

MAYOR OF LONDON

ESOL Plus Employer Partnership

Guidance for Adult Learning Providers and Employers



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Introduction

London is a city rich in diversity. One in three Londoners were born outside the UK, and more than 300 languages are spoken on our streets.

Although most migrants speak English fluently, data from the last Census showed over 210,000 working-age Londoners reported that they cannot speak English well; and around 25,000 said they cannot speak English at all. Not investing in the link between English-language development and employability presents a missed opportunity of unlocking the talent and skills migrant Londoners bring with them. The Mayor of London has emphasised the importance of English, and the need for government, cities and employers to invest in English-language learning for community development and career progression. For those who speak limited English, improving English-language proficiency is associated with several benefits, including confidence, independence, self-determination, access to healthcare and education, and community integration.¹

Most migrants who do not speak English when they arrive in the UK want to improve their English-language skills,² but often face barriers in terms of the availability, sufficiency and flexibility of the ESOL offer.

They often find themselves locked out of language learning, stuck at a basic level, and unable to progress to a level that would support their independence and integration. For ESOL learners in employment, some of the most significant obstacles include lack of time to travel to/from learning venues, and a lack of information on accessing suitable courses. Another significant barrier includes not having enough time to engage with English-language activities due to precarious work, changing shifts and not being able to be released from work to attend courses.³ In recognition of these barriers and the benefits accrued through improving English language skills for employers and employees, the GLA's 'Good Work Standard' encourages London's employers to offer workplace learning opportunities, including ESOL.

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

2. Bell, R. and Plumb, N. (2017): Integration not demonization – the final report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration's inquiry into the integration of immigrants. London: The Challenge.

3. Learning and Work Institute (2019): Supporting people with an ESOL need to progress in work – An evidence review. Leicester: National Learning and Work Institute. Available at: [EAAL-ESOL-literature-review_FINAL.pdf](https://learningandwork.org.uk/EAAL-ESOL-literature-review_FINAL.pdf) (learningandwork.org.uk)



210,000+

The last Census showed over 210,000 working-age Londoners cannot speak English well

25,000

Said they cannot speak English at all

300,000

Jobs lost in the capital as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic



“Since the Mayor took responsibility for London’s £330 million annual share of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in 2019, a greater number of migrant Londoners have been able to access ESOL provision due to the extension of eligibility for AEB-funded courses to learners in low-paid work.”

With 300,000 jobs lost in the capital as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to opportunities to upskill, including English-language skills, has also become essential for Londoners to get back into work or improve their career prospects. Since the Mayor took responsibility for London’s £330 million annual share of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in 2019, a greater number of migrant Londoners have been able to access ESOL provision due to the extension of eligibility for AEB-funded courses to learners in low-paid work. Furthermore, a 10 per cent funding increase per learner for those enrolled in essential and vocational skills courses up to Level 2 has also made a difference for organisations supporting English, maths and digital-skills learners.

The Mayor’s ESOL Plus Employers initiative piloted provision of ESOL for workers, particularly those in low-paid and insecure employment. City Hall awarded £20,000 match-funding to Battersea Academy for Skills and Employment (BASE), a Community Interest Company established by Battersea Power Station (BPS) in 2014, to run a project from September 2018 to September 2019.

In partnership with a range of managers at BPS and employers operating nearby Battersea Power Station, employees from different companies, including Mother Pizzeria, Green Zone, Wright Brothers, BaxterStorey, Fiume (part of D&D London), Cinnamon Kitchen, Megan's and BPSDC (Battersea Power Station Development Company) Front of House participated in learning. The participants worked in the service sector as **cleaners, security officers, drivers, concierge staff, retail staff, catering and hospitality workers.**

At the start of the project, BASE carried out a business needs analysis for these employers, finding that:

- There were three types of employers based at BPS: BPSDC, service contractors and commercial occupiers
- 38 per cent of the workforce at the time had ESOL needs
- Employers recognised that English-language opportunities in the workplace are a good vehicle for career and in-work progression
- Employers were committed to improving the integration of colleagues with ESOL needs into the workforce

This guidance was formulated from the project's learning and it is designed to provide practical advice on how to set up or improve provision for learners on employer premises.

The guidance is structured in three sections:

01. Benefits of ESOL and employer partnerships

02. Set up of provision

a. Consideration for planning

b. Considerations for teaching and learning

03. Delivery models

For a more detailed description of the projects please refer to [ESOL Plus – Employer Partnership](#).

COVID-19-RELATED CONTEXT

The UK was put into lockdown on 23 March 2020 to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Schools and businesses were affected and temporarily closed or operated at significantly reduced hours. The pandemic highlighted roles that are considered key for the functioning of society, such as NHS employees and shop assistants, among others, that are characterised by a high representation of migrants who may have limited English.⁴

The impact of the pandemic on London's labour market has disproportionately affected specific groups, such as people in low-paid jobs often held by women, young people or members of BAME communities, who are more likely to have lost their job since the outbreak, and have seen larger falls in income.

