
Unlocking Potential - Making Sense of ESOL in the Region



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Foreword

Following an invitation from the West Midlands Combined Authority, a wide group of ESOL delivery partners were brought together to review ESOL in the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

I feel privileged to have been the Chair of the ESOL Review Group and see the commitment and passion for ESOL across the group members. We were all particularly pleased that the WMCA had asked for this review and given the opportunity for ESOL to have a specific focus and to raise the profile of this important area of work.

Over a six-month period, the ESOL review group considered local and national evidence and shared experiences of local delivery. The result of this work is this report, which includes analysis, findings and recommendations for the way forward.

There is some excellent ESOL delivery in the WMCA area, and many examples of innovation. We recognise however that the focus on ESOL has received less attention over recent years in line with funding. Funding policy has not kept up to date with changes in migration and local residents ESOL needs. Demand has grown over the years and supply does not meet the needs of some West Midlands residents with different ESOL needs.

The fundamental shared aim of the Review Group is to **deliver more effective ESOL to greater numbers** of learners through:

- More and better collaboration
- Better aligned and coordinated funding of provision

The report highlights a number of key issues with the delivery of ESOL from stability of funding to delivery methodology. To meet the different needs of ESOL learners, it is clear that there is a need for a mix of delivery methods. There also needs to be better alignment of ESOL and employment

and how it can fit with maths, IT and vocational training.

There are a number of recommendations in the report. Setting up a proposed Expert Panel of ESOL practitioners and the development of a clear strategy to implement recommendations will be the start of the next stage towards our aim to ensure more effective ESOL delivery to greater numbers of adults.

In the next year we would want the focus to include:

1. Ensuring that ESOL is fully integrated into a local adult skills offer.
2. Development of improved local intelligence of local migration flows and potential demand and a shared dataset of provision.
3. Developing new vocational training provision in key WMCA priority sectors at Level 3 with a specific ESOL element enabling greater access to high value-added jobs.
4. Developing an ESOL for employment offer in major employment sectors with the development of bespoke language skills more appropriate to the employment market and ESOL provision embedded within wider training.
5. Developing online learning proposals to enhance the range of ESOL delivery options.
6. Exploring the development of an ESOL hub to enhance the Information Advice and Guidance offer for learners.

Working in partnership and with the WMCA will be key to our success.

Mel Lenehan

Principal and CEO of Fircroft College
Chair of ESOL Review group

Introduction

This report is the first product of a new collaboration across the West Midlands Combined Authority area of all of the major providers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) together with representatives of the Combined Authority. The partnership comprises ESOL professional and funding providers across a range of deliver partners including:

- Adult and community learning
- Further education colleges
- Voluntary organisations working with migrant/refugee communities
- DWP/JCP
- WMCA

What we share is a recognition of the importance of ESOL as key element of any employability which supports inclusivity. In an ethnically diverse region and with inward migration, particularly of refugees, as a longstanding feature of the West Midlands, it is important that we sustain and grow our capacity to deliver ESOL effectively.

Together we have established a working group under the chairmanship of Mel Lenehan, Principal of Fircroft College. Our fundamental shared aim is to deliver more effective ESOL to greater numbers of individuals through:

- a. More and better collaboration
- b. Better aligned and coordinated funding of provision

Our initial recommended actions in support of these aims are set out in Section 3 of this report (How We Could Change the Picture) including those absolute priorities which we are committing to in the next academic year. There is agreement across the provider base and, crucially, from the WMCA itself, that the delivery of ESOL is a key element of any comprehensive employability strategy in this region. There is a pressing need to address the challenges in ESOL delivery because:

- i. Demand has remained exceedingly high over a period of time and waiting lists exist across the CA area
- ii. Inclusive growth ambitions will require the delivery of ESOL at an appropriate level, where and when it is needed.



Current context

Over the last 10 years or so, there has been a shift in government priority and funding of ESOL provision. This policy context has led to some change in behaviours towards ESOL delivery and resulted in a decline in the visibility and importance of ESOL in the area.

