

January to March 2007: Issue 13

What is the future for adult education?

Sheffield No. 2 Branch of the WEA organised a public event in Sheffield on 1 March, which celebrated the centenary year of WEA activity in the city while addressing current concerns about the future of adult and community education. It attracted a diverse audience from Sheffield and further afield to see panellists try to answer that question.

The panel on the night was made up of David Blunkett (MP for Sheffield and former Secretary of State for Education), Alan Tuckett (Director of NIACE) and Ann Walker (Regional Secretary of WEA Yorkshire and Humber Region - pictured below with David Blunkett).

The panellists each outlined their views on three main questions: what they think the position of adult education will be in five years, where they would like it to be – and the steps needed to bridge the gap between the two. Some of the key points agreed by the panel were:

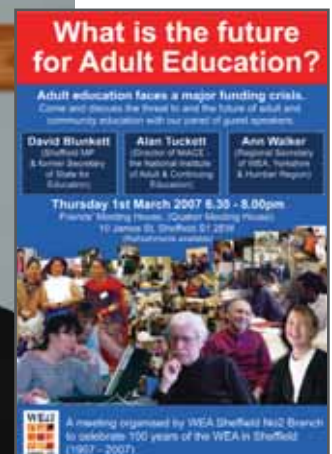
- Adult education is vital if regeneration and the revival of civil society are to be achieved.
- Parents need to be confident in their own level of education if they are to be able to help their children learn.
- Adult education for older people often has great value for their health, keeping them active socially, keeping their minds active and providing

them, in the words of one audience member, with “a reason to get up in the morning”. This is just one example of the way in which the benefits of adult education may not all be obvious or be related to any one government department, yet the costs usually all come from one place. As NIACE studies show, this makes it difficult to demonstrate the full public value of adult learning and to persuade people that the government should fund it.

- Current government policy risks an exclusive adult education system, where the rich will be able to pay for the courses they choose and the poorest able to get free courses that the government regards as in their interest – with those falling in between being “squeezed out” of adult education.
- Many policymakers do not sufficiently understand the differences between the courses provided by Further Education colleges and Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provision such as that provided by the WEA. More widely, adult education in general often gets “lost” behind schools in terms of government priorities.

Sheffield No. 2 Branch is planning another event later this year on the theme of creativity in adult education. This event will coincide with the WEA's Create07 festival of creative arts, taking place across the Yorkshire and Humber area in June.

Photograph: Gill Dean





Photograph: Slough Express

The latest group of learners of the WEA's Slough Learner project received their Trinity certificates from Slough MP Fiona Mactaggart at an event in December. The project helps learners progress from beginner level to level three of the Trinity English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tests, which are a requirement for British citizenship. Slough Borough Council also funds family learning classes run through the project.

Although the main objective of the ESOL courses is of course to learn English by speaking, listening, reading and writing, learners achieve much more according to outreach worker Sahira Tariq, who has been with the project since it started in 2002. "They get learning, enjoyment, friendship and happiness from the courses," says Sahira. "When the courses first started, we had to go to people's homes to persuade them to join a course, but now we are noticing new learners coming to us."

Dedicated tutors, many of them from careers other than education, often become friends and mentors of their students. Bernadette, who was a midwife, nurse and marketing manager before becoming a tutor, says, "Some of these women have never spoken to anyone outside their own group before, so having conversations with different people and learning about their foods, clothes, and cultures is fantastic for them." Another tutor, Grania Wright, who previously worked in computing, adds, "I love it, it has overwhelmed my whole life. It is very rewarding."

This year 150 women from 18 countries - including Bangladesh, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Albania and Lebanon - have attended classes in Chalvey, Manor Park, Britwell, Claycotts and other local centres.

ESOL entitlements under threat

The government is proposing to end the universal entitlement to free ESOL courses from August this year, a move which would primarily affect low-paid migrant workers who could not afford to pay for English lessons. This has led to concern from a wide range of people and organisations who believe that the decision does not lie in the country's best interests, and would be counter-productive given the government's wish for greater integration between communities.

The WEA is supporting a campaign on this issue co-ordinated by the University and College Union, which has also received backing from within

the Trade Union movement and from a range of education organisations. The campaign organised a lobby of Parliament, which took place on 28th February and was attended by over 1,000 people. It also asked concerned citizens to write to their MP using a model letter.

