

Scotland E Brief September 2021

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ESOL provision in Scotland

We continue to deliver a broad range of ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) in Edinburgh through Scottish Government funding.

Due to the continuing impact of the pandemic, our courses have continued to be delivered online on Zoom and Canvas. The courses we have run this year include:

- Two employability courses (one aimed at learners looking for work, and the other at learners who are in work, but who want to improve their prospects)
- A Digital Skills course that focused on introducing ESOL learners to the IT skills required to be part of everyday life.

You can learn more about these courses below as well as the feedback we received, which was glowing.

Two learners actually secured jobs before the end of the courses, which was a fantastic outcome and testimony to the quality of the course and its learner-centred focus.

ESOL for Employability

Learners studied traditional employability skills such as; job hunting, CV writing, personal statements, and interviews and there was a particular emphasis on competency-based interviews and transferable skills.

The course also covered the current employability landscape in Scotland post-COVID lockdown, and what employers are looking for. Learners were taught how to navigate the wider issues surrounding employment such as P45/60s, tax codes, national living wage, union membership, national insurance (NI) contributions, types of contracts and so on.

The course also examined inter-cultural differences and how these may affect workplace interactions. Learners are now aware of equalities legislation and their employee rights.

The resources used were a mixture of job-seeking websites and work-related ESOL resources, such as those from the SQA and the British Council. Learners also had access to a range of material made available on Canvas.

Many learners commented on the fact that they learnt a lot of useful information about working in Scotland beyond just language. They also shared that they felt themselves becoming more confident in imagining a brighter future where they can utilise skills and qualifications gained in their own countries.

ESOL for Work and Employability

The majority of learners attending this class were underemployed i.e. working below their qualifications and capability. The aim of the course was to help learners develop in their current workplace and, for those that wanted a career change, to have the confidence to apply for jobs that match their skills.

This course had an additional focus on in-work skills, transferable skills, recognition of prior learning and employment, and dealing with challenges at work. The language component of the course focused on a work-based context, with a selection of authentic resources as well as those mentioned above.

ESOL for Digital Skills

The majority of this group were functioning well in their own language on a variety of digital platforms, but lacked the knowledge of how similar programmes and websites function in English.

Topics covered in the course include; email; Microsoft Word; PowerPoint; using YouTube (creating playlists, loading videos onto a personal channel etc); internet shopping (advantages and pitfalls, comparison websites); Facebook; selling online via Ebay and Amazon; and making a digital book for family and friends.

The class also looked at wider issues concerning the digital age such as; intergenerational internet use; the environmental impact of online shopping; avoiding scammers; and text speak.

The digital skills students noted that the course allowed them to explore areas in-which they had previously have very little or no knowledge. And, many realised they could take part in common online activities without language being a barrier.

Feedback from learners

We asked learners from the above courses to share their feedback with us and here is a small selection of the feedback we received:

“I enjoyed your teaching and learnt so much from your classes, not only English, but lots of useful platforms on finding jobs, joining events, online classes etc. I can feel your passion in caring for us who are new here. I really appreciate your kindness and commitment in teaching us [...] Thanks so much again!”

“I am very lucky to get a chance to attend a course of WEA employability. After the course, I learnt how to find a job, to prepare a CV, to attend an interview, and to fully understand the content of employment contracts.”

“My English has definitely improved in listening and speaking! I have more confidence in finding a job in the UK and I hope to get it soon. Thanks very much for teaching me.”

Working with the Scottish Government

As part of our role as a leading voice for adult education in the UK, we have continued to work with the Scottish Government. Most recently, we have helped to facilitate the Scottish Government Personal Assistants Bonus Helpline. This will ensure any learners feel fully supported on their learning journeys.

Since April 2021, the Personal Assistant (PA) network programme has drawn 233 people to online learning modules. We will be running further promotion campaigns and hope to see this number rise.

Reach out

The WEA Reach Out summer has just kicked off from 30th August. Our summer programme is a short four course where we provide the following activities:

- The walking group
- Trips to National Trust Scotland
- Environmental art
- Environmental clean ups
- Gardening

We also have our IAG (information, advice and guidance) service available throughout the term. This is where we offer an advocacy service for those who need the help.

Highlands

Syrian New Scots

We recently asked learners on the Highlands ESOL courses whether they would like to continue learning online with the WEA or in-person learning with another local provider,

Initially we retained 18 out of the 24 learners who were on the course, but in the past week we have seen three of the learners return to us. Learners who returned said that they had missed the “very good teaching” and “flexibility” that WEA’s online ESOL program allows them in their daily lives.

We are continuing to deliver eight hours of core ESOL content every week, including six hours of classes and two hours of conversation practice.

We are also providing digital skills classes as well as employability at beginner and intermediate level. This is in addition to one to one Employability support.

