

## Learning in the Workplace: Screenwriting for Postal Workers

### Introduction

In 2015, Education Scotland launched a survey to identify what has changed in adult literacies provision in the five years since the introduction of 'Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020: Strategic Guidance' (ALIS 2020). The survey was designed to capture progress, as well as establish priorities and identify challenges for the next five years.

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/ALIS-2020-Survey-Report2016.pdf>

An analysis of responses has shown that the picture for adult literacies provision is varied across Scotland. However, key strengths were identified, which were: increased focus on employability; improved quality of learning and teaching; and improved partnerships.

The case study below is a good example of Adult Literacies provision which embodies all of these strengths. This example shows adult learning in the workplace and the impact that it has on adults looking to re-engage in learning.

### Who does it involve and where does it happen?

This example shows learning in the workplace, developed in partnership between the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in Scotland, the Communication Workers Union and Scottish Union Learning (SUL) – which is part of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) that supports trade unions in accessing skills and lifelong learning opportunities for their members. This learning opportunity takes place at the Royal Mail's Glasgow mail centre for postal workers.

### Background Information

The WEA's Workplace Literacies Glasgow Project is funded by the Glasgow Integrated Grant Fund. It aims to promote, organise and deliver learning in the workplace and does this by engaging with a range of external stakeholders to build and develop relationships and to explore possible learning opportunities for workers in workplaces to improve on literacies skills.

This objective supports the strategic guidance for Adult Literacies in Scotland which states –

“the benefits of workers improving their literacies capabilities may include increases in productivity and efficiency, reductions in costs, improved staff loyalty and flexibility, lower wastage rates and reduced absenteeism. Employees who undertake literacies learning in the workplace gain confidence in their abilities so that they can sustain existing employment, apply for promotion, take up further learning opportunities/qualifications and participate in workplace activities.”

### Identifying need

The project engaged in discussions with union learning representatives and trade unions to consider the best learning opportunities for postal workers at the Glasgow mail centre. A variety of opportunities were tried and tested with limited success. These opportunities focused more on dedicated literacies activity such as - 'Understanding your Payslip' and 'Help with reading and writing' programmes - and while partners recognised that there was a real interest in learning, these activities were limited in their impact. Through discussion and dialogue at regular steering group meetings with Union Learning Representatives (ULRs), the suggestion to take a creative approach was made after realising that embedding literacy in a programme would appeal to more people and that sometimes the dedicated approach is not the right approach.

### How did the programme come into place?

Firstly, the partnership organised two taster sessions –on screen writing workshops. These were funded by the WEA. This received a great response and ULRs asked for further input. This led to ULRs approaching SUL – to fund a programme with the WEA's workplace literacies project contributing some embedded literacies support.

### Factors to consider if developing a similar piece of work

The proposal to run a screen writing course meant that the project would need to consider a tutor who was not a dedicated literacies tutor.

The tutor would need to have credibility and credentials related to screen writing. This consideration would need to apply to any creative discipline for potential learners to take the opportunity seriously. They would also need to understand the difference in delivering learning in a workplace setting as opposed to a more conventional learning setting.

Workplace learning programmes need to consider a range of factors including possible disruptions to the learning, background noise and work culture environment. As a result the tutor needs to make sure that things are kept inclusive and to be aware of how workplace dynamics may affect the learning environment. This is done by offering the learning programmes to all workers, at all levels within the workplace. By doing this, it helps to avoid negative associations with adult literacies learning. Conversely, it also helps ensure that literacies learners do not feel excluded from a course which they might have felt was too a high a level for them.

An appropriate and accessible room with the right equipment is not always available in workplace settings. This needs to be taken into account when considering the kinds of learning opportunities to be delivered in the workplace.

Supportive and proactive ULRs can help to generate interest in the course. ULRs are responsible for the marketing and organising of the course as well as trying to encourage workers to come to the course and to be positive about the opportunity.

Because of shift work times, there were two classes to accommodate workers in different shifts. Classes had to fit around these times and the tutor had to keep the classes working on the same programme whilst meeting separately.

### Embedding literacies through the role of the Project Coordinator

It was important to establish the role of the Workplace Literacies Project Coordinator within the class to determine in advance how literacies would be embedded within the context of the screenwriting programme.

The Project Coordinator and tutor would discuss the content of the course and would shape the course based on the knowledge of the learners in the workplace.

The Project Coordinator as a result was directly involved in the programme, contributing embedded literacy support using an informal approach that involved encouraging learners to write and keep creative ideas developing even when learners were unsure of their own literacy skills. The Project Coordinator would be on hand to offer guidance and advice in relation to this.

Using the context of the screenwriting programme, editing skills were necessary which also gave an opportunity for the Project Coordinator to review scripts with the learners to help them with their literacy skills.

The Project Coordinator would help learners to elaborate on their ideas in group discussions and by doing this, would build their communication skills.

As part of the course, learners would need to read out their scripts which the Project Coordinator would help with and support learners to do.



## Outputs

7 scripts were produced leading to the possibility of producing a film. This idea was then explored in tandem with the possibility of applying for an award to a local film network.

The learners' outputs can be seen in these clips which are the products of the screenwriting course.

