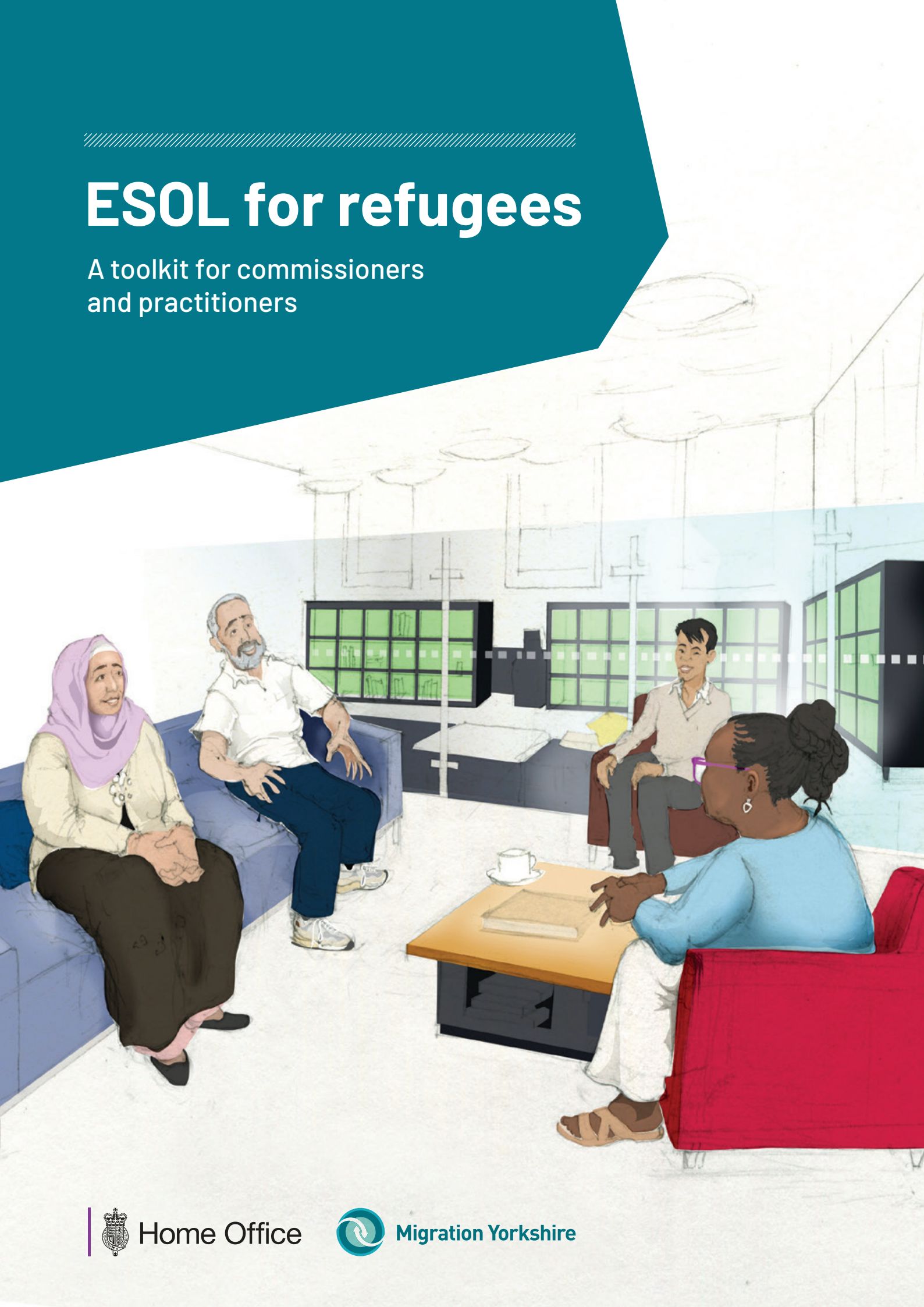


ESOL for refugees

A toolkit for commissioners
and practitioners



Home Office



Migration Yorkshire

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Introduction

Purpose and structure of this toolkit

'ESOL for refugees: a toolkit for commissioners and practitioners' draws together current good practice on language learning for refugees; and offers practical insights on how to achieve this for all local agencies involved in planning, funding and delivering English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to refugee populations.

Learning English enables refugees to go about everyday life, make social connections and work as they rebuild their lives in the UK. Local commissioners, practitioners and volunteers play crucial roles in supporting them towards confidence and proficiency in English language.

Refugees share many similarities with other ESOL learners, but many also face different challenges and barriers. This toolkit is based on a mix of research and practice evidence about suitable and effective English language support for refugees. It highlights and promotes commissioning and practice that is:

- Informed by need
- Suitable and effective for refugees
- Focused on language skills needed for everyday life and work, expediting integration between refugees and their communities

The English language funding and delivery landscape, and the wider network of local support services accessed by refugees, are made up of diverse partners across the public and voluntary and community sectors (VCS). The toolkit is also designed to encourage stakeholders to connect and work together.

This toolkit relates to English language provision for adult refugees. English language support for children is provided through schools.

The toolkit is split into four main sections:

- 1. Understanding refugee learners**
- 2. Delivering suitable and effective ESOL for refugees**
- 3. Strengthening joined up working**
- 4. Overcoming challenges**

Available separately, 'What is Suitable and Effective ESOL for Refugees? A literature review' supports this toolkit. The review is a survey of the literature on effective ESOL delivery and commissioning. The review was compiled to support this project by a team from Leeds Beckett University and NATECLA (the National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults).

See the [Appendix 1](#) for an explanation of key terms used in this toolkit.

Both this toolkit and the supporting literature review are available at www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/esoltoolkit

The SEER project

Suitable and Effective ESOL for Refugees (SEER) was a project delivered by Migration Yorkshire in collaboration with Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships (RSMPs) across England, and funded by the Home Office.

At least 367 individuals from different sectors and professional backgrounds, representing 269 separate organisations across the nine Strategic Migration Partnership regions of England, were consulted during the development of this toolkit. A series of regional events brought together the English language sector (commissioners and providers) with the refugee support sector (civil society, local authorities and other agencies) to develop a shared understanding of effective practice. Sessions with the Yorkshire and Humber Refugee Advisory Group and with Migration Yorkshire's peer researchers ensured that the voice of those with lived experience was included. Material gathered during the events built on a literature review to guide the toolkit content, which is supported with case studies from across England gathered by the RSMPs.

Although this toolkit was developed using information from stakeholders in England, we hope that it has application throughout the UK. Note that the legislative and practice context may differ in the devolved nations.

The consultation events and literature review were completed in winter 2019/20 before the Covid-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic, however the societal impacts of the virus were being felt at the time of writing this toolkit. From our work with regional and national partners we are aware of some of the resulting challenges for ESOL learning, and have referred to these at appropriate points in the toolkit.

Part 1

Understanding refugee learners

This section focuses on understanding the make up of your local refugee population to help plan ESOL provision; and understanding barriers refugees face to learning English, as well as what works, to help design services that are suitable and effective.

We use the term ‘refugee’ to describe people who have been recognised as needing international protection by the UK government, and whose language learning needs are likely to be affected by this context. However, we recognise that people in this situation are not solely defined by their immigration status but have a wealth of diverse experiences, needs, traits and skills that we celebrate as members of our community.

1.1 Your local refugee population

Understanding how people become recognised as refugees and the infrastructure in place to support them as they settle into life in the UK impacts on opportunities to access and learn English (eligibility is summarised below, and the different ESOL funding streams are explained in more detail in [Part 2](#)). There are two main routes to being recognised as a refugee in the UK as shown in Figure i.

Figure i: The main routes to being recognised as a refugee in the UK

A resettlement scheme

UNHCR works with refugees overseas to determine eligibility for resettlement to the UK. Resettlement schemes prioritise those in greatest need of protection, including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk.

Recent schemes in the UK include the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), the Gateway Protection Programme (GPP) and the Mandate programme.

On 17 June 2019, the government announced a new global UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) to start once the UK has met its commitments under VPRS. This consolidates the VPRS, the VCRS and the GPP into one global scheme and has a single funding package mirroring that currently paid under VPRS and VCRS.

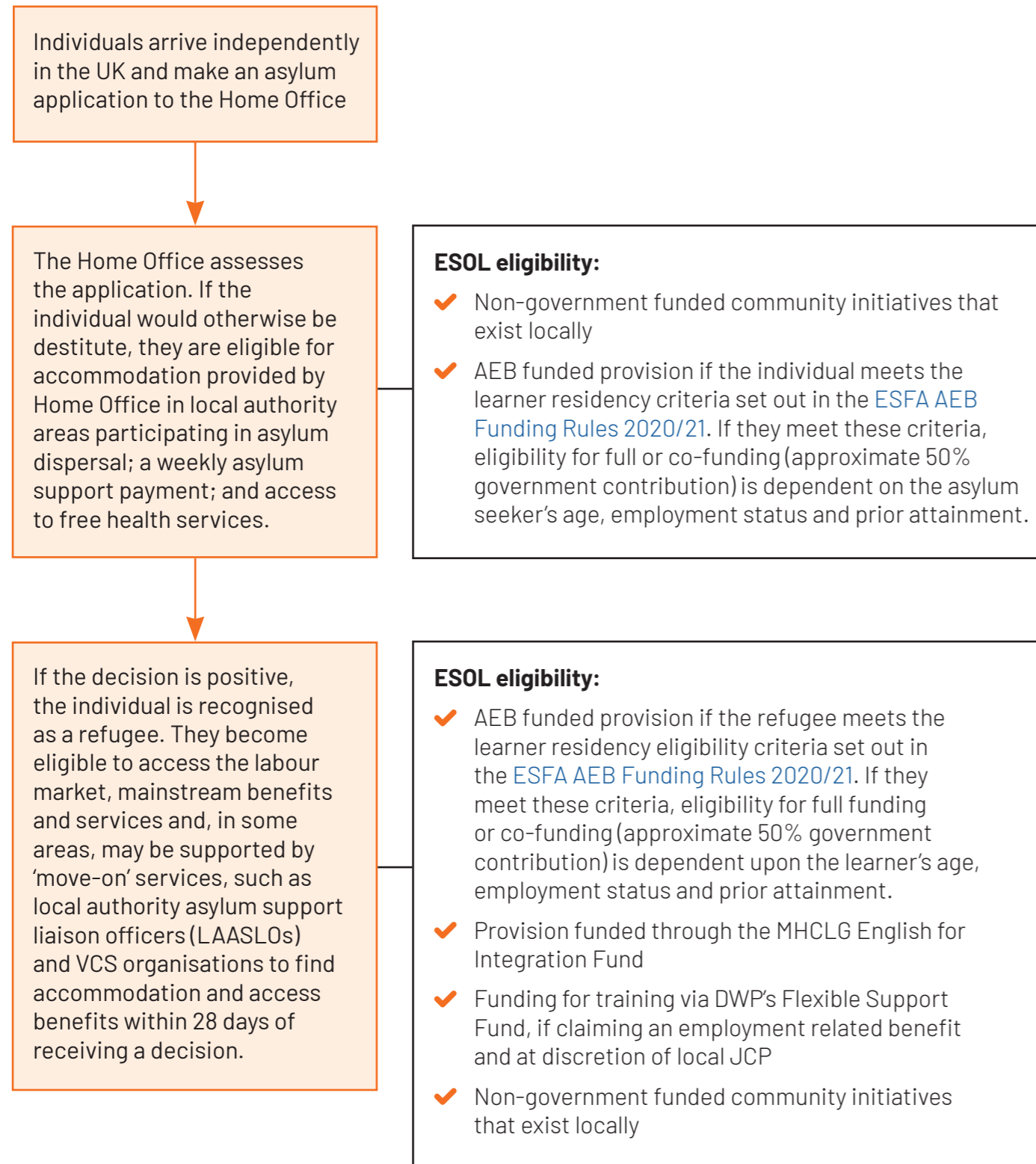
Individuals arrive in the UK recognised as refugees. Local authorities or community sponsors provide housing and dedicated case work under some resettlement schemes.

Refugees are immediately eligible to access the labour market, mainstream benefits and services.

ESOL eligibility:

- ✓ Adult Education Budget (AEB) funded provision, if a refugee meets the learner residency eligibility criteria set out in the [ESFA AEB Funding Rules 2020/21](#). If they meet these criteria, eligibility for full funding or co-funding (approximate 50% government contribution) is dependent upon the learner’s age, employment status and prior attainment.
- ✓ Provision funded through the MHCLG English for Integration Fund
- ✓ Local authorities (LAs) receive additional funding of £850pp from the Home Office to enable refugees resettled under the VPRS and UKRS to access at least eight hours of ESOL provision; and are able to apply to the Home Office for additional funding to cover childcare costs
- ✓ Funding for training via DWP’s Flexible Support Fund, if claiming an employment related benefit and at the discretion of local JCP
- ✓ Non-government funded community initiatives that exist locally

The asylum process



Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships

Information about regional migration priorities, resettlement and asylum dispersal can be sought from Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships:

- Strategic Migration Partnership, East of England Local Government Association (SMP at EELGA) smp.eelga.gov.uk/about-us
- East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (EMSMP) www.emcouncils.gov.uk/Migration-Hub
- London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/communities/migrants-and-refugees
- North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) www.nemp.org.uk
- North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (NWRSMPP) northwestrsmpp.org.uk
- South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) www.secouncils.gov.uk/about-us/about-sespm
- South West Strategic Migration Partnership (SWSMP) www.swcouncils.gov.uk
- West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) www.wmsmp.org.uk
- Migration Yorkshire www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk
- Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP) www.nilga.org/nilga-networks/strategic-migration-partnership
- COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership (CSMP) www.migrationscotland.org.uk
- Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) www.wlga.wales/wales-strategic-migration-partnership

We use the term 'refugee' to describe people who have been recognised as needing international protection by the UK government

1.2 Barriers and challenges faced by refugee learners

Language providers are increasingly adapting their learning environment to be inclusive to their learner groups, rather than expecting learners to adapt to the environment. Our recent literature review and stakeholder engagement have identified a number of barriers that particularly affect refugee learners, outlined below. Challenges facing young refugees, and refugees seeking work, as well as challenges relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, are also considered here.

Barriers affecting refugee learners

Availability of classes at the right levels

- Supply of provision not keeping pace with changing local demand, particularly at pre-entry level. [Research by DfE](#) (p61) found that refugees are more likely than other learners to access provision at pre-entry or Entry level 1.

Accessibility of learning opportunities

- Previous trauma, health and emotional problems that a teacher is not usually equipped to identify or support can lead to concentration difficulties, anxiety, a short attention span, memory impairment and irregular attendance.
- Previous disruption to education (including in the UK), a previous lack of education or literacy in their first language, or a lack of literacy in a Roman script.
- Not having family networks or social networks with local knowledge to help negotiate new systems (including the UK education system), counter social isolation, practise English, and provide childcare. See case studies about providing [ESOL with childcare](#) and [onsite crèche provision in Plymouth](#) as well as [the family with different learning needs in the East of England](#).
- Learning hours may conflict with jobcentre requirements for job searching or with hours of employment.
- Not having financial resources to travel to classes.
- Competing priorities in the UK, potentially including the need to meet basic needs such as shelter, avoiding social isolation and working to be able to send money to family overseas.
- Not having financial resources to pay for registration or exam fees, or IT equipment in the home, even if course fees don't apply. (As highlighted at the end of this section, lack of appropriate IT equipment has impacted access to learning even more acutely during the Covid-19 pandemic).

Effectiveness of learning opportunities (helping refugees build confidence and proficiency)

- Course material on topics that do not reflect the experiences of refugees.
- Course content that does not help refugees quickly acquire the language skills needed for everyday life and work.
- Poor, temporary housing conditions can affect continuity of attendance.
- An aspiration to return to the country of origin can affect a person's psychological investment in language learning.



Refugees can get to know people in their local community more easily with good English language skills.

Specific challenges

Further, certain sections of refugee populations face specific challenges due to their age or other characteristics. Two key examples prominent in the literature are young refugees and those seeking work, as detailed below. We also consider challenges relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Challenges facing young refugees

Young refugees (aged 16-19) face particular issues and barriers to learning that arise in both the learning environment and the home environment.

16-19 year olds do not qualify as adult learners (19+) but have also likely missed out on EAL provision in schools. This affects the resources available to tailor provision to their needs, and the likelihood that a school or college will anticipate what they need to do to support that young person specifically.

Issues within education settings include insufficient support for English as an additional language in some schools and children not having enough time to gain a grasp of the English language before enrolling on courses leading to qualifications, as well as some unsuitable course material on topics that young refugees in particular may not be able to relate to such as 'gap years' and holidays. Barriers to learning for young refugees include having little or no prior education; disrupted education due to transit; and experiences of loss and trauma.

For young refugees who are in the UK without family members (often referred to as unaccompanied asylum seeking children or UASC), these difficulties can be compounded by multiple placement moves to different parts of the country for their care, a lack of familial support for learning, and minimal opportunities to practise English outside of the classroom. During research with young refugees cared for by the local authority in Yorkshire and Humber, participants reported only interacting with other young people in the same situation, due to living in shared accommodation together and attending the same college classes; there were limited opportunities to interact with English speakers ([Migration Yorkshire, 2019](#)).

For further discussion about young refugees, read our [literature review](#).

Challenges facing refugees seeking work

Some of the barriers to employment that refugees experience are exacerbated by language-related issues.

It is common for refugees to find their initial level of English competency is below what is required by many employers. The standard of English required varies, with reports of [some employers asking for Entry level 3](#) while others require Level 2 standard, for example. (See our [outline of ESOL stages](#) for reference). Access to formal ESOL provision at the right level and access to the resources to pursue higher level courses and professional training are particularly pertinent examples of obstacles to suitable work. These were identified by our associated [literature review](#).

Another hurdle at interview stage is that the language used in the job interview can be more complex than the language needed to do the job ([Roberts, 2010](#)).

Without reaching the language level appropriate to their skills, refugees can find themselves in entry-level jobs with few opportunities to communicate in English, then face difficulty in progressing due to the challenges of accessing ESOL lessons when working. Other negative consequences of being underemployed and experiencing a loss of status include the impact on wellbeing, motivation and confidence.

There is evidence that for some refugees, getting into work early is more important than what type of work (as long as there are opportunities for progression) because time out of work depreciates skills ([McKinsey, 2016](#)).

Possible solutions to work-related challenges for refugees are provided in [Part 4](#).

Challenges in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

At the time of writing, society is facing unprecedented challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic. ESOL providers and refugee learners had to make a shift to online learning when restrictions began in March 2020. This has highlighted issues of digital exclusion for some learners, for example limited access to appropriate devices, and to data and WiFi, as well as a lack of digital skills. Providers were not always enrolling new learners at this time which affected access for those not already registered on courses.

For some refugee learners, the stresses of lockdown have affected their ability to engage with learning, therefore a flexible approach has been needed, with opportunities to discuss wellbeing issues, and a recognition that some learners may need to put their learning 'on hold' and access more informal opportunities to practise English conversation during this time.

The VPRS approach has been an example of swift adaptation, with the Home Office encouraging local authority leads to use the additional funding earmarked for ESOL to address barriers to digital learning, for example purchasing devices and ensuring the availability of data and WiFi. The

childcare for ESOL funding for 2020-21 has been adapted to encourage local authorities to address barriers for those with childcare responsibilities. There has been less need for childcare places with learners accessing teaching at home. Alternative uses for the funding have included interpreters to help support online learning, support to improve digital skills, or support to access family learning that enabled learning with the children.

With the easing of some restrictions, many providers moved to a blended learning approach with some learning taking place online and some face to face. The value of the interaction that comes with physically attending a setting and accessing learning in person has been widely acknowledged, especially where learning English is key to reducing isolation and building friendships for many new refugees. As noted in [Challenge 14](#), further research is needed on the effectiveness of online ESOL teaching. Not all learners have been in a position to return to face to face learning, for example if they are clinically vulnerable, isolating, or concerned about using public transport.

For some refugee learners, the stresses of lockdown have affected their ability to engage with learning, therefore a flexible approach has been needed, with opportunities to discuss wellbeing issues

1.3 Wider integration needs

The Home Office [Indicators of Integration Framework](#) defines interrelated domains and outcomes, which are needed to facilitate integration for refugees in the UK. English language is one of these and is identified as a key enabler of other outcomes related to employment, housing, health, education, leisure and social connections. As far as possible, design and delivery of ESOL should connect to and promote wider integration outcomes.

1.4 What does suitable and effective ESOL for refugees look like?

Taking into consideration practitioner and research expertise, Figure ii presents key features of an ideal learning journey for refugees. While refugees have particular needs, bear in mind that many of the points made in this section are relevant to all ESOL learners. Further, refugees and other ESOL learners can benefit from learning together in the same sessions, and this mixing can also aid integration of communities.

Figure ii: Key features of an ideal learning journey for refugees

A. Initial Assessment

- ✓ Refugees are assessed in a way that identifies their existing language skills and individual barriers to learning as well as reflecting their daily lives and needs.
- ✓ Happens quickly after refugee arrives or is recognised by government as a refugee.
- ✓ Initial assessment enables referral into to a mix of provision appropriate to the existing learning level and tailored to reflect the individual need.

B. Access

- ✓ Access to classes at the right level, including pre-entry and Entry level 1.
- ✓ Start classes quickly, without a long wait.
- ✓ Opportunities to learn in a range of settings outside of the classroom, especially initially. Those new to learning environments do not feel intimidated.
- ✓ Learning opportunities offer different amounts of structure and degrees of formality, and can be accessed in a complementary way according to learner needs.
- ✓ Basic literacy teaching is included for those with little or no formal education prior to arriving in the UK.
- ✓ Provision is adjusted to overcome barriers that hinder refugees from accessing English language provision, in order to enable equal access.
- ✓ Practical support is available: financially (fees, transport, childcare), and a multi-agency response to needs.
- ✓ Refugees are treated with sensitivity to their cultural background and journey to the UK.

C. Progress

- ✓ Refugees enjoy a stable learning environment where they can develop a positive, trusted relationship with their ESOL teachers.
- ✓ All ESOL provides adequate conditions for learning (such as those highlighted by the [VIME report \(2018\)](#). For example: language used should be comprehensible even though learners may not understand all the individual words; learners should be able to ask for clarification; there should be opportunities to practise so the learner starts to speak English without conscious effort).
- ✓ Refugees are able to make regular progress that is part of their learning plan and regularly revisit this with support staff to adjust to their progress, changing circumstances and expectations.
- ✓ Refugees have genuine opportunities to feed back if they do not feel they are progressing or if the learning is not relevant to them.
- ✓ Opportunities and links are made to employment and vocational courses where appropriate.
- ✓ Refugees have opportunities for conversation practice outside of ESOL classes.
- ✓ Measures of progress are realistic for the individual and recognise both increased confidence and proficiency.