This increase in provision reflects the flexibility of the WEA’s current online model and the breadth of our tutor skills pool in accommodating learner need. Learners have been delighted by the increased provision and engagement has further increased.

Updates on Poetry in Public Places project

Last month, we shared that as part of our Poetry in Public Places project, poems from learners were displayed at a Community Gallery in the main shopping centre in Inverness.

Here are photographs of the Poetry in Public Places Project showcased at the Eastgate Shopping Centre in Inverness:



You can also see some press clippings by clicking here

<https://www.weascotland.org.uk/file/1346/download?token=h0Mrbas->

<https://www.weascotland.org.uk/file/1347/download?token=tmaSQReA>

North East

In the North East, our classes in Aberdeen city and Peterhead continue to be hugely popular with four of our six classes now at capacity.

We have seen an increase in learners who have studied with us previously, as well as new learners. Learners have told us that they love the flexibility of being able to fit the classes around their working lives and families.

As we emerge out of lockdown, the North East team is also working closely with local CLD (Community Learning & Development) providers to manage learners' needs. The team has been in discussions with local CLD about supporting lower level learners through Digital Skills classes to access online lessons more easily.

Financial first aid for challenging times

In partnership with Aberdeen City Council, the North East Scotland team delivered a series of online Financial First Aid workshops this summer.

These entry-level workshops were aimed at community groups and organisations who might be working with people in financial difficulties, as well as individuals looking to improve their financial first aid skills.

The workshops took a practical look at how we can deal with financial emergencies at the individual and community level. They aimed to help learners identify emergencies, act quickly to aid those in crisis and connect them to specialist services and support networks. Topics covered reflected the range of interlocking crises affecting people daily, such as benefits problems, redundancy, ill health, debt and eviction.

There are plans to run more workshops this autumn for those who missed out. Additionally, in response to feedback from participants we may be able to offer a longer, more in-depth Financial Citizenship course. This would be either later this year or early in 2022 – subject to interest.

Falkirk

Reach out comes to Falkirk!

Falkirk CLD have shifted focus within Falkirk Councils Strategic Plan with a more targeted approach prioritising disadvantaged communities in SIMD localities (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation).

WEA are continuing to provide support within Job Clubs, but are also offering additional provision in SIMD areas.

This will be based on the Aberdeen Reach Out model with the offer of learning that contributes to health and wellbeing.

After consultation with the community the activities that have been highlighted include; cooking, creative writing, photography, fishing fly-tying and walking. SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) bite-size units and AAA (Adult Achievement Awards) will be offered.

Also, WEA's experience with SQA and AAA is contributing to partnership initiative with Falkirk CLD and NHS Forth Valley. The Thrive to Keep Well programme is a 16 week course to improve skills, confidence and opportunities to move towards a positive destination.

WEA will work concurrently with learners offering SQA accreditation and or Adult Achievement Awards.

In the last month:

- A Falkirk learner has achieved an AAA award.
 - 3 learners have started working towards SQA accreditation
 - 2 job clubbers moved into employment
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Glasgow

We are delighted to share that we have been successful in our AMIF ([Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund](#)) bid. The WEA will work in partnership with Glasgow Life, Glasgow ESOL Forum and Glasgow Clyde College.

Learner spotlight: Morag

I decided to do a course in Communications and ICT because I wanted to get back into work after taking some time out following the birth of my last child.

Whilst I wanted to get back into work, I didn't really know where to start. I didn't want to go back to working in a pharmacy, which is where I worked before, but I also wasn't sure what I wanted to do.

I knew that whatever I might do that computer skills would come in handy and give me a better chance in finding a new job. So I joined the ICT level four course.

Working on a one to one basis on the course really helped me regain my confidence as did making new friends and picking up new skills.

I feel the courses also gave me some structure in my life. I knew they were improving my knowledge and helping me get back into work by working towards a qualification. This improved my mental health and happiness.

These courses also helped me back into work. I applied for a job in admin, despite not having experience in the field, I was offered the job as my interviewers said that they were impressed that I took the time to complete these courses to better my chances to get a job.

I felt confident starting my job, knowing I had learned so much during my time on WEA courses and I was able to put a lot of new skills into practice immediately.

These courses have also given me the confidence to start an Open University access course. This is something I would never have thought I could ever do. The courses have made me feel excited to keep learning and improving my knowledge, and improve life for myself and my children.

I also feel confident enough to help my daughter with some of her school work. Before doing the courses I used to tell her I knew nothing about computers, so couldn't help her if she was having trouble, which was a problem during lockdown. I now feel I can at least try without feeling nervous.

I would tell anyone considering doing a course to just do it – even if you feel it's beyond what you think you can do!

Everything is achievable as the WEA help you every step of the way, they are friendly, encouraging and very approachable. They are so helpful and they help you build your confidence. I'm so glad they are there to help people!

Ray McCowan (Director WEA Scotland)