To continue supporting Londoners with limited English, ESOL providers moved quickly to set up online provision during the lockdown. This came with significant

challenges, and highlighted the risk of learners experiencing digital exclusion because of a lack of resources, such as devices and broadband, as well as digital skills.

This guidance does not take into account measures such as social distancing and face coverings that may be implemented while dealing with COVID-19, or the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. On the other hand, it may provide useful considerations when supporting employees who speak limited English in participating in learning in the recovery phase.

“The impact of the pandemic on London's labour market has disproportionately affected specific groups, such as people in low-paid jobs often held by women, young people or members of BAME communities.”

4. OECD (2020): COVID-19 and key workers: What role do migrants play in your region? Available at: COVID-19 and key workers: What role do migrants play in your region? - OECD (oecd-ilibrary.org)

01

Benefits of ESOL and employer partnerships

There are many benefits to the employer as well as the employees from employer-based ESOL learning. **Enhanced** English-language competence and confidence tend to result in **better communication, services and support for customers**. The Facilities Manager at Battersea

Power Station – as part of the ESOL Plus Employer pilot – for example, noticed a “great difference, vast improvement” in how staff performed at work: they had better understanding, talked more, and improved the lines of communication with their teams.

CASE STUDY

When Marco started working at Mother, a pizza restaurant located at Battersea Power Station, he couldn't speak a word of English.

His manager referred him to a BASE ESOL class for beginners and allowed him to take time from his shift to attend. Eight weeks in, and Marco said that he loved attending the class, which enabled him to converse more easily with his colleagues and customers. His class attendance was excellent and he was determined to advance to the accredited ESOL programme, starting in the summer.

His tutor said:

“When Marco enrolled onto our ESOL non-accredited course, he was unable to understand basic questions and unable to express himself in English – so he had to depend on other Italian-speaking learners to translate for him. With support from me and perseverance, Marco fully committed to the course and made an effort to practise outside of the classroom. Today Marco can hold a conversation in English and express himself without the support of other people. He feels more confident in his use of English in his daily life.”

Outcomes for learners

Some of the main positive outcomes that students identify as a result of their employer-based learning programme include:

- improved English skills in life and work
- increased ability to effectively carry out work responsibilities, and effectively communicate with residents, workers and visitors
- increased confidence to use English within the workplace
- improved communication with other colleagues in the workforce
- improved career prospects and access to further employment opportunities within the organisation
- increased success in achieving vocational qualifications.

Benefits for employers

Employer-based English-language programmes also bring some key benefits to the organisations involved. These include:

- **staff engagement and performance:** staff see their English-language competence increase, particularly in terms of speaking, listening and grammar
- **better relationships** between co-workers, as a direct effect of increased language competence
- **increased team bonding, and a feeling of belonging** to the company and local community
- staff who previously would be hesitant in using English now feel **more confident**
- **staff are better placed to carry out their responsibilities** effectively – for example, in the ESOL Plus Employer pilot, staff who were too scared to answer the radio/walkie-talkie prior to their course became eager to communicate using the devices
- **improved staff morale** within the team, with employees stating that they found their jobs less stressful and felt more motivated as a result



- staff feel better able to communicate with residents and customers, resulting in **better customer care** – this **can also raise the profile of the company** by demonstrating investment in staff that would in turn create a better customer experience
- for staff who are new to the UK, it can help them **settle into and adapt to the new country**.

Among other incentives for participants, employer-based courses also contribute to overall improvement in staff performance, in combination with other factors such as work opportunities and social relationships. When asked what could be attributed to the course, one employer in our pilot explained how the staff had been “inside a box”, somewhat closed off from their surroundings, and the course had “opened the box”.

SETTING UP A PARTNERSHIP WITH ADULT LEARNING PROVIDERS: EMPLOYER CHECKLIST

**1**

Assess the English language need within your business and think about what type of English classes will work best, keeping in mind the needs of managers and employees – particularly regarding rosters and cover (further practical suggestions are provided in the section 'Considerations for Planning', below)

2

Approach an [ESOL Single Point of Contact \(SPOC\)](#) service or [AEB provider in the local area](#) (see 'Delivery models' section). They will be able to carry out assessments with your staff and make recommendations on the most suitable level and type of provision according to their needs.

3

Discuss your needs as an organisation and look at potential models that work for both the employer and the learning provider. As an example, suitable delivery models could include

adult-learning providers funding the course, including teachers and qualifications; and the employer providing a training space as well as factoring in time for employees to attend.

4

Agree on expectations for both organisations. It is important to ensure that you are involved in the planning and design of the course, including on the language and vocabulary to be covered, and in the choice of model. Employer-based courses could start as non-accredited⁵ and move on to qualifications once attendance and retention rates for the programme are satisfactory.

