

REQUEST FOR DIRECTOR DECISION – DD2826

London's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) offer

Programme: Supporting Londoners to Benefit from Growth

Executive summary:

In October 2025, the GLA published the Inclusive Talent Strategy, where the Mayor committed to strengthening how English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services are organised across London.

This decision seeks approval to spend £185,000, from the Adult Skills Fund budget, on funding an 18-month ESOL coordination pilot and evaluation. The funded project will provide:

- evidence to support a more accessible, integrated, effective and efficient London ESOL offer
- clear recommendations for scaling ESOL coordination mechanisms across London.

This pilot workstream forms a core element of Project 2.2 (the Essential Skills and progression pathways) within the Supporting Londoners to Benefit from Growth programme (approved in Mayoral Decision 3395). The work contributes to delivering essential skills training and so helping people to progress into good jobs.

Decision:

That the Executive Director of Communities and Skills approve expenditure of up to £185,000 across three workstreams:

- a grant of £70,000 to the London Borough of Ealing (on behalf of the West London Alliance), as a contribution to the delivery costs for its Sub Regional Partnership-level English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Single Point of Contact (SPOC) pilot
- a grant of £65,000 to the London Borough of Camden, as a contribution to the delivery costs for the borough-level ESOL SPOC – namely the Camden and Islington ESOL Advice Service
- expenditure of £50,000 on the evaluation of the outcomes of the funded pilot activity. The evaluation will run concurrently with the pilot implementation.

AUTHORISING DIRECTOR

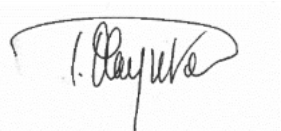
I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Tunde Olayinka

Position: Executive Director, Communities & Skills

Signature:



Date: 28/09/2026

PART I – NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. London's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programme is designed to bridge the English language gap; foster social integration; and enable speakers of other languages to progress into further learning and employment. The GLA's goal is to ensure high-quality provision is accessible to all who need it. This aligns with London's commitment to remain a welcoming, inclusive capital where everyone can thrive and contribute.
- 1.2. London is a global capital city attracting talent, investors and entrepreneurs; and providing sanctuary to asylum seekers, refugees and people fleeing war and persecution. As such, the demand for ESOL provision in London is high. London has the highest number of residents with limited English skills in the UK – over 334,000 Londoners aged 16 and above cannot speak English at all, or cannot speak it well.
- 1.3. Over the past decade, demand for ESOL in London has been shaped by:
 - continued international migration
 - refugee and humanitarian resettlement programmes
 - increased labour market demand for English language skills
 - growing recognition of the role of English proficiency in supporting integration, wellbeing and employment.
- 1.4. Demand has consistently exceeded available provision in many parts of London. Funding and workforce capacity constraints are contributing to waiting lists and unmet need. The London Strategic Migration Partnership administers the ESOL Pulse Survey every quarter. Across three survey waves, between March 2025 and March 2026, findings show that the unmet ESOL demand is high and persistent, with many providers reporting large waiting lists. A few providers reported vacancies, reflecting a lack of coordination amongst providers and geographical variations.
- 1.5. The demand for ESOL support is expected to keep growing, due to changes to UK visa and settlement rules introduced by the UK government's immigration white paper proposals in 2025. These changes include the increase in minimum English language requirement for settlement, from B1 (Entry three equivalent) to B2 (Level One), which will come into effect from 26 March 2027.
- 1.6. London's ESOL offer is delivered through a robust network of further education (FE) colleges, local authorities, specialist institutions and civic organisations.
- 1.7. The Mayor's primary lever for ESOL provision is the Adult Skills Fund (ASF). Currently, 20 per cent of ASF spend is allocated to ESOL provision; these courses account for 25 per cent of ASF-funded enrolments. Given the high demand for ESOL in London, it is essential that ESOL-related ASF spend is both efficient and effective.
- 1.8. ESOL provision plays a critical role for job market entry and participation as evidenced by the London Learner Survey and consistently conveyed by London's ESOL stakeholders. It is vital for social integration and engagement with local communities and public services.
- 1.9. The 2024-25 London Learner Survey showed that 39 per cent of ESOL learners progressed to further education, vocational training or wider employability – compared to 44 per cent of ASF learners overall. ESOL provision is often focused on entry-level language skills. It provides an initial step towards wider integration and participation for learners who may face language barriers and start

further from the labour market. Learners are at different points on their journeys, with different skills and barriers.