In terms of demand, the West Midlands is recognised nationally as a region of diversity with first generation migrants and/or refugees a significant proportion of the overall population. The most recent census (2011) indicated that 16.6% of people resident in the WMCA area were born outside the UK, which is higher than the England average of 13.9%. Regarding language specifically, census data revealed that in 1.2% of households across the region, none of the adults (but some children) have English as their main language, compared to 0.8% nationally, and in 5.7% of the region's households nobody has English as their first language, compared to 4.4% nationally. This demonstrates the huge potential market for English language and related training, and these figures are already eight years old. There have been significant events since 2011 that will have impacted upon migration flows into the West Midlands region, such as the most recent EU enlargement in 2013 and the aftermath of conflicts in the Middle East generating immigration.

We often talk about provision or qualifications but from a resident perspective we identified five broad groups of ESOL learners:

- Those who want to work and are ready and qualified but lack English language skills
- Those who want to work but lack both English skills and occupational skills and qualifications
- Those who are working but want to improve their English so they can progress at work or in further study
- Those who are not working and want to learn English to integrate, take up work or further study
- Those who want to learn English but are not fully literate in their own language or have learning needs.

The vast majority of ESOL provision is funded through the Adult Education Budget (AEB), although there are a number of other sources including ESF and MHCLG funding which may duplicate provision. The table below (with acknowledgement to the Learning and Work Institute)¹ is based on a survey of 39 major providers in the West Midlands region. ESOL provision accounted for approximately 9% (£11m) of AEB funds used in the region during the 2017/18 academic year. Just over 90% of this provision was targeted at entry level courses and there was significant drop-off of AEB-funded ESOL provision at post-entry levels, with Level 1 provision accounting for just over 8% and Level 2 at just over 1%. This is in a wider regional employment context where, beyond ESOL, currently just under half of the working age population is qualified to Level 3 and just under 30% is qualified to Level 4, while projected need indicates that 42% of jobs will require Level 4 skills by 2024.

Although AEB has declined in real terms over the past 10 years, the devolution of this funding to the WMCA, from August 2019, offers the opportunity to fully integrate ESOL into a comprehensive local adult skills offer, and target those furthest away from the labour market, in order to support the WMCA's inclusive growth ambitions. In recent years, ESOL and/or functional skills qualifications have been focused on those not in employment. More recently, the WMCA has piloted a scheme to allow more low waged learners to access free delivery, and in May 2019 the West Midlands Skills Advisory Board agreed that this be extended to people earning up to the real living wage.