The lobby followed an Early Day Motion of MPs concerned about the future of ESOL provision, which has so far attracted the support of 163 MPs; it expresses concern over the "low paid and vulnerable migrant workers [who] will lose access to ESOL learning" and calls on the government to reinstate appropriate funding.

A week after the lobby, some concessions were announced by Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Further & Higher Education. These include people with an ongoing asylum claim becoming eligible for LSC funding after six months and a decision that the DfES will look at evidence other than Working Tax Credit to determine low income.

The Refugee Council website has a page on the concessions with relevant links at the following address:

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/news/2007/march/20070308.htm>

Techno Elders' art on show



A group of WEA learners from the Caribbean community known as the 'Techno Elders' displayed their works of art in an exhibition at The Drum in Aston, Birmingham, during February and March.

The group has studied together with the WEA since 1999, and participated in a joint project with the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter in 2005, in which group members produced art displays based on personal heirlooms. The works incorporate events, items and people important in the learners' lives - they worked with jeweller Rita Patel to create very personal and touching pieces.

The exhibition was opened by Anna Dolecka from the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, who spoke of the success of the project in tapping into the potential of a group of older learners and about the close relationships established between all those who had participated.

The works have previously been exhibited at the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter and by the BBC at the Mailbox (both in Birmingham).

Governance decisions

The latest cycle of WEA governance meetings was completed by the Trustees meeting on 28 February. Some of the key decisions and items discussed are listed below, while the text on the right briefly explains the three national governance committees.

Regional Chairs and Trustees heard that the WEA appears to be producing more course hours of educational provision in England than it is being paid to provide by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) under its annual contract. It was agreed to review the summer term programme with a view to not running uncommitted provision that would not be funded as this would jeopardise the Association's financial performance. The Regional Chairs and Association Committee meetings both also discussed the potential development of policy to establish a framework whereby some open-access courses may be run without LSC funding.

Trustees heard an update on recent progress with the Association Plan. It was suggested that the plan should include a clear focus on campaigning work and internal communication within the WEA, as well as building on the increased financial stability and improved quality now in place thanks to work in recent years.

The Association Committee received a presentation about the WEA Pensions Scheme and a range of possible actions, some combination of which will be needed to address its deficit. A decision on this will be taken by Trustees in July this year, following a period of consultation with staff groups and current and prospective scheme members.

Association Committee discussed WEA membership, an issue which has recently been consulted on with branches, and on which a motion will be proposed to Conference in October this year. More in the next WEA News.

Trustees welcomed recent progress on employer engagement and trade union work over the last eighteen months, which had involved increasing the number of courses run and the WEA's reputation with individual unions and with the TUC.

The Association Committee nominated Ruth Tanner, from Durham Branch in North East Region, to continue to serve as a Trustee at the end of her current term of office. This was accepted by Trustees at their meeting, so Ruth serves as a WEA Trustee for a further four years.

For further details on any of these items or meeting minutes please contact news@wea.org.uk

Trustees

The WEA's twelve Trustees are accountable for key national policy decisions and strategy. The Trustees currently consist of four Officers elected at Conference, four externally co-opted Trustees, and four others elected by the Association Committee from amongst its members. Each meeting includes a report on any important decisions taken since the Trustees last met and feedback from the Association Committee on items discussed at their meeting.

Association Committee

The Association Committee (AC) is accountable for the implementation and effective operation of WEA policy at national level. It also advises Trustees on their decisions, and a number of sub-committees exist that report to the AC on specific aspects of policy. In addition to the four Officers elected at Conference, there is one AC representative from each English region and two from WEA Scotland. In addition, Rosemary Mayes, London Regional Director of the Open University, is currently co-opted to the Committee.

Regional Chairs

This group is advisory and consultative in nature and has no decision-making powers. Its meeting comes first in each governance cycle to enable the views of Chairs, who are elected by members in each region, to be taken into account by the AC and Trustees when making decisions.

Skills learnt on WEA London Region courses have helped learner Martin Valente win the 'Union Representative of the Year' award from London Transport Region of the RMT. Martin has already completed four WEA courses - TUC stages one and two of both Union Representatives and Health and Safety. He is currently attending a WEA/TUC Occupational Health course and hopes to move on to Employment Law next term.



Martin's award came as a result of his success in recruiting union members at his workplace, rail contractors Grant Rail, to the RMT and gaining official recognition from

the employer. Union recognition is often beneficial for companies as well as workers: it can act as a focus for communication and consultation and help build a good working relationship between management and the workforce.