- 1.10. Currently, 97 per cent of ESOL learners have positive social outcomes, compared to 95 per cent of all ASF-funded learners. This highlights the importance of ESOL for social integration.¹
- 1.11. London's failure to maintain an effective ESOL offer would mean that the full social and economic potential of Londoners who cannot speak English well, or at all, would not be realised. These Londoners would be excluded from good work opportunities in the capital – restricting London's skills and talent base; and contributing to skills shortages in sectors such as health, social care and hospitality. Many such Londoners would be forced into precarious and unprotected work opportunities.²
- 1.12. A lack of adequate ESOL funding would also result in poorer social outcomes for these Londoners. It would limit opportunities for participation in civic and community activities; increase loneliness and social isolation; and worsen health and wellbeing outcomes, owing to difficulties in navigating services and advocating for one's needs.
- 1.13. London's ESOL offer is made complex by the many different providers – such as local authorities, civic organisations and FE colleges, some ASF-funded, and others not. Weak coordination in the ESOL ecosystem makes it extremely difficult for learners to navigate. For some potential ESOL learners, this is an added barrier to entering the labour market and socially integrating – as they may already be experiencing social isolation; may not have a fixed abode; and may not know how to access London's ESOL offer. Weak and inconsistent coordination can result in providers' processes and provision being duplicated – adding to pressure in the ESOL workforce.
- 1.14. In October 2025, the GLA published the [Inclusive Talent Strategy](#) (ITS), where the Mayor committed to strengthening how ESOL services are organised across London, as a one-year action.
- 1.15. This decision seeks approval to spend £185,000 from the ASF budget to fund 18-month ESOL coordination pilot projects, and their evaluation, in the boroughs of Ealing, Camden and Islington.
- 1.16. The London ESOL coordination pilot aims to:
 - learn from existing ESOL coordination practices and structures in London
 - develop best-practices
 - scale an informed approach to ESOL coordination across London.
- 1.17. The ESOL co-ordination pilot will test and learn from experiences at a Sub-Regional Partnership (SRP) and borough level. The participating SRP and borough were selected as follows.
- 1.18. The SRPs are currently the implementing agents for the GLA's No Wrong Door (NWD) programme, which brings together employment, skills, health and support services across London to improve coordination and simplify access for Londoners. The West London Alliance (WLA) was the only SRP to specifically include ESOL co-ordination of providers in its NWD delivery plan.
- 1.19. While all four Sub-regional Partnerships were consulted by the GLA during the ESOL coordination pilot design phase, the West London Alliance (WLA) indicated its willingness to extend its ESOL coordination offer through implementing a Single Point of Contact (SPOC).

¹ GLA, London Learner Survey 2025 Topical Briefing Note: ESOL Learners, August 2026

² The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford published research in 2021 showing that people who could not speak English well or at all were less likely to be employed and further research in 2025 that showed that migrant employees are overrepresented in the admin services, hospitality and health and care services in the UK. [English language use and proficiency of migrants in the UK - Migration Observatory](#) and [Migrants in the UK labour market: an overview - Migration Observatory](#)