1. Mapping ESOL Provision in the West Midlands Region, L & WI 2018 draft report

2. Delivery of intensive ESOL is restricted by DWP regulations and hours limited and therefore seldom takes place

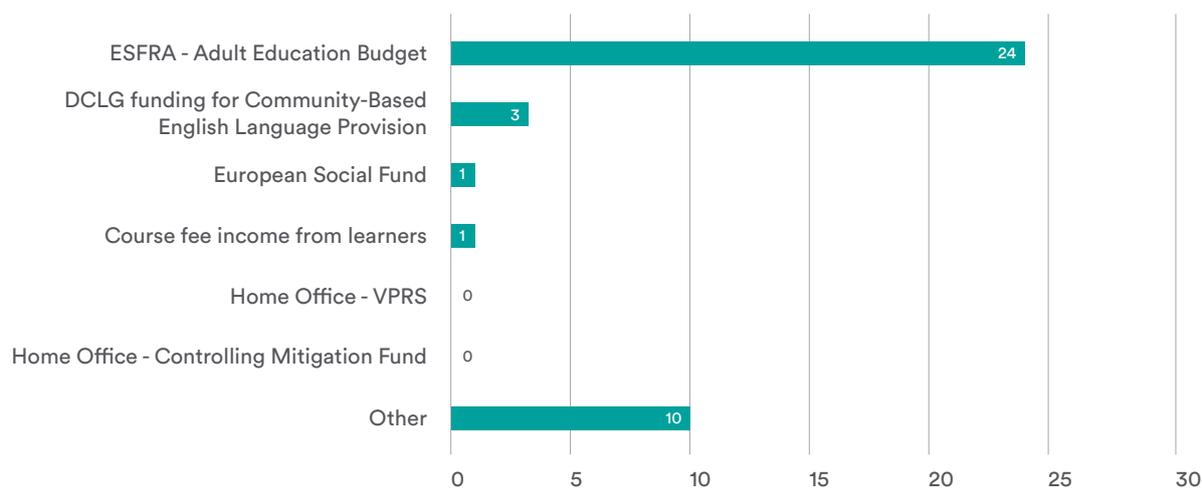


Table 1 - based on 29 providers

The LWI report³ also indicates that a little over half the providers responding considered some of their provision to be over-subscribed. Although providers described a high level of demand across all levels, demand is particularly acute at lower

levels i.e. Pre-Entry and Entry levels, and for non-accredited or informal provision. This is despite the fact that the bulk of current provision is at Entry Level.

Levels of provision available⁴

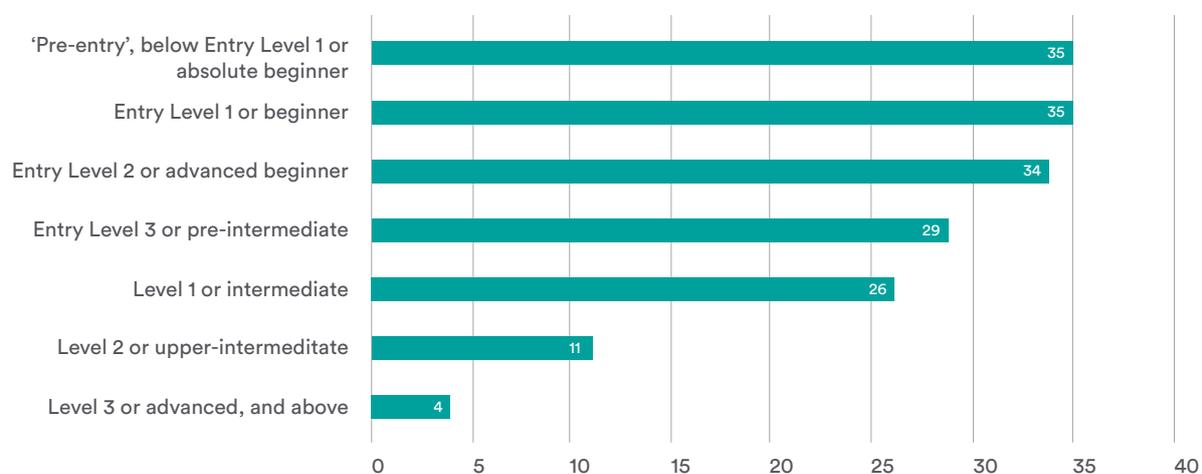


Table 2 - based on 39 providers

This was supported by the stakeholder conversations, where a particular shortage at Pre-Entry and Entry level was described. It was also noted that some learners may not be able to attend classes at their preferred provider e.g. if the local college has a waiting list. Importantly, the shortage of provision is often due to factors other than availability of funding, such as lack of appropriately qualified teaching staff and constraints on delivering in locations appropriate

to the learners.

Whilst ESOL qualifications are available from Entry 1 to Level 2, at higher levels the English provision has not recognised funded qualifications. The table below also shows the same pattern: the bulk of provision is general and first level. More bespoke and higher level ESOL, for example related to specific professions or vocations, is very limited.