Martin, who is pictured (centre) with RMT General Secretary Bob Crow and RMT regional organiser Bobby Law, began by recruiting over 50 Grant Rail staff to the RMT in London, before moving on to add a further 250 Grant Rail workers from elsewhere in the country. With so many of the company's staff on-board, Martin started to try to gain formal recognition of the RMT from the company. This was a struggle - involving a period of industrial action with a 100% turn-out of London staff. Martin feels that the breakthrough came when the union called off a second strike because the company would have lost out financially through a contract overrun. "This made Grant Rail realise we weren't as militant as perhaps they'd thought," he says. "Within days, the talks that led to our gaining recognition were underway."

There is now a good working relationship between the RMT and management at Grant Rail, and Martin believes this is enhanced by RMT's direct knowledge of the industry. The fight for official recognition was difficult at times, but the things Martin had learned on WEA courses stood him in good stead. As he says, "the courses pointed me in the right direction and showed how to run meetings and organise members - it's been great to be able to bring what I've learnt into real life. I'm very grateful for the award and proud of what we've achieved - especially as it's been with the RMT."

RMT Regional Secretary Olly New said, "Martin is a star. He was selected out of 330 reps in recognition of his exceptional work recruiting and organising members. He led the recruitment of the overwhelming majority of the workforce and as a result we have achieved union recognition with this company. It is only the 3rd year we have made such an award and there was a strong field - but Martin stood out."

Education Strands

WEA provision is now classified into three 'Education Strands', intended to help those organising WEA courses consider potential students and develop courses and programmes around their needs and interests.

All courses will be classified into one of three strands: Second Chance to Learn, Community Involvement or Cultural Studies - depending on what students will get out of the course and how the WEA can help them achieve this. The strands will be applied to courses irrespective of their subject content (which will still be grouped into Curriculum Management Areas).

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document about the change has been compiled, along with advice to on how to identify where provision might fit. FirstClass users can find these in the Association Plan section of the internal strategy area of the education zone - alternatively readers can request a copy by emailing news@wea.org.uk



Annual Review

The WEA's Annual Review for 2005/06, and the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements, are both now available on the publications section of the WEA website at www.wea.org.uk. Hard copies of both will soon have been sent to all Branches.



A week in the life of a tutor organiser

By Moira Hyde

SPEAKERS'
CORNER

As a Tutor Organiser overseeing an astonishing mix of challenging, innovative courses for adults in East Kent, I am increasingly angered by the threats, real or imagined, to continuation of government funding for adult learning.

The current programme in East Kent includes courses that explore the meanings behind religious texts; examine our archaeological heritage or local geological features; study Kent's maritime history; consider the relationship between art and social movements; examine literature and its relationship to social change or movements in twentieth century music - as well as a range of courses to help parents understand children and teenagers, the primary school system and to assist parents in addressing their own learning needs.

To give an idea of the scope and range of WEA courses in just one part of the country, here is a snapshot of courses and meetings I visited in early November last year.

More than a Name (Petham)

Learners researched the names on 6 village war memorials and created an exhibition of stories and images, paying tribute to those people's lives. For this course, written by WEA tutor Sue Owen, learners developed their research skills and learned to use a publishing programme to create professional exhibition material. The exhibition was attended by 140 villagers during the Remembrance weekend. The exhibition took place as a result of tireless fundraising efforts by the branch secretary.



The Art of Sketching and Drawing (Wingham)

Complete beginners have made enormous strides here under the careful tutelage of Maggie Roberts. Following the art class, learners from the Wingham area attended the branch AGM and planned their programme for the next year.

Whitstable in Early Cine Film

A course led by local historian and WEA tutor Tony Blake, in which learners were given an introduction to the making of cine films and then, with the knowledge they had gained, went out and made two documentary films of two parts of Whitstable valued by local people: the harbour and the old pubs. They have decided to use these in a campaign to save these areas from development.



Helping in Schools

An accredited course in which parents learn about their children's experience of primary school. This term there is government funding for only two Helping in Schools courses in the whole of Kent, despite demand from parents and schools and government assurance that funding is being directed towards parenting courses. The photograph shows parents in Hythe learning from WEA tutor and former school teacher Suzanne Beale.