Part 2 looks at factors that can enable delivery of an ideal learner journey.

Part 2

Understanding the ESOL landscape

ESOL is currently funded from a range of different sources and delivered by a range of organisations, professionals and volunteers. This can result in diverse learning opportunities. Learners can benefit further when different stakeholders collaborate and work together to improve what is on offer to refugees, and how it is coordinated and delivered locally and regionally. The wider support infrastructure around refugees is also made up of a range of local organisations that can play important roles in referring refugees to ESOL or supporting their learning, if they are appropriately connected into the ESOL delivery landscape.

This section outlines the current delivery landscape and highlights the key components of good practice in ESOL funding and delivery that underpin positive learner journeys for refugees.

2.1 Mapping ESOL funding

The Department for Education's Adult Education Budget (AEB) is the core funding stream for ESOL. Other funding streams available tend to focus on specific cohorts and offer greater flexibility to fund provision tailored to the needs of these cohorts; they are intended as complementary to the AEB. Funding is allocated to a range of local commissioners who determine local priorities, make decisions on what types of provision will be funded in which settings, and how many classes will run at each level.

Local commissioners include: college principals, local authority officers holding budgets that can be used for ESOL, devolved or combined authorities, and independent agencies with funding to commission services.

Powers being transferred to English regions and new mayoral responsibilities have brought both challenges and opportunities, including for ESOL provision. At the time of writing, approximately half of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) has been devolved to 6 Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and delegated to the Mayor of London acting through the Greater London Authority (GLA). These authorities are responsible for the provision of adult education and allocation of the AEB in their local areas. From the 2020/21 academic year, North of Tyne joins the 6 MCAs and the Mayor of London in taking responsibility of AEB funded education for their residents.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is responsible for the remaining AEB in non-devolved areas. In non-devolved areas colleges and training providers have the freedom and flexibility to determine how they use their AEB to meet the needs of their communities.

Figure iii sets out core sources of funding, which local commissioners they can be allocated to and core ways in which funding can be allocated locally.

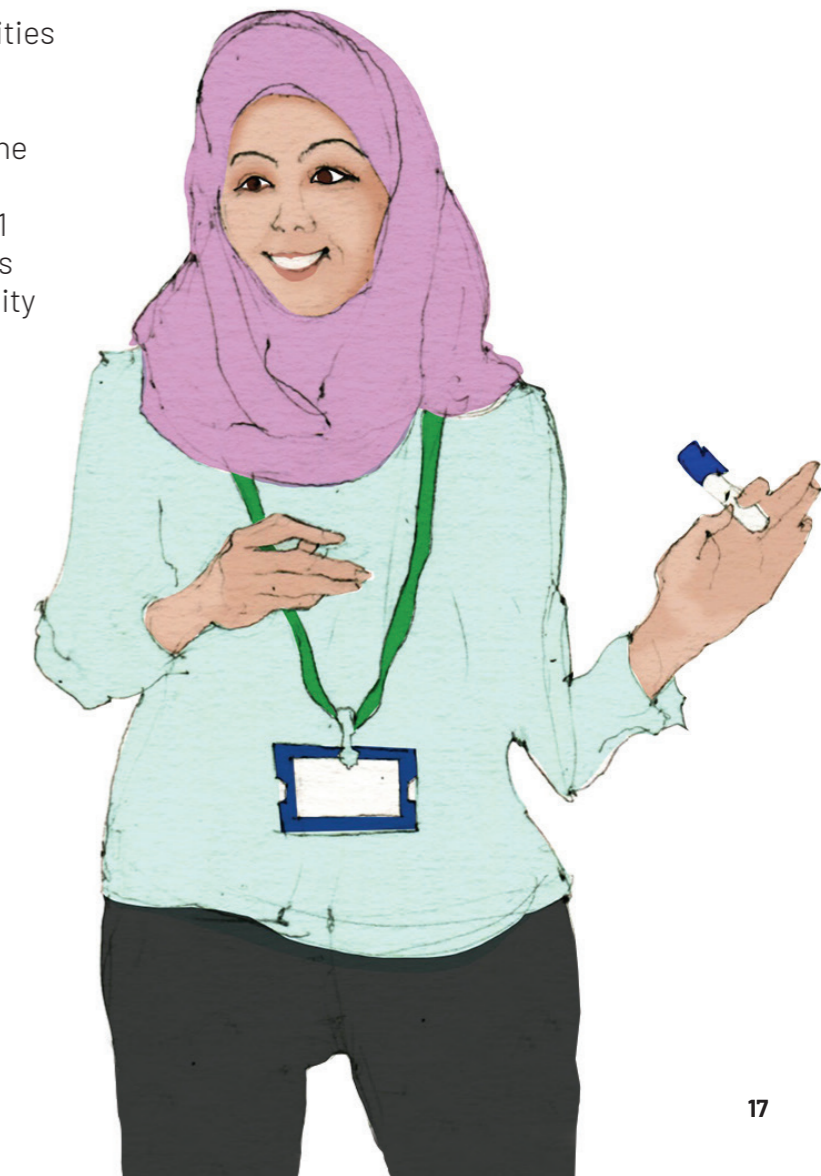
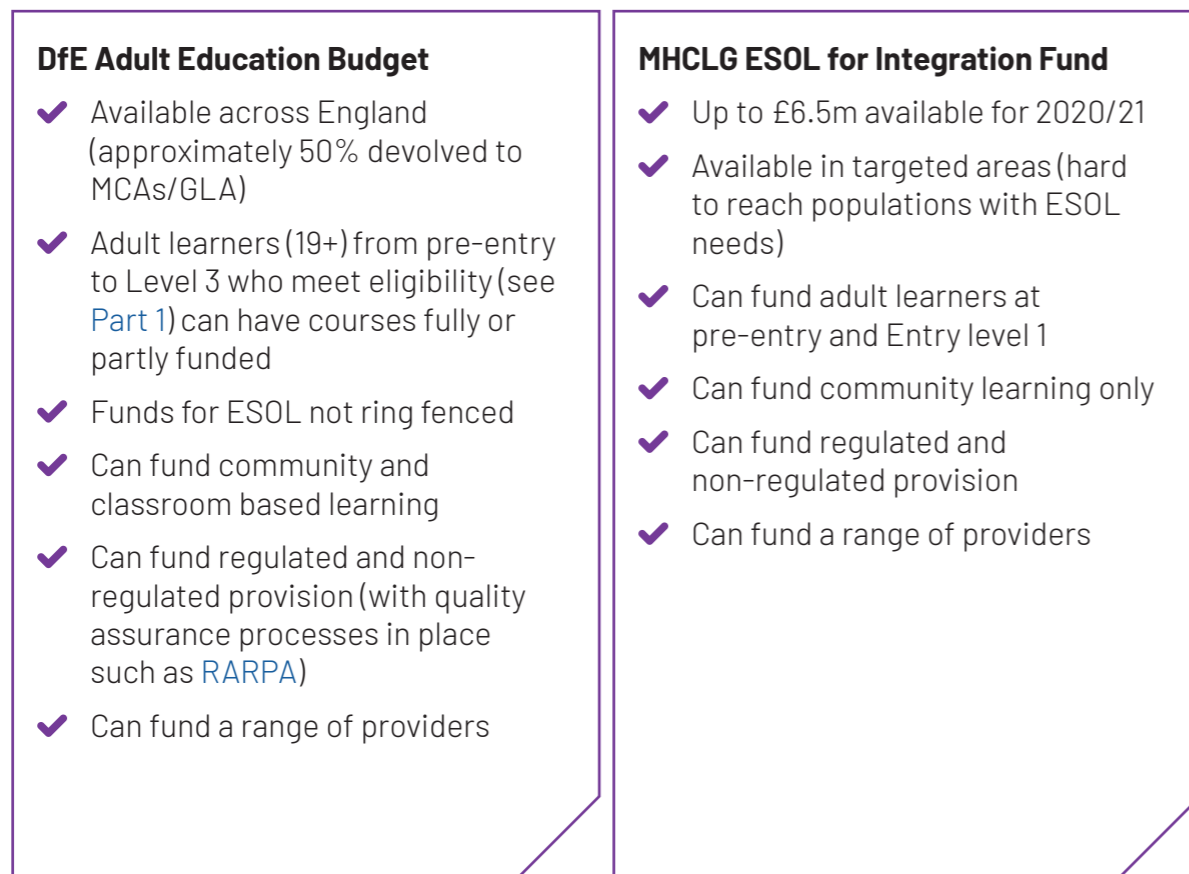
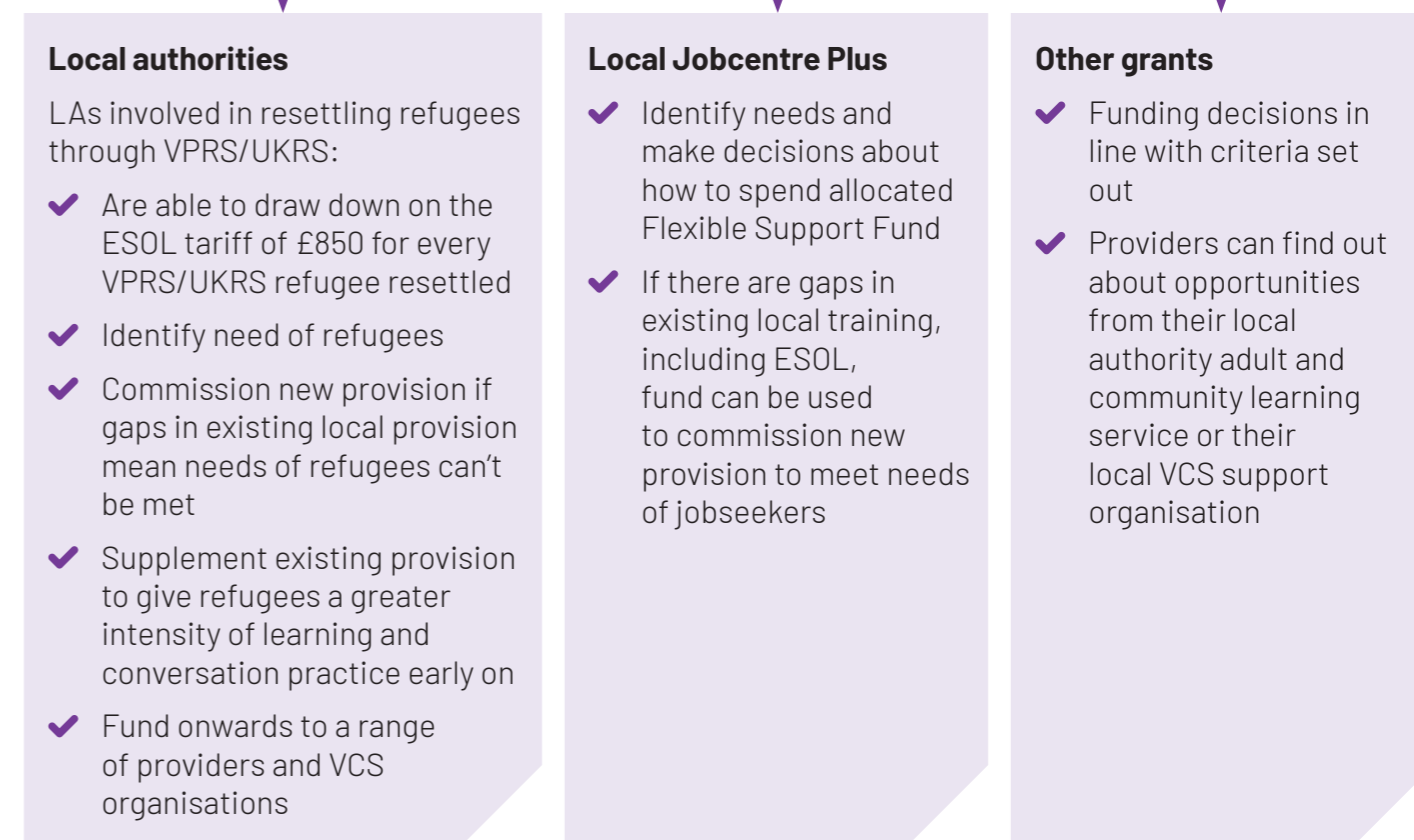
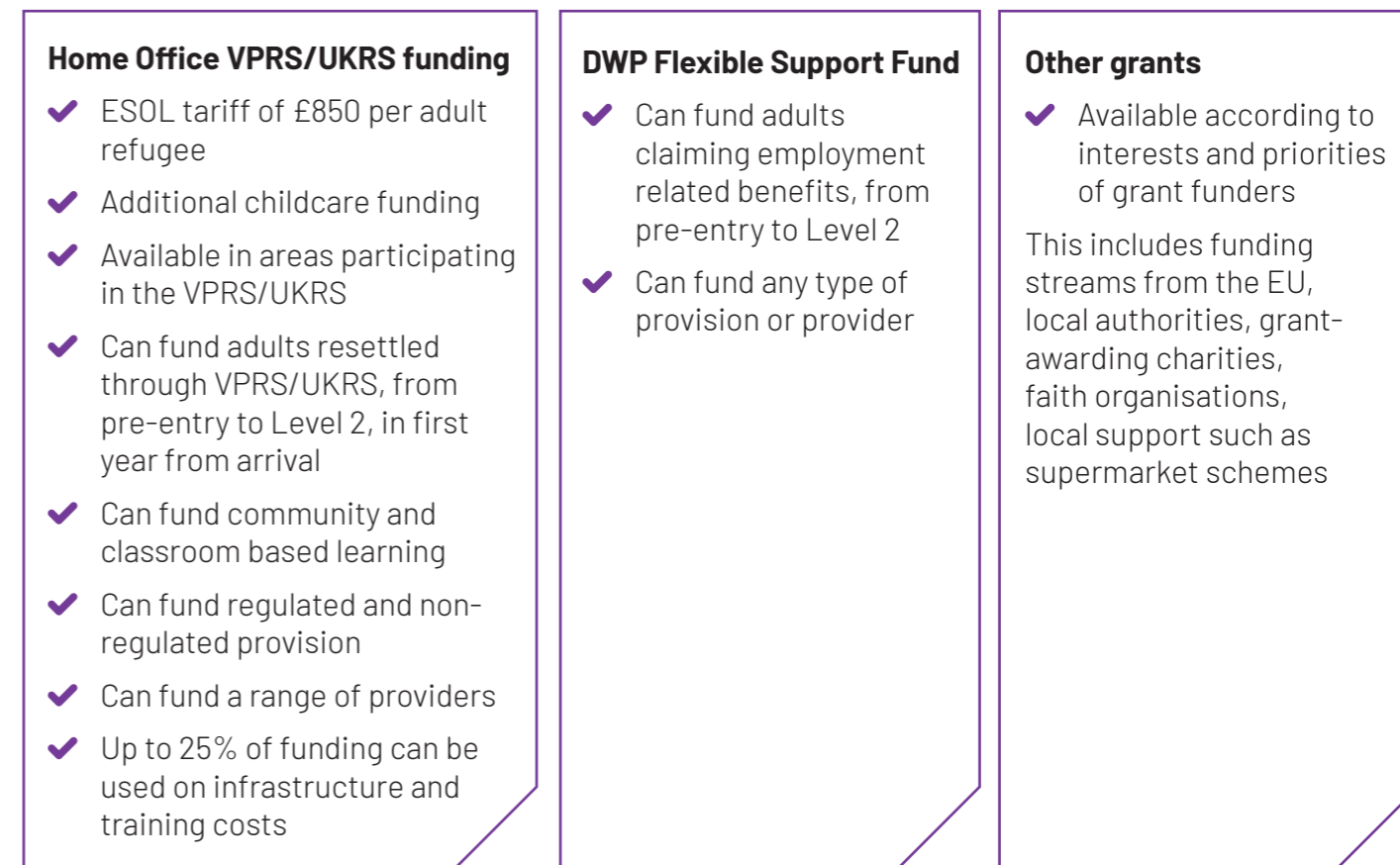
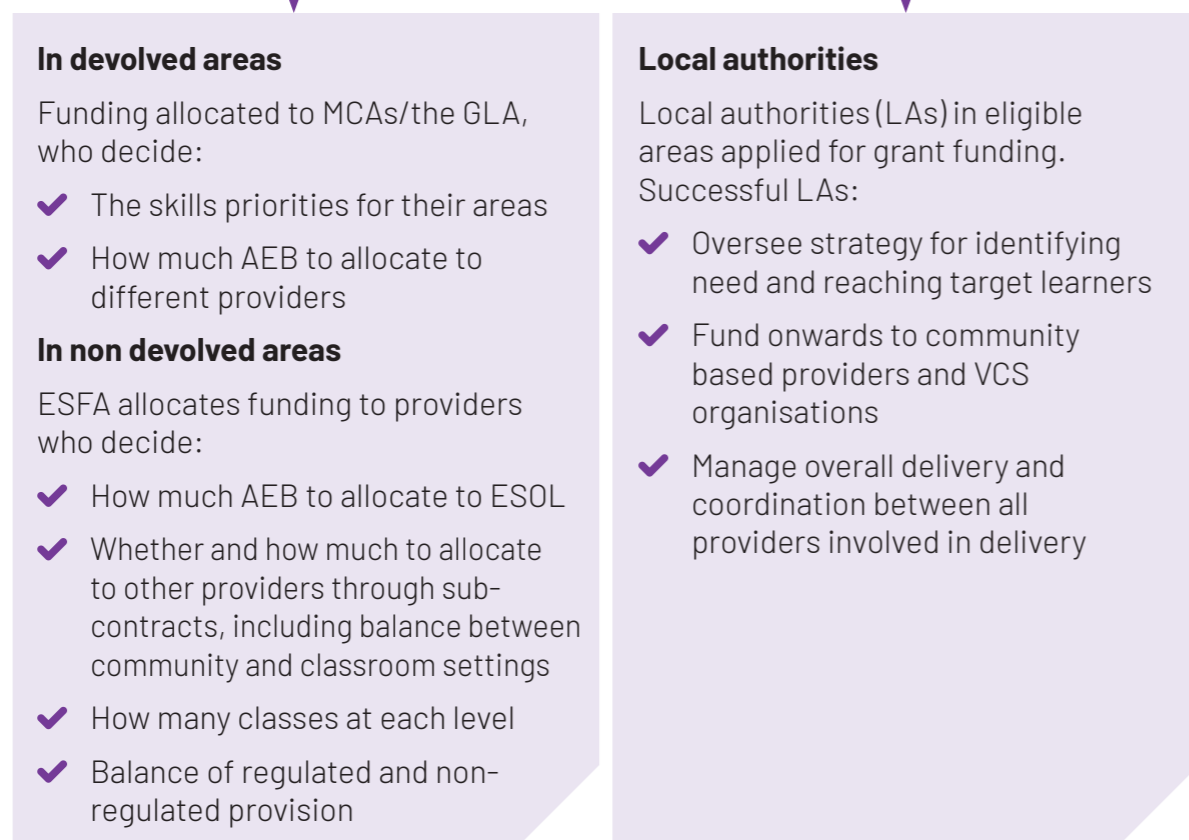


Figure iii: Funding sources for ESOL provision that might be accessed by refugees

National funding



Local budget holders



2.2 Mapping ESOL delivery for refugees

ESOL can be delivered to refugees and others in a variety of settings and a range of formats, as suggested in [Figure iv](#). Each can help to address different aspects of learner need, and can be combined in an individual learner journey plan to enable progression. There is benefit in offering a range of provision to meet multiple needs and learning styles.

People usually do not have one single reason for learning English and people learn best in different ways. Refugees' needs and motivations for learning are key factors in how much they will engage in different types of provision. For example, 'play' activities may not be taken seriously by a learner aiming to get into employment quickly, and lessons set outside the classroom may take some adjustment for learners whose cultures afford great respect for teachers and learning institutions.

Environments in the delivery landscape

Language instruction can take place in an assortment of settings, from the classroom to community locations such as voluntary sector agencies and community centres, workplaces and the home. Most refugee learners will benefit from formal, class-based learning complemented by more informal learning opportunities.

- **Classroom learning** in an adult education setting can be particularly beneficial, for example, for young people making the transition to the UK education system and older refugees wanting to continue their learning or re-train via further or higher education. These settings can also provide access to other learning opportunities and raise learners' aspirations by increasing awareness of the possibilities open to them, as demonstrated in adult education centre settings used to teach resettled refugees in Derbyshire.
- Opportunities to learn **outside the classroom** can reinforce and supplement learning from the classroom, for example where learners have passed a level but are not necessarily ready for the next level. It can provide an opportunity to gain confidence and practise English in real life contexts which may not otherwise be available to refugee learners or might be intimidating. Community venues can encourage people unfamiliar with formal education and study skills and are anxious about taking those first steps to learning, or those who may struggle to attend classes due to physical limitations or caring responsibilities. Further, non-classroom settings can provide means of social engagement with the local community, especially refugees who are isolated and have little social contact with local people.



The style of ESOL delivery can vary from a more formal structured curriculum where learners work towards qualifications, to topic-based learning that may be directed by learners themselves, or applied learning where providers arrange visits to places for refugees to practise their English in everyday life. Learning also takes place during informal chatting before and after lessons, or during breaks. Blended learning combines traditional face-to-face teaching with online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online.

The composition of learners can vary from independent learning or one-to-one learning to group sessions; groups may range from single nationality groups, groups resettled under the same programme to mixed groups that include a range of people who moved to the UK for different reasons. There may also be large variations in abilities and learning outcomes among learners within the same group.



Case Study

Additional benefits of ESOL provision in a classroom setting (Derbyshire)

In Derbyshire, ESOL provision for resettled refugees is based at adult education centres.