3. Ibid p.18

4. Ibid p.8

Type of Provision⁵

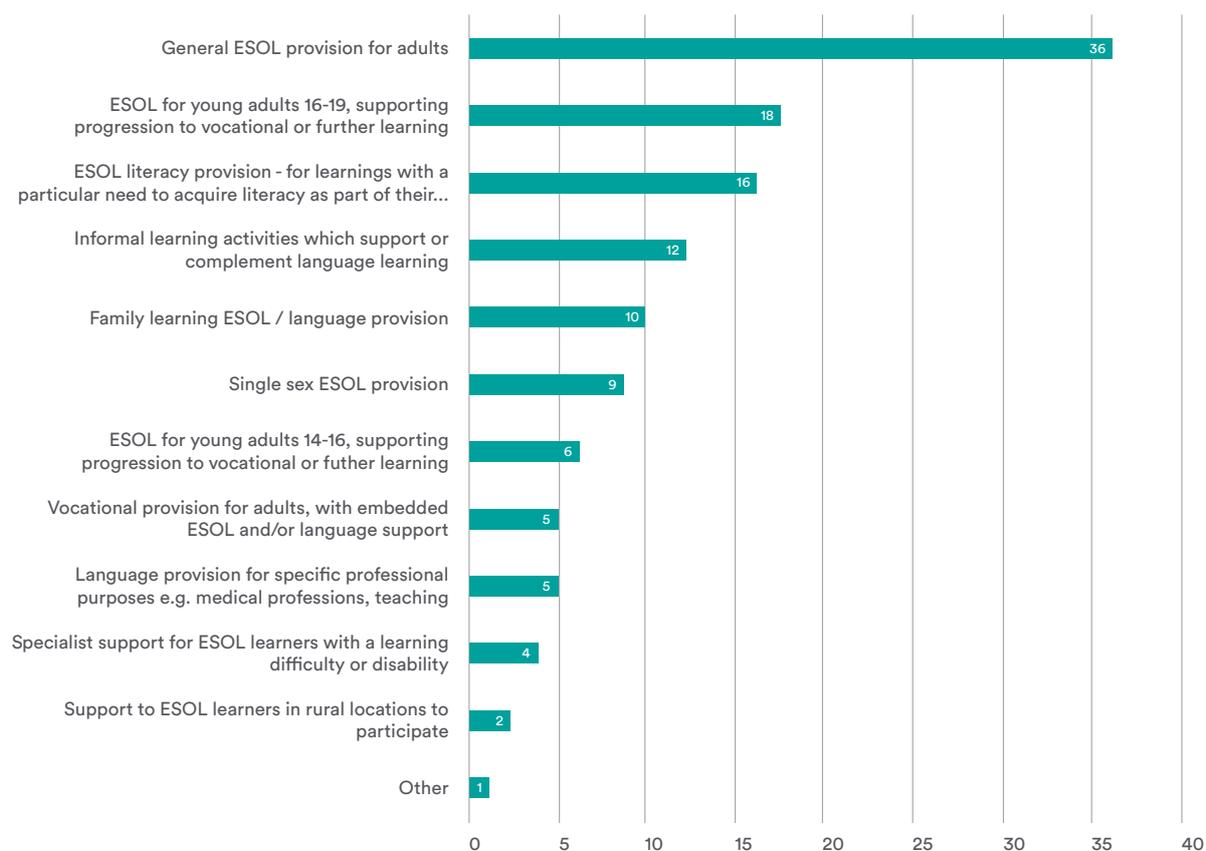


Table 3 - based on 39 providers

ESOL remains predominantly delivered through full or part time courses running during the day. There is some evening provision but little weekend or blended options available.

This is supported by the Learning and Work Institute's assessment⁶ which points to a fairly limited offer in terms of flexibility of provision, see table overleaf.