In addition, I attended a meeting of volunteers from across Kent, who, for up to 50 years, have worked to create programmes of courses that suit their particular communities and involve them in creative, active learning. Nobody who looked closely at these courses would be in any doubt that learning takes place. Other benefits to our communities are in health, community involvement, children's well being, social cohesion, understanding our heritage and our place in society. How can we consider placing these activities beyond the financial means of the people who benefit in so many different ways?

Hereford Branch

Len Moss, Secretary of WEA Hereford Branch, has written in to correct the suggestion in John Hurst's article in the last WEA News that Gloucester is the only one of the 'Three Choirs' cities with a WEA branch.

Len confirms that there is indeed an active branch in Hereford, which organised five courses in the Autumn term and three in the Spring term. Hereford Branch has also been instrumental in helping set up a new branch in nearby Ledbury, building on courses previously organised there through Hereford branch.

North East office

The main regional office has left Gateshead and moved to the new address below. Phone and fax numbers have also changed.

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Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 1QQ

Telephone: 0191 212 6100
Fax: 0191 212 6101
Email: northeast@wea.org.uk

Branch banking clarification

Some branches may have received notification from Natwest of charges to be debited from their account. Finance Director Linda Acquaye has confirmed that this is an oversight on the bank's part, and that branch accounts should not in fact be directly debited.

Instead, charges will be offset against the interest received centrally, and the net sum distributed once a year on 30th June. Any branch with queries on this should contact their regional Finance Manager.

Fairtrade conference

WEA North East region held a conference entitled 'Exploring Fairtrade: More than buying chocolate?' during national Fairtrade fortnight in early March.

Regional Director Nigel Todd says, "We were delighted to display the variety of ways in which people and organisations in the North East are supporting Fairtrade and directly contributing to combatting poverty in the developing world." The event was held in partnership with the Newcastle Fairtrade Partnership and the Co-operative Group in the North East and Cumbria.



Monitoring visit report

The WEA received a mostly positive report from the government's Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) on 18 January after a Quality Monitoring visit, arranged following the 2005 re-inspection.

Unlike inspection and re-inspection reports, ALI only send Monitoring visit reports to the organisation visited and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). They are not public documents. The overall assessment made by the inspectors was as follows:

Good progress was reported on the following areas:

- Information, advice and guidance
- Development of leadership and management
- Partnership working and widening participation

Satisfactory progress was reported on the following areas:

- Support for tutors and curriculum areas
- Strategic curriculum planning
- Contribution of volunteers
- Self-assessment and development planning

Some progress was reported on the following area:

- Achievement and standards

This outcome was broadly in line with the WEA's own Improvement Plan and the Association is already working on areas for further improvement, especially around Success Rates and improving self-assessment.

The Inspectorate (now merged with Ofsted) will undertake similar monitoring visits each year and we can anticipate the next full inspection in about two years' time.

Concessionary fees update

The WEA has confirmed that discretionary concessions on fees for retired learners, regardless of their income level, which had previously been available in some regions can no longer be offered.

This is because, as a provider receiving Further Education funding from the Learning and

Skills Council, the WEA must comply with the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations that came into force in October 2006.

All WEA courses remain free to anyone who receives means-tested benefits, regardless of age, and certain courses are also free to anyone with low household income (currently below £15,050 per year).

'Reach Out' picks up success

Good news from WEA Scotland's Reach Out project, which has received a glowing evaluation from Learning Connections, a government agency which supports community learning and development policy and practice in Scotland.

Reach Out students have been using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) creatively to look at everyday problems in new ways while at the same time improving their computer and literacy skills. The group produced a comic-strip style Survival Manual, centred on a fictional family whose members face a



A model of really good community based practice, reacting to the needs and ideas of the learners and working with them.

