

Supporting people with an ESOL need to progress in work

An evidence review

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About Learning and Work Institute

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy, research and development organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

This work was conducted as part of our role as UK National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) – 2017-19 Programme of Work.

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Executive summary

It is well documented that for individuals who do not have English as their first language, gaining English language skills supports transitions into the labour market and accrues wider benefits such as social integration and better familial wellbeing.¹ However, once in work, many people with an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) need occupy low-paid, low-skilled positions². They can face multiple barriers to accessing suitable support to help them achieve career progression and increase their earnings. Recent evaluations of in-work progression initiatives in London have shown English language skills as a key barrier to both accessing in-work support, and to progressing in work.³

Most existing literature focuses on boosting language ability in order to move into employment⁴, and more recently on English as a tool for integration. However, there is an

¹ Collyer, M et al. (2018) *A long-term commitment: integration of resettled refugees in the UK*. University of Sussex

² D'Arcy (2018) *Low Pay Britain* Resolution Foundation. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2018/05/Low-Pay-Britain-2018.pdf>

³ Colechin, J et al. (2017) *Evaluation of the Skills Escalator Pilot: Final Report*. Learning and Work Institute <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Evaluation-of-the-Skills-Escalator-Pilot-FINAL.pdf> and Murphy, H et al. (2018) *Step Up: Trialling new approaches supporting low-paid workers to progress their career*. Learning and Work Institute <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Step-Up-Evaluation-Report-1.pdf>

⁴ For example, see Greater London Authority (2012) *ESOL works: Building on best practice to support people into work*. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/esol_works_-_nov_2012.pdf; Greater London Authority (2013) *ESOL works: Embedding best practice for supporting people into work*. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/esol_works_-_june_2013.pdf; and Home Office (2019) *Integrating refugees: What works? What can work? What does not work? A summary of the evidence*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/812891/integrating-refugees-2019.pdf

evidence gap on how and what provision can support individuals with an ESOL need to progress.

In England, the Government provides full funding for ESOL classes for people who are unemployed, but not for people who are in work⁵. This limits the ability of people in low-paid work to improve their language skills in order to progress at work.

At the same time, there is growing awareness of the need to fund ESOL provision for people who are in work, and a number of pilots and policy developments have been initiated which promote English language learning in the workplace, including supporting and incentivising employers to sponsor workplace ESOL learning.⁶ This has a number of benefits for workers and employers⁷. However, there is also a need to improve access to language support for people who are not able, or do not choose, to access ESOL in the workplace, as well as providing access to a range of other types of support also needed for progression in work, such as employability support and career planning skills. This is especially necessary where people need to change occupation or sector in order to progress.

This review identified a range of existing approaches and design features that are effective in supporting those in low-paid work with an ESOL need to access provision and achieve in work progression. These include:

- **Workplace-based ESOL provision** which can accrue benefits for both employers and employees. Good practice examples include tailoring ESOL classes to workplace settings and running classes on employer and employee time (i.e. shared across paid working hours and employees' free time).
- Employer engagement with emphasis on the value of delivering ESOL provision in the workplace. Good practice examples can be taken from the Greater London Authority's (GLA) employer partnership pilots (part of ESOL Plus) and the Mayor of London's '[Good Work Standard](#)' which provides a framework of what a 'good' employer looks like and seeks to incentivise good employer practice. Workplace-based training to support in-work progression, including ESOL provision, are important elements of this framework.
- **Sector specific or employment-focused ESOL** can provide targeted provision for learners working in or wanting to progress in a specific sector. In community settings a more generic citizenship-focused provision has been identified as working well to improve learners' language ability.