5. Ibid p.11

6. Ibid p.9

Times of ESOL provision

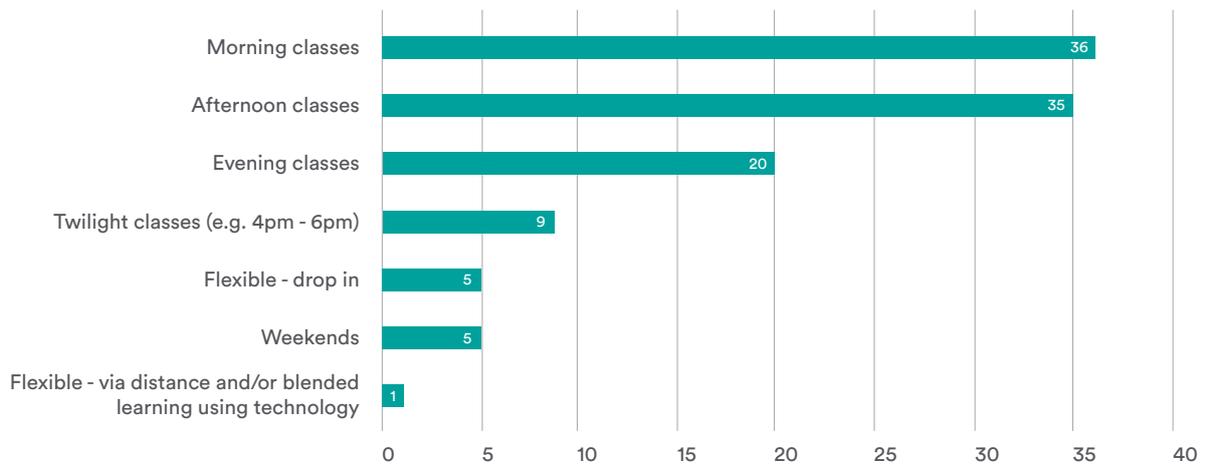


Table 4 - based on 39 providers

There is the need for more flexible provision, such as drop-in classes, blended or supported online learning, out of hours classes etc. Similarly, there is a need for more vocational ESOL, with English language skills embedded with vocationally specific provision ('construction for the building site') has been underdeveloped as providers report prohibitive costs as a barrier.

Cost of provision is only one barrier to improving the scale and relevance of provision in the region. The table below sets out some of the barriers and restrictions which lead to gaps in provision.



Table 5 - Issues

Area of delivery	Current restriction / barrier
Current Delivery Models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery is predominantly day time training during term-time rather than reflect the needs of the region's communities. • DWP limit provision to 16 hours a week or less for those who are in receipt of benefits • Childcare is a factor for learning and limits the ability for parents and carers outside of term time. • Travel can be prohibitive to some individuals in need of ESOL training • Funding is tied to qualifications which drives delivery models. • Length of courses can be an issue due to complexity of Pre Entry and needs of each individual learner. • The majority of delivery is Pre Entry and Entry level and there is limited delivery linked to demand above these levels • Vocationally related delivery in companies is limited due to cost implications, funding regulations and flexibility of delivery
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant volumes of ESOL teaching (nearly a third) is delivered by staff on temporary contracts, leading to lack of stability and limitations in terms of quality improvement. • There is a lack of opportunity and progression for teachers aspiring to join the profession. • A significant amount of government funded ESOL delivered in the community is led by volunteers. Professional status and progression strategies should extend to this group in order to ensure parity of esteem for staff and quality for students.
Funding ESOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of parity with Functional Skills English which is offered free at all levels. • Some learners have to pay for ESOL but can receive Functional Skills free. ESOL qualifications / courses are far more suitable for second language learners with basic English than Functional Skills English qualifications. • ESOL is free to learners who are on low income (from Sept 2018 below £15,735.50 pa) or unemployed. For anyone earning more than £157345.50, ESOL is co-funded and fees to students can be prohibitive.

Area of delivery	Current restriction / barrier
Pre Access L1 and L2 ESOL courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESOL qualifications at Level 1 and 2 are not valued in the same way as Functional Skills for learners due to lack of recognition of this as a language qualification. This limits progression to more traditional vocational programmes.
Initial and Diagnostic Assessment for Pre-Entry classes / ESOL Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no standardised initial assessment for ESOL learners and there are particular issues in identifying the language and support needs of pre entry ESOL learners. Many learners with learning difficulties go undetected. This is an area for further research and development.
ESOL Initial Assessments and Diagnostic Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is nothing currently available for initial and diagnostic assessment which is validated and recognised by all providers. Currently many providers pay a fee for commercial initial assessment package of support which is often not fit for purpose. Most ESOL providers devise their own initial and diagnostic assessment which is time consuming to administer and not necessarily portable for the learner.
Maths and digital skills for ESOL learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a lack of teachers able to teach Maths and Digital skills to ESOL learners. There is also a lack of resources for ESOL Maths/Digital teaching and qualifications that are suitable for ESOL learners

It should be emphasised that there is very good practice in the region already. Most of the issues raised above are being addressed by one or more individual providers. Moreover, some of the issues have surfaced at national level in a number of recent government reports. In particular, the Integrating Communities Action Plan⁷ published in February 2019 published a set of cross-government recommended actions including 5 specifically on ESOL. This is to be followed by

a new national strategy for English language in England to be published in Autumn 2019. The government will engage widely with the sector to help shape its content. It is proposed that this West Midlands report be shared with DfE as this region's response.