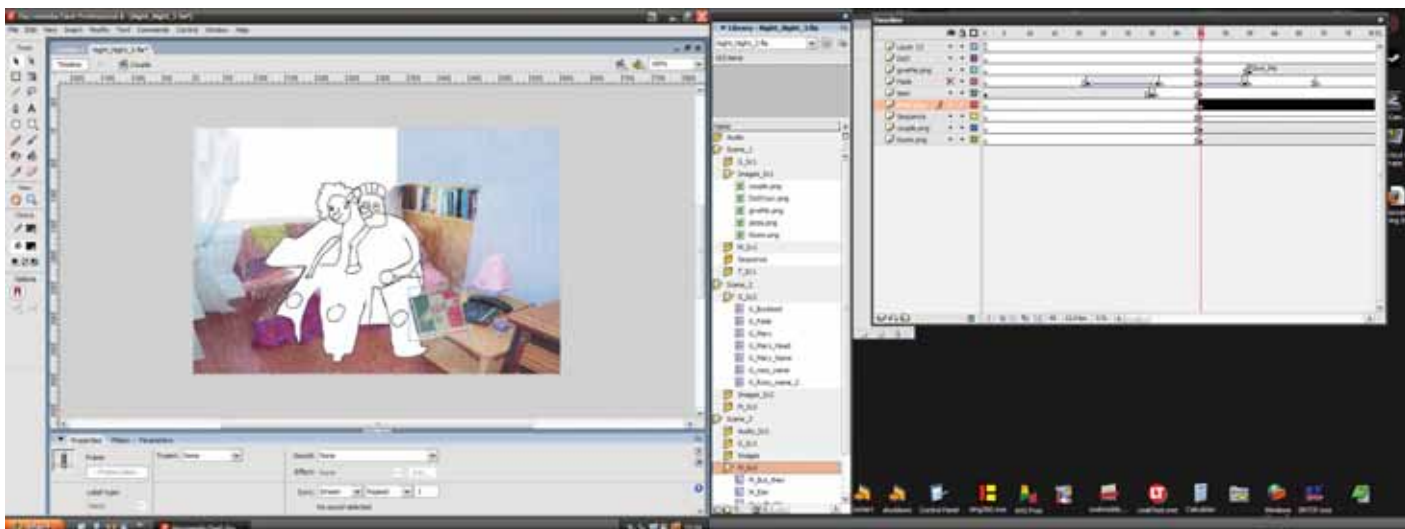
I wish more literacy projects worked like this.



Pru Pullen, Learning Connections, Communities Scotland

wide range of problems. The Survival Manual describes how these problems are tackled by the members of the family using the support agencies available to people in the Aberdeen area - with a happy ending to each. It will be made available for use by WEA students and others in the area, and will be distributed to educators from around Scotland as an example of innovative work at a Learning Connections seminar in June. The students are also working on an animation to accompany the manual, using their own illustrations, photographs and scripts - the photos below show this work in progress on a computer.

This aspect of the work of Reach Out was funded by a grant from Learning Connections' Innovations in ICT and Literacies Fund, hence the evaluation visit in late February. Evaluator Pru Pullen spoke to students and tutors, and mapped out the process Reach Out had taken to achieve its outcomes. She described the work as "a good example of ICT seamlessly integrated into the project - I see a move from the 'add-on' use of IT to this kind of project based work, where the two are inseparable. Excellent!"



Voluntary Endeavour Awards

The deadline for nominations for Nationwide Awards for Voluntary Endeavour is 30th April. There are awards specifically for adults in both individual and group categories, in each of ten UK regions.

The WEA has been sent some nomination forms for anyone interested in making a nomination (please email news@wea.org.uk to request one), or details are available on the awards website:

http://www.nationwide.co.uk/about_nationwide/community_and_environmental_affairs/nationwide_awards_for_voluntary_endeavour/awards.htm

Quick Reads

Literacy and ESOL tutors may be interested in the second range of Quick Reads, published on 1 March to mark World Book Day, and the free promotional materials, lesson plans and learning materials available from the Quick Reads website at:

www.quickreads.org.uk

Count Me In

Readers may be interested in the 'Count Me In' calendar, the world's leading not-for-profit events listing.

The UK section of the site includes a section on education and learning, as well as all religious and other festivals.

<http://www.countmeincalendar.info>

Adult Learners' Week



Adult Learners' Week will be taking place from 19-25 May. Although it is too late to put in any further nominations for the Adult Learners' Week Awards, there are still plenty of ways in which branches or

course organisers could get involved. For suggestions - including organising taster sessions, staff training days, or cultural diversity events - and for details of free promotional material available, visit the official NIACE Adult Learners' Week website at:

<http://www.niace.org.uk/alw/2007/providers/gettinginvolved.htm>



Arrivals, departures and exchanges

Outstanding Service Award

WEA Scotland has given an Outstanding Service Award to **Ann Walden**, who can trace her WEA involvement back to a meeting in Leicester in 1937.