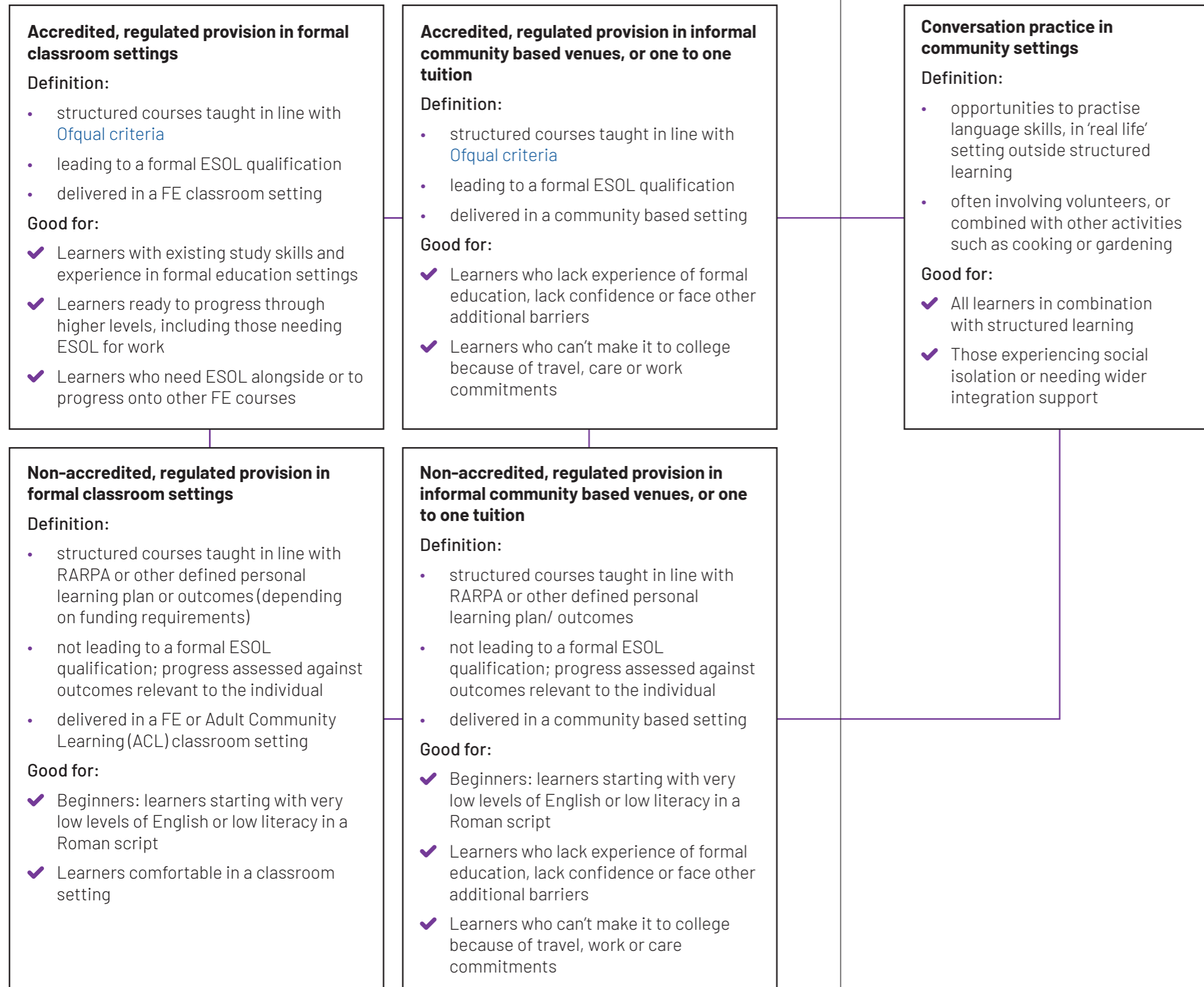
An unforeseen benefit of working with Adult Education Services has been that families have become comfortable in the adult education centres. This has led to refugee family members trying other subjects on offer including art, yoga, flower arranging, GCSE maths and IT.

It has also provided them with access to expert staff who can guide them towards their goals, whether that is further study, volunteering or paid employment.

For more information contact the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (see [Part 1](#) for contact details).

Many learners benefit from attending ESOL in an adult education setting.

Figure iv: The diverse ESOL provider landscape



Agencies in the delivery landscape

ESOL providers

ESOL providers might be colleges, local authorities, voluntary and community sector agencies, or support organisations in the refugee sector. Different providers are well placed to offer different types of ESOL. By working together locally, they can ensure a comprehensive ESOL offer that meets diverse needs and opportunities for individuals to move from one type of learning to another in line with their progression needs. For example:

- FE colleges tend to offer classroom style accredited learning, but can also offer non-accredited courses and sometimes deliver ESOL in community-based settings.
- Local authorities may provide or commission ESOL as part of their adult community learning offer, delivered in a variety of settings.
- VCS organisations are more likely to offer pre-entry and entry level ESOL, and in informal settings including in learners' own homes.
- Any provider might also offer complementary learning opportunities, for example conversation clubs, activities such as cooking classes and trips to local places of interest.

Refugee support organisations

Refugee support organisations offer a range of support to refugees across key areas of integration: employment, housing, finances, health, education, leisure, social connections and language. In this capacity, many refugee support organisations are providers of ESOL or work closely with providers of ESOL to deliver language learning as part of holistic and tailored integration support. The benefits of funding and delivering ESOL within this type of approach are demonstrated in the case studies overleaf.

Case Study

Delivering an integrated construction sector package between sectors (Leeds)

Ahmed, 40, arrived from Syria in the UK in 2016 as a resettled refugee. The Specialist Training and Employment Programme (STEP) delivered by [World Jewish Relief](#) has been supporting him on his journey into meaningful and sustainable employment since October 2018. As part of several activities designed to support Ahmed into work he attends ESOL classes. Ahmed is passionate about being able to speak English well, understanding this as important to allow him to integrate better into society.

As with many STEP clients, Ahmed's aspiration is to find work in the construction sector. STEP, delivered by the Refugee Council in Leeds, created an integrated construction package which delivers an ESOL for construction course at the same time as a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) theory course. Delivering them simultaneously enables clients to acquire the information with a great depth of understanding because it provides an opportunity to learn the sector specific vocabulary and to apply this in their CSCS theory course. As Ahmed describes:

'It was an important introduction for the building industry in the UK. Having both [CSCS theory and ESOL for construction] at the same time was very useful. We had the opportunity of practically applying what we learnt in ESOL construction at CSCS card training.

[ESOL] is really important to be integrated with the society at personal and professional level ... however ESOL for construction is more useful than the general ESOL as it will help me career wise.... it is helpful to have both.'

Following their classroom training the clients then attend a 'Behind the Scenes' session at a working construction site with Business in the Community (BITC). Behind the Scenes is a programme that provides STEP clients with a tour of a UK workplace, in this case a construction site. This offers clients an opportunity to apply the language they have learnt and to become familiar with a construction site to relieve any nerves about going into a UK workplace for the first time.

Case Study

Tailored quality information through partnership working (London)

[Refugee Council](#) have been partnering with different organisations who are best placed to provide specific information on topics that learners ask for, in a format that is appropriate and ESOL-centred.

For example, in London they worked with a legal organisation to provide sessions about housing and employment rights. Previously the organisation had delivered the workshops without providing appropriate resources or activities for participants who spoke English as a second language. Refugee Council worked with the organisation to design workshops that incorporated language learning (delivered by ESOL teachers at the Refugee Council), followed by information sessions.

The sessions benefitted refugee learners because they were able to access information relevant to their integration and safety in the UK, whilst also learning and practising their English, and Refugee Council were able to ensure that they understood the content of the lesson by teaching the language through ESOL guided practice.

Case Study

Targeting specific refugee learner need (Bristol / Birmingham / Wolverhampton / Coventry)

ACH ([Ashley Community Housing](#)) developed Hello Neighbour and Hello Job courses in response to the limitations they saw in existing generic ESOL provision. The two courses, which are complementary but can be delivered separately from one another, focus on developing a core set of basic vocabulary for pre-entry learners, with Hello Neighbour focused on everyday life and Hello Job concentrating on finding work and workplace language.

Providing this basic vocabulary allows refugee learners to begin the process of integrating into life in the UK far more quickly than progressing through the Adult Education system. Typically learners will spend a year in pre-entry, a year in Entry level 1 and so on. Each of the courses are 12 weeks in duration, equipping learners with a starting point to enable them to engage in conversations in English and to find work. Once this basic level of English has been established, learners can then pick up additional language more effectively through their day-to-day lives.

These courses have high success rates with over 30% of participants finding work with three months of completing the course(s). Ultimately, they act to increase learners' confidence to a point where they no longer need to rely on mainstream language acquisition provision and can instead take control of their own integration journeys.

Basic vocabulary allows refugee learners to begin the process of integrating into life in the UK

Case Study

User-centred, holistic support facilitated by partners working together (Ashford)

Since 2016, the partnership between Ashford Borough Council and Concept Training has facilitated a continued successful delivery of the LIST Programme to Syrian refugees. Their needs are understandably complex and extra support provided by Kent Adult Education and Home-Start help ensure a wider range of need is met.

The language and emotional needs of all families are assessed within a week of arrival in the UK which enables them to be placed in the most suitable setting to support their personal development. The [LIST programme](#) is flexible and tailored to individual need with Individual Learning Plans also implemented to help monitor progress.

Concept Training operate a 'one stop shop' where refugees can access a variety of services to support integration including employment advice, language practice and parenting classes all within an empathetic and holistic framework. This setting also provides personal growth e.g. mother and baby classes support the bonding process in a safe and stress-free environment.

The benefits of working in partnership mean a more seamless approach where both the practical and emotional needs of the refugees can be identified and responded to promptly and efficiently.

Frontline referring and support agencies

Many organisations that have direct contact with refugees regularly need to make referrals to ESOL courses. These referring agencies include:

- Resettlement case workers – the Home Office provides funding for a dedicated caseworker for refugees resettled through the VPRS/ UKRS. This person may work for the local authority, or for a VCS organisation if the local authority has contracted out the wraparound support.
- Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officers (LAASLOs) – MHCLG funding, matched by local authorities, put in place a network of case workers to support refugees who have come through the asylum route with their transition from the asylum system to mainstream services, including English language tuition. At the time of writing this was a pilot operating in 19 local authority areas.

- Refugee support sector voluntary organisations (including refugee-led community organisations or RCOs) – they often provide support to resettled and asylum route refugees, including urgent support through the ‘move on’ period and wider employment and integration support in the longer term.
- Jobcentre Plus – most refugees will have interaction with Jobcentre Plus in order to claim benefits. Those claiming a work-related benefit will be allocated a work coach, who will provide employment support services.
- Other public service providers, including housing providers, healthcare providers, social care and libraries.

It is beneficial for the learner if respective institutions communicate about how best to support the same individual to maximise their learning, whether in the transition between providers or for providers working with the same learner at one time.

2.3 What enables effective funding and delivery?

Taking into consideration practitioner and research expertise, this section summarises key elements of good practice that can help overcome challenges and increase opportunities to deliver an ideal learner journey for refugees.

Local multi-agency coordination

- ✓ There is a strategic, multi-agency approach at a local level where stakeholders from all relevant domains come together.
- ✓ These stakeholders have a shared understanding of their learners’ needs, collaborate on funding bids, share teaching resources and training, and create smooth pathways for learners moving from one institution to another.
- ✓ They keep up to date on the changing local context and the national policy and political environment as well as funding opportunities.
- ✓ There is an efficient, coordinated system about learners that includes
 - exhaustive and up-to-date mapping of provision across providers
 - a central place where potential learners can access information about provision, support and initial assessment
 - established processes for learners to register and join a shared waiting list
 - good quality initial assessments undertaken in a consistent way
 - each learner receiving a personalised learning plan, appropriate referral and monitoring
 - a central learner record.
- ✓ Organisations collaborate on funding bids and refer learners to one another so that learner needs are prioritised.

Resources and funding environment

- ✓ There is reliable funding so organisations can plan and optimise efficiency of their work.
- ✓ Funding is comprehensive so that all learners have access to appropriate language support – regardless of their needs, background, household circumstances, government programme under which they were recognised as a refugee, and geographical location.
- ✓ Learning is based on available evidence about what approaches are effective, although not compromised by targets and funding or spending requirements.

Workforce

- ✓ ESOL tutors receive training on assessment, course design, teaching strategies, fostering progression, and refugee specific knowledge and skills. This includes training on teaching basic literacy to those with little or no formal education prior to arriving in the UK.
- ✓ Learning is designed and delivered by trained staff, who have opportunities for continual professional development and networking.

Parts 3 and 4 of the toolkit are dedicated to detailed good practice examples and existing resources that can support delivery.



Local collaboration and consultation is an important part of ensuring suitable and effective ESOL provision.

Part 3

Strengthening joined up working

Working across different institutions and professional backgrounds is not always straightforward, and people need to give much time and effort to working together constructively. Some challenges are perhaps inevitable and need to be worked through carefully to minimise their impact and to not hinder effective language provision for refugees.

There was consensus from participants in the SEER project that strengthening joined up working is key to delivering comprehensive, inclusive ESOL provision tailored to the needs of refugees and their wider integration. For this reason, we have dedicated this section to illustrating existing good practice and detailing existing strategic coordination functions.

3.1 Strategic coordination

Local authorities in particular have expressed a desire to see more initiatives to improve ESOL coordination, such as frequently mapping provision, a single point of contact for information about ESOL provision, and better partnership working within local authorities and with the VCS. A key task for those with a coordination role is to develop a picture of current provision, which can be challenging particularly in areas where there are many small community-based organisations delivering ESOL informally. Recent coordination initiatives include the following:

- There is an ESOL coordinator in each region whose roles relate to ESOL for resettled refugees ([see more information here](#)).
- The English Language Coordination Fund projects, funded by MHCLG in 2019/20, have developed new coordination models ([see more information here](#)).
- Learning and Work (commissioned by DfE) have developed [resources that encourage collaborative working](#) and support local areas looking to develop ESOL local partnerships.

Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships (RSMPs) have a broader role supporting local authorities to meet the needs of refugees in their areas, which includes the need for language support. They bring together key partners and stakeholders in their regions, which can help to improve information sharing and coordination of ESOL. See [Part 1](#) for a list of RSMPs.

Examples of strategic coordination efforts follow in the next pages.



Focus on ESOL Regional Coordinators for Refugees

ESOL Regional Coordinators were established by the Home Office in 2016 to support the delivery of ESOL provision for resettled refugees across the UK. The main purpose of the role is to facilitate the pooling of resources, expertise and coordination of arrangements to ensure that language training needs in a region are met with quality provision, at a place and pace that suits each eligible migrant's needs and circumstances, while providing assurance that quality standards are maintained and issues can be identified and addressed appropriately and in a timely manner.

Key tasks of the coordinator role include:

- Map existing ESOL provision in each region
- Support local authority partners in their plans to deliver on access to ESOL for resettled adults
- Draw together contributions of those supporting English language learning for resettled adults to ensure funding is used to maximise access at regional level
- Support local authorities to increase the volume and quality of informal ESOL provision
- Support and drive problem solving and planning at a national, regional and local level
- Capture key learning and identify and share good practice.

The coordinators have been supporting local authority partners to work towards meeting the Home Office funding instructions for ESOL for VPRS-resettled adults of eight hours provision per week plus conversational opportunities, up to Entry level 3. The coordinators have mapped ESOL provision across every region - for example the [www.](http://www.learningenglish.org.uk)

learningenglish.org.uk site in Yorkshire and Humber - and created or built upon existing networks of ESOL providers, practitioners and other key stakeholders such as JCP to work together to better meet the English language needs of the resettled adults.

The coordinators have also supported local authority partners to identify and overcome a range of barriers to ESOL for the resettled adults, including: a need for more informal, pre-entry level provision for newly resettled refugees with very little English or formal schooling in their own language prior to arriving in the UK; particular challenges that can be faced in rural areas, with a lack of existing ESOL provision in isolated settings; and, the need for more childcare provision to enable adults to access ESOL, especially women.

The coordinators meet quarterly as a group with the Home Office to update on progress, discuss common issues and barriers, and to share good practice and resources. The coordinators value this way of working together, sharing expertise, good practice and resources on a day to day basis and benefitting from the range of expertise in the group from ESOL practitioners to academics to those with experience of the refugee and asylum-seeking sector.

ESOL Regional Coordinators have also been invited to share good practice and lessons learned with the Home Office, DfE and MHCLG on English language training for refugees to inform broader government planning on ESOL, including feeding into the 2019 consultation on the proposed National ESOL Strategy for England.

To contact the ESOL coordinator for your region, get in touch with your RSMP (see [Part 1](#)).

English Language Coordination Fund projects

Seven local authorities and one RSMP have benefited from funding from the English Language Coordination Fund (ELCF) to develop new coordination models. The projects are listed below:

- Bedford ESOL Service (East of England)
www.bedfordesol.org.uk
- English Language Coordination Fund Project in Boston, Lincolnshire (East of England)
www.learnenglishinbostonuk.co.uk
- Haringey ESOL Coordination Project (at Haringey Adult Learning Service, London)
www.haringey.gov.uk/jobs-and-training/adult-learning-service
- This Way for English (Kirklees)(Yorkshire and Humber)
welcometokirklees.blog/english-this-way also see the case studies on [agencies taking complementary roles](#), and [libraries as a single point of contact](#)
- Manchester ESOL Advice Service (North West)
gmesol.org also see the case study below
- Learn English Together (Merton, London)
let.org.uk
- Newham's Entry to ESOL (London)
newhamesolexchange.org.uk
- Learning English in Yorkshire and the Humber
www.learningenglish.org.uk also see the [case study](#)

Case Study

Identifying specific shortages through common approaches (Manchester)

The [Manchester ESOL Advice Service](#) developed a common assessment tool and shared waiting list so that there is only one waiting list for ESOL in the city. The Advice Service undertakes assessments, liaises with providers about available provision and offers places to individuals on the waiting list. Each learner is given a card at the end of their assessment, to avoid learners having multiple assessments.

Data collected is used to generate detailed reports on met and unmet demand for ESOL in Manchester by level, geography, home postcode, employment status, and availability for classes. This has resulted in provision being reconfigured to meet the need. For example there was a shortage of evening classes at pre-entry and Entry 1 levels in central and east area. Some providers were able to respond by offering provision there.

Further, a need for additional daytime provision was identified in east Manchester. A church minister became aware of this through an ESOL providers meeting and she offered teaching space. A provider recruited a tutor currently volunteering at the church, and an Entry 2 class was delivered.

The Manchester ESOL Advice Service is funded by the MHCLG English Language Coordination Fund (ELCF).

Case Study

Tracking pre-entry learners together to enable progression (Blackburn with Darwen)

A challenge for Blackburn with Darwen is that a number of ESOL learners have been ‘stuck’ at the pre-entry stage, accessing provision delivered by VCS providers but not progressing to the next level of provision due to long waiting lists across the borough or other barriers. Learners often access the same type of course again and often with the same provider.

The local authority initiated several strands of work with other stakeholders to address this issue:

- **ESOL hub** – regular meetings for ESOL providers. Providers delivering ESOL in the borough for years have met through the group for the first time. This has resulted in sharing of resources and tutors, and greater streamlining in provision across the borough.
- **Online service directory** – local ESOL provision has been mapped and will be available online to search for appropriate provision by level and distance and to register for an assessment. The website was created with a mobile first approach and has a translation feature.
- **Learner database** – this database will have an entry for each ESOL learner in the borough; details on over 600 learners have been collected so far. The aim is to use the data to identify gaps in provision and to support individual learners to access appropriate provision – an officer in the local authority will be able to see when a learner has completed a course and will contact them to discuss the most appropriate next step for them. Providers complete an online form for each learner; initial resistance from providers with their own forms was overcome by taking their views into account when designing the process. A local authority data protection officer helped ensure the database is compliant with GDPR requirements.

Blackburn with Darwen is one of the five Integration Areas identified in the government’s Integrated Communities Strategy. Each area has produced a local integration strategy, with ESOL as a key focus.



A number of ESOL learners have been ‘stuck’ at the pre-entry stage, accessing provision delivered by VCS providers but not progressing to the next level of provision due to long waiting lists.



Case Study

Addressing collective priorities through a coordinated funding bid (Suffolk)

The Suffolk ESOL Steering Group brings ESOL providers together termly to share information on a range of issues including waiting lists, tutor availability, curricula, exam boards, funding, current delivery and plans for future delivery. This improves awareness of available provision and where gaps exist. The group is independently chaired by a representative from the university with an interest in adult learning and supported by a representative from the county council. The group has collaborated on several successful funding bids: Investing in Communities; Challenge and Innovation Fund; Migration Impacts Fund; Reaching Communities and the Controlling Migration Fund (CMF).

The ESOL Steering Group discussed key priority areas for ESOL provision. Their CMF bid gave examples of the types of provision that could be delivered for a nominal number of learners with an estimated cost per learner, rather than set out who would be delivering the provision and what the specific delivery would be. When the funding was secured there was a tender process and bidders proposed provision for their chosen learner profile.

The providers appreciated that they did not have to be involved in the time-consuming elements of evidence gathering, bid and report writing that can be barriers to organisations accessing funding – and in the CMF case only local authorities are eligible to apply. They also found benefits in spreading the provision across providers. One provider, whose learners exceeded expectations of their learning, had made too-low assumptions about how many learners would attend their new course. As other providers were exceeding their targets, it was appropriate to allow the provider with lower than target numbers to continue to meet the needs of the learners who were on their course.

502 learners were able to improve their English language skills through the CMF-funded ESOL provision, compared to a target of 120. Feedback survey responses indicate that learners feel they have improved their English skills.

For more information, contact the Steering Group via the East of England SMP (see [Part 1](#) for contact details).



The providers appreciated that they did not have to be involved in the time-consuming elements of evidence gathering, bid and report writing that can be barriers to organisations accessing funding.



3.2 What good practice looks like for local ESOL steering groups

If you are working with other stakeholders, consider how far you currently work together - or could in the future - on the following aspects of ESOL provision.

- ✓ **Do you have a multi-sector, multi-agency group concerned with ESOL provision locally that meets on a regular basis? If not, can you gauge interest in setting up an initial meeting?** Consider contacting college ESOL leads, local authority officers responsible for the adult education and refugee resettlement budgets, VCS ESOL providers, refugee support organisations, and your regional strategic migration partnership. Does your group have resources or capacity to provide a secretariat function, make joint funding bids and coordinate the actions of the group?
- ✓ **Is there a means of sharing learning and teaching resources among ESOL tutors, volunteers, support workers and learners? How can everyone have access to this bank of resources?**

- ✓ **Are there training opportunities available to local ESOL tutors (volunteers and paid professionals)?** These might cover teaching skills, cultural competence/understanding of refugees, safeguarding and so on. What are the ways of seeking out such opportunities locally?
- ✓ **Are members of the local community aware that there are refugee communities living locally who are learning English?** Are there opportunities for them to volunteer, or build relationships with learners?

- ✓ **What information is already coordinated about ESOL provision across the sector?** Can refugees and support workers readily understand what is on offer by referring to one single document or tool? Can support organisations make a referral to the most appropriate provider available? Are you able to identify gaps in provision at certain levels, locations or for certain groups of refugee learners? Can you work together to address any gaps?
- ✓ **Is there a 'one stop shop', a hub or triage point in your area where refugees can find out about an array of support services locally that include ESOL provision?** If not, what are the options available to develop this kind of resource? Can you look at what other places have done for inspiration?