7. Integrating Communities Action Plan, HMG, February 2019

How we could change this picture

We have set out below some definitions of what needs to improve reflecting and responding to the list of issues in Table 5, and in each case a recommended action or actions to make it possible. Highlighted actions represent immediate priorities.

What needs to improve	Proposed actions	By whom
Commitment to delivering an improved adult learning offer, with more strategic and long-term planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 3 year delivery agreements, with annual reviews, for colleges and providers setting out the broad volume of ESOL provision expected to be delivered. 2. Confirmation of the continuation of the existing ESFA 'top up' arrangements for funding. 	WMCA
Strategic collaboration that enables the sharing of best practice and expert input to future funding policy, to better meet local needs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Establish an Expert Panel of ESOL Practitioners including providers and other agencies. Sponsored by the WMCA, the Panel would: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure more effective planning of ESOL across the West Midlands • Provide advice to the WMCA on enabling better ESOL provision including alignment of funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote best practice - Provide sector-led CPD for ESOL providers in the region 	WMCA
Better alignment between ESOL and priority high value-added and key employment sectors and jobs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Develop an ESOL for employment offer in major employment sectors with the bespoke language skills more appropriate to the employment market and ESOL provision embedded within wider training. 5. Develop new vocational training provision in key WMCA priority sectors, with a specific ESOL element enabling greater access to high value-added jobs. 6. Work with the partners including DWP and the WMCA to better integrate ESOL provision with existing employment support. 	<p>WMCA</p> <p>Providers - Adult and Community Learning, Further Education, Voluntary and private sector providers</p>

What needs to improve	Proposed actions	By whom
Ongoing awareness of the scale, type, level and distribution of ESOL provision across the region	7. Development of improved intelligence of local migration flows and potential demand, and a shared dataset of provision across all types of providers and localities with the capacity to analyse and update the information as required.	Providers - Adult and Community Learning, Further Education, Voluntary and private sector providers
Better alignment of the different services and offers in specific localities, and/or for linguistic communities or sectors	8. Development of ESOL hubs, integrating services in each local area, replicating and extending best practice models across the region.	Providers - Adult and Community Learning, Further Education, Voluntary and private sector providers
Improved opportunity for professionalisation and progression of ESOL specialist teachers to support all of the above	9. Decasualisation of ESOL teaching 10. Increase in the availability and relevance of ESOL CPD, including ESOL awareness and teaching strategies for technical/vocational subject teachers (dual professionalism)	Providers - Adult and Community Learning, Further Education, Voluntary and private sector providers
Initial Assessment and diagnostic tools that are fit for purpose including those for ESOL learners that may have learning difficulties	11. Develop a consistent initial assessment and diagnostic tools. 12. Develop a consistent assessment methodology, to include broader learning difficulties, at pre-entry ESOL level.	Providers - Adult and Community Learning, Further Education, Voluntary and private sector providers
The length of courses can be an issue due to complexity of Pre Entry and needs of each individual learner	13. Develop separate, more flexible learning programmes within the overall offer. 14. Explore options to encourage more intense, but shorter learning programmes. 15. Develop online learning to enhance the range of ESOL delivery options to include an online ESOL offer coupled with the wider proposals for more flexible use of AEB funding.	ACL and FE consortia Expert Panel of ESOL practitioners ACL and FE consortia able to bid for the WMCA Adult Tech funding

Year one priorities

This report has highlighted a number of actions. We propose that an Expert Panel of ESOL Practitioners working with the WMCA, the FESPG and the Adult and Community Learning Alliance (ACLA) to be set up and focus on the six actions highlighted below. The first full year of planning of the skills funding devolved to the WMCA will result in an overall West Midlands delivery plan for adult skills. We would also want to ensure that these are aligned with any emerging national ESOL strategy.