⁵ Although there is a trial taking place in 2018-19 that will fully fund learners in low-paid work through the Adult Education Budget – see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/adult-education-budget-aeb-2018-to-2019-increased-flexibility-for-learners-in-receipt-of-low-wage>

⁶ For example GLA's Good Work Standard: <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/business-and-economy/making-london-best-city-world-work>, and the ESOL Plus Pilot <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/communities/migrants-and-refugees/esol-plus-employer-partnership>

⁷ Demos. (2014) *On speaking terms: making ESOL policy work better for migrants and wider society*. Available at: https://demosuk.wpengine.com/files/On_speaking_termsweb.pdf?1408395571

- **Step-by-step, shorter, modular course structures** can be particularly beneficial for this cohort due to learners often uncertain/temporary statuses. These courses make it more straightforward to track the learning that has already been undertaken, and to know where a person might most appropriately re-join learning at a later stage.
- **Flexible, informal provision** can help to overcome the barrier of the in-work cohort not being able to commit to attending a course at a set time. Informal provision enables learners to practice English in a relaxed setting which helps to build confidence and develop social networks.
- **Tailored in-work progression support from a consistent single point of contact** can be beneficial for individuals, especially for refugees, some of whom may be quite isolated and lack social networks. Effective practice includes when points of contact are easily accessible and provide consistent formal and informal support options.
- **Multilingual support** for example promoting the support offer in a range of languages and having multilingual points of contact or staff can be an effective approach to engagement.
- **Support available outside of work hours** is necessary for those unable to access support during working hours.
- **Partnership working** can be an effective approach to advocating for and promoting the benefits of good practice such as employer engagement and workplace-based learning than a single organisation. Organisations working in partnership also tend to be better placed to meet the needs of service users.

1. Policy background

ESOL is a vital educational resource for individuals who are living in the UK and whose first language is not English. Given the positive links between literacy and language competencies and an individual's ability to contribute to the economy and better integrate into local communities, ensuring that everyone can speak English is a shared objective across the political spectrum. Research has demonstrated that ESOL learners who achieve their learning aims are more likely to be employed, not in receipt of benefits and earning more than learners who do not reach their objectives or non-learners.⁸ Recent local and national policy papers⁹ support this economic argument. They also highlight the

⁸ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2016) *Returns to Maths and English Learning (at level 2 and below) in Further Education*. Available at: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/26378/1/bis-16-180-maths-english-learning.pdf>

⁹ Casey, L (2016) *The Casey Review*. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf; HM Government (2018) *Integrated Communities Strategy*. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf; Mayor of London (2018) *All of Us, The Mayor's Strategy for Social Integration*. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/final_social_integration_strategy.pdf.

role that language learning can play in supporting individuals to access capabilities needed for civic engagement and therefore boost opportunities for positive integration trajectories. Engaging in ESOL fosters access to wider public services such as healthcare, promotes continued learning and therefore contributes to enhanced social mobility.

Additional tangible benefits, such as increased confidence, self-esteem, and overall improved wellbeing have also been cited for ESOL learners and their families. For example, there is evidence that children's educational and life opportunities are often bettered through parental engagement in education.¹⁰ The Casey Review (2016), the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy (2018) and The Mayor of London's Strategy for Social integration (2018) also proposed to develop a new strategy for ESOL, aimed at improving integration.

Most existing literature focuses on boosting language ability in order to move into employment¹¹, and more recently on English as a tool for integration. However, there is a gap in research exploring **how accessing provision and developing ability in English may improve career progression opportunities for those already in work.**

This research gap is reflected in policy and funding arrangements. Government support prioritises ESOL for Jobseekers by fully funding provision up to and including Level 2 for learners aged 19 and over who are unemployed, while support for workplace-based provision was withdrawn in August 2011.¹² People in work can access co-funded ESOL provision (in instances where ESOL is not available through their employer), meaning learners can contribute to course fees, rather than pay the full price. However, this can often be a significant sum, presenting a barrier to learning for those in low-paid work.