- ✓ **How can learners become more aware of the various locations locally that provide language support in different ways?** Can providers arrange visits for learners to experience the culture and ethos of different institutions and enable them to travel independently to and from those locations?
- ✓ **Are ESOL provision times coordinated so that learners have options about when they can attend ESOL provision that fits around children, work and their other commitments?** Look at duplication, gaps in times of day, days of the week and so on.
- ✓ **Have you agreed a consistent or standardised approach to initial assessment (IA) and tracking learners?** This might include a consistent approach and standardised content to an IA with a learning plan so that assessment is ongoing during the learning journey, sharing information between providers so that all learners have one, good quality assessment and a smooth transition between learning providers who are aware of what the individual has learned so far and their key needs.
- ✓ **How can different ESOL providers communicate about individual learners?** For example, can they arrange to cover topics at the same time in order to reinforce learning in different classes and settings? Can they work together to look at ways to supplement the learning of particular individuals who may be getting stuck at the same level and struggling to progress?
- ✓ **Are there clear ways for refugees to progress between courses, without significant gaps?** Are these communicated to learners?
- ✓ **Is the transition between types of provision smooth for the learner?** Can 'sending' and 'receiving' institutions communicate about the leaving/arriving cohort of learners?
- ✓ **Is ESOL coordination sustainable here?** Is it reliant on a key individual? How can this network be sustained in the longer term?



Mapping current ESOL provision is an important first step in the process of addressing local need.

3.3 Examples of working together

Instances of promising networking and partnership working in different parts of the country to improve ESOL provision for refugees are provided in the remainder of this section. They may inspire readers to build on their progress and adopt similar efforts in their own locale.

Case Study

Providing opportunities to build local relationships (SEER project)

ESOL stakeholders attending regional consultation events for this toolkit were given meaningful opportunities for networking and relationship-building within professional backgrounds and in geographical locations. Stakeholders increased their awareness of one another's work. There are indications that their participation, networking and discussions are improving partnership working. For instance a new ESOL networking group is now being established in the East of England.

In one discussion group that brought together people from different organisations in the same part of the region, participants explored the possibility of working jointly to deliver an ESOL for construction course, to enable learners to get their Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards. On their own, the local authorities around the table had insufficient learners to make a course financially viable; bringing together learners from more than one local authority could overcome this. If this comes to fruition, more refugee learners will be able to take a meaningful step towards employment.

Case Study

Spotting duplication by consulting widely (Waltham Forest)

The Waltham Forest Single Point of Contact (SPOC) is a free, independent ESOL advice service. They also carry out research on the needs and barriers to access and progression onto ESOL courses in order to commission provision based on findings. A report on the needs of migrant residents in the borough is due for publication in 2020.

For the research, residents are asked about barriers they experienced in accessing an ESOL course or progressing to a higher level. The team also consulted key stakeholders including ESOL practitioners, community leaders and key workers, learners, and those who were unable to access provision.

Having mapped all the ESOL and social integration projects in the borough, the SPOC team found not only areas of unmet need (such as the need for crèches and for creative

provision for those with health issues) but many similar programmes targeting the same groups. They concluded that without an effective community engagement strategy and time to implement it, only the same learners will benefit from these programmes.

Because of the research project, local statutory providers are being encouraged to apply jointly with local VCS organisations to maximise opportunities for capacity building. This approach will also ensure providers use their AEB allocation for eligible learners and utilise additional SPOC funding for those ineligible for AEB-funded provision.

Waltham Forest is one of five local authorities within MHCLG's Integration Area Programme (IAP). Their SPOC is part of their wider MHCLG Connecting Communities programme, funded through the IAP and launched in July 2019.

Case Study

Different agencies taking complementary roles (Kirklees)

#KirkleesWelcomes This Way for English works to support vulnerable migrants, including new refugees, when they arrive in Kirklees by completing initial assessments to explore their English language development needs and their holistic, personal needs, followed by signposting to appropriate provision. Assessments are conducted at single points of contact in local libraries in four wards with the highest levels of migration.

The project works in a complementary way with the regional Learning English in Yorkshire and the Humber (LEYH) project (see the associated case study). The LEYH resource maps and lists all provision in Kirklees (as well as across the region) while the local Kirklees project provides initial learner assessment and then uses the LEYH resource to match learners to appropriate provision.

As a further example of complementary working at #KirkleesWelcomes Sar, an Iranian refugee, had an initial assessment where he expressed an interest in volunteering. He not only subsequently attended two different ESOL classes, the assessor arranged for him to have an interview for volunteering with a relevant local organisation. She also referred him to Huddersfield town library where a DWP colleague helped him to write his CV. Sar lacks confidence with his English but is determined to improve and has worked hard. As a further consequence of this successful engagement, Sar now brings new refugee families from his community to the assessment centre, and so generating opportunities for new refugees to also benefit from this service.

#KirkleesWelcomes also holds ESOL Partnership Meetings which bring together ESOL providers to increase information sharing and collaboration. They have noticed that while tracking and supporting the progression of learners using outreach workers, progression has proved challenging due to a shortage of appropriate provision in the authority - most is pre-entry or Entry level 1. Much of the provision is community-based, dependent on short term contracts and reliant on volunteers. More strategic planning is now taking place and work is ongoing with partners to explore funding options to address the unmet need.

#KirkleesWelcomes This Way for English is funded by the English Language Coordination Fund.

Part 4

Overcoming challenges

This part of the toolkit recognises some of the most common or significant challenges that can arise for organisations, professionals and volunteers who are all working to improve provision of ESOL to refugees, and provides some examples of ways in which these challenges have been tackled around the country.

4.1 Common challenges

Common challenges in providing suitable and effective ESOL for refugees identified by stakeholders participating in the SEER project can be summarised as follows:

- Getting a comprehensive overview of changing local need and matching provision to need.** There are some pockets of good practice where data on need is collected centrally and used to inform which classes are put on. For example, [Manchester ESOL Advice Service](#) uses a common assessment tool, coordinates a shared waiting list across the city, and can generate reports on met and unmet demand. However, this is not happening regularly in every area. Consequently, learners can appear on multiple waiting lists and gaps in provision could go unnoticed; for example we know there is a general shortage of ESOL provision at the extremes – at lower levels (Entry level 1 and below) and at the higher end (Level 2), as concluded by our [literature review](#). Progression pathways can be less effective with people becoming stuck at pre-entry level because suitable follow on courses do not exist or have not been identified for the individual.
- Balancing competing priorities where ESOL funding is not ringfenced.** Providers will not always be able to prioritise ESOL within the AEB when there is limited funding and they have to meet demand for other qualifications. Further, some providers understand ESOL courses to be less cost effective to run than other courses (for a range of reasons such as different funding rates for different qualifications and where small class sizes are most appropriate), making it more difficult to make the case for prioritising them. These challenges inevitably will impact on the availability of courses for refugees and, in turn, upon waiting lists.
- Institutions being rated according to performance.** Where outcomes focus on attainment rather than progress and wider goals, it can create incentives for providers to rush learners towards a qualification, even where that pathway may not best suit the learner need. This could lead to demotivation of learners whose longer term aspirations could be crushed.
- Short term budgets.** Providers in the voluntary and community sector are an important part of ESOL delivery but the often short term nature of funding pots available to them can make it difficult to justify the resources required to submit a good quality application. This again will impact on the availability of courses for refugees, particularly in community settings. Some providers are able to survive by coordinating provision, seeking alternative sources of funding, and looking for ways to recruit and retain tutors on short-term contracts.
- Engaging and working effectively with other stakeholders in the local area.** This happens in some places more than others. Smaller organisations can struggle to resource attendance at such meetings. Some key statutory actors may not prioritise this area of work, leaving coordination efforts patchy and may disillusion other people round the table. Missed opportunities to coordinate at this level can also have a multitude of impacts on learners, such as fewer appropriate learning options available to refugees and opportunities to progress.
- Overcoming practical issues refugees may have in accessing ESOL.** This could include arriving mid-way through academic year, travel costs and childcare. Further, such issues often arise in combination, and meeting just one need in isolation is likely to be sufficient to result in a refugee learner attending an ESOL class. These are big challenges for providers for many reasons, including where they have limited learner support budgets and a limited ability to provide wraparound support.
- Overcoming psycho-social barriers that refugees may face to learning.** This could include dealing with mental health or trauma that manifests in the classroom, limited literacy skills and limited prior educational experience with a corresponding lack of confidence. It is difficult for providers to deal with this effectively, particularly where they do not have training or experience of dealing with such challenges. Failing to respond to such needs could have unwanted impacts upon a refugee learner beyond the immediate learning opportunity; it could reinforce their psychological struggles and lead to their disengagement with learning or other services.

4.2 Case studies of meeting top challenges in ESOL provision for refugees

The major challenges in supporting refugees to improve their English through providing suitable and effective ESOL have been highlighted throughout this toolkit. This section provides examples of work going on around the country around a) planning, b) working with other stakeholders, and c) tailored delivery. Most of these examples are recent and pioneering, and therefore not yet been subject to rigorous evaluation. We showcase them here in solidarity with anyone grappling with similar issues and seeking inspiration.

a) Planning delivery

Challenge 1. How can I use my ESOL funding most effectively?

When considering how to best use an ESOL budget, give thought to:

- where the greatest need exists in your area
- what types and settings for ESOL are known to be effective
- how you can work creatively and strategically, in partnership with others to provide an offer that meets the local need.

Improved coordination at a local level can help map need, address gaps and enable existing resources to be used most effectively, as described in [Part 3](#).

Funding should be used to commission delivery models that have been shown to be effective; [Challenge 10](#) considers when different styles and settings might be appropriate. There is usually a need for a variety of provision types to meet the various needs of the refugee learner population, typically delivered by different types of provider. For example colleges are most likely to offer accredited provision, while VCS organisations may offer conversation clubs and other less formal, integration-focused language learning opportunities.

There can be other ways to meet need within existing resources. For example:

- A participant at a stakeholder consultation event described investing local authority funds to increase provision capacity. This local authority delivers some AEB-funded ESOL Level 1 and 2 classes in-house. Waiting lists for the classes were reduced by investing in reconfiguring the provision to increase capacity: class frequency was increased and the available space was used differently by splitting the room into three teaching spaces. Although this required the council to invest its own funds in the short term, learner numbers were a factor in subsequent AEB funding allocations. This meant an increase in the next funding allocation, enabling the council to maintain this level of provision.
- Derbyshire County Council combined funding under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) with AEB funding to offer services open to all learners, rather than just refugees resettled via the VPRS. This has resulted in an increase in ESOL capacity across Derbyshire, and provision to meet the needs of small groups of learners in geographically diverse locations. This would have been otherwise impossible in a rural area such as Derbyshire. For more detail see the case study '[Establishing ESOL provision in a rural context \(Derbyshire\)](#)'.

Case Study

Using flexible funding to complement existing provision (Southampton)

Southampton City Council used Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) resources to develop a programme that complemented the ESOL provision already on offer and reached learners that had not previously accessed mainstream provision. Consultation with partners indicated what would help address the unmet need.

The council commissioned an FE college experienced in ESOL delivery and a third sector provider deeply embedded in the refugee and migrant community. Stand-alone courses covered themes including understanding money, food shopping, internet safety, helping your children learn, and filling in forms. A variety of settings were used including the college, children's centres, community centres, schools, and a supermarket. Half of the courses came with a crèche offer.

New learners have developed familiarity with classroom culture and the expectations of regular and punctual attendance, notifying absences, completing homework, etc. This has allowed them to progress to other courses with greater learner-readiness.

Learning points from Southampton City Council include the following:

- For the college, involvement in the project has resulted in changes to its delivery, saying 'We will incorporate a lot of the materials we have developed into mainstream Family ESOL courses. We are also looking at running similar short courses within the college ESOL department or Family Learning. As there is no drive to cover an exam syllabus, learners can spend more time on ensuring that they have fully understood and are able to use relevant language, which can lead to better retention.'
- Offering free, accessible short courses meant recruiting some very hard-to-reach and vulnerable learners, but engaging these learners to invest in themselves and progress as learners remains challenging.
- The project could have done more to address the needs of higher-level learners.
- Courses that ran over the summer holiday periods were very poorly attended and had very high non-completion rates.
- Courses organised within schools were very challenging, as it was hard to coordinate free time and space within the schools and attendance numbers were much lower than in the more generalised community provision.

For more information contact the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM, see [Part 1](#) for contact details).

Case Study

Colleges working with local partners (ShIPLEY)

ShIPLEY College spends around 10% of its AEB allocation on a range of accredited ESOL provision, much of which is community-based.

Recognising the need for a mix of provision in order for ESOL to be accessible to students in a wide variety of situations, ShIPLEY College sees value in working in partnership with the VCS to create pathways and flexible provision.

'We work hard to develop AEB-funded provision that is financially responsible and effective, whilst also ensuring we are supporting the needs of the local community. This can be a difficult balance, but one that needs to be addressed when it comes to ESOL.' (Head of English and ESOL, ShIPLEY College).

The college works with a consortium of community partners to commission other types of ESOL provision, for example:

- Talk English - funded by MHCLG through the Integrated Communities English Language Programme (ICELP). Through the consortium of partners the college manages the contract but a range of VCS providers deliver the provision. Over 300 volunteers have been trained to teach low level ESOL classes for pre-entry and Entry 1 students in community settings.
- English for Everyone - funded by the Controlling Migration Fund (CMF). This programme targeted residents who couldn't access existing ESOL classes due to eligibility, work pattern, location, confidence etc. Community-based classes for over 600 students focused on helping them become an active member of their own communities.
- ESOL for pregnancy - funded through Better Start, Bradford. This programme consists of short courses for pregnant women run by a tutor and midwife, developing language and confidence around having a baby in the UK.

We work hard to develop AEB-funded provision that is financially responsible and effective, whilst also ensuring we are supporting the needs of the local community.

Challenge 2. How does devolution of the Adult Education Budget affect ESOL?

Powers being transferred to English regions and new mayoral responsibilities (referred to in 2.1) have brought both challenges and opportunities, including for ESOL provision.

Case Study

A Combined Authority (North of Tyne)

The North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) is preparing for devolution of the AEB from the 2020/21 academic year. This case study sets out how the NTCA is maximising the resulting opportunities and mitigating the challenges.

Devolution of the AEB presents an opportunity for a strategic approach to ensure ESOL provision is of high quality and meets local need, and ESOL has been identified as a mayoral priority in this area.

Now that adult skills provision is commissioned on a regional basis, the NTCA can have oversight of what is being delivered. There is an ongoing dialogue with providers about strategic priorities, and the NTCA is able to monitor providers to ensure that local priorities are met. It is instigating a shift away from short generic skills courses to more substantial occupation-linked courses. The NTCA is taking advantage of the opportunity for greater collaboration. Workshops have been held to discuss ESOL provision which have already resulted in improved and effective partnership working. For example it became apparent that one provider was undersubscribed while another had a waiting list; it was agreed that the provider with spaces would accept learners on the other provider's waiting list. In this way, the NTCA ensures that providers are collaborating not competing.

Combined authorities can decide how to allocate funds and their own approach to provider subcontracting. Some are allocating

100% of the budget through a tender process. The NTCA has allocated some funds to colleges and local authorities for 2020/21 based on provision delivered by those providers in 2018/19. The remaining 30% was put out to tender (open to providers nationally in accordance with EU procurement rules). Providers were asked to bid in line with regional priorities (to create provision to support the employed, the unemployed, and to create innovative provision). The NTCA sees the value that small providers (including in the VCS) can add, especially for subjects such as ESOL, but recognises their capacity issues in terms of tender applications. Consequently one of the contracts had a very low minimum threshold which meant that small providers could bid for an allocation that would be manageable for them.

Although the AEB allocated to the region is based on learners in 2017/18, the NTCA is projecting an increase of 36% in ESOL provision capacity by 2022/23 to 2,000 places. Work has started towards achieving this – the NTCA has set out strategic priority areas and providers are moving towards learner payment for courses not falling within these, such as some community learning courses (for example some craft-based courses). Although charging is not the NTCA's preferred option, it is enabling providers to increase capacity for key provision such as ESOL.



Refugees living in rural areas will benefit from learning vocabulary and phrases associated with public transport, and being able to practise them.

Challenge 3. How can I ensure learners aren't disadvantaged by living in a rural place or small town?

Rural areas and small towns can face additional hurdles to providing suitable and effective ESOL to refugees.

- Places without a diverse population tend to have minimal infrastructure in place to support new arrivals, including English language provision. There are few places to signpost refugees to pre-entry level ESOL provision. There may be few obvious venues to hold ESOL classes.
- Areas new to hosting refugees have less expertise to draw on, as all service providers are new to supporting refugees. There are likely to be few ESOL tutors in the area, and it can be difficult to recruit local volunteers because of a lack of awareness locally about the presence or needs of refugees.
- Isolation and transport are issues for new refugees. Likewise, colleges may find it difficult to work together when they are physically distant.
- Colleges struggle to provide ESOL when resettled refugees are the sole client group, as they cannot satisfy minimum class size requirements and small numbers of refugees cannot be split into classes appropriate to their level. This in turn impacts on refugees' opportunities for language socialisation as they will not be learning in a diverse learner group.

Case Study

Flexible funding to support areas new to hosting refugees (VPRS)

Many places participating in the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) after 2015 have been rural areas, yet the scheme has provided the opportunity to demonstrate that refugees can be resettled successfully in locations with little history of migration or diversity.

In recognition of the issues arising in these locations, the VPRS allows for 25% of the 'additional funding for ESOL' to be for 'non-participation' costs to set up provision or infrastructure, and additional 'childcare for ESOL' funding can help where travel to classes means usual drop off and pickup times for children at school cannot be accommodated. An example of how this has worked in practice can be seen in the [Derbyshire case study](#).

There may be other advantages associated with operating on a small scale: in places with a finite number of refugee learners it may be more feasible to set up more tailored initiatives that reach every individual. For example, in Darlington a buddying and mentoring scheme uses volunteers to support ESOL learners, an intervention that can realistically be offered to every individual who needs English language support because of the size of the refugee population. See [case study](#) for more details.

Case Study

Establishing ESOL provision in a rural context (Derbyshire)

Derbyshire is a geographically and economically diverse county. It has picturesque rural locations as well as market towns and ex-mining communities. It stretches up to border with Manchester and Sheffield in the north, and down to Leicestershire in the south.

Derbyshire County Council (DCC) – coordinating the VPRS on behalf of the district and borough councils across the county – decided to provide a new ESOL service designed around the needs of resettled families, rather than asking the families to adjust to what was on offer; existing ESOL classes in Chesterfield and Derby were full with waiting lists, timings of classes did not coincide with school drop off and pick up time, locations of classes involved a long protracted bus journey and the provision on offer did not meet the needs of the refugee families.

Important insights to designing a new service came from a charity in Derby city providing free informal ESOL in the city, as a starting point to build an ESOL structure that would work for DCC and around the needs of the families.

The solution to operational capacity came through working with the county Adult Education Service who have adult education centres across the county. They extended and set up new classes using existing tutors employed by DCC, recruited new tutors and sub-contracted tutors from a charity supporting refugees in Derby. Three classes in three locations were set up initially. As the number of resettled families increased, provision was extended and classes are now offered in 8 locations covering the whole county.

DCC made this affordable by combining VPRS and the Adult Education Services ESFA funding, as most of the learners are doing qualifications which attract funding. Travel and childcare costs have been shared between VPRS funding and the mainstream Learner Support Budget.

The advantages of creating bespoke ESOL provision include the ability to be very flexible to the needs of the students. For example, new mothers brought their babies along to class with them initially, topics are relevant to the family's needs e.g. sessions on the driving theory test, and family learning sessions in school holidays involve all members of the family. Consequently, attendance levels are very high for both men and women. Informal and formal learning can be combined in both classes so that learners can progress when ready; most learners who arrived in 2016 and 2017 at pre-entry level are now working towards an Entry level 3 qualification.

This approach provided additional opportunities to the wider community, as ESOL classes were open to other learners in rural communities who wouldn't normally have access to ESOL locally, and to unaccompanied asylum seeking children awaiting a school or college place. Offering mixed classes also gives resettled refugees the opportunity to interact with other groups of migrants.

The VPRS funding enabled DCC to provide ESOL in a way that would have been otherwise impossible. Working in partnership with a mainstream provider has enabled them to combine funding to increase ESOL capacity and meet the needs of small groups of learners in different locations. Bespoke flexible ESOL provision for this cohort is resource heavy in terms of management and coordination; a good working relationship between VPRS staff and the ESOL provider and lots of communication is key. Making classes sustainable without access to this funding is an area DCC is always looking to develop and will continue to focus on.

For more information contact the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (see [Part 1](#) for contact details).

Tips for supporting language learning in rural places and small towns

- Look into developing or joining a scheme to provide bikes and cycle training to refugees, like they did in the [East Riding of Yorkshire](#) and [won an award](#), or travel tickets and support refugees to take driving tests?
- Can your funding or other local support agencies provide laptops to be issued to isolated families so they can continue learning from home?
- Build relationships with other local services to open up alternative venues and sources of support, like Derbyshire did with Adult Education centres and offer additional work to ESOL tutors that are based elsewhere.
- Team up with colleagues in nearby local authorities to plan classes that are available across borders.
- Seek advice from nearby local authorities who have a longer history of supporting refugees.
- VPRS budget holders can consider using non-participation costs to set up new ESOL locations, and 'childcare for ESOL' funding to help where classes will clash with school drop off and pickup times.
- VPRS and AEB budget holders could collaborate on covering travel and childcare costs for refugees to attend classes.
- Consider how you can engage the local community to support refugees who need to improve their conversational English or confidence in using public transport.

Build relationships with other local services to open up alternative venues and sources of support.

Challenge 4. What does good practice in undertaking initial assessments with refugees look like?

Initial assessment (IA) activities assess the language needs of learners before they are placed on a programme of study. Effective and holistic IA is crucial to ensure that learners are placed in classes at the appropriate level, that wider learning needs are met such as literacy training, and support with attendance is available.

