportunity to learn real and everyday English. We improve our communication skills at the same time we get confidence and feel more integrated in the community. I applied for a promotion in my job, without Melodie's support I would never have felt confident to apply for it. We need these classes to support our learning process. It is a valuable asset for all of us."

Highlands

Women in the Highlands (WITH) continues to present online courses to meet the interests and needs of Highland women. Offering events and learning online via Zoom and the

Canvas has enabled women from remote rural and island communities to connect, share and learn from other women across the region.

Summer meetings and courses have included the third round of the Highland Women Writing group which has seen the majority of the women continue to attend since the first course was presented in summer 2020.

Learners on the course have told us that this depth of engagement has enabled them to learn from and support each other and many feel confident enough to consider writing more seriously, including offering their work to Highland publications, blogging and beyond.

During the summer we are presenting the following courses -

- **Mindfulness practice** - another round of this very beneficial course, supporting resilience and positive strategies. Learners have demonstrated a clear need for this as the basis from which they feel able to cope and maintain their well-being.
- **Slow stitch** is a short course where women bring found materials and learn some stitching techniques. Learners have previously benefitted from similar courses which provide space to focus on a specific, creative task and benefit from the restorative process it provides.
- **Journaling for wellbeing** - a popular course in other Scottish regions - this course has been presented to unpaid carers and is now available for Highland women. They create a visual journal which has been shown to improve well-being and reduce negative mood and anxiety.
- **Women's multicultural Yoga** is presented to women from the Syrian refugee communities in Highland. It stemmed from discussions with third sector partners about the issues around accessing health and fitness facilities faced by these women. The online course enables participation from the women's homes.

For August we have the following courses:

- Two workshop sessions to introduce the **Scottish voting/political system** – this is aimed at informing women and promoting their engagement with these important topics. From there women can then use their knowledge for positive influence.

Palestine - Highland women's meetings - A group of WITH Highland women continue to meet online with women from the Highland Refugee Advocacy Service and a women's group (ADWAR) in Palestine.

The three groups bring together women from very different backgrounds and experiences, however they all share the aims of supporting their knowledge and skills development. Women from all three groups have discovered more about their cultures, societies and individual lives.

Their discussions have brought to light the recognition that nurturing, supportive environments foster, for women, a sense of self-belief which is the basis for their growth and empowerment.

Poetry in Public Places project -

The Poetry in Public Places project stemmed from discussions at a weekly women's meeting where the members were all passionate about making a difference to their communities and improving the visual appearance of town centres. In light of this, the idea of poetry enriching public places such as museums, libraries and shopping centres was born.

In August, poems from learners will be displayed at a Community Gallery in the main shopping centre in Inverness.

Kirstin Gault, Eastgate's Digital and Marketing Executive, said: "We are delighted to be able to display thought-provoking poems that have been written by women from across the Highlands. Many of whom have never been given the opportunity to shine, so it's an honour to provide a public space where a spotlight can be put on their literary talent."

The poems, many of which have been written to make people stop, think and question will be admired by Eastgate's regular customers and we hope the Poetry in Public Places exhibition by WITH will open shoppers' eyes to the joy of poetry and will also inspire other women to put pen to paper".

Other venues using the poems are community centres and a highland museum. The poems will also be highlighted at two Highland Arts festivals in Nairn and Dingwall, including displays on empty buildings and shop-fronts and the women taking part in poetry readings.

Other projects taking place in the Highlands include:

- In Highlands, we received consistently positive feedback in our end of term evaluations. Our funder has now confirmed that we will continue to deliver the online portion of learning for learners who have preferred this method of learning and we are retaining 16 out of 20 learners attending classes. They have also requested that we increase our hours of delivery.
 - This term we have had a number of learners progress to the next level of ESOL class. This has all been done while learners have been studying online and learners some have commented that they feel they are able to focus more whilst studying online and therefore able to progress more quickly.
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North East

- Learner feedback – the tutors in the North East did an excellent job of gathering learner evaluations before the summer holidays and we had an impressive 62 learner evaluations come back. This was a different format of evaluations compared to what the tutors and learners were used to, so the result was great. Here is a breakdown of the feedback we received:
 - Learners rated us 4.66 out of 5 stars for enjoyment, 4.40 for improving their English and 4.16 for the online learning experience.
 - Learners told us that classes improved their confidence, were made personal and relevant to them and that they found their tutors helpful and engaging. Many learners commented on how much they enjoyed being able to learn from the comfort of their own homes, negating the need for childcare and helping them feel more comfortable.
 - In response to improvements we could make to the classes, the majority of responses said they either wished for more classes, or that they were longer. Other comments provided useful comments on other improvements such as, muting other learners to minimize background noise, doing extra checks for understanding and providing a class schedule to learners via means other than Canvas so that learners know what to expect in coming weeks.