- 1.20. The Camden and Islington ESOL Advice Service (EAS) has been selected as the pilot borough to demonstrate the role of a learner-facing Single Point of Contact (SPOC). It was chosen as it has been operating for eight years and currently faces a financial sustainability challenge that is threatening their ongoing operations. The Camden and Islington EAS is willing to partner with the GLA and share its learning and experience.
- 1.21. This WLA and Camden and Islington ESOL Advice Services will provide:
- evidence to support a more accessible, integrated, effective and efficient London ESOL offer
 - clear recommendations for scaling ESOL coordination mechanisms that benefit both providers and learners across London.
- 1.22. The expenditure for the ESOL Co-ordination pilot is drawn from the Management & Administration budget approved under cover of Mayoral Decision (MD) 3482 Adult Skills Fund: 2026–27 Expenditure Budget.³ In April 2026 the Apprenticeships, Skills and Children Learning Act 2009 was amended to confer a range of legal duties and provisions relating to the education and training of adults to strategic authorities. This allowed the Mayor and the GLA to directly assume responsibility for functions previously delegated by the Secretary of State of Education, under Section 39A of the Greater London Authority Act 1999. As a result, the specific legislative framework and governance requirements that previously required the Mayor to take all ASF decisions personally no longer apply; decision-making is now aligned to the terms of the GLA’s Mayoral Decision-Making Framework.
- 1.23. This project aligns with Project 2.2 (Essential Skills and progression pathways) of the Supporting Londoners to Benefit from Growth (SLBG) programme, as approved by the Mayor under cover of [MD3395](#). The SLBG delivery plan included expected delivery to assess existing models for ESOL coordination. This is to understand what is working well; and consider how these approaches could be scaled across London to provide clear routes for people to progress into good jobs.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. The desired outcomes of London’s ESOL programme are to:
- ensure the ESOL system is accessible to all Londoners who need it
 - increase the number of ESOL learners progressing into further learning and training
 - ensure ESOL learners continue to achieve positive social outcomes, including:
 - improved wellbeing
 - greater confidence and independence in navigating systems in the UK
 - active participation in their local communities
- 2.2. The ESOL coordination pilot objectives will be to test whether specific ESOL coordination activities in London would:
- increase Londoners’ awareness of diverse and integrated ESOL provision and progression.
 - improve use of existing resources
 - improve evidence base for ESOL planning and funding
 - increase providers’ collaboration, to reduce duplication and improve system efficiency

³ MD3482 is deferred from publication as it contains commercially sensitive information.

- increase sharing of resources and good practice amongst providers.
- 2.3. The ESOL coordination pilot will contribute towards our longer-term goals of:
- ensuring Londoners thrive
 - providing clearer routes into work
 - ultimately, creating a ESOL system that is accessible to all Londoners who need it.
- 2.4. The ESOL coordination pilot will test a model that includes both learner-facing and provider-facing services and will be tested at both SRP and borough levels.
- 2.5. Learner-facing services include:
- learner outreach and advice
 - English-language assessment
 - learner registration
 - learner and provider data collection
 - partnership building
 - learner progression signposting to further education and employment services
- 2.6. Provider-facing services include:
- networks that include formal and informal ESOL provision
 - a focus on improving ESOL access and reducing administrative duplication.
- 2.7. The proposed pilot and evaluation will run for 18 months (September 2026 to March 2028). It will include:
- testing an ESOL SPOC at SRP level, through partnering with the WLA⁴
 - co-funding the continuation of an existing borough-level ESOL SPOC, the Camden and Islington EAS⁵
 - gathering learning from SRP ESOL provider networks, such as Central London Forward's Refugee Integration & Employment network; and WLA's ESOL Network⁶
 - undertaking an evaluation, as part of the pilot roll-out, to test and reflect the accessibility, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of sub-regional and borough-level SPOCs and provider-facing ESOL networks; the evaluation will also draw on experiences from outside London
 - facilitating alignment between London's ESOL offer and complementary programmes and institutional mechanisms – such as the Community Outreach Programme, the No Wrong Door programme and neighbourhood hubs

⁴ The WLA NWD 2026-27 delivery plan includes ESOL coordination provider-facing activities. The additional funding to WLA will be used to offer learner-facing activities, as part of the pilot.

⁵ This will give the service more time to address financial sustainability issues; and ensure that key staff will still be in place, during the pilot and evaluation, to show how a borough-level SPOC functions.

⁶ As part of the Central London Forward's No Wrong Door 2026-27 delivery plan.

- capturing and testing co-investment models and mechanisms and identify potential partners to support the scaling-up of ESOL coordination in London.