Stakeholders at the consultation events proposed that IA should:

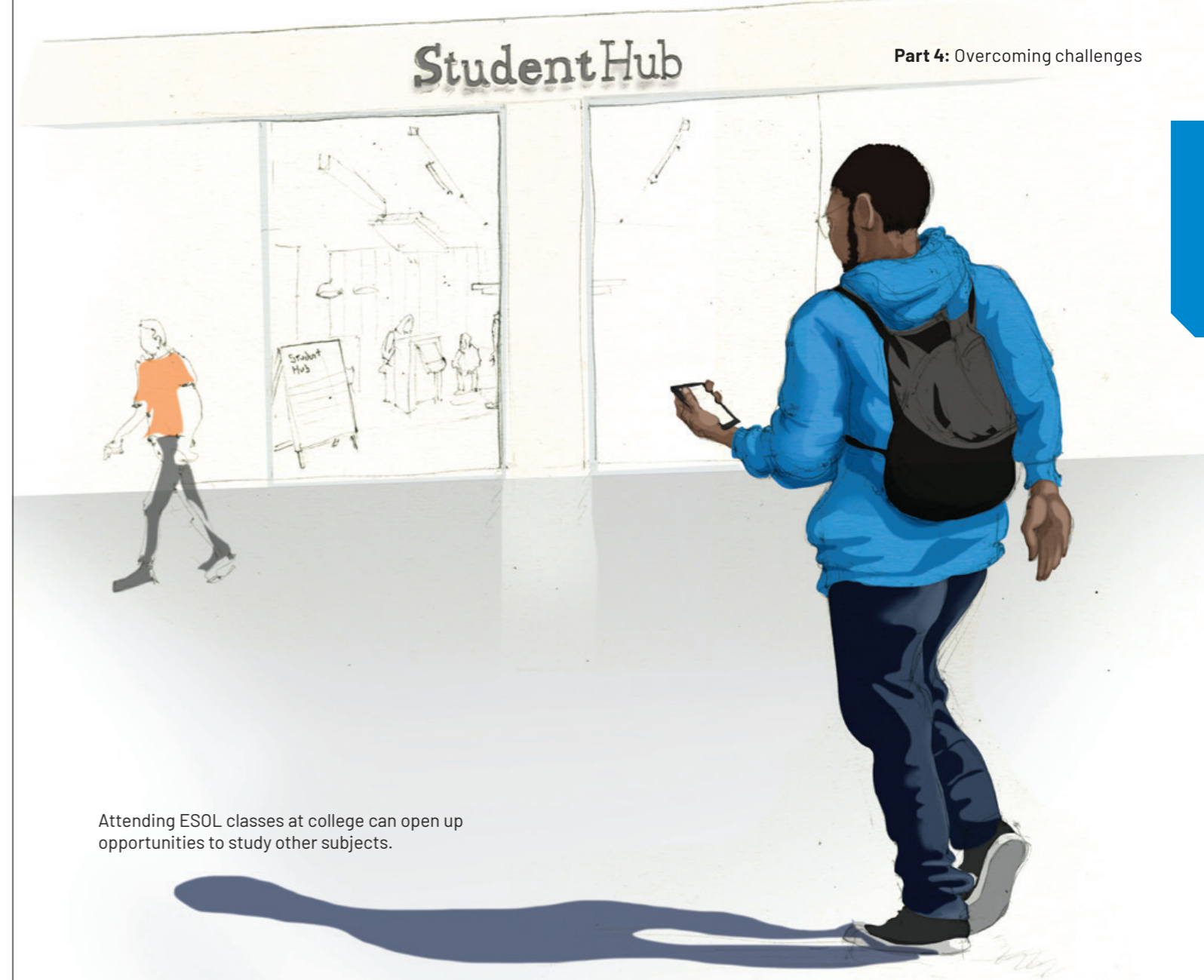
- be undertaken by assessors trained in refugee needs and backgrounds, who can handle the interview with sensitivity
- be given sufficient time and be conducted in a private and relaxed setting
- be conducted in the learner's own language if possible
- include learner aspirations
- note information about factors that may impact the learner's ability to commit to learning, such as caring responsibilities or part time work
- include literacy in the person's own language
- be holistic, that is, look at other support needs such as trauma and mental health
- involve sharing of information where appropriate so that learner does not have to be interviewed multiple times.

For various reasons it can be difficult to make an accurate assessment initially. Rather than being a one off event, the assessment needs to be more of a process that is continually reviewed.

Links to information and resources about initial assessment are given below:

Information and resources about initial assessment

- A study on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Nation & Macalister 2010, 2011) recommends carrying out a needs analysis to gauge learners' language and learning needs, followed by a diagnostic of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. At the consultation events for this project, participants highlighted the need for a standardised IA as learners are often assessed multiple times by different providers.
- Resources on IA created as part of the Skills for Life strategy detail how IA for refugees needs to be different from that for other ESOL learners, highlighting similar themes to those from the stakeholder events listed above.
- A new resource pack 'ESOL for refugees: resources for new arrivals', developed by the Learning and Work Institute and Learning Unlimited, includes guidance on screening. This builds on their guidance for the 'Learners New to ESOL' resource pack.
- Education Scotland has produced some detailed [ESOL initial assessment guidance and resources](#).
- A key element of the #KirkleesWelcomes [This Way for English](#) project has been the development of a robust initial assessment, with the aim of assessing over 1,600 learners in the local authority area in four libraries. The initial assessment tool was developed based on Learning Skills and Improvement Service (LSIS) good practice (the LSIS no longer exists but resources can still be found on the [Education and Training Foundation Excellence Gateway](#) website).
- Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English (SAVTE) has developed assessment tools that are learner centred and focus on micro skill targets as well other goals that enhance community connectivity, local knowledge and wellbeing (confidence and motivation). SAVTE works with new learners to produce a set of stepping stone targets, which sit on top of a range of micro English language skills. The learner assessments are based not just on English language levels, but also centred on individual learner aspirations, motivation, wellbeing, confidence and how well they are connected in their community.



Attending ESOL classes at college can open up opportunities to study other subjects.

Challenge 5. How can institutions respond to the needs of young refugees?

Education providers could consider a range of ways to support this group:

- providing tailored language support alongside mainstream education
- providing both formal and informal learning spaces that are flexible to meet the needs of young people
- allowing extra time in exams
- mentors and coaches working with young people one to one, to provide pastoral support and help learners navigate their educational journey
- multi-agency working, linking ESOL support with integration, social, educational and emotional well-being activities.

Our literature review highlighted a multi-agency ESOL programme for young refugees delivered at Glasgow Clyde College. The programme linked ESOL teaching with personal, social and creative development in addition to outdoor learning and specific subject teaching. The course used resources based on topics of interest to many of the young people such as football heroes. The college worked in partnership with the British Red Cross, social services and other agencies to support young people dealing with trauma. Staff accessed a 'Seasons for Growth' education programme which focuses on developing strategies to deal with grief and loss. Refugee students from the course have progressed to undergraduate courses and employment (Ma and Richardson, 2019).

While some of the following examples focus on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, much of the practice highlighted is equally applicable to young refugees more generally.

10 steps for improving educational outcomes for unaccompanied children (Virtual School Kent)

1. Bring key stakeholders involved in providing education to unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) together via regular meetings.
2. Commission 'ready for school' initiatives with local 'English as an Additional Language' (EAL) providers, including schools, colleges and NGOs. Schools and colleges are more likely to accept children who have been on these courses, and are prepared for formal learning environments.
3. Be creative with October EAL Census and Pupil Premium plus funds to help develop capacity in schools for English as an additional language provision, by collaborating with designated teachers for children in care in schools.
4. Complement provision, don't replicate it. Work with existing NGOs, schools, colleges to create greater coverage of ESOL provision, not more of the same in the same areas.
5. Develop service level agreements with NGOs or alternative educational providers for year 11s where necessary, as many mid entry year 11 unaccompanied children will find it difficult to secure a school place.
6. Appoint lead officers for this work within virtual schools and social services, rather than having it as an 'add-on' to someone's workload. Decision makers need to be of senior authority in local authority education or social services departments to make things happen regarding educational provision for UASC.
7. Develop accredited courses with members of staff who are responsible for looked after children, care leavers and UASC at further education colleges. Collaborate with designated members of staff for care leavers at colleges and heads of departments delivering ESOL courses.
8. Have an effective system to prioritise personal education plans (PEPs) and to monitor progress for UASC students. Profiling of ability on arrival, tracking and monitoring progress, and establishing base line testing are all vital to ensure progression in education.
9. Regularly and accurately map all provision in your area with relevant contacts, addresses, course details. Disseminate this regularly to local authority staff, NGOs and FE College providers, as well as young people.
10. Ensure continuity of advice, care and provision across all services for UASC – this matters to them. One message, with clarity and transparency across all agencies. Continuity of staff contact also matters as it helps develop trust, rapport, feelings of safety, and open and inclusive relationships.

Case Study

Supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children prior to joining mainstream education (Kent)

The 'Learning for Life' project, run by [Kent Refugee Action Network \(KRAN\)](#), is an ESOL project aimed at unaccompanied asylum seeking children mostly aged 15 to 18. It is funded by Virtual School Kent and the Colyer Ferguson Grant.

Young people are usually referred to the project by social care, often when they have missed out on entry to college at the start of the academic year. As a result, some spend up to a year accessing this provision before entering mainstream education.

Sessions are delivered four mornings per week across different venues. The subject matter contains themes useful to young people including: 'education and my future', 'looking after myself', 'community', 'health' and 'safety'. Lessons also link to the interests of the young people, for example cricket. The most successful lessons are those which are interactive.

In addition to formal learning, young people are offered extra-curricular activities such as art, drama and cultural/historical trips. They are also paired with a mentor with whom they meet once a week. Furthermore, young people visit Kent University where they have the opportunity to access the [Erasmus 'Online Linguistic Support' programme](#).

Recommendations from the project include:

- Recruit well-qualified teachers with experience of teaching ESOL.
- Offer basic literacy lessons and phonics sessions for young people who are illiterate in their first language (the project was not able to offer this).
- Provide opportunities to access mainstream education earlier – many young people are demotivated by long waiting times.
- Retention of the online Erasmus programme. This is at risk of being cut due to the UK leaving the EU.

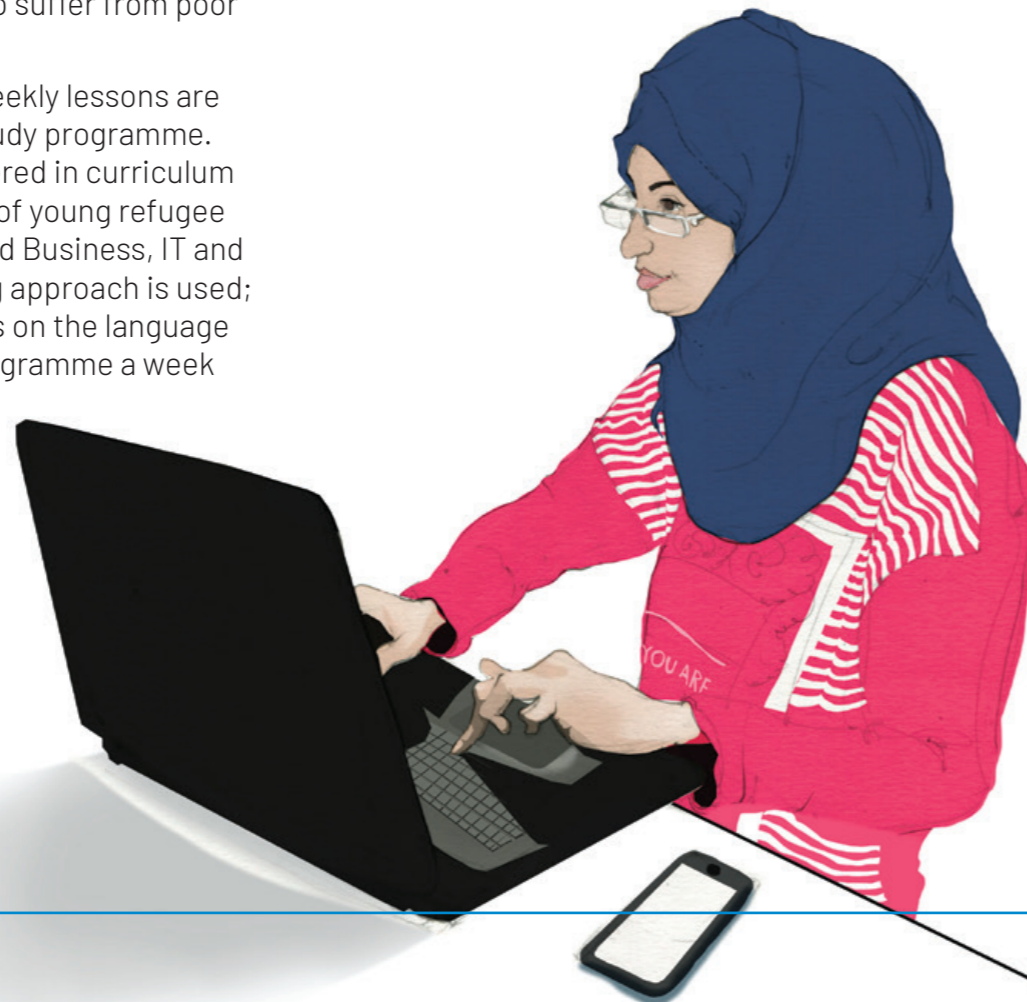
Case Study

Tailoring support for young refugees and asylum seekers at college (Brighton)

ESOL provision at Brighton MET has changed over the past five years to reflect growing numbers of young refugees and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. Though many of these students can achieve qualifications through mainstream ESOL provision, the majority find it difficult to progress through the levels in the timescale outlined by the guided learning hours of these programmes. In addition, lower literacy levels create barriers for these students accessing the next level reading or writing course. Many of the younger students on full-time study programmes find achievement challenging due to a lack of study and IT skills and levels of literacy lower than their oral/aural skills.

The provision for young refugees at the college has 4 main areas:

1. Skills for Life accredited provision from Entry 1 - Level 2.
2. Non-accredited courses that focus on literacy, study skills, soft skills, local orientation and employability. These courses act as stepping stones to accredited provision, or for students who find the framework of exam courses and exams themselves too stressful. They provide a clear progression route in ESOL for students with low levels of literacy or study skills and those who suffer from poor mental health or trauma.
3. ESOL bolt-ons: 2 hour weekly lessons are bolted onto a full-time study programme. Currently these are delivered in curriculum areas with high numbers of young refugee students: Hair, Beauty and Business, IT and Travel. A blended learning approach is used; the ESOL session focuses on the language and skills of the study programme a week in advance to increase the students' ability to access learning in their curriculum programme the following week. The ESOL bolt-on also supports students with assignments and study and IT skills to facilitate their access and progression in the programme.
4. Courses which respond to the current needs and interests of the cohort, for example, Beginners Computing or AAT and ESOL. We work with Refuaid offering free IELTS places for refugees interested in applying for university.



We employ a designated young refugee and asylum seeker learning mentor who supports these students to navigate their educational journey as well as providing pastoral support to manage their complex needs (see quotations that follow). The mentor is also responsible for coordinating appropriate communication internally and externally. This post is currently funded by an educational trust.

'Before the Learning Mentor (FR), I didn't come to college too much. Now when I don't come, he texts me. ... He helps me with the bursary ... [housing] advice ... he tells me I have to be patient about my asylum application. He helps me to understand what is happening so I feel better. I feel shy with teachers but with FR I can talk about everything. Before I don't talk to anyone in the UK. ... When he's talking to me, he gives me more power.' (Student ZA)

'I am able to support ZA with any issues he is facing; he now has someone in college to represent him. This is so important when students are finding life challenging and are unfamiliar with how to navigate their way both in college and outside college. Subsequently, ZA's engagement with the college has really improved.' (Learning Mentor FR)

'The mentor will be in regular contact with me about these students, so I can be more understanding of poor attendance and behaviour because I know what's going on in their lives. They tell FR things that they don't share with the teachers. It means I can give even more praise for the student just turning up to class and understand where and how I can support them best.' (Teacher)

The college is now looking at a new bespoke ESOL full-time study programme for 16-19 students in 2020/21 who need a more holistic approach to learning to study before embarking on a full-time vocational study programme. We will be working with other FE colleges who have demonstrated good practice in this area and will be aiming to incorporate creative arts, outdoor learning and well-being elements to the course.

Case Study

Preparing young refugees for work (Plymouth)

Empowering Enterprise (led by Petroc College of Further and Higher Education) is an initiative for 18-24 year-olds who are not in education, training or employment and aims to prepare them for work. ODILS Learning Foundation is a specialist provider on the project, delivering ESOL and Functional Skills in English for participants needing English language support, most of whom are refugees. One to one support tailored to individual needs, is provided to help young people integrate into life in the UK and prepare for employment. This complements the ESOL teaching. Support is provided with activities which aid integration and provide opportunities to practise English, such as joining sports clubs, volunteering opportunities, and social activities.

Since the project started in September 2017 39 young people (the majority being refugees) have participated. To date 11 of these have gained employment and 4 accessed training courses for the first time. 8 participants have achieved certificates in areas such as food hygiene and driving theory. The project is unable fund the driving theory test, but mentor time helps with learning the necessary vocabulary. Learners have taken an Ascentis Award in Using Employability Skills. 8 learners have volunteered regularly due to the project. Project funds have been used to develop a BAME information fair and a self-employment short course, which have also attracted participants from other providers and supported community integration.

'The project helped me to meet new people through group systems like IT and NHS. I feel more confident speaking to new people in English.' (Participant)

The project is funded through the European Social Fund and National Lottery Community Fund.

b) Ideas for partnerships

Challenge 6. How can the statutory sector work with grassroots projects?

Small community-based groups and organisations are often well-placed to engage refugee learners with barriers to accessing classroom-based provision at the start of their ESOL journey, but such organisations can have difficulty in accessing mainstream, reliable funding sources. The following case studies illustrate how local authorities have supported these types of organisations to deliver language support in the form of conversation practice.



Cooking together can be a good opportunity to practise English in an informal setting, while socialising and learning about other cultures.

Case Study

A grant scheme to provide complementary, conversational ESOL (Lancashire)

Lancashire County Council runs an ESOL grant scheme with a focus on conversation and informal settings. The scheme encourages innovative and creative approaches, and will also fund pilots with a view to full implementation of the proposed project. The scheme also encourages projects that will meet a localised need or those of a specific group of refugees e.g. older people, or employment-related ESOL.

For example [Birchwood](#), a local charity, has received a grant to run a project for resettled refugees which will deliver a programme of opportunities for people to come together, learn and grow in understanding of the English language and of each other. A part time language development worker will be active in the community, developing language learning opportunities, facilitating conversational ESOL, and working to recruit a range of volunteers to support language development across the refugee community.

Activities will include:

- conversation classes led by volunteers to improve language skills and develop friendships
- weekly signposting sessions connecting people with the information and resources they need to improve their language and understanding of the community
- quarterly community events sharing learning with the wider community and agencies, to disseminate information, course content and ideas (interpreters will be available)
- a welcome space for all local people to meet, learn about each other and connect as human beings, beyond cultural and language divides
- cultural education workshops to broaden horizons and increase understanding.

There is an emphasis on the whole family embracing language so where possible activities will take place with children present, with craft and toys provided at the conversation classes.

Lancashire County Council developed the Informal ESOL Grant Scheme as part of its VPRS programme. The application form is short and straightforward to complete. Grants awarded are up to £10,000 with a panel meeting every three months.

Case Study

A grant scheme accessible to small organisations (Leeds)

Leeds City Council secured CMF funding for an ESOL Strategy for Leeds and for a £200,000 [Language Hub](#) grant funding pot. Language Hub offers up to £5,000 for volunteer-led activities which bring people together from new and settled communities to share their skills, build relationships and have opportunities to practise conversational English. It complements the existing ESOL provision in the city offered in the community learning and formal learning domains to provide an integrated approach.

The following steps have been taken to make the application process accessible for small organisations:

- Guidance is written in plain English.
- Applications can be supported by videos.
- Applicant organisations who are not registered charities, community interest companies or training providers are advised to partner with more established organisations to ensure the projects are well-managed. We have identified a number of partners across the city willing to support community groups. This has allowed smaller organisations to benefit from the fund and gain valuable project delivery experience in partnership with trusted organisations. At the same time, the more established organisations have benefited from the reach into new communities.
- The Language Hub Coordinator does not sit on the decision-making panel and therefore is able to support applicants impartially. As a qualified ESOL teacher, she is able to provide guidance to organisations at the application stage and throughout the project delivery and evaluation.

The Language Hub programme has funded a wide range of activities that cover art and craft, cooking, conversation, music, parent and child reading activities, active lifestyles, creative writing, gardening, personal development, sewing, storytelling and theatre. Features of the programmes that are working well are:

- Volunteer and participant-led projects have led to improved psychosocial wellbeing. For example, one participant said 'With Language Hub I feel like a teacher for the first time and also a student at the same time.'
- Overcoming learner barriers: the fund allows flexibility in delivery to accommodate changing priorities, for example to provide transport costs or crèche costs.
- Strength focus: guidance provided to applicants focuses on building on the strengths of participants, such as their linguistic competence in often several languages and their lived experience of settling into a new country, alongside their diverse skills and knowledge.
- Skills sharing such as cooking and eating is valued by participants. One stated '(the project) created...something to look forward to, meeting different people, bringing people from different cultures together, sense of shared experience.'

Challenge 7. How can I make appropriate and effective use of volunteers?

Volunteers play a critical role in supporting refugees to learn English, particularly in non-classroom settings. They can provide opportunities for learners to practise and apply what they have learned in the classroom in more realistic, everyday situations, for example through social activities and conversation clubs. Volunteers bring many skills and life experiences that enhance the learning experience for refugees, and often have teaching experience themselves. They should add value to provision delivered by qualified ESOL teachers, rather than compensate for shortages in provision. Where volunteers or staff in voluntary and community sector organisations provide pastoral and wraparound support, this can help reduce pressure on ESOL tutors to address support needs and allow them to focus on teaching.

Of course volunteers should complement rather than replace the role of trained ESOL tutors, including at pre-entry level where skilled teaching is important, especially as learners may arrive in the UK with limited previous English and potentially limited schooling generally. Using qualified and trained teachers in non-formal ESOL initiatives like [Talk English](#) and [Talking Together](#) have shown higher retention and completion rates among students, rather than volunteer teachers with variable levels of training. Research indicates that teacher knowledge and expertise is an important determining factor in student achievement and progression, and that volunteers need more training and support.

The Learning and Work Institute has developed [guides for volunteers](#) running conversation clubs and other English language practice activities, and for organisations who are involving volunteers in their delivery.

Volunteers play a critical role in supporting refugees to learn English, particularly in non-classroom settings. They can provide opportunities for learners to practise and apply what they have learned in the classroom in more realistic, everyday situations.

Case Study

Volunteers adding value to a coordinated programme of accredited and non-accredited ESOL provision (Hertfordshire)

Refugee families in Hertfordshire receive at least 8 hours of ESOL per week, through a mixture of community and college based learning.

Volunteer befrienders from [Herts Welcomes Refugees](#) (HWR) provide opportunities for resettled Syrian refugees to reinforce their learning from ESOL classes and gain extra practice in speaking English. The volunteers are not necessarily qualified teachers, but all volunteers receive regular training and teaching materials from HWR.

The volunteers complement the work of the charity [Community Action Dacorum](#) (CAD), an ESOL sub-contractor of Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Services (HAFLS). CAD had been asked to complement the accredited hours of ESOL tuition available through college provision.

They provide non-accredited pre-entry and Entry 1 ESOL classes for small groups of four or five resettled Syrian refugees, taught by fully qualified ESOL tutors in close cooperation with tutors from West Herts College to coordinate the curriculum. The classes run over the full academic year and students usually remain with CAD until they have the opportunity to join the classes at West Herts College in September of each year.