The award was given to Ann in recognition of the diverse and valuable contribution she has made as a Branch Officer and as a West of Scotland District Committee member, roles to which she always brought an enquiring and challenging mind.

Today, Ann is a pillar of the Clydebank Branch, where she is Treasurer and known for picking up members who need a lift to ensure they don't miss a meeting. As a member of the West of Scotland Local Association Steering Group, she is making a valuable contribution to WEA Scotland's planning for the future.

Eastern Region

Gordon Vowles was thanked at November's Regional Committee meeting for all his contributions to governance during 50 years of involvement with the WEA. He was first involved as a part-time tutor, and has since given 40 years service as a member of Eastern District/Regional Council and spent 25 years on the District/Regional Committee. Gordon is still the Eastern Regional representative on the Association Committee and a WEA Trustee.

Congratulations also to **John Rolfe**, Secretary of WEA Hemingfords Branch and Cambridgeshire Federation Representative on the Regional Committee, who has received two medals from the Royal Aeronautic Society in recognition of his contribution to the use of human factors in the development of flight simulation and aeronautical engineering.

Phil Coward joined the region as Regional Education Manager on 1 February. Phil had been working at Corporate Services as Co-ordinator for Initial Teacher Training and CPD, and will continue to work on Initial Teacher Training for one day per week.

Congratulations to field staff member **Jane Babbage** on her achievement of an NVQ4 in Information, Advice and Guidance.

London Region

Martin Sundram was elected Regional Chair at London Region's AGM. He replaces **Moira Eagle**.

Two tutors left the region in early 2007: Consolidated Tutor **Momina Kahttak** and Family Learning Tutor **Jasmine Dawson**.

Southern Region

Gillian Colling, Surestart Southampton Community Worker, left on 9 February.

South West Region

Ewa Mahey started on 1 February as a half-time Liaison Worker. Ewa will help develop, implement and extend flexible English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes for migrant workers in and around Yeovil, Somerset.

West Midlands Region

Hilary O'Connell has joined the team at Coventry as a part-time Development Worker. Hilary has a teaching background and has most recently been working at Hillfields Children's Centre in the Training Team, teaching, assessing and internally verifying the work of NVQ students and teaching OCN courses to adult centre users. She has worked for the WEA before, as a tutor in Bedworth, Nuneaton and Rugby.

Becky Samara has joined the West Midlands WEAMIS Team as a part-time Administrator. She previously worked for the Arts Council and also runs a vegetarian catering company. Becky will work for the WEA on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings.

Janet Henson has joined the team in Stoke-on-Trent as Project Outreach Worker on the Community Gym Project 'Exercise in the Community'. Janet is a trained keep-fit and Pilates tutor, and has worked as a swimming teacher and aqua-fit instructor.

Iram Naz has joined the region as a researcher. Half of her time will be spent carrying out research as part of the DCLG Connecting Communities Project in Dudley (also known as Tandrusti). This will include gathering learner stories and helping the development of funding bids and marketing activity. Iram previously worked for Birmingham LEA as an educational researcher.

Yorkshire and Humber Region

Nicky Reed, previously a WEA Organiser in Sheffield, was promoted to the Regional Education Manager post for West Yorkshire at the start of this year. Nicky will take lead role on learner support and information, advice and guidance in the region.

Corporate Services

Congratulations to Marketing Manager **Maria Flemmer** and IT Operations Manager **Russell Flemmer** on the arrival of their daughter Sara.

Welcome to **Sadia Bowering**, who has joined as PA to the Director of Finance.

A mirror on **Angela Clark's** desk reflected the Spring sunshine streaming through the window on to back of her computer screen in early March. After it had burned three holes in the plastic, resembling bullet fire, smoke began spiralling towards the ceiling. Quick action by Finance staff averted a potential disaster. Angela reports, "It was most fortunate that this happened on a weekday. The damaged screen has been retained as a reminder and the mirror consigned to a drawer."

About WEA News

WEA News is produced for WEA staff, tutors and voluntary members. Many thanks to all who contributed to this edition, including: **Nicky Reed, June Diegan, Inge Riley-Cuperus, Monica Gort, Peter Templeton, Nigel Todd, Joyce Connan, Simone Sinclair and Angela Clark.**

If you have an item for inclusion or would like to comment on the newsletter please let us know. It is not always possible to include all items submitted but every effort will be made to do so.

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