The lack of funding is a main challenge in the sector. Firstly, it limits the support that can be provided, such as ESOL classes, childcare facilities, financially supporting individuals to access more formal courses, or wider bilingual support (including translation and interpretation services). Secondly, it limits provider staff capacity, meaning they are forced to juggle responsibilities which hinders their ability to dedicate time and effort to one area. This was felt to have implications for the quality of support being delivered.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For example, see Greater London Authority (2012) *ESOL works: Building on best practice to support people into work*. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/esol_works_-_nov_2012.pdf; Greater London Authority (2013) *ESOL works: Embedding best practice for supporting people into work*. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/esol_works_-_june_2013.pdf; and Home Office (2019) *Integrating refugees: What works? What can work? What does not work? A summary of the evidence*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/812891/integrating-refugees-2019.pdf

¹² Foster, D and Bolton, P (2018) *Adult ESOL in England: Briefing Paper Number 7905, 25 April 2018*. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7905>

In response to this gap, recent interventions (both London-based and national) have been announced that focus on supporting those working people with low level English. These include:

The flexibility pilot

In 2018, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) announced¹³ that Adult Education Budget providers could fully fund provision for learners in low-paid employment. Originally developed as a one-year pilot, will continue to 2020.¹⁴ This flexibility was proposed to enable more individuals with ESOL needs in low-paid work (anyone earning less than £16,009.50 annual gross salary) to access provision by removing the cost of course fees. Additionally, it was designed to support in work progression opportunities for those in low pay. Following this, the GLA announced in the Mayor's Skills for Londoners strategy. that they plan to full-fund anyone earning less than the London Living Wage (£20,572.50) from 2019/20.¹⁵

The ESOL Plus pilot

The GLA launched the ESOL Plus pilot¹⁶ which had an employer strand aiming to work with partners to meet gaps in ESOL provision for workers.

The Good Work Standard

The GLA also launched the 'Good Work Standard'¹⁷ - a key policy development that aims to encourage employers to support their employees in various ways, including providing workplace learning opportunities.

2. Mapping ESOL need in low-paid work

- According to the 2011 Census (which asked people to self-report on their English language skills) around 770,000 people in England aged 16 and over reported that they could not speak English well or at all. Of these, 312,773 people (or two-fifths) were in employment¹⁸.

¹³ Education and Skills Funding Agency (2018) *Adult Education Budget (AEB) 2018 to 2019 increased flexibility for learners in receipt of low wage*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/adult-education-budget-aeb-2018-to-2019-increased-flexibility-for-learners-in-receipt-of-low-wage>

¹⁴ Education and Skills Funding Agency (2019) *Continued increased flexibility for learners in receipt of low wage, Adult Education Budget (AEB) 2019 to 2020*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/continued-increased-flexibility-for-learners-in-receipt-of-low-wage-adult-education-budget-aeb-2019-to-2020>

¹⁵ Mayor of London (2018) *Skills for Londoners: A Skills and Adult Education Strategy for London*. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sfl_strategy_final_june_20186.pdf

¹⁶ See more at <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/communities/migrants-and-refugees/esol-plus-employer-partnership>

¹⁷ For more information about the Good Work Standard, see: <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/business-and-economy/making-london-best-city-world-work>

¹⁸ Foster, D and Bolton, P (2018) *Adult ESOL in England: Briefing Paper Number 7905, 25 April 2018*.

Available at: <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7905>; HM Government

- Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people are disproportionately likely to be low-paid,¹⁹ and one of the barriers to higher earnings for some BAME people is limited English language skills – especially for refugees and recent migrants.
- Refugees are more likely to be in work below their formal education level than non-refugees and earn 59% less per hour than workers born in the UK.²⁰
- Individuals with ESOL needs who are in employment are overrepresented in the cohort lacking basic skills. Employers who report skills gaps are significantly more likely to have employees with ESOL needs (39% versus 22% of employers not reporting a skill gap). Because of this skills gap, many individuals with ESOL needs occupy low-paid, low-skilled positions.²¹
- There is no readily available recent data about people with no or very little English who are engaged in the UK labour market. The evidence is mainly in reports, including media reports, about workplace exploitation and abuses (e.g. nonpayment of minimum wage, excessive charges for accommodation, equipment or documentation or withholding passports) where lack of language skills is frequently highlighted as a factor that limits workers' understanding of their rights in a workplace which in turn, leaves them open to such abuses and also limits the possibilities to seek help.²²
- Census data is no longer current, with the last data collected in 2011²³. Therefore, it does not provide an accurate outlook of possible ESOL need across the country. Migration trends also contribute to the challenges of maintaining an up to date picture of potential ESOL need. Consequently, there is a need for more accurate data to be collected to ensure that interventions are commissioned more effectively.

