

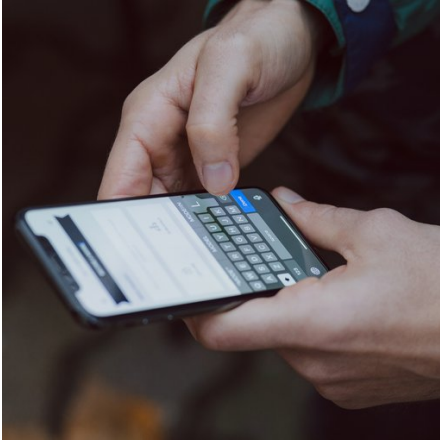
CareerTech Challenge: Citizen Literacy App

www.nesta.org.uk/project-updates/careertech-challenge-citizen-literacy-app/

City of Glasgow College

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CareerTech Challenge is an ambitious innovation programme led by Nesta and Nesta Challenges in partnership with the Department for Education. The programme focuses on stimulating new solutions for precarious workers, such as workers in low paid, insecure work, susceptible to change, to upskill and retrain online, or access accurate data-driven information, advice and guidance that helps them find work.

The Citizen Literacy Taster Project is building a smartphone app to give low literacy learners a 'taste' of what a literacy class might be like to encourage them to seek help. When they are ready, they can ask the app to direct them to their nearest learning provider.

The Citizen Literacy consortium, led by the City of Glasgow College, has assembled a group of leading UK literacy teachers, learning designers and software developers to develop a comprehensive set of adult literacy learning resources. The scale of low literacy in the UK is a serious challenge economically and socially; more than 1 in 6 of

the working age population struggle with literacy skills. In addition, the social stigma surrounding low literacy also presents a considerable barrier to these learners finding local help.

Our mission statement is 'Reading and Writing for Everybody', we see access to literacy support for adults as a matter of social justice.

Our approach has been to use a mixture of technical innovation and educational creativity to work with the adult literacy community in the UK and beyond to design our learning resources.

The Citizen Literacy Apps

Most of our target learners own a smartphone and many are in work – facts which often surprise people new to this area. So, we have created a smartphone app that allows learners to practice basic literacy exercises. As the learner progresses, they gain enough confidence and encouragement to think about approaching local learning providers – asking for help is a big step! We are working with trade unions, teachers and community education networks to reach these learners and to involve all of them in the design. Nesta funding is enabling us to make the first five lessons from our literacy course freely available. By the end of lesson three learners are starting to read and write simple sentences.

We have just released a test version of the app as a website to get feedback from learners, their friends, work colleagues and teachers. The test version of the app features the first lesson, which is for absolute beginners.

Technical features of the app include voice and handwriting recognition for user data input along with traditional touch screen interactivity, multimedia learning resources, the use of AI (Machine Learning) to understand learners accents, and an interface

designed for low literacy users with online virtual tutors that provide audio instructions and adaptive feedback to the learners using text-to-voice services. The same app with teacher specific extensions will be made available for teachers as a 'web app' that can be used on a wider range of devices in different learning contexts. Both apps will be free and open access with no adverts or personal data capture..

The apps can be used independently but are closely mapped to lessons in our adult literacy development courses and their paper-based learning resources. The apps are intended for use in class by teachers and for students to use with practice exercises in between their face-to-face lessons to maintain progress.

Participate

[Sign up to test the Citizen Literacy App](#)



Since the project kicked off in March 2020, we have been through nine alphas and five beta versions of the app. Now that the test version is out, we are picking up a growing

amount of interest in our work in the UK and beyond. The project recently featured in the [Times Educational Supplement](#). Since our test launch in late September the app has had over 300 unique users visit with over 3,500 activity pages viewed. What is particularly encouraging is that we are getting offers of help from the wider adult literacy teaching community to help with design feedback – these are generally people passionate about adult learning. In fact, some teachers are already using the test app with their learners and want to know when the rest of the lessons will be made available.

We designed and planned our project before the Covid pandemic hit the UK. In general, we have been very fortunate in that the project team are all experienced in remote teamwork. Getting access to test users has been delayed until recently as face to face contact was difficult due to restrictions. Now with the test app available, we can use our networks to reach learners for user testing.

The Citizen Literacy apps will formally launch in January 2021 and will be open for low-literacy learners and their teachers to download and use at their own pace. Use of the app will be evaluated to see if it can act as a bridge to more formal, in-person learning, as well as providing key research and insights into how to use technology to support low literacy learners and their teachers. The consortium will continue with developing the full 30 lessons of the beginner course in the apps and produce the accompanying Teacher Handbook and Workbook.

For more information, email elizabeth.north@nesta.org.uk.

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