The HWR volunteers liaise with CAD tutors so they know what would be helpful to focus on. The volunteers also provide practical support to help students progress, for example helping to prepare for the driving theory test, correspondence, making appointments, setting up apps on mobile phones and even assisting with shopping if a student is unwell.

Volunteer befrienders provide opportunities for resettled Syrian refugees to reinforce their learning from ESOL classes and gain extra practice in speaking English.



Volunteers play an important role in supporting and complementing ESOL teaching.

Case Study

Volunteer-supported home learning in preparation for Entry level college classes (Darlington)

Darlington Assistance for Refugees (DAR) offers practical assistance, befriending, language support and employment help to refugees and asylum seekers. TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages)-qualified volunteers from DAR deliver a Home Learning service, visiting refugee families in their homes once a week to give individualised language support. For children and young learners, a team of volunteers provides support with reading and homework. Their main sources of referral are word of mouth leading to self-referral, and referral via the Red Cross and the local authority.

Volunteers tailor sessions around learner needs. Initially the sessions focus mainly on literacy skills: letters and sounds and letter formation, as well as practising basic functional language. Tutors do not use a text book or a specific published programme but follow an outline programme, responding to learners' needs. Resources – including worksheets and word lists – are shared online. Ideally, tutors are paired so that they can cover for each other when someone has other commitments. This helps with volunteer retention, and means less 'demand' on one person and less risk of overstepping boundaries. In practice, however, the number of volunteers available means this has proved difficult to achieve.

DAR provides other informal ESOL for the wider refugee and asylum seeker community that complements the Home Learning, delivered in the evening to make it more accessible. Learners can join the topic-based, rolling 12 week programme at any point. In addition, small group teaching takes place at the Monday morning Drop In and there is a weekly Women's Conversation Group.

These initiatives, particularly the Home Learning, prepare the adult learners for the Entry level classes at the local FE College. Feedback from staff at the college shows they welcome the intervention and feel that it is a good starting point for formal learning.

DAR advises that volunteers need to understand the nature of their role and to be trained in safeguarding. There must be clear boundaries, to avoid volunteers spending a disproportionate amount of time problem solving and dealing with personal and practical issues rather than teaching.

Volunteers tailor sessions around learner needs.

Case Study

Differentiated volunteer roles to support those unable to access classroom provision (Sheffield)

Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English (SAVTE) is a charity providing English language support to people in Sheffield who are not able to access formal class-based provision. Volunteers support refugees with learning English informally, helping them practise and build confidence to eventually access more formal provision.

Volunteers help learners in their communities or in their homes. There are three volunteer roles to meet learners' varying needs:

1. Language Volunteers provide one to one support for learners at home.
2. Language Buddies work with learners not confident enough to access community (and ESOL) activities. They support learners through language mirroring, coaching and real life practice. The volunteer supports the learner to gradually access other provision.
3. Conversation Group Volunteers facilitate community based groups: conversation clubs, or activity based for example sewing or cooking.

SAVTE seeks to actively engage language volunteers from the communities in which it works, including ESOL learners. Training is differentiated to match the volunteer role. Training courses include two core introductory sessions which cover SAVTE's ethos, safeguarding and barriers to learning including mental health issues, with further sessions depending on the role. Volunteers access a range of resources and lesson plans which link to their learners' assessment.

SAVTE volunteers do not replace qualified ESOL teachers but they are not a free resource, with training and support resources representing a significant investment to ensure that there is quality provision for learners and that volunteers also benefit in terms of developing skills and experience. SAVTE challenges the idea that volunteer led provision can be done 'on the cheap'. Online resources are not enough. Volunteers are working with people with complex needs and need professional support. SAVTE attributes its positive learner outcomes to this approach.

Volunteers support refugees with learning English informally, helping them practise and build confidence to eventually access more formal provision.

Challenge 8. What can library settings do to support English language learning for refugees?

There are examples of libraries welcoming refugees and encouraging language learning around the country. For example:

- Nottingham Libraries run conversation groups for anyone who wants to improve their confidence in speaking English. They are aimed at people whose first language is not English and help build confidence by discussion, debate, exchanging ideas and through activities and tasks. They also run The Language Café, an informal language exchange.
- Conversation Cafés run at seven libraries across Coventry.
- Manchester Libraries work with Manchester Adult Education Services to bring Talk English sessions to various libraries across the city.

Libraries can apply for the [Library of Sanctuary Award](#) which recognises the good practice of libraries welcoming people seeking sanctuary and other new arrivals. In order to obtain this recognition, libraries need to meet a number of criteria including taking positive action to embed concepts of welcome and inclusion. This could include providing space for English classes, conversation clubs, community language and reading support. Where libraries lack space for classes and clubs, they can signpost to appropriate provision.

Benefits of becoming a Library of Sanctuary include extending the reach of the library to a wider range of people, strengthening partnership working, and placing the library as a community hub. More examples are available on the [Libraries of Sanctuary website](#), as well as resources for libraries.

Case Study

Libraries as single points of contact for ESOL advice and assessment (Kirklees)

Four libraries in Kirklees, West Yorkshire are being used as single points of contact (SPOCs) for assessments and information, advice and guidance to enable access to ESOL provision, as part of #KirkleesWelcomes [This Way for English](#) funded by the MHCLG English Language Coordination Fund. The library service also hosts a conversation group, and is offering volunteering opportunities to new arrivals.

The libraries are in the wards with the highest levels of migration. The project is working closely with the library service in Kirklees, which is working towards the Library of Sanctuary Award.

C) Tailoring delivery

Challenge 9. How can challenges facing refugee groups learning English be tackled?

Part 1.2 outlined the barriers that many refugees face to accessing and progressing in ESOL. Some key strategies to ensure refugees have the right support to enable learning are summarised below. Our associated [literature review](#) describes in more detail the political and legislative, social and economic, cultural and psychological barriers facing refugees learning English, and how they might be overcome.

Strategies for improving access to learning for refugees

- Invest in training for initial assessors and admissions staff to recognise alternate documentation of existing skills and qualifications, so refugees are able to access the appropriate course level.
- Provide training for teachers so courses can be developed and delivered to foster confidence and self-efficacy; this should include CPD covering refugee-specific barriers to learning such as literacy, language for resilience and mental health.
- Create safe spaces by providing some courses along gender lines (see [case study about women in Plymouth](#)).
- Provide means to cover any course fees, and support travel and childcare costs.
- Offer flexible alternatives that do not require IT access or skills, for example for enrolment in classes, in accessing learning materials or submission of assignments.
- Coordinate a multi-agency response to refugees' needs that includes signposting to mental health support and pathways into appropriate employment (see [case study about young refugees at Brighton college](#)).

The following case studies provide examples of where learning environments have been adapted to more closely meet the needs of particular groups of refugees, reflecting different elements of the recommended strategies listed above.



Opportunities to practise English in a relaxed, informal setting such as a library can complement classroom learning.

Case Study

A community-based therapeutic group for men who had not engaged with ESOL (Oxford)

A group of men who had not started to engage with accredited ESOL courses or who had given up was identified following a review to establish how adult refugees were engaging with ESOL provision within Oxford city. Their lack of engagement was understood to be due to the men either enduring significant trauma, being illiterate or not having had any previous experience of formal learning.

A pilot of 10 weekly sessions was commissioned to offer an alternative approach for teaching English to a group of men who were not engaging with any other form of English provision. The course was provided by Refugee Resource - a local charity that specialises in counselling therapy, mentoring, volunteering, English lessons and group sessions. One of the therapists spoke Arabic.

Lessons were given in a more relaxed setting (a sitting room arrangement) where they initially learned English in an unpressurised environment for an hour, followed by half an hour of therapeutic group session in Arabic to share particular issues and concerns as an open discussion. In order to improve the retention of information between classes, a WhatsApp group was created with each week's vocabulary pre-recorded and sent to the members.

For those men who consistently attended, over time their confidence and trust has grown which has enabled them to forge friendships and learn to share their problems with others. In some cases, they were able to help and guide each other, without counsellor or tutor involvement. The course enables both the client and the counsellor to determine whether they need to explore any further individual therapeutic intervention to help overcome the barriers to learning English and in turn, to develop and help themselves secure their independence.

For more information contact the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (see [Part 1](#) for contact details).

The course enables both the client and the counsellor to determine whether they need to explore any further individual therapeutic intervention to help overcome the barriers to learning English.

Case Study

A gateway to learning: women's ESOL with an onsite crèche (Plymouth)

The main aim of this initiative is to offer non-accredited ESOL to women with children under 3 with childcare on the premises, with a view to progression into accredited learning. The project is delivered by the [ODILS Learning Foundation](#) and commissioned by Plymouth City Council using Home Office funding.

Initially the setting was a large room in a council building informally divided into two spaces: a classroom and a crèche space with qualified crèche staff. The children could see their mothers and could sit with them whilst the women learned.

This informal setting continued for two years until the children and mothers found the confidence to go into different rooms. The provision was moved to a new building with two classrooms and a separated crèche area. Mothers are responsible for changing nappies and there is a break for the women to sit with their children with a snack.

Initially mothers were reluctant to be separated from their children, but now they are upset if they have to leave the class to change a nappy. Many of the women have built up the confidence to transition into mixed classes as their English improves and they progress to higher levels and once their child enters mainstream education, therefore no longer requiring crèche support.

ODILS suggest the following learning points:

- Due to cultural differences, for many of the families this is the first experience of any kind of childcare setting. Parents and children both need support and time to ease into childcare arrangements.
- Employ qualified crèche staff. The ODILS crèche is manned by a Level 6 nursery manger and 3 Level 2 crèche workers. This enables the children to learn and develop through play.
- Attract volunteer support. The project has approximately 10 volunteers who help in the classroom with 1-1 teaching and support.
- Employ someone with a shared language. One of the nursery team is a Syrian refugee and has been able to help with settling in, explaining to the learners what is expected, answering concerns and able to console the children in the first couple of days.
- Roll-on/roll-off provision is a must. Refugees come into the city throughout the year and not having to wait for a September start is key to immediate integration and overcoming barriers to learning.



Case Study

Teaching vocabulary about mental health (Sheffield)

Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English (SAVTE) has developed a set of resources in consultation with health professionals to teach the vocabulary needed to describe symptoms and experiences related to mental health.

Topics covered within the resources include bereavement, depression, anxiety, loneliness and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

For more information take a look at [SAVTE'S resources webpage](#).

Case Study

English language support for a family with visual impairments (East Midlands)

A refugee family, N and A, have a genetic eye problem which means they are unable to see. Nottingham-based organisation [Enable](#) was asked to support this family. Enable has been supporting refugees on the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) programme for the past few years. Due to issues such as mental and physical disability and illiteracy in their native language we have had to ensure our approach is as flexible as possible to meet their needs. Our tutor explained his approach:

'For lower level students I would normally use nonverbal methods to communicate with my students such as pictures and drawings, gestures and mime to get my point across. After meeting N and A, the problem that I found when attempting to teach English was that I didn't know how to read or write braille.

N and A are both trained in reading Arabic braille. They also know the English alphabet in braille but don't understand the words. I learnt the braille alphabet and constructed a magnetic whiteboard into a braille work board using small magnets for the braille writing. In the meantime, Enable supplied a dictaphone which has been a good success. By recording English common sentences with translation to Arabic they can repeat practising their pronunciation.'

Both N and A are enthusiastic learners and are making progress. It is our hope in the near future, that with the support of their caseworker we can look to integrate them on to one of our group sessions and improve their social mobility. Key learning from this experience is that flexibility is key in both how and where the delivery takes place.

Case Study

Encouraging new parents through creative ESOL activities with childcare (London)

Sutton College was awarded GLA funding to deliver one of the innovative ESOL Plus Childcare pilots between November 2018 and March 2019, a partnership between four local authority-run Adult and Community Learning providers (ACL): Sutton College, Croydon Adult Learning and Training, Kingston Adult Education and Westminster Adult Education Services.

The project supported learners with pre-school children and expectant mothers. The classes were held in children's centres, with the parents and children in close proximity to each other. The project focused on providing a supportive and nurturing environment for parents to develop their language skills through designing a 'book' or a 'keepsake' box for their children that describes their journey into society in this country.

The project ran over six weeks and gave women the opportunity to: learn new nursery rhymes, as well as to share those from their own countries; cast clay impressions of their baby's feet or hands; make flags, song books, sock puppets and musical instruments; and also read books with their children. All of the items were then placed in the 'keepsake' boxes, which the women designed and decorated to take away with them.

An evaluation found that the project increased English language confidence among the participants and fostered social integration outcomes.

For more information contact London Strategic Migration Partnership (see [Part 1](#) for contact details).

Challenge 10. How can different styles, settings and providers work in a complementary manner for a learner?

The diversity of the ESOL landscape, from settings, style and learner profiles to delivery agencies and their relative strengths, was outlined in [Part 2.2](#). An individual learner journey should combine these opportunities effectively.

Learners' individual circumstances and needs vary hugely, and change over time. Some refugees have a staged journey from home learning to informal conversation clubs to college or other formal classes; like stepping stones to formal learning. Some people will access more than one type of ESOL at the same time, as different types of language learning can help meet different needs and reinforce learning. For example, volunteer-led activities such as conversation clubs can complement formal classroom learning providing learners with a much-valued opportunity to practise their English outside of the classroom. Accessing different provision simultaneously can also help those demotivated due to being 'stuck' either in the same setting or with the same provider but seeking to progress.

For example, for a newly-arrived refugee with low literacy in their own language, no experience of formal education and with mental health issues related to previous trauma, initial priorities are likely to be social interaction and accessing local services. They might benefit from a pre-entry course delivered in a local community centre as part of an activity such as gardening or cooking, and supplemented with attendance at a conversation club.

The priority for a graduate learner with a professional background might be to seek employment commensurate with their qualifications and experience as soon as possible. The most suitable option may be an accredited college course with prospects for progression alongside opportunities for practising English, for example one-to-one with a volunteer and at a conversation club.

At the time of writing, delivery of ESOL has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic with much learning taking place online. See [Part 1.2](#) for a summary of some of the challenges related to this.

Case Study

Using a combination of ESOL provision to meet different learning needs (East of England)

B and M are adults in a Syrian family resettled to a market town in Cambridgeshire. They were supported during their first year in the UK by a local group under the Community Sponsorship programme within the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). Since there was no substantive formal ESOL provision in the town, the community sponsorship group assembled provision from a variety of sources to cover the next year of learning English.

B accessed a 1-to-1 tutor (March–September), Creative English (March–July) and then 20 hours a week of ESOL at a private language

school for 20 weeks (August–January). He was a highly dedicated student – commuting over an hour each way, using the school’s online resources and completing homework. This provision totalled approximately 450 hours of ESOL and enabled him to go from a high-level pre-entry on arrival to intermediate level (B1/2, Entry 3) within 10 months. He is now preparing for his driving theory test and has been enrolled on a MENTA refugee entrepreneurship course in Peterborough. The community sponsorship group hopes he will be employed or self-employed in his previous occupation as a tiler shortly.

With the responsibility of three young children, M was not able to access the private language school. She had left school aged 11 and her English language was low pre-entry on arrival. She accessed six hours of ESOL a week with a qualified volunteer and childcare funded in part by the Home Office, supplemented by a private tutor for two hours on one evening a week. M also attended 1.5 hours a week of a creative English class with the children along with two volunteers – one to support her English and the other to look after the children. M completed approximately 350 hours of ESOL and after 10 months reached Entry 2 (A2) level.

The community sponsorship group considers that suitable and effective ESOL for this family involved:

- extensive research and networking ahead with full and accurate costings of a range of options
- an adequate number of teaching hours
- commitment and dedication from the learners
- close consultation with the couple
- learning hours within a short space of time enabling quick progression and maintaining their motivation
- very informal provision
- comprehensive childcare that enabled M to focus on the content rather than splitting her attention
- frequent positive feedback, praise and encouragement
- bi-monthly team reviews.

For more information contact the East of England Strategic Migration Partnership (see [Part 1](#) for contact details).

Refugee learners benefit if their caring responsibilities are taken into account in the design of ESOL provision.

Challenge 11. How do I advertise my ESOL provision to reach all refugees?

Refugees who are unaware of how to find information about provision may not discover what is available to them. ESOL providers sometimes do not feel the need to advertise due to high demand for their courses, or may conclude that a low response rate to an advertised class means there is no demand. Gaps in knowledge and expertise among outreach and referral staff can mean that some migrants are not referred or signposted to the most appropriate programmes. At the time of writing, restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic are in place, presenting additional challenges in terms of reaching out to refugees.

Actions that can help reach refugees who may otherwise miss out on opportunities to improve their English include:

- Coordination between refugee organisations, ESOL providers and services such as health and housing, perhaps in the form of an ESOL steering group, or bringing together ESOL providers and practitioners to encourage cross-referral, as has happened with ESOL networking events in Yorkshire and Humber. Refugees should be involved in discussions about ESOL provision and need in the community, for example at multi-agency forums or ESOL steering groups.
- Making links with key agencies in the local community that are not ESOL providers themselves can help to identify individuals with unmet need, like they have done in Waltham Forest. ESOL provision could be advertised through everyday services such as schools, places of worship, libraries, GP surgeries and so on.

- Outreach and referral staff should have in-depth knowledge and expertise of local ESOL provision and capacity, and have developed constructive working relationships with providers.
- A central location where all provision can be itemised, updated regularly and searched by learners and support organisations, whether that is a physical place, a single point of contact (such as in [Blackburn with Darwen](#), [Waltham Forest](#), [Kirklees](#) and [Manchester](#)) or a website such as the [Learning English in Yorkshire and the Humber](#) website (see the case study on a regional ESOL resource).

Case Study

Local partnerships between ESOL and non-ESOL agencies (Waltham Forest)

The Waltham Forest SPOC team has developed partnerships with agencies such as JCP, local community organisations, specialist services, and programmes which encourage social integration and tackle loneliness e.g. Welcome Meals, Community Networks, Friends and Neighbours network. A two-way referral system is in place with these services.

ESOL advisers are based at locations such as libraries, community centres and a children's centre and this has helped the service to engage with individuals who may not have been aware of ESOL provision.

Case Study

A regional ESOL resource and practitioner network (Yorkshire and Humber)

Initial mapping of ESOL providers and provision across the Yorkshire and Humber region by the ESOL Regional Coordinator in 2016 highlighted that many local authority (LA) areas had little, if any, up to date information on the range of local ESOL provision and providers available.

All 15 LAs across the region agreed to support a regional ESOL resource, developing 'Learn English in Leeds', a local model that had received national attention as an example of good practice (e.g. [DEMOS, 2014](#)). In 2018 Migration Yorkshire secured match funding for the project from the MHCLG English Language Coordination Fund. Migration Yorkshire sub-contracted Migrant English Support Hub (MESH) to deliver the project at regional level. In 2019 the Learning English Yorkshire & Humber website (LEYH) www.learningenglish.org.uk was launched.

The aim of the resource is to list all ESOL provision (formal and informal, statutory and voluntary) across the region to raise awareness of, and increase access to, existing ESOL provision, for all migrants. As of March 2020, the LEYH website listed 119 providers offering 286 courses across 225 locations, with an average of 1,000 visits to the site each month.

The resource supports strategic partners to be more aware of current local ESOL provision, providers and gaps, to inform service development. For example, the resource supports the Resettlement LA leads to be better able to target the additional ESOL funding available through the Syrian Resettlement Programme to support resettled refugee learners where barriers and needs are identified.

MESH has also run a series of regional networking events for ESOL providers and practitioners. The aim of the events is to improve cross-signposting, share good practice and discuss common challenges.

In-person and online events have been well-received and attended, showing the value placed on these opportunities.

An independent evaluation of the project indicates that users value the resource's layout, functionality and ease of use. 'Almost all stakeholders have confirmed that the development of the Learning English website is effectively responding to a long standing need to create an accessible, coherent resource of information on ESOL provision across the region' ([Malfait and Scott-Flynn, 2020](#)) which stakeholders stated they would not have had capacity or resources to develop individually or locally. 'Several stakeholders emphasised how much easier it is becoming for providers and learners (with sufficient English and IT access) to search, find and access or signpost learners to different levels and forms of ESOL across the region' (ibid.). Feedback for the evaluation and from the networking events indicates that stakeholders are now more aware of existing provision and more easily able to identify local provision to signpost learners to.

The DWP is now using the online resource to signpost refugees seeking employment to appropriate ESOL, where this is identified as a key barrier to work. The Universal Credit model provides more flexibility for work coaches to refer to a range of ESOL provision to best meet learner needs, not just formal class-based accredited provision, so the development of the online regional ESOL resource in Yorkshire and Humber proved timely for this significant change within DWP.

Challenge 12. What helps refugees with practical English skills for everyday life?

Ways in which refugees can be supported to develop their everyday English include opportunities for social interaction, building confidence, developing specific vocabulary areas relevant to the individual learner, and avoiding what may have negative impacts on learning.

Research and practice on ESOL for refugees suggest that socialising provides a particularly important opportunity to develop and practise language skills, including for the workplace. Language learning is often helped by family members supporting learning in real life contexts, but for refugees this is not often an option if they are alone in the UK or if their family members are ESOL learners too. Similarly, ESOL classes do not often provide informal social engagement opportunities for refugees to support their learning.

Some ways of providing opportunities to practise English include:

- Joining informal local social networks, although it can be difficult for refugees to meet local people beyond those involved with refugee support agencies. See for example the [language café case study](#) in this section.
- Encouraging refugees to join clubs that align with their skills and interests such as gardening or cooking.
- Running social programmes with clubs and outings to facilitate refugees mixing with a range of students and others in the community.
- Using digital resources like voice chat and Facebook as they can help with communication skills.
- Volunteering and work placements, as they provide opportunities for learners to use and personalise the language they have learned in classes and to prepare for types of language used to socialise in the workplace.

The Learning and Work Institute has developed [guides for volunteers](#) running conversation clubs and other English language practice activities, and for organisations who are involving volunteers in their delivery.

Learners can suffer a lack of confidence, from anxiety or demotivation that negatively affects their learning. It can really help to adopt, for example:

- Learning activities that build self-confidence for people to use what they've already learned. Home learning and ESOL classes can do this, and topic-based personal and social development courses for young people. See for example the case studies on [saving money and food](#), and on [navigating local life in Blackburn](#) that follow. It can be particularly effective to acknowledge the learner's existing competence in languages.
- Creative activities, as they can reduce anxiety.
- Participatory methods, that develop students' motivation and their ability to extend discussions from classes to friends and family. The following case studies provide some examples.



Participatory ways of delivering ESOL

A 'cooking & ESOL' programme in the North West helped people practise English in a practical, informal environment to complement their classroom learning.

Participants reported expanding their English vocabulary, and volunteers noticed an increase in confidence in speaking English (Heart & Parcel 2020).