Job Nae Chance (2016) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7Jke8WjLxE>

Family by Shirley Cheng - <https://youtu.be/ZW8tCIQv9yY>

Route 666 by Helen Mooney - <https://youtu.be/VV-JILFniI0>

Heaven & Hell by Stuart Ross - <https://youtu.be/0KiJUmvq7bc>

Darkness Rising by Scott Taylor - <https://youtu.be/7fQLXuif0QM>

We All Fall For It by Alan Summers - <https://youtu.be/ghnaRVI0qck>

## Impact on learners and the Improvement agenda

The National Improvement Framework (NIF) has key priorities around attainment – particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy, closing the attainment gap between most and least disadvantaged, improvement in health and wellbeing and improvement in employability skills.

While the NIF is focused on schools, this programme clearly shows impact that aligns to the themes within the Framework. The project has helped people with their communication skills and literacy skills because of the amount of writing and presenting that was involved in the course. Workers grew in confidence in their digital skills because of the need to use technology and equipment such as ipads. They learned how to use file transfer facilities and have set up a Facebook page for the group to share links and keep contact.

The subsequent filmmaking from the screenwriting part of the course gave people a chance to look at editing skills and editing software. People became more confident with computers. Celtex software was used to professionalise their work. Digital activity was the by-product of writing their script. Presentations were made on how to pitch your script or summarise your script.

Visibly, people did grow in confidence – by being included and by coming to take part and be part of a group. This built their confidence and group participation remained high throughout the course.

## Adult Achievement Award

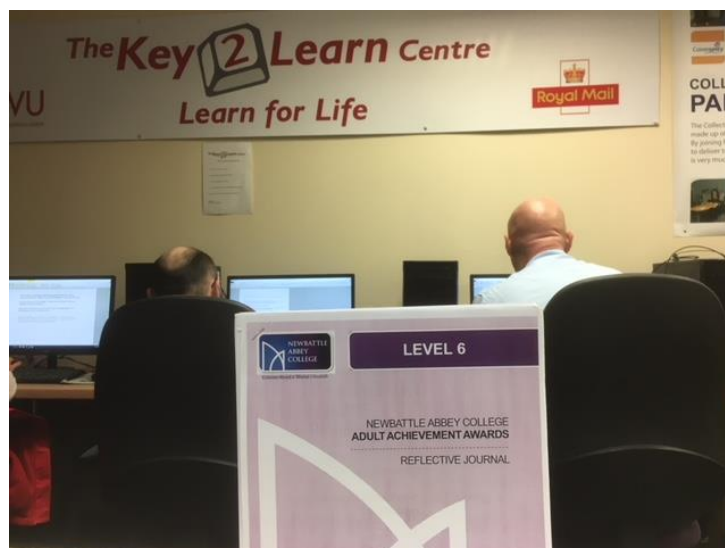
By January 2017, most of the participants had amassed over 60 hours of learning gathered through:

- screenwriting workshops;
- a 30 hour screenwriting programme; and
- a 30 hour Script to Screen film making course.

At the same time, Newbattle Abbey College were piloting stage 2 of the Adult Achievement Awards (AAA). When put to the group, 9 learners agreed to go forward for the Qualification at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 6. WEA's Workplace Literacies Project Co-coordinator delivered the award over 3 sessions in January and February, 2017. To achieve the qualification, individuals are required to reflect on all aspects of their learning, review and evaluate their own performance as well as that of the learning providers. They also had to demonstrate knowledge of learning theory and make a detailed plan for future learning.

All 9 students were successful in achieving the AAA at Level 6. They received their certificates from Graham Smith, head of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), at a ceremony for friends and family in September 2017.

The AAA was a very worthwhile venture for the group, instilling further belief and confidence with the learners and demonstrating to colleagues what can be achieved through learning in the workplace.



## Overcoming challenges

Practitioners and providers who are familiar with developing learning in the work place will be aware of the common challenges which include firstly, generating interest in learning opportunities and secondly securing and retaining participation. With an ambitious learning programme like this, keeping learners focused is a significant challenge, especially for the learning provider. It is particularly important to ensure that learners understand the goals of the programme and what they themselves will get from participating. Communication is also important and the provider needs to take a strong coordinating role. Also, when using a variety of tutors, it is vital that they also understand the broader aims of the programme, and work together as a team to achieve them

## What made it successful?

Key factors to the success of this learning programme include the recognition that workers were interested in learning and delivery partners were able to explore different approaches to engage people. On taking a creative approach, learners became fully engaged and were committed and enthusiastic about the learning they were involved in. A pro-active and committed approach from ULRs also ensured that the programme was effectively marketed.

## Quotes from learners

*"I am happy that I took the class. It was something different and was the first time I really felt belonging to a group."*

*"The course brought out skills I never knew I had."*

*"I was surprised by all of it - to see a project come together over a short period of time was pretty extraordinary."*

*"I never would have believed I could have been involved in something like this."*

*"I now want to learn more about filming and writing manuscripts."*

*"The screenwriting course was excellent and I would recommend it highly. There was a great group with everyone encouraging each other. I look forward to the opportunity to further my learning in the near future."*

*"I have developed new skills and have more confidence in my ability to learn."*

*"This course has given me the incentive to learn more."*