These actions would be:

1. Ensuring ESOL provision is fully integrated into a local adult skills offer and embedded in local delivery plans for AEB providers for 2020 - 21
2. Development of improved local intelligence of local migration flows and potential demand and a shared dataset of provision: develop the FESPG dashboard system to accommodate data from all ESOL providers to show the breadth delivery of ESOL across the West Midlands.
3. Develop new vocational training provision in key WMCA priority sectors with a specific ESOL element enabling greater access to high value-added jobs.
4. Develop an ESOL for employment offer in major employment sectors with the development of bespoke language skills more appropriate to the employment market and ESOL provision embedded within wider training.
5. Develop online learning proposals to enhance the range of ESOL delivery options to include an online ESOL offer.
6. Explore the development of an ESOL Hub to enhance the Information Advice and Guidance offer for learners.

Outcomes and benefits

Given the WMCA's commitment to inclusive growth coupled with the devolution of the Adult Education Budget, we have a timely opportunity to face ESOL challenges collectively. This report recognises the importance of ESOL in

enabling people without English to develop their communication skills in order to integrate into their local community and access opportunities to work. It highlights the need for more flexible and vocationally relevant provision, with language skills more appropriate to the labour market and ESOL provision embedded within the wider adult skills offer.

We are confident that the implementation of these proposals will fundamentally improve our service performance on ESOL delivery in the region. Specifically, in terms of our fundamental goal to deliver **more effective ESOL to greater numbers of learners**.

We aim to monitor improvement by the establishment an Expert Panel of ESOL practitioners and incorporating all ESOL learner figures in the newly established FESPG dashboard.

The recommendations in this report will lead to more communities participating in the region's economic success and will focus on how the West Midlands Combined Authority and its partners can encourage our diverse communities to participate in adult learning.



Case studies

Sonia Sohota

Adult Education Wolverhampton

I came to Wolverhampton from the Punjab in 2015 and I started ESOL classes. My language skills were limited. I wanted to improve my communication skills and fit into my new life. I have progressed through the levels and am currently studying towards my Level 1 qualification. My skills have improved and I feel much more confident. I have completed my Childcare Level 1 and am currently working towards my Maths Level 1 qualification.

Since attending Adult Education Wolverhampton, I have found seasonal employment and have recently been interviewed for different positions. My long-term plan is to progress on to the Childcare Level 2 and work toward a career as a nursery school teacher.

Adult Education is really helping me to change my life and better my prospects. I was made to feel comfortable really quickly. The teachers here are all brilliant, and learning is fun. I recommended Adult Education to a couple of my friends who also agree that it really is a great place to learn.

Saima Zafar

Walsall College

Saima is 36 years old and came to the UK from Pakistan 16 years ago. She is married with two children. She had her Primary education in Pakistan. When she came to the UK, she could not speak English but had a strong desire to learn the language. She could not integrate in the community and there was no help for her at home. This meant enormous dependency on the family for little things and all this leading to isolation and depression.

Saima started taking English language classes at Walsall College at a pre-entry level. She worked hard, attended the classes regularly and enjoyed coming to the college as it was close to her home and in the community. She made new friends and socialising improved her physical and mental wellbeing. Her plans were to find a job for herself and become independent.

She took career advice from the teachers and the guidance team and achieved a level 1 qualification in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Whilst, studying for a level 2 Speaking and Listening qualification, she has recently secured a job in a sewing factory as a Seamstress.

Lava Alhameed

Fircroft College

Lava joined the Talk English programme at Fircroft College in 2018. Successfully completing the Talk English course Lava gained confidence and the opportunity to develop her English skills:

‘I feel more confident because my English is now better’

Lava went onto study English at the Brasshouse Centre in Birmingham with BAES (Birmingham Adult Education Service). From here Lava went on to achieve an Outstanding Learner award 2018 with BAES.

Lava is now looking forward to progressing with her studies and to eventually achieve her ambition of becoming a pharmacist.

‘I want to be a pharmacist and I want to help sick people’