The case study about the [men's therapeutic group in Oxford](#) adopted a language learning approach called the 'Growing Participator Approach,' based on language learning situations with refugees. As the name suggests, it aims to help the newcomer grow through participation both in the language and in the culture. The primary focus is not on learning grammar and vocabulary, but on getting to know the new world around them and gradually 'growing into' this world.

Refugees may not find traditional ESOL class syllabuses so useful for immediate, practical needs, such as legal language. A great example comes from Norfolk where refugee learners on the VPRS have been supported with practical English skills, such as contacting the emergency services. Learners had two opportunities to practise with the ambulance service, and within 6 months of arrival all families in the first cohort of Syrian refugees were able to make a 999 call and communicate the problem, their address and phone number, to enable emergency services to attend. Also see, for example, the case study on [ESOL for parents that focused on educational terminology](#), the [Meet, Try, Learn session](#) on food waste in Kirklees, and SAVTE's resources that teach [vocabulary relating to mental health](#). 'Real world' visits and trips can be particularly effective for refugees who do not have much recent formal learning experience; projects in [Blackburn with Darwen](#) and in [Oxford](#) explaining how to access local services contribute to this kind of learning.

It is also important to avoid actions causing negative impacts upon learning, such as lengthy delays in accessing ESOL or gaps when progressing between ESOL levels. Providers should also be aware that individuals in the learning process can have a disproportionately negative impact on learner confidence if they are interpreted as negative, judgmental, or using threatening motivational tools or sanctions.

Examples of activities aiming to improve practical English among refugees are provided in the following case studies.

ESOL can enable refugees to access everyday local services with confidence.

Case Study

Practical, peer learning at a Language Café (Gateshead)

The Language Café is a whole day drop-in service facilitated by a coordinator and supported by a group of volunteers. It is based at an existing project with an established service user base undertaking creative crafts, so around half of their clients are registered with the Language Café. Most participants are at the pre-entry level, and include Syrian refugees who arrived under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) as well as asylum seekers and refugees from other areas of the world.

The programme of learning focuses on equipping the students with practical language teamed with scenarios focusing on day to day activities. The course is non-accredited. It is flexible in its content, with a focus on speaking and listening with a strong peer learning element. It is deliberately practical where students can learn things about the local area.

The project has observed outcomes such as having a few basic phrases to get around, and reduced feelings of isolation through having the confidence to navigate around your environment. It aids mental health and wellbeing with this client group who can carry feelings of trauma, loss and displacement and identity. Having the options to include sessions linking activities to the on-site allotment such as gardening, construction and healthy eating further add to language enrichment, as well as feelings of personal fulfilment.

The peer mentoring approach offers a more personal approach to learning. Providing a student with a safe space to practise language with someone they do not feel judged by can lead to accelerated learning. For example, a woman was referred to the project who was extremely hesitant to communicate and presenting very low levels of self-esteem. After a few weeks she began to open up and started to speak basic levels of English. She is now one of the most engaged members of the group and also assists in peer mentoring others.

Another user who lived further away from the centre would attend the classes to reduce his feelings of loneliness. Whilst there he reported some racist behaviour towards him by residents in his area. This was reported to the authorities as a race hate incident. As a consequence, the Hate Crime team carried out awareness raising sessions and informed them of their rights, support available and how to report it.

These sessions do come with challenges. Their informal nature sometimes means that there is a tendency to revert to socialising with others who speak with a similar mother tongue which means they need reminding to speak English. The nature of the Language Café with its knock-on effects of reducing isolation and making friends from all over the Gateshead region means that it is extremely oversubscribed.

The Language Café was commissioned by [Gateshead Housing Company](#) to provide 'add on' ESOL to supplement formal provision. It is delivered by [The Comfrey Project](#).



Activities like gardening can offer an opportunity to practise English in an informal setting at the same time as supporting mental wellbeing.

Case Study

Developing parents' competence in education terminology (the North East)

Staff from schools in one local authority mentioned the difficulty some parents - particularly mothers - had when needing to communicate with them. There appeared to be very low engagement from women in the town with ESOL classes in the area. A new 10 week ESOL course was commissioned. An outreach venue within the community was selected on the basis of accessibility; it was anticipated that parents were more likely to engage within a school based setting because a school is deemed a safe and secure environment.

Classes were tailored to incorporate 'school language', orientation and cultural language. The classes were not structured on a classic curriculum basis and were requested to be innovative and inventive in delivery, using life experiences as a teaching tool. The concept behind 'school language' was to enable parents to help with their children's education requirements such as understanding attendance requirements, school rules such as bringing PE kit, explaining about levels and SATS for example in simple terms.

The development of these bespoke, basic, pre-entry classes have enabled class members to achieve a number of different social, economic and personal outcomes, including: integration and citizenship, raising self-esteem and confidence, and understanding how best to

access services. For example, after attending the classes one class member was able to telephone the school to report her child's sickness. Previously, the child would have had an unauthorised absence as the parent would not have had the confidence or ability to report the illness.

For more information contact the North East Strategic Migration Partnership (NESMP, see [Part 1](#) for contact details).



For refugee parents, being able to communicate with their child's education provider is a major benefit of learning English.

Case Study

Saving money and food at a Meet, Try, Learn session (Kirklees)

An activity workshop part of the Meet, Try, Learn initiative in four locations focused on reducing food waste and saving money but included language development in the session. As well as making simple family friendly dishes, the group were encouraged to take part in literacy activities. For example, the group played a dice game where they rolled a dice and then had to answer a question on the dice; this got them all engaging with each other in conversational English. They took part in crosswords and word games themed around the environment in which activity sheets of varying levels were supplied in class, and extension tasks and take home activities were offered. The sessions were supported by seven Welcome Mentors (volunteers) enabling one-to-one support and tailored activity to meet personal needs.

Kirklees Street Scene attended the sessions and supported the participants to develop understanding and knowledge of creating a safer environment through recycling and waste management, using tailored resources for ESOL learners.

Because the sessions are informal and friendly, supported by the Welcome Mentors, we have time to get to know people and listen to their stories. Participants have shared stories about how the activities have given them opportunities to spend time with other people in a safe and welcoming environment, and has given them confidence to return independently of the Welcome Mentors. They also value the option to dip in and out of the sessions depending on their other commitments.

For more information contact Migration Yorkshire (see [Part 1](#) for contact details).

Case Study

Learning about local life and services (Blackburn with Darwen)

Blackburn with Darwen Council – one of the five integration areas identified in the government’s Integrated Communities Strategy – identified that even where ESOL learners were progressing, they were still having difficulty navigating life in the borough. It was felt that ESOL provision needed a greater focus on integration. Projects have been commissioned to address this, including:

- The Shared Spaces project aimed to help with integration, and combined ESOL with visiting local assets such as the hospital, museum, libraries and leisure centres, and learning how to make use of these. There was also an expressive art element to this project.
- Digital ESOL - the local college is planning to offer a course focusing on web resources important for everyday life, such as completing online forms for childcare provision or universal credit, and accessing school and primary healthcare web resources. The learning will be via phones and tablets, in recognition of how most learners access digital resources.

For more information contact the North West Strategic Migration Partnership (NWSMP, see Part 1 for contact details).

Case Study

Information films for non-English speakers (Oxford)

Oxford City Council has used Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) funding to develop short films aimed at non-English speakers on topics that learners suggested they wanted to know more about, including accessing council services, accessing interpreters for healthcare appointments, and the benefits of volunteering to gain skills for employment.

The films have been utilised in local ESOL classes for more interactive sessions, which have benefited individuals with low literacy levels or who find the classroom environment difficult. They are currently available in English, Arabic and Pashto.

Challenge 13. What kind of ESOL provision helps refugees to get into, or take steps towards, employment?

This issue of language to facilitate employability was particularly pressing for many people involved in contributing to this toolkit. Some ways of addressing this include:

- The OECD and UNHCR (2018) recommend public authorities provide targeted language training – by skills, backgrounds and specific needs. A report on ESOL in Greater London notes the importance of ‘fast track’ provision for employability, but also the need to tailor provision to the individual in relation to their prior skills (Stevenson et al, 2017).
- ESOL courses should prepare refugees for job applications and competency-based job interviews, and provide opportunities for language socialisation in work contexts, for example through work placements.
- Work-specific ESOL courses that give refugees a basic level of language needed to do a first job should build in opportunities to continue developing language skills alongside career progression.
- There is a role for professional bodies to be more active in their engagement with highly qualified refugees, as generic support provided by statutory employment services or the voluntary sector may not be the kind of support that is most suitable for them. Highly qualified refugees are not always referred to or signposted to suitable English or mainstream courses and professional organisations. Indeed, there is often little available English language provision above Level 2, and often provided only by the private sector.

A wide selection of case studies follow, to demonstrate the innovative ways in which refugees can be supported to develop appropriate English language skills for the workplace in the UK. For example, they include classes that incorporate vocabulary suited to different work sectors (ESOL for construction, Work-based ESOL) and classes for those already in work (Employment based ESOL). Other projects enable learners to meet employers (Intensive ESOL for work pilot) as well as working on CVs and practising interviews (Support into training and work, Linking newcomers), practising English during work experience (Café Laziz) and incorporating into classes ways to demonstrate existing skillsets (Recognising existing skills). Funding for the highlighted projects include the AEB, VPRS funding, the London ESOL Plus Programme, as well as charitable grant funding. Much of the learning is accredited while being tailored to meet specific language needs for employment.

ESOL courses should prepare refugees for job applications and competency-based job interviews, and provide opportunities for language socialisation in work contexts.

Case Study

Intensive ESOL for work pilot (the North West)

This two-week pilot course was developed by Manchester Adult Education Service. There were six classes each week: four ESOL classes, an ICT class and an employability class. This equated to 13.5 guided learning hours, regarded as a high level of input by ESOL providers. The model was unusual as rather than embedding ICT and employability, these components were taught by specialist tutors in discrete classes. The course was focused on employability skills, learners meeting employers and third sector organisations, and language needed in different sectors of work. Two pilot courses were provided, reaching 32 learners in total, and for 10 individuals the outcome was either paid employment or a volunteer opportunity. Here are three of the learners' journeys:

In August 2017 Hania didn't know what to do with her future and her confidence was very low. In September she enrolled on the Intensive ESOL for work course that would help her with her English and help her to find work or a volunteer placement. The director of a local care provider visited the class to do mock interviews with the learners. He was so impressed with Hania that he offered her a job.

Arshad had been for a lot of interviews but had never quite got the job. After progressing with his English and receiving support with CVs and interview skills he got a full time job with Asda. Arshad told his teacher that everything he was asked in the interview had been practised in the class.

Farah is about to start volunteer work at a Sure Start Children's Centre after attending this course, which will help her achieve her ambition of working with children and parents. She has recently done first aid and health and safety training in preparation for her placement. This will be fantastic on her CV to help her find paid work.

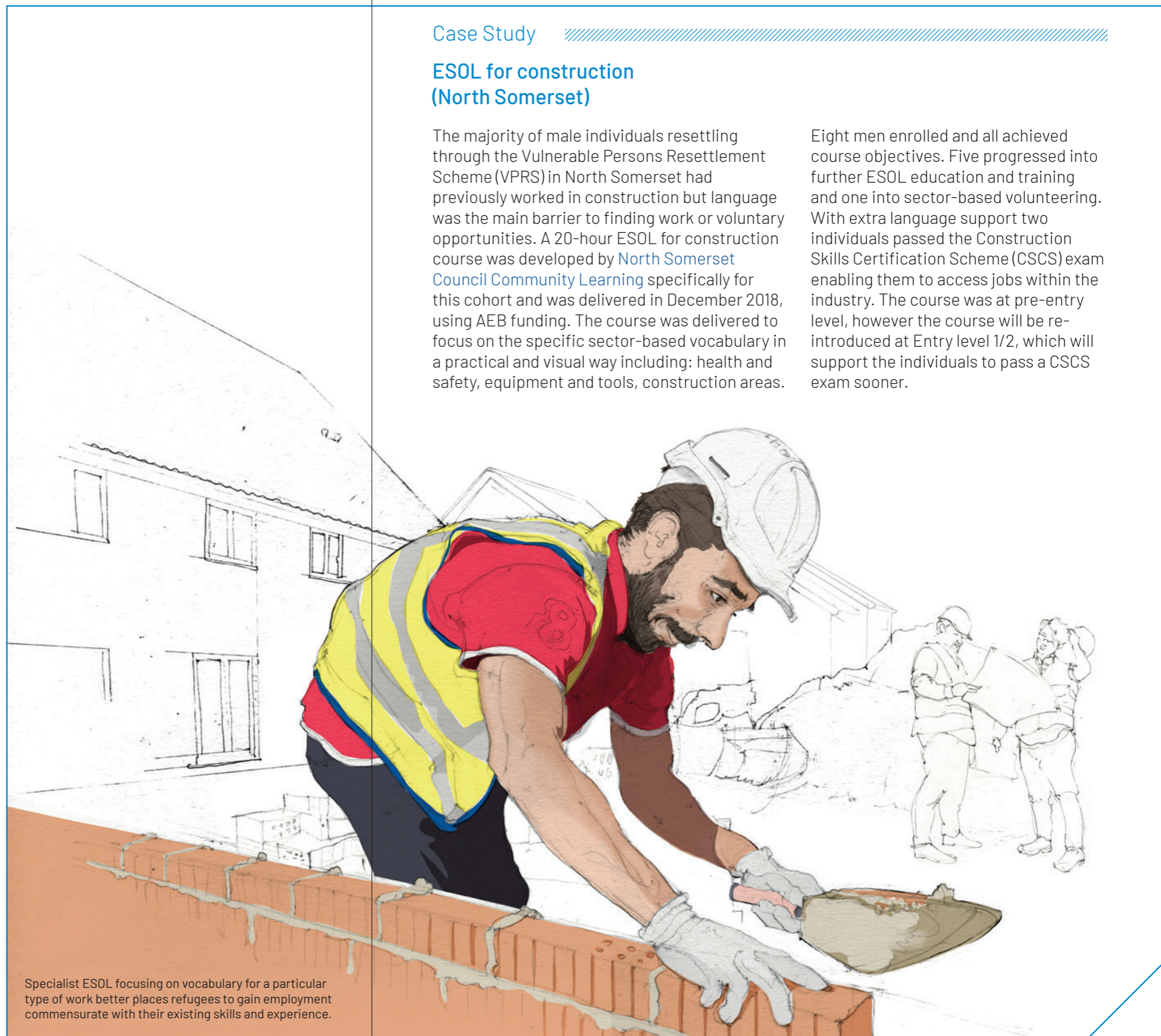
Case study adapted from content on innovative practice in the North West ESOL Regional Coordinator's report (Mackey, 2018).

Case Study

ESOL for construction (North Somerset)

The majority of male individuals resettling through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) in North Somerset had previously worked in construction but language was the main barrier to finding work or voluntary opportunities. A 20-hour ESOL for construction course was developed by [North Somerset Council Community Learning](#) specifically for this cohort and was delivered in December 2018, using AEB funding. The course was delivered to focus on the specific sector-based vocabulary in a practical and visual way including: health and safety, equipment and tools, construction areas.

Eight men enrolled and all achieved course objectives. Five progressed into further ESOL education and training and one into sector-based volunteering. With extra language support two individuals passed the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) exam enabling them to access jobs within the industry. The course was at pre-entry level, however the course will be re-introduced at Entry level 1/2, which will support the individuals to pass a CSCS exam sooner.



Specialist ESOL focusing on vocabulary for a particular type of work better places refugees to gain employment commensurate with their existing skills and experience.

Case Study

Support into training and work (Banbury and Oxford)

The EMBS Employment Support and Training Programme supports people in Banbury and Oxford into work, training, and active job searching.

Hanan, resettled through the VPRS, has participated in the programme. When Hanan arrived in the UK from Syria at the end of 2017, she didn't speak any English. She started college at EMBS in Banbury, first in a class for absolute beginners, learning the alphabet. Over the course of two years, she has worked her way all the way up to a Level 2 class.

From here, she could choose to find a job or study in a further education programme. Seeking employment, she began working with our Banbury employability coach, Sam. Together, they created her CV and practised mock interviews. Sam gave her practical tips on how she could sell herself to employers in the UK.

After passing her first interview, she has now started working as a teaching assistant in a local school. She also has recently passed her driving test.

Sam is thrilled by her achievements, saying that, 'Hanan is incredibly motivated and dedicated.' At EMBS, we love enabling our students to thrive in the UK, whether that's learning English, finding a job, or passing the driver's test. Hanan is just one of our many success stories. She writes poignantly: 'EMBS has opened so many doors for me ... I have found a new life.'

(Adapted from the EMBS Newsletter 11 January 2020).

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Case Study

Work experience and language development in a community café (St Helens)

Café Laziz is a community café in St Helens, Merseyside, where refugee and asylum seeker volunteers serve Arabic meals ('Laziz' means 'delicious' in Arabic). Using grant funding, it was established as a community interest company by Debra, an ESOL tutor who realised that refugee learners needed more than just traditional ESOL classes. Many had never worked in their home countries (Syria and Iraq) and those who had worked needed support to understand the British labour market, but Debra recognised that they had skills in cooking and hospitality.

The café is based within a children's centre, which has allowed free use of a kitchen, and the café provides children's meals free of charge as part of this partnership. Currently the volunteers are all women although the project is hoping to recruit men in the future.

The aims of the café are to:

- develop English language skills whilst volunteering in a real working environment
- offer training and qualifications to refugees and asylum seekers
- provide volunteering opportunities to refugees and asylum seekers
- aid integration between refugees, asylum seekers and the St. Helens community
- provide a warm meal to asylum seekers free of charge (customers donate to a pay it forward scheme).

Initially, the volunteers were nervous about speaking to people from the local community and chose to remain in the kitchen. Debra ensured that roles were allocated and swapped each week in order to give the volunteers experience of all roles. Within a few weeks volunteers were asking to work front of house and as cashier taking customer orders. One of the volunteers describes her experience at Café Laziz: 'I love working here because I speak to people, I make new friends, people like my food. I am very happy'.

The café recently catered for 100 people at an external event. All 12 volunteers have gained Level 2 qualifications in Food Safety and Allergen Awareness. All will soon be starting City & Guilds qualifications in Customer Service. The long term aim is to provide paid jobs and managerial opportunities for the volunteers.



Case Study

Recognising existing skills (Coventry)

St Francis Employability recognises that refugees often struggle to demonstrate existing skills due to a lack of English. A 10 week course is offered which helps refugee learners to demonstrate their skills and accredits learners from Entry level to Level 2. Underpinning the approach is the belief that skills can be demonstrated in a first language, before English is refined; developing skills and English language can happen in parallel. It is not necessary to wait until English is well developed before students can study for skills that will improve their opportunities for employment.

Rather than sit an exam or test which shows how good they are (or not) at understanding grammatically complex English sentences, refugees are taught either in their first language (with additional ESOL) or in ESOL-style skills based classes to show they have skills in IT, customer service, hospitality, catering, health and safety for work, understanding policies and procedures, employer expectations etc. They are asked to demonstrate these skills through practical work experience. The work experience is also helpful in securing references and UK work history as they move towards employment. Most learners have improved their English language skills.

Case Study

Linking newcomers with help in their journey to self-employment (North East)

The Newcomers Digital Employment Network in the North East is an online checklist that allows newcomers to link with local offers of assistance that can assist towards their journey to self-employment. There are over 20 services offered, including help with language, CVs, and volunteering opportunities.

The Network has been piloted by JCP and by Middlesbrough Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officers (LAASLOs) with positive feedback.

For more information contact the North East Migration Partnership (see Part 1 for contact details).

Case Study

Work-based ESOL and facilitating work experience opportunities (Oxfordshire)

Aspire Oxfordshire, an employment charity and social enterprise, was commissioned by Oxford City Council in 2018 to deliver work-based ESOL courses with local work experience opportunities, for Syrian refugees on the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). Learners spend 10 weeks in the classroom learning customer service vocabulary, followed by four weeks of work shadowing and then four days of formal work experience. The four employers currently involved are the Co-Op, John Lewis, Brasenose College and Oxford Bus Company. By the end of the programme learners have a learning log which can be used when applying for jobs, to demonstrate the skills that they have learnt. Work-based ESOL courses focusing on self-employment and trade skills have also been developed, available to all migrants, not just refugees.

Aspire Oxfordshire also works with employers on diversity and equality issues, through workshops and conferences, and aims to raise employers' awareness of refugees as a cohort with a need for employment opportunities. The ongoing challenge is to support refugees to access employment – those who have succeeded have usually attained Level 2 ESOL. A key barrier is obtaining the necessary skills for interviews – this is the next challenge Aspire plans to address.

Aspire's tips for engaging with employers include the following:

- **Develop an understanding of local business needs.** Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) should help gain an understanding of the local labour market. In Aspire's experience the sectors most struggling with recruitment are construction, hospitality, leisure, and care. Employers often say there is a skills shortage and they can't recruit, but in reality there are skilled people who find the recruitment process complex and difficult to navigate.

- **Develop trust between your organisation and local employers.** Joining a local business network, and attending the meetings regularly, is a good way to do this – for example a Business in the Community network, or a local network. This will help your organisation understand the concerns of local businesses and become familiar with the jargon. You can take opportunities to explain your project – hopefully then employers will show an interest and this is the start of a conversation. Attending job fairs is another way to engage with employers.
- **Start at the top.** Try and get buy in from an employer's CEO – once they are willing to come on board, your organisation can develop the necessary processes with the relevant staff in the organisation.
- **Start small.** Don't start by asking an employer to take on a refugee as a paid employee. Firstly ask employers to offer work shadowing opportunities – short sessions of 2-3 hours. Then if this goes well ask for work experience opportunities. Be aware that some employers are reluctant to offer work experience as they feel uncomfortable about not paying people. If you explain that the person is trying to build their employability skills as part of a long-term process of getting back to work, and ask for a maximum of four days, employers feel that they are helping and not taking advantage.

Case Study

Employment based ESOL (London)

The Mayor's ESOL Plus programme funds innovative pilot projects in London that overcome barriers to ESOL provision for learners with particular needs. [ESOL Plus – Employer Partnership](#) works with partners to meet gaps in ESOL provision for workers, particularly those in low-paid work and insecure employment. Battersea Academy for Skills and Employment (BASE) received funding from the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Battersea Power Station (BPS). BASE worked in delivery partnership with High Trees Community Development Trust.

The project ran from October 2018 – September 2019. The aim was to facilitate access to ESOL for those who are under-employed or face access barriers due to their work patterns. BASE engaged with employers (including restaurants and cleaning providers), offering free English language classes for their staff in a location on the BPS site. High Trees delivered the teaching, customising its standard ESOL syllabus to match the needs of BPS employers, incorporating some content focused on customer service and hospitality. The level of courses ranged from Entry 1 to Entry 3.