(2018) *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

¹⁹ D'Arcy (2018) *Low Pay Britain* Resolution Foundation. Available at:

<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2018/05/Low-Pay-Britain-2018.pdf>

²⁰ UNHCR (2019) *Tapping Potential: Guidelines to Help British Business Employ Refugees*. Available at:

<https://www.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/bitc-employment-toolkit-tappingpotentialguidelinesbusinessrefugees-may2019.pdf>

²¹ Foster, D and Bolton, P (2018) *Adult ESOL in England: Briefing Paper Number 7905*, 25 April 2018.

Available at: <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7905>

²² FLEX (2017) *Risky Business: Tackling Exploitation in the UK Labour Market*. Available at:

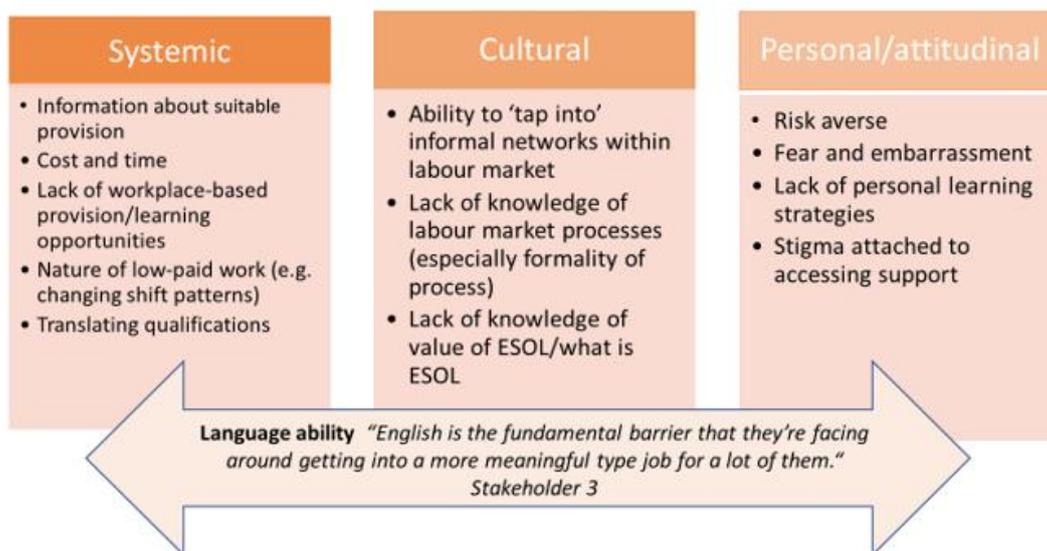
<http://www.labourexploitation.org/publications/risky-business-tackling-exploitation-uk-labour-market>

²³ For more information see: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census>

3. Barriers faced to accessing ESOL provision and IWP support for low-paid workers

People in low-paid work can face barriers to accessing ESOL provision. There can also be challenges to accessing the support needed to achieve in-work progression. Recent L&W research²⁴ categorised these barriers into three main groups as set out in figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1: Overview of barriers



4. Effective practice

This section presents what works to overcome the barriers in figure 1.1 and to engage and motivate low-paid workers with an ESOL need to take up provision. It also explores effective approaches to delivering provision to the cohort.

4.1 Engagement

Recent L&W research²⁵ identified a range of ways to effectively engage low-paid workers with an ESOL need in provision designed to support them to improve their language skills and their opportunities to progress in work. These are:

Partnership working

Developing links with other community and voluntary organisations in the local area whose client base might benefit from the support they provide is effective. For example, an employment support service that works primarily with refugees and asylum seekers engaging with new service users through refugee organisations and food banks.

²⁴ Learning and Work Institute (forthcoming) *In-work progression deep dive: A collection of qualitative deep dives as part of the Step Up project*

²⁵ Ibid.

Word of mouth

Word of mouth can be a particularly effective given the cultural dynamics of some communities. For example, organisations working with particular cultural groups such as the Latin American community, or the refugee and asylum seeker community found that existing service users would readily signpost individuals from their social networks to the support.