- Learner feedback was overwhelmingly positive and strongly reflected the appreciation learners have for the skill and professionalism of the tutors working with WEA. Many comments focused on how tutors made them feel at ease and safe in the classroom environment, further enhancing their learning experience.
 - The WEA has been working closely with partners in local CLD to ensure that learners are able to progress in their learning to the next level of classes. Usual initial assessments usually performed by CLD were cancelled throughout lockdown and have only just begun again. WEA has been working hard to support those learners throughout this period to make sure they continue to be stimulated and engaged with their learning.
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Communities of Practice

The core themes for the ESOL COP meetings over the past year have been:

- Resource sharing and peer support
- Digital support using online platforms – Zoom and Canvas
- ESOL SQA qualifications
- WEA related discussions (tutor email addresses, intranet access etc.)
- Training and CPD needs

We recently asked tutors and Education Coordinators who attend the COP meetings to complete a survey regarding what topics for discussion they enjoy most at the COP and what they feel would be the most productive use for the meetings.

The majority of tutors stated that sharing teaching resources for online teaching was of the most interest to them. Others were also interested in any ongoing CPD opportunities, learning about Digital developments on Canvas and Zoom and some were also interested in SQA.

We have had steady levels of attendance at the COP meetings and varying the days and times of the meetings has allowed most tutors to attend at least one meeting. Tutors have been engaging well and are gradually becoming more confident with taking a lead in sharing with the group.

For our next meeting, we are going to divide tutors into breakout room based on the level of ESOL learners they teach to enable them to have more focused discussions surrounding delivery online, resources and pedagogy.

The Health, Wellbeing and Community Engagement COP

The Health, Wellbeing and Community Engagement COP met on 16th June.

In the meeting Keira McLean talked about her Visual Journaling for Wellbeing courses, sharing materials and experiences of delivery to a variety of groups.

After the session, we added her canvas materials to Commons for all in the WEA to share. The group discussed ways of getting different groups involved in journaling for wellbeing, including ESOL learners and men's groups.

Employability COP

The Employability COP has continued to meet approximately every two months. We have deliberately avoided having a meeting during the busy holiday months of July and August.

Over the last couple of meetings we have had presentations to the group from Craig Brown, Emma Williamson and Ross Murray regarding SVQs, Canvas and Ross's bite size SVQs. The presentations are always well received and plenty of questions are asked. We also discuss any relevant news or information particularly anything that might affect tutors.

Spotlight – Reach out residential

We asked one learner to share their experience exploring Newbattle Abbey, Dalkeith, which was part of their residential with us. Read about their experience below:

I felt grateful to be invited to go on the Residential course as the last year was extremely stressful for me. During the activities, I felt like I was being guided to the next steps upon my life and future career, as it reminded me of what I was interested in. At times, I felt challenged to try new things and socialize with the others. I found that this was good for me as I lost confidence in myself during the winter lockdown.

Upon arrival, we got a tour of the main building and was able to take photos which I enjoyed.

The accommodation was good, clean and tidy and what I would expect from 2** Bed and Breakfast. The Continental breakfast was more than enough for a morning's walk. I met Fran from Housekeeping along with the Security staff which made me feel reassured upon the campus. It was so nice to be in a beautiful place full of history.

The walk with Roddy from the Forestry Commission was really interesting and I learnt a lot about trees, the site of the crypt and the history of the Abbey itself. It was a lovely walk on a really nice day. We even got to practice some knots in the Forest School area.

The place has dandelion spores flying around as we entered the space and I thought that was magical place to learn. I found out that the film crew filmed Princess Switch in the buildings and on the grounds of the Abbey in 2020.

Going to see Newhailes, (a National Trust Property) was also good, the weather was warm and we had a tour of the 17th century Palladian mansion.

It felt a bit odd walking through the mansion, where they filmed parts of Outlander. I did feel the heavy dark energy of the curse that was put upon the family due to their contacts and influence in the 17th century. It is a shame that during the early 20th century the family found things difficult. The Tour guide mentioned that in the library (with no books as they sold them probably due to the alcoholism debts of David) people heard noises of horses galloping! I think a library with no books is awful.

I enjoyed the John Muir museum in Dunbar. I had briefly heard of him. Seeing his journal with his drawings and writing really healed my heart from the stress of lockdown due to Covid-19. I really like Botany and liked the film. The chair that made different noises made me laugh – it was a fun addition to a museum which to some people, can be quite overwhelming or “dry” due to the amount of information presented there.

It was fantastic that I won a John Muir thermal flask for taking a picture of the building where John Muir’s father had his shop. It added to the two books I had, one of which was bought by Reach Out staff, which was unexpected.

I really felt like myself whilst reading the John Muir books and felt really refreshed being around so much nature and history, plus being fed well by Kev, who organized and ordered the food for us all.

I really enjoyed seeing the parts of the buildings were the film crews were – I found this quite exciting and I could see why the locations were picked.

I am inspired to take the time to read the books I got about John Muir and the Frontier Scots that established communities in America and Canada in the 1800s. I would like to continue with the John Muir award as it is interesting. I also want to learn more about Botany, Writing, Drawing, outdoor crafts and Beekeeping. I think I would like to live as a Monk for a while!

I also have the confidence to learn more about my laptop and mobile phone whilst also learn to drive.

Thank you so very much to Ross and Kev for assisting me getting back to being healthy and well.

Ray McCowan

Director (WEA Scotland)