An evaluation of the project indicates an improvement in language competence and confidence (ESOL Plus Employer Partnership, 2019). Employers reported staff being more confident in using radios or walkie-talkies, and in responding to customer queries. A learner reported 'I feel more confident with the customers and can have nice and long conversations with them.' A facilities manager reported a 'great difference, vast improvement', with cleaning staff having improved understanding and communicating more. Most employers were keen to release staff for similar courses in future.

For many learners, a key purpose of ESOL is to enable them to access employment.

Challenges for the future include how best to match course times with staff schedules, and how to provide opportunities for practising English while at work; suggested solutions are 'coffee morning breaks' and/or weekly half hour slots in which workers can interact and practise English.



Challenge 14. What role do online and digital learning tools play in refugees' language learning?

Digital resources are already integrated into some ESOL learning. Teachers use mobile phones and online virtual learning environments ([Higton et al, 2019](#)), voice chat and Facebook help with vocabulary and communicative competence, while film and TV aid listening. There is potential for rural areas to benefit particularly; in Northern Ireland learners in rural locations access learning remotely, issued with ipads to receive interactive lessons at home and attend college just once a week. Derbyshire County Council provides ESOL learners with logins for language learning software.

At the time of writing, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, many providers are offering online learning opportunities. This follows earlier calls from politicians recommending collaboration to 'new approaches to language learning incorporating digital tools, apps and massive open online courses' ([APPG on Social Integration, 2017](#)) and calls for a freeview 'Learning English' channel to enable greater exposure to English ([British Future, 2019](#)).

There is a gap in relation to evidence of effective practice in this area. Existing examples of using digital tools tend to focus on blended learning (where digital is often used as a resource to enhance face to face learning) and extending face to face learning outside the classroom (extra hours of self-directed study, or options to catch up on missed lessons). Less is known about the effectiveness of completely self-directed learning.

Digital learning can only benefit those who are able to access it. The [Carnegie UK Trust](#) and [Good Things Foundation](#) are looking at key digital inclusion challenges and opportunities for those who have English as an additional language. Projects to improve access to technology include [100% Digital Leeds](#) that aims to ensure that everyone in the city is digitally included, using measures such as a tablet lending scheme, Digital Champions training sessions, and local network events. Bradford-based [Solidaritech](#) is a community interest company enabling refugees and asylum seekers to access technology, by repurposing old laptops, tablets and smartphones.

Digital resources enable a shift from teacher-led to learner-initiated learning – but respondents still want classroom teaching ([Trinder, 2017](#)). Of course the benefits of digital learning need to be balanced with increasing accessibility to face to face interaction in learning, not least to aid social mixing, integration and prevent isolation.

Online resources arranged by user groups – learners, volunteers and teachers, and online platforms to create learning spaces – are listed overleaf. These resources were free of charge at the time this list was put together.

Online resources for learners, volunteers and teachers

Resources for Learners

- Developed by the British Council, [ESOL Nexus](#) is intended for use by learners as self-study materials and organised around five areas – Skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), UK Life, Grammar and Vocabulary, English for Work, Your Turn. The Your Turn pages host accounts of those new to the UK, these texts are accompanied by language learning activities, for example, pronunciation quizzes. The materials are mapped to five language levels in the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum which can be found here www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf1194.
- [BBC Learning English](#) hosts self-access materials which can also be used by teachers or volunteers. The materials are arranged by level and language systems (grammar etc.) and include materials to develop [academic skills](#). This site also hosts bilingual materials in a number of languages, [Afaan](#), [Mandarin](#), [Gujarati](#), [Marathi](#), [Punjabi](#), [Korean](#), [Telugu](#), [Thai](#), [Tigrinya](#). BBC Learning English host [Facebook groups](#) for each of these languages.
- [Learning Circles](#) is a set of videos which can be used by learners with a basic level of English. These videos introduce everyday language and provide opportunities for practice as well. These resources are part of English My Way, see below.
- The ESOL Special Interest Group ([ESOL SIG](#)) with the International Association for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) has put up [free resources](#) to study English at home.
- [ESOL Courses](#) provide learning materials as well as course listings in major cities in England and Scotland. Future Learn hosts a [course](#) aimed at refugees and asylum seekers who wish to apply for university in the UK, as well as two courses for lower levels.
- [Little Bridge](#) is an e-learning package designed specifically to support primary school children learning English, and offers support to schools who have resettled Syrian pupils.

Resources for Volunteers and Teachers

- The Learning and Work Institute have developed [guides for volunteers](#) running conversation clubs and other English language practice activities, and for organisations who are involving volunteers in their delivery.
- [English My Way](#) is structured around 10 topics and offers a 24 week syllabus with learner materials and notes for teachers. These materials are intended for use in classes taught by trained ESOL teachers alongside one to one learning sessions with volunteers. The aim of this set of materials is to create learning communities where teachers, volunteer tutors and learners' experiences are considered equally important.
- The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) have produced a set of downloadable [ESOL materials](#) tailored to the needs of learners with little or no literacy in English.
- The Excellence Gateway hosts resources relevant for [ESOL](#), including resources aimed at [learners new to ESOL](#). The site hosts a new resource pack, '[ESOL for refugees: resources for new arrivals](#)', developed by the Learning and Work Institute and Learning Unlimited. This website also has materials to support [vocational learning](#) in 12 subject areas, suitable for use with ESOL learners.
- Learning Unlimited, a not for profit enterprise, have produced [free resources](#) for ESOL as well as Family Learning and Maths.
- Museums offer resources to support ESOL and also a sense of citizenship. The British Museum runs tours for ESOL and Literacy learners, supported by [learning materials](#). The National Portrait Gallery hosts [resources](#) for ESOL learners to make the most of visits to the gallery.
- The IATEFL ESOL Special Interest Group ([ESOL SIG](#)) hosts [resources](#) for teachers ranging from materials to explore sexual and gender diversity in ESOL classrooms to issues and opportunities in online teaching.

Materials for Professional Development

- The Education and Training Foundation have developed two [CPD modules](#) for supporting ESOL learners with grammar and literacy.
- ESOL Nexus have a section for [teachers](#), the Staff Room pages include videos to develop teachers' skills and understanding for teaching English.

Platforms to Create Interactive Learning Spaces

- [Microsoft Teams](#), originally set up by Microsoft as a group chat platform is now being used for educational purposes to create online classrooms. Users need to have Office 365 on their lap/desktops to [download](#) and use this platform. Microsoft Teams is also available as an app from Microsoft.
- Schoology is a Learning Management System (LMS) and social networking site for educators. Aimed at high schools in America, a [free version](#) is available. Schoology allows teachers to set up blended and online courses, organising learning materials in units. The platform can host multimedia materials and it is possible to build in some interactivity.
- [Moodle](#) is another LMS and a free version is available with a sandbox to try out activities. The plugin for distance learning is free until the end of 2020.
- Digital resources for ESOL can be a moving feast, tried and tested resources have been listed here. To learn about up and coming resources, subscribe to updates by The National Association for Teachers of English and Community Languages ([NATECLA](#)) and the [ESOL Research List](#), a forum on jiscmail.

Looking to the future

This toolkit has sought to address some of the key issues facing professionals and support agencies who want to improve accessibility and efficacy of ESOL provision for refugees. This final section sums up the advice we heard from professionals and refugees around the country, and identifies the outstanding gaps that challenge us to persist in improving the offer we make to refugees for improving their English language skills in order to welcome and encourage them in their lives in the UK.

Considerations for funders and commissioners

Some dos and don'ts in commissioning and funding ESOL for refugees

What to fund

- ✓ When funding provision specifically for new arrivals, consider commissioning flexible, informal or tailored learning settings as a gateway to build confidence and foster a positive experience of learning environments in the UK.
- ✓ Get informed about what is already funded:
 - Look at what provision that is in greatest demand, such as intensive courses, pre-entry ESOL for those with little existing English, basic skills for those with limited literacy on arrival in the UK, ESOL for work and for highly skilled refugees.
 - Likewise consider groups that may not be numerous but have specific needs and would benefit from tailored provision such as those with learning difficulties or older learners.
- ✓ Think about funding provision where all types of learner are eligible, regardless of their immigration status, and whether they are the principal or second welfare benefits claimant in a household.
- ✓ Funding training for ESOL tutors could have long-term benefits. Raising awareness of the issues faced by refugees, both in country of origin, during transit and here in the UK, as well as training on cultural sensitivity and working with those who have experienced trauma can all help tutors adapt ESOL provision to better meet the needs of refugee learners.
- ✓ Consider funding ongoing assessment as part of ESOL provision, as well as training on conducting assessments.

Set realistic goals

- ✓ Be aware that there might be a gap between the outcomes you seek and learner needs (especially in the early days for a refugee adapting to life in the UK); consider how to take these into account and reconcile them.
- ✓ Consider how far targets or accreditation requirements might skew a provider's focus away from meeting learner needs, or if they might discourage a provider from enrolling learners with the greatest needs.

Encourage collaboration

- ✓ Allow and encourage different sectors and agencies to work together on funding bids and delivery.
- ✓ Encourage bids that will provide consistency in capacity, tutors and class arrangements over a long period of time, without large gaps between courses and with clear routes to progression.
 - Don't require geographical boundaries that strictly limit eligibility for courses; avoid situations where learners living close to an administrative boundary might not be able to access a nearby course.
 - Don't enforce some kind of penalty or sanction for non-attendance – be aware of the potential consequences upon future learning for that individual.
 - Short term, non-intensive courses can be useful for learners on waiting lists, or to meet the short term pre-defined needs of a specific group. However be aware that learners taking only short courses might have significant or lengthy gaps before subsequent learning opportunities, and small organisations have to spend disproportionate time bidding for small pots of money.

Considerations for providers

Some dos and don'ts in design and delivery of ESOL provision

Logistics and planning

- ✓ Consult with your client group to ensure you have identified and removed as many practical, logistical barriers to attendance and learning at your class as possible.
- ✓ Keep learner costs to a minimum; cover transport and childcare costs where possible.
- ✓ Choose a venue that is on public transport routes and may be familiar (or at least easily found) by refugees who are new to the area.
- ✓ Find out availability of your learners and plan class times accordingly. For example, allow learners to carry out caring duties such as the school run, fit around work hours, and be flexible enough to accommodate appointments and prayer times.
- ✓ Make adjustments for those who are new to learning environments or have not studied for some time. This might include home learning options, relaxed settings, lots of encouragement and reassurance, 'real world' settings to practise, and bilingual staff.
- ✓ Create some single gender opportunities for learning.
- ✓ Where you have learners who are parents, explore with them what kind of childcare arrangements they will have confidence in.

Staff and support workers

- ✓ Ensure continuing professional development in literacy and phonics is available to practitioners - both qualified teachers and volunteers - and take steps to enable them to engage with this training.
- ✓ Find training for ESOL tutors that covers cultural competence, working with refugees, and working with people who may have experienced trauma.
- ✓ Help students appreciate that there are a wide range of regional accents and dialects in the UK and these help identify where we are from and these are variations are all 'English'. Students need to become confident with English as it is actually spoken and used in everyday life.

- ✓ Recognise that learners may need support in many areas of their life; providing pastoral and practical support in an appropriate way can enable them to focus on learning in class, but also know when to refer on to a specialist or signpost to a support service.

Content and delivery

- ✓ Give regular cues that indicate learners are making progress e.g. issue certificates, arrange celebration events.
- ✓ Be as flexible as humanly possible; learners cannot be flexible about family crises, their trauma-affected behaviour, or the demands of employers (recognising that some refugees will be in precarious work, shift workers or on zero-hours contracts).
- ✓ Seek feedback about your courses - perhaps with the assistance of interpreters to ensure your learners are able to express themselves fully - and be prepared to make adjustments based on this. Consider how you could regularly evaluate the courses you offer and check they are as effective as possible.

- Avoid creating situations that may push learners to choose between their family/ caring responsibilities and learning English.
- Don't organise ESOL on days or dates that clash with religious events. ESOL classes can continue during fasting times but practitioners should be aware when learners are observing these.
- Don't enforce strict attendance rules or use threats and sanctions as motivational tools.



Considerations for national policy

- National priorities on further and higher education, immigration policy, social integration and employment are inextricably linked to language learning. Policy goals in these areas must routinely factor in appropriate, sufficient ESOL resources so that refugees can learn and improve their English language skills. As an example, public sector agencies must ensure that employment and integration initiatives are accessible to people who fall within scope of the Public Sector Equality Duty; such access might be improved in the longer term through ESOL instruction. The curriculum content for vocational qualifications should routinely consider how an ESOL element could support refugee learners. The forthcoming national ESOL strategy should recognise the linkages between ESOL, employment and community integration policy, ensure a more coordinated approach to ESOL provision to support learner access and progress as needed, and ensure adequate ESOL resources are planned in parallel to facilitate implementation of the strategy.
- Investing in early support on English language learning and related integration issues is known to be cost-effective in the long term ([Refugee Action, 2016](#)). Being excluded from learning opportunities prior to being granted refugee status will have had an impact on English language development for many refugees. Clear, positive leadership and coordination on refugee and ESOL issues to identify local gaps and needs will enable local decision makers to give this due attention and appropriate local budgeting.
- National and local ESOL strategies should be evidence based. Research studies and practitioner experience clearly point to two critical deficits in ESOL provision across England at present: a need to focus on support for young refugees (aged 16-19), and a general shortage at the extremes in levels of ESOL offered – at lower levels and the higher end, which impacts on employability and entry to professional courses. Strategies should prioritise these in terms of funding and resources and draw funder and budget holders' attention to such gaps. Further, they should support further research to identify needs, gaps in provision and effective means of addressing them as the learning landscape is affected by the impacts of Covid-19, Brexit and the economy.
- National and local ESOL strategies should reflect the strong evidence base that access to a mix of types and settings for ESOL provision is most effective in supporting social integration, steps to appropriate employment for refugees, meeting the different learning needs of refugees and addressing many of the multiple barriers that they face to learning. Funders of ESOL should be cognisant of this evidence when allocating budgets, ensuring both community based and qualifications based ESOL are resourced, that vocational ESOL is part of the spectrum of ESOL provision on offer to refugees, and that different ESOL providers across the country are able to easily share knowledge, practice and resources and work with one another locally.
- The provision of funding specifically to ensure a minimum learning offer to refugees resettled under the VPRS – a set number of hours of language provision per week – has been very much welcomed by stakeholders as it provides a critical opportunity for refugees as part of the process of 'move on' and a step to integration locally. Even with this resourcing, learning English has remained a significant challenge for many resettled refugees. Building on this initiative, to provide parity this minimum learning offer should be made available to all refugees as a standard aspect of the 'move on' process, regardless of the path to refugee status.
- Local ESOL providers and those supporting refugee integration want to do a good job, and are extremely skilled at making the most of their resources. Many providers run on a shoestring, a short term budget and are vulnerable to cuts in funding available to support ESOL provision. Adequate, long term statutory funding is the foundation of providing suitable and effective ESOL for refugees.
- If refugee learners are to thrive and achieve their potential, educational measures of performance should incentivise development of learner pathways that meet the needs of refugees as holistically as possible, avoiding penalising education institutions with refugee students. Inspections and other evaluative processes should incorporate the needs of refugee students related to confidence and integration, for example, rather than solely attainment. Local colleges, for example, should not be deterred from registering refugee learners because of the potential negative impact on institutional performance and attainment scores.



Gaps and unanswered questions

Finally, we present a set of unresolved issues that were identified by people who took part in events to provide material for this toolkit as well as those that have arisen following the Covid-19 outbreak. We suggest they are deserving of further research at the national level to find ways to address them.

There are a number of gaps in the evidence base from the academic literature that deserve more attention, for example concerning unaccompanied children and highly-skilled migrants.

There were also some important issues raised during the consultation workshops for the SEER project that at the time offered fewer clear answers:

- **Progression:**
How can we encourage people who are demotivated or 'stuck' at a particular level (often pre-entry) and help them to progress rather than give up?
- **Providing consistency in learning:**
How can we minimise disruption to learning journeys and cope with short-termism in funding?
- **Home learning without IT skills or IT access:**
What resources can refugee learners use to extend their learning at home, particularly if they don't have IT access or if they have a low level of English?
- **Reframing refugees as assets:**
How can refugees' existing multi-language skills be used to encourage and bolster their learning? How can they offer peer support?
- **Low-cost options:**
How can we provide low-cost or no-cost opportunities for refugees to integrate with English speakers and practise their language skills?
- **Targets, monitoring and milestones:**
How can funder requirements be met but without skewing delivery that prioritises targets over meaningful learning?
- **Devolution:**
How will the devolution of AEB funding impact the ESOL landscape in the coming years?
- **Covid-19:**
How have the restrictions related to the pandemic impacted the ability of refugees to learn English? (For a summary of some of the challenges related to Covid-19 and ESOL see 'Challenges in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic' at the end of Part 1.2). What can we learn from the ways in which ESOL providers and refugees have adapted to this situation?

Appendix 1: Key terms

We use the terms 'ESOL', 'ESOL provision' and 'English language provision' fairly interchangeably to mean English language teaching for adults whose first language is not English.

ESOL is studied at different levels:

- pre-entry
- Entry level 1
- Entry level 2
- Entry level 3
- Level 1
- Level 2

Pre-entry ESOL is for learners with a very low level of English proficiency, for example they may be able to answer basic questions about personal information. Pre-entry courses are likely to focus on the sounds of letters and syllables, basic grammar and essential vocabulary. Entry level

3 is generally regarded as the level of required proficiency for self-sufficiency (McKinsey, 2016, p.50) and is also the minimum level required for British citizenship. Learners often need to be at Level 1 to be able to access general college courses in different subjects. Level 2 denotes a high level of English proficiency, equating to standards of literacy and language expected of English speakers achieving GCSE grades 4 and above. See our associated [literature review](#) for more detail about ESOL levels.

We use the term 'refugee' to describe people who have been recognised as needing international protection by the UK government, and whose language learning needs are likely to be affected by this context. However, we recognise that people in this situation are not solely defined by their immigration status but have a wealth of experiences, needs, traits and skills that we celebrate as members of our community.

Appendix 2: Reference list of figures, tools and case studies

Figures

- i: The main routes to being recognised as a refugee in the UK
- ii: Key features of an ideal learning journey for refugees
- iii: Funding sources for ESOL provision that might be accessed by refugees
- iv: The diverse ESOL provider landscape

Tools

- What good practice looks like for local ESOL steering groups
- Tips for supporting language learning in rural places and small towns
- Information and resources about initial assessment
- 10 steps for improving educational outcomes for unaccompanied children (Virtual School Kent)
- Strategies for improving access to learning for refugees
- Online resources for learners, volunteers and teachers
- Some dos and don'ts in commissioning and funding ESOL for refugees
- Some dos and don'ts in design and delivery of ESOL provision

Case studies

1. Additional benefits of ESOL provision in a classroom setting (Derbyshire)
2. Delivering an integrated construction sector package between sectors (Leeds)
3. Targeting specific refugee learner need (Bristol/Birmingham/Wolverhampton/Coventry)
4. Tailored quality information through partnership working (London)
5. User-centred, holistic support facilitated by partners working together (Ashford)
6. Focus on ESOL Regional Coordinators for Refugees
7. English Language Coordination Fund projects
8. Identifying specific shortages through common approaches (Manchester)
9. Tracking pre-entry learners together to enable progression (Blackburn with Darwen)
10. Addressing collective priorities through a coordinated funding bid (Suffolk)
11. Providing opportunities to build local relationships (SEER project)
12. Spotting duplication by consulting widely (Waltham Forest)
13. Different agencies taking complementary roles (Kirklees)
14. Using flexible funding to complement existing provision (Southampton)
15. Colleges working with local partners (Shipley)
16. A Combined Authority (North of Tyne)
17. Flexible funding to support areas new to hosting refugees (VPRS)
18. Establishing ESOL provision in a rural context (Derbyshire)

19. Supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children prior to joining mainstream education (Kent)
20. Tailoring support for young refugees and asylum seekers at college (Brighton)
21. Preparing young refugees for work (Plymouth)
22. A grant scheme to provide complementary, conversational ESOL (Lancashire)
23. A grant scheme accessible to small organisations (Leeds)
24. Volunteers adding value to a coordinated programme of accredited and non-accredited ESOL provision (Hertfordshire)
25. Volunteer-supported home learning in preparation for Entry level college classes (Darlington)
26. Differentiated volunteer roles to support those unable to access classroom provision (Sheffield)
27. Libraries as single points of contact for ESOL advice and assessment (Kirklees)
28. A community-based therapeutic group for men who had not engaged with ESOL (Oxford)
29. A gateway to learning: women's ESOL with an onsite crèche (Plymouth)
30. Teaching vocabulary about mental health (Sheffield)
31. English language support for a family with visual impairments (East Midlands)
32. Encouraging new parents through creative ESOL activities with childcare (London)
33. Using a combination of ESOL provision to meet different learning needs (East of England)
34. Local partnerships between ESOL and non-ESOL agencies (Waltham Forest)
35. A regional ESOL resource and practitioner network (Yorkshire and Humber)
36. Participatory ways of delivering ESOL
37. Practical, peer learning at a Language Café (Gateshead)
38. Developing parents' competence in education terminology (the North East)
39. Saving money and food at a Meet, Try, Learn session (Kirklees)
40. Learning about local life and services (Blackburn with Darwen)
41. Information films for non-English speakers (Oxford)
42. Intensive ESOL for work pilot (the North West)
43. ESOL for construction (North Somerset)
44. Support into training and work (Banbury and Oxford)
45. Work experience and language development in a community café (St Helens)
46. Recognising existing skills (Coventry)
47. Linking newcomers with help in their journey to self-employment (North East)
48. Work-based ESOL and facilitating work experience opportunities (Oxfordshire)
49. Employment based ESOL (London)

Websites are provided where available for organisations featured in each case study. If you need assistance contacting an organisation, reach out to the relevant Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP) whose details are listed in Part 1.

Appendix 3: Abbreviations

AEB	Adult Education Budget
CMF	Controlling Migration Fund
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
ECLF	English Language Coordination Fund
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
FE	Further Education
GLA	Greater London Authority
IA	Initial assessment
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
LA	Local authority
LAASLO	Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officer
MCA	Mayoral Combined Authority
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
RCO	Refugee-led community organisation
RSMP	Regional Strategic Migration Partnership
SEER	Suitable and Effective ESOL for Refugees
SPOC	Single point of contact
UKRS	UK Resettlement Scheme
VCS	Voluntary and community sector
VPRS	Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

Appendix 4: Acknowledgements

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Every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of information provided in this toolkit. However, in this constantly evolving policy environment, we advise readers always to seek up-to-date information from the Home Office regarding the issue of English for Speakers of Other Languages.

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Covid-19 information for migrants and services in Yorkshire and Humber. Resources to share.

Migration Yorkshire provides strategic leadership and local support across the Yorkshire and Humber region, and is hosted by Leeds City Council. Migration Yorkshire works with national, regional and local partners to ensure that the region can deal with, and benefit from, migration.

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