Linguistic accessibility

Producing promotional material in a variety of languages and having a multilingual frontline team can improve accessibility to services for those with low levels of English. Having points of contact who speak other languages commonly spoken in the local area was identified as being effective (as well as useful for a service users' ongoing support journey).

Peer learning mentors

Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) part of Trades Union Congress' Unionlearn,²⁶ play a unique role in supporting those with learning needs to access provision in unionised workplace. For non-unionised workplaces, peer learning mentors, or Workplace Learning Advocates have been cited as playing a beneficial role in employee progression.

ULRs take a two-pronged approach; pitching a business case to the employer demonstrating how providing learning opportunities would accrue benefits for their company (such as higher productivity and enhanced communication between staff), while also supporting the learner by identifying their learning needs and signposting them to relevant provision. For more information, see case study 1 below.

Case study 1: Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) at Unionlearn

Previous research undertaken by L&W indicates that ULRs hold a unique and essential position within Unionlearn and a network of active and trained ULRs are key to employer and learner engagement. ULRs:

- Promote learning in the workplace by working with employees and employers.
- Support learners to access and to progress through provision.
- Celebrate and advertise the success that comes through learning.
- Develop and run bespoke and relevant formal and informal provision.

In partnership with Unionlearn, the British Council has developed a guide²⁷ for ULRs to supporting ESOL delivery in the workplace. As well as explaining the benefits of improving English language skills for both employees with ESOL needs and their employers, and providing a range of activities to help ULRs develop a critical understanding of learner

²⁶ For more information, see: <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/union-learning-reps-ulrs>

²⁷ British Council and Unionlearn. *ESOL: Language for Life and Work*. Available at: <https://esol.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/ESOL%20Language%20for%20life%20and%20work%20Interactive.pdf>

needs and how to support them most effectively, it provides guidance on how to successfully set up ESOL learning in the workplace. The key points include:

- **Partnership working**; the union, employer and provider should work together to plan the ESOL programme, agree its aims and design how it will be delivered and managed.
- **Commitment to learning** from all involved parties (learners, providers and employers) from the outset of the programme yields better results. A good approach to this is a matched time agreement whereby employers allow some learning time within company time and employees are also expected to give up some of their personal time.
- **Quality learning** which includes courses pitched at a suitable level and duration, that learner progress is regularly monitored and that resources are context appropriate.
- **Support**; additional support can help accelerate learner progression. Good approaches include informal conversations or social sessions run by the ULRs, mentoring through line managers or colleagues and signposting to wider support.

Employer Engagement

Where ESOL provision is already being delivered in the workplace, engagement through an employer can be an effective approach to ensuring individuals have access to wider in-work support.

4.2 Delivery

Once individuals have engaged, it is crucial that they have access to suitable support. A variety of delivery approaches that work to help those with an ESOL need to progress at work have been identified. This section draws on learning from both ESOL specific and in-work progression pilots and initiatives to support those in low pay and insecure work, recent L&W research with key stakeholders in the sector and wider literature.

Workplace-based provision – ESOL

Workplace-based ESOL provision has been identified as particularly important in ensuring that people in low-paid work can access language support and in-work progression support (see case study 2 below for an example of workplace-based and sector specific language provision in Sweden).

Training in the workplace accrues business benefits such as including improved health and safety awareness and procedures, increased productivity, improved communication and cohesion²⁸. Having access to training at work is beneficial too for employees. It can mitigate chances of exploitation, isolation and vulnerability at work and boost employee

²⁸ Demos (2014) *On Speaking Terms: Making ESOL policy work better for migrants and wider society* Available at: https://www.demos.co.uk/files/On_speaking_termsweb.pdf?1408395571

confidence and self-esteem as well as awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Most significantly, it increases opportunities for in-work progression.

In acknowledgement of these benefits, existing research²⁹ calls for the re-introduction of workplace-based ESOL funding and recommends that employers are encouraged to recognise employees' ESOL needs within training programmes. The GLA's 'Good Work Standard' builds on this agenda, incentivising London employers to support their employees in various ways, including providing workplace learning opportunities.