5

Once the course starts, it may be useful to arrange regular meetings with the adult-learning provider to share feedback and ensure that learning is captured for future programmes.

5. Non-accredited: a course which does not lead to a qualification

02

Set-up of provision

Considerations for planning

Local adult education providers will be able to advise on different funding streams available to support ESOL courses for employees. Employers can also consider what funding or other resources they have available to support staff development via ESOL courses.

Hosting the learning programme on employer premises could help mitigate any travel-related barriers, as learners do not have to commute to a different place of learning and use up time in their busy schedule. **Courses should be designed to fit around the working day**, and course timetables need to work around the schedule of participants – for instance running lunchtime, early-morning or after-work sessions. It is important to work with managers to devise a range of suitable timings to cause the least disruption possible. Employer-based delivery also allows managers to organise the work roster around the course.

At the planning stage of the ESOL Plus Employer pilot, for example, employers were asked to indicate optimal days and times to maximise chances for employees to attend. **Timetables were finalised collaboratively** each term to ensure that emerging needs and priorities were taken into account.

Assessing what the **best format of courses** might be, according to the participants' and managers' needs, is also essential. These could entail shorter or longer courses, with or without accreditation, and level-based or mixed-level courses. Whichever option is chosen, **adequate planning and flexibility** should be weaved into the programme to allow for shift patterns, planned leave and career progression.

Obtaining managers' support is crucial in getting the best results for learners and the business. One employer stated:

"It's not easy to release staff (for a couple of hours every week) – you need to be organised; it's an investment – shows support to staff and they pay back the investment."

It may be useful to draft a partnership agreement between the employer and the learning provider which outlines the full extent of involvement and input necessary from employers for employees to benefit from the ESOL course. It is also helpful from a teaching perspective to be cognisant of the context in which the training is being delivered, the career progression routes available for employees, and whether the training is being offered as part of mandatory workplace training.

Considerations for teaching and learning

A thorough initial assessment of each learner, including but not limited to, speaking, listening, reading and writing skills carried out by the learning provider, is an important step towards setting the participants' learning aims and personal goals. Other information, such as home language/s and prior schooling or education can be helpful for tailoring the scheme of work to be relevant and engaging for learners, and setting an appropriate pace, which, in turn, improves attendance, retention and achievement rates.

Below is a sample of learners' goals recorded as part of the ESOL Plus pilot:

- to improve communication at work
- to understand co-workers with fluent or native levels of English
- to have casual conversations with colleagues and clients
- to talk about their daily life without being fearful of making mistakes
- to take notes more accurately
- to be more confident in speaking to clients over the phone.

All learners in the pilot also recognised that improving their English skills was a **priority for security and progression in their careers.**

"I am a cleaner, but I don't like it, it's an honest job but it's hard, I would like to work with children. For my dreams to come true I have to improve my English".

In terms of course planning, schemes of work should be **contextualised to the workplace**, with language-practice opportunities directly relevant to the participants' roles. It may be useful to plan in opportunities to **practise outside of the classroom** and involve the wider team in the discussion. These activities could be **coffee morning breaks or weekly half hour slots** in which meaningful interactions take place between language learners and fluent speakers.

In line with employer's input, the ESOL Plus programme also focused on elements of a Battersea Power Station bespoke customer service accredited course – and included real-life examples that were directly relevant to the workplace. The element of **bespoke and contextualised training** made the courses relevant for employees while responding to employers' needs. The pilot also found that using **authentic materials** such as texts that employees are likely to encounter in their day-to-day work, to keep students engaged can be a useful learning tool.

Creating a **friendly atmosphere** to encourage learners to overcome their shyness and fears and fully build their confidence will enhance the participants' learning experience. It is also important to **differentiate materials** and activities so that all learners can receive adequate support. **Blended learning** that combines face-to-face and online learning could be introduced to encourage participants to study independently, and to not fall behind when they are unable to attend.

Routes for progression and continued learning for employees at the end of the course will also need to be considered. These could include opportunities to enrol on a course delivered by a local adult education provider, if appropriate, or a higher-level course on employer premises. Capturing data on specific, unique learners can also support tracking of continuity and progression.

Some suggestions made by the employers in the ESOL Plus pilot on similar projects and programmes in the future include:

Content

- Content could be more hospitality focused – how we communicate with customers, the way we interact, professional language
- Get job specific questions from supervisors
- Offer other courses – Excel, digital marketing... more opportunities for staff
- Incorporate relevant contextual information or cultural content, such as the British citizenship test, attitudes to smoking, etiquette, schooling...