Despite an absence of formal support for workplace ESOL provision, there are provider level examples of effective practice such as splitting the delivery of ESOL provision between the employees' and the employer's time. For example, running sessions split between employees' lunchbreak and paid working hours.

In the Welsh and Scottish contexts, established workplace-based provision exists for those who have an ESOL need. In Wales, employers are expected to contribute towards improving the English language capabilities of all employees, and to adapt ESOL learning to make it relevant to the specific employment context.³⁰ In Scotland, ESOL provision specifically focused on enhancing individuals' opportunities to enter and progress in work is widely available.³¹ In 2007-8, the Scottish Government developed a Guide and Resource pack for ESOL in the workplace³² which aims to support ESOL tutors delivering work-place based provision to increase the number of ESOL tutors who can confidently run workplace ESOL courses. This toolkit aligns with the Scottish Government's Adult ESOL strategy which states that partners should collaborate with employers to support and develop English for employability.³³

Unionlearn's '*Are we all speaking the same language?*'³⁴ is a useful tool for employers to use to better understand the support needs of employees with language needs, how to provide workplace-based training and how training will meet their business needs.

²⁹ Wood, C and Wybron, I (2015) *Entry to, and progression in, work*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

³⁰ Welsh Government (2014) *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) policy for Wales*. Available at: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20373/1/140619-esol-policy-en.pdf>

³¹ The Scottish Government (2015) *Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015-2020, The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Strategy for Adults in Scotland 2015*. Available at: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22892/2/ESOLStrategy2015to2020_tcm4-855848_Redacted.pdf

³² WEA Scotland (2008) *ESOL in the workplace: Guide*. Available at: <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/public/esesol/uploads/sites/4537/2017/05/WEA-Workplace-ESOL-Guide.pdf>

³³ The Scottish Government (2008) *ESOL in the workplace: Guide*. Available at: <http://www.esolscotland.com/documents/weaesol/WEA%20Workplace%20ESOL%20Guide.pdf>

³⁴ Unionlearn (2018) *Are we all speaking the same language?* <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/Are%20we%20all%20speaking%20the%20same%20language.pdf>

Case Study 2: Project ArbetSam, Sweden³⁵

Project ArbetSam, running from 2011 to 2013, aimed to upskill care workers employed in 75 adult social care workplaces across the Stockholm region.

In the Stockholm region, migrant workers with Swedish language needs make up over half of those working in adult social care. Overall, the project engaged with and benefitted 3000 care workers, and 650 gained vocational qualifications.

The project was built on the following premise:

- **Connecting learning to workplace practice** to make course content more accessible and relevant
- **Strong partnership working** between the learning provider and the employer
- **Communication** is central to performance in the workplace, language is key to communication but also to learning and personal identity
- **Shared responsibility** for developing the learner's language skills between the learner, their colleagues and their employer is key

Workplace-based provision – progression pathways

A recent United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report³⁶ sets out the importance of employers ensuring that there is support in place for refugees to progress in work. Aspects of an effective model include; having an internal mentoring scheme, ensuring progression is accessible for all employees regardless of contract type or working hours, and delivering a range of training in the workplace, including bite-size provision and developing softer skills.

Sector specific or employment focused ESOL

Sector specific ESOL can be an effective way to support this cohort to improve their employment opportunities. An effective approach is to provide ESOL that links with clients'

³⁵ See more about Project ArbetSam at:

<http://www.aldrecentrum.se/kompetensutveckling/spr%C3%A5kutveckling-och-arbetsplats!%C3%A4rande/arbetsam-l%C3%A4rande-arbetsplatser-inom-0>

³⁶ UNHCR (2019) *Tapping Potential: Guidelines to Help British Business Employ Refugees*. Available at: <https://www.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/bitc-employment-toolkit-tappingpotentialguidelinesbusinessrefugees-may2019.pdf>

prior skills, qualifications and experience as well as their future aspirations. Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation (IRMO)³⁷ provides support for Spanish speakers who aspire to, or already work in the construction sector to acquire a professional construction qualification. The course delivery is tailored to this cohort by embedding English language into the course structure. This model is also endorsed by the GLA – see Case Study 3 for more detail. Engaging with employers in the sector so that clients can be job matched or offered a work placement after completing the course would improve opportunities for progression.

Step-by-step, shorter, modular course structures

Shorter courses can be particularly beneficial for those with uncertain or temporary statuses, such as people seeking asylum.³⁸ Shorter courses make it more straightforward to track the learning that has already been undertaken, and to know where a person might most appropriately re-join learning at a later stage.

Flexible, informal provision

Flexible, informal English language provision (such as drop-in sessions) can be particularly beneficial for those in work who may not be able to commit to attending courses at a set time. A relaxed environment can also provide additional benefits of developing the social networks which refugees and recent migrants may be seeking. Conversation classes and peer learning mentors who run informal classes in the workplace are examples of this approach.

Tailored in-work progression support from a consistent single point of contact

The evaluation of the Step Up pilot³⁹ highlighted that wraparound support that is flexed to the aspirations, capabilities and needs of the individual is effective in supporting all participants' in-work progression. Effective support activities include a thorough needs assessment, action planning, regular one-to-one adviser sessions, mentoring and employment-related support (e.g. CV writing and interview technique support). These processes ensure that the support given is individual-led and therefore more likely to meet their individual need.

Recent L&W research built on this work to identify specific ways in which provision could be tailored to individuals with language needs. Support activities and approaches include:

³⁷ See more at: <http://irmo.org.uk/>

³⁸ Association of Colleges (2015) *The experience of colleges using new ESOL QCF Skills for Life Qualifications*. Available at: <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/The%20experience%20of%20colleges%20using%20new%20ESOL%20QCF%20Skills%20for%20life%20qualifications.pdf>

³⁹ Murphy, H et al. (2018) *Step Up: Trialling new approaches supporting low-paid workers to progress their career*. Learning and Work Institute. Available at: <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Step-Up-Evaluation-Report-1.pdf>

- Providing individuals with an ‘anchor’ contact who is easily accessible and provides consistent formal and informal support options is an effective approach to working with low-paid workers with an ESOL need, especially for those who may be isolated or lack social networks.
- Conducting longer and more regular one-to-one adviser sessions than might be provided to individuals without language needs. In order to ensure effective communication, face-to-face sessions were also seen as preferable to virtual contact.
- Ensuring that bilingual or multilingual support is available. Even if the support is delivered primarily in English, having the option to communicate in their first language can be beneficial.

Support available outside of work hours

Having opportunities to access ESOL provision and in-work progression support outside of work hours is valuable. For example, offering English language provision in the mornings, evenings and at weekends to make it more accessible to those in work. However, funding and capacity issues can mean that providers are unable to provide such a flexible and extensive range of provision.

Partnership working

A partnership voice can better advocate for and promote the benefits of good practice such as employer engagement and workplace-based learning than a single organisation. By being aware of each other’s provision and their own limitations, providers can refer and signpost to partners to better meet the needs of their service users.

Case Study 3: Greater London Authority ESOL works

The GLA proposed three models to develop the English language competency of migrants working in low-paid, low-skilled jobs in London.⁴⁰ Workplace learning was a key element, along with voluntary coaching and mentoring schemes; and informal learning enabled by technology. The key features of this model are:

- **Guidance for employers** on how to support on-the-job language learning using guided learning materials, coaching and mentoring, supervisory feedback, peer learning and support groups.
- **Guidance for migrant workers** on how to form self-facilitated study groups at work. Further support for such groups can include linkage to virtual learning communities, to support networks and to voluntary mentors.
- **Awareness-raising, support and incentivising of employers** to sponsor workplace ESOL learning, possibly involving supporters of workplace learning

⁴⁰ Greater London Authority (2013) *ESOL works: Embedding best practice for supporting people into work*. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/esol_works_-_june_2013.pdf

such as union learning representatives and, in non-unionised workplaces, the Workplace Learning Advocates initiative.

- **Incorporation of support** for ESOL learning within programmes of occupational learning/Continuing Professional Development