Delivery

- Give learners something to achieve – a certificate, clear steps to progress levels
- Weekly reminder of why they are doing the course
- Share topics with supervisors for awareness and practice outside of class
- Use role-plays to practise communicating and new words – e.g. a difficult customer

Logistics

- Increase the intensity of the course – more hours per week
- More lessons – double the number of classes from 10 to 20
- Offer two options per week so all the staff are not out at the same time

Delivery models

03

An intermediary/consortium model: ESOL Plus Employer Partnership

One of the learnings from ESOL Employer Plus Project concerned the opportunities created when an intermediary organisation is able to broker a broad programme across a range of employers – benefiting from economies of scale and from any funding opportunities that may be available to such organisations. It is therefore worth considering this element of the model in greater detail.

The project focused on delivery of ESOL courses to employees and service contractors of Battersea Power Station. It was specifically designed to reduce barriers that had prevented them from engaging and fully committing to English-language activities. This was delivered as a pilot for a year, working with a minimum of 20 employees over this period to support employees to **progress in the workplace**. It addressed barriers to participation by offering **flexible ESOL sessions, building confidence** among employees, and encouraging them to become ambassadors for the programme.

Training was delivered by High Trees Community Development Trust, a recipient of a Battersea Power Station Foundation grant. This project was specifically designed to address and overcome barriers to learning by

involving employers in the shape and delivery of the courses, to maximise chances for employees to be encouraged and supported to attend the programme.

As part of this pilot, six ESOL courses were delivered on employer premises over three terms. The levels ranged from Entry 1 (beginner/elementary) to Entry 3 (pre-intermediate). Five of the six courses were 10 weeks in duration, whereas the accredited course (Entry 3/ Level 1 (intermediate), which involved examination, was 18 weeks' long.

The full evaluation of this programme can be found [here](#).

Direct partnerships between individual learning providers and employers

In this scenario, the learning provider may fund the course through existing funding streams, whilst the employer provides the premises, and/or ensures their employees are allowed the time to attend and progress on their course.

Similar to the 'intermediary/consortium model', collaboration is crucial to identify the best times to run the course. This is to ensure that rosters allow learners to attend their class, and to obtain high attendance and retention

rates as a result. Regular communication between supervisors and learning providers, in terms of course content, will also have a positive impact on the learning process. A thorough initial assessment process is also essential to identify which type of course, and which funding stream, would be most suitable for the proposed provision.

Use of local ESOL Advice Service/SPOCs

If an ESOL Advice Service or Single Point of Contact (SPOC) exists in the employer's local area, it can be a good source of information on local adult education providers to partner with. After an initial discussion with the employer and initial assessments with employees, the Advice Service is able to recommend the most suitable provider based on needs and the most suitable funding stream. For example it may be best to run an accredited course where shifts are regular, cover is guaranteed, and learners are able to achieve a qualification; if that is not possible, then a non-accredited programme may be more suitable.

CASE STUDY

Camden and Islington ESOL Advice Service (EAS)

Private businesses and local employers are included in the Camden and Islington EAS's local partnership network; a network map can be found [here](#). Owing to the nature of the businesses involved in the network (mainly cleaning and security companies), over 90 per cent of employees working for the network's largest partner have English language needs.

This type of partnership is particularly successful because the Camden and Islington EAS reach matches the London-wide reach of the employer, enabling them to refer learners who live and work across the city. As a neutral and independent service with connections across multiple boroughs, the Camden and Islington EAS offers the employer a range of options – from full registration and assessment of their employees to setting up relationships with other SPOCs and providers, either placing employees in existing English language provisions or bespoke courses in the workplace.

Conclusion

The ESOL Plus Employer pilot, and current best practice in the sector, highlight the benefits of employers commissioning English-language training for their employees. These include improved staff engagement and performance, communication with colleagues and customers, and better relationships with other staff members.

This guidance outlined several delivery models which businesses looking to develop partnerships with adult learning providers can consider, according to the needs of their employees and of their businesses. Some of the key considerations in setting up a partnership include the importance of thorough initial assessments of participants' needs, and of employer involvement in the planning and delivery process from the outset. This will ensure that the course matches participants' and employers' needs; allow for the scheduling of work rosters; and enable participants to access further learning and career opportunities.



Additional research and evaluation on ESOL in the workplace

Learning and Work Institute (2018),
**Step Up: Trialling new approaches
supporting low-paid workers to progress
their careers**, link available [here](#).

Learning and Work Institute (2019),
**Progressing resettled refugees into
employment**, link available [here](#).

Learning and Work Institute (2019),
**Supporting low-paid workers with
an ESOL need to progress in work**,
link available [here](#).

LLU+ at London South Bank University
(2011), **Report on the lessons learnt
from the London City Strategy
Pathfinder Work Focused ESOL Pilots**,
link available [here](#).

UNHCR, (2019) **Tapping potential –
guidelines to help British Businesses
employ Refugees**, link available [here](#).

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