2.8. The table below illustrates the breakdown of components involved in the ESOL coordination pilot and evaluation, and their respective budget asks:

	Additional GLA funding required	Co-funded amount expected
SRP-level ESOL SPOC: WLA	£70,000	£35,000 from WLA
Borough-level ESOL SPOC: Camden & Islington EAS	£65,000	£65,000
SRP-level provider-facing ESOL network: WLA, Central London Forward & other SRPs	None	Covered by No Wrong Door 2026-27 funding
Borough-level provider-facing ESOL network	None	None
Evaluation	£50,000	None

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as a public authority, the GLA (including the Mayor of London) must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) when exercising its functions. The PSED is a duty to have due regard to:
- the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and any conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
 - advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between people who share a ‘protected characteristic’ as defined in the Equality Act 2010 and those who do not.
- 3.2. The protected characteristics under section 149 of the Equality Act are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marital or civil partnership status, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Compliance with the duty may involve ensuring people with a protected characteristic are provided with all the opportunities that those without the characteristic would have.
- 3.3. This involves having due regard to the need to remove or minimise any disadvantage suffered by those who share a relevant protected characteristic that is connected to that characteristic; taking steps to meet the different needs of such people; and encouraging them to participate in public life or in any other activity where their participation is disproportionately low.
- 3.4. The recommended approach will address inequalities faced by groups with protected characteristics, and wider groups facing structural inequality, in the following ways:
- the SPOCs, at SRP and borough levels, will help improve accessibility to ESOL provisions, support and services for migrant learners, particularly those with little or no English
 - ESOL networks at SRP and borough levels will allow ESOL and wider skills and training providers to share best practices and problem-solve collectively, to improve provisions offered to learners in need.
- 3.5. The aim of the ASF is to improve opportunities for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market. Many potential ASF participants have the protected characteristics listed above. The GLA’s ASF provision will support a range of groups, particularly the most disadvantaged people not currently receiving sufficient support into employment or education. These include young adults who are not in

employment, education or training; people without basic skills; and people who are workless. It will also support Londoners in low-paid/low-skilled jobs.

4. Other considerations

Risks arising/mitigation

4.1. The following risks and mitigations have been identified in relation to this decision:

Risk	Mitigation
That once the ESOL coordination pilot is completed, it fails to scale or be adopted further. A major contributing factor to this risk is that ESOL SPOCs are battling for financial sustainability	To manage this risk, the project has been designed to: • focus on the financial sustainability of the borough- and sub-regional level SPOCs • extract lessons that can inform a broader financing model – at borough, sub-regional level and pan-London levels. We are also, as part of the pilot, testing the feasibility of co-funding ESOL coordination models.
That a breakdown in partnering relationships in the pilot that would undermine the achievement of the pilot's aims.	This will be mitigated by putting in place an operational project-monitoring team, with representatives from the SPOC pilots, that would meet regularly to address any implementation challenges and concerns as quickly as possible. Issues requiring escalation will be dealt with appropriately.
That the project-initiation time for the WLA SPOC will shorten the time available for the actual pilot implementation and testing.	This risk will be mitigated by working with the WLA to adopt measures to shorten the set-up time, including fast-track recruitment. This risk will also be considered in the evaluation and the performance indicators that are set.

Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

- 4.2. This project responds to the Mayor's ITS commitment to, within 12 months, explore coordination models already working well, and so strengthen how ESOL services are organised across London.
- 4.3. This project is closely aligned with the SLBG core objectives set under MD3395. Ensuring that Londoners who need ESOL provision have access to it, will contribute to Londoners having the skills they need to improve their lives; and Londoners having access to good work. Many ESOL learners are highly skilled, and ESOL provision will contribute to making sure that London's economy has the skills it needs to thrive. The project directly contributes to addressing the fragmentation and complexity of London's skills and employment system. In particular, the project will help reduce the number of Londoners with no qualifications; and create a rise in employment rates. The project will be implemented in close collaboration with the No Wrong Door programme; and will focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of ASF spend.
- 4.4. This project also aligns with the Mayor's ambition to make London a welcoming city for people seeking sanctuary and migrants – so they can find safety; rebuild their lives; participate fully in their

communities; and contribute to London's social and economic prosperity. This ambition is supported through the Accommodation and Wider Support for Those who Need it Most mandate and delivery plan. This plan includes work on welcome and integration; increasing capacity of immigration advice; and improving migration-system leadership.

Consultations and impact assessments

- 4.5. As stated in [MD3440](#), an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been conducted to assess how the ITS impacts on Londoners who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, as well as other disadvantaged groups. This project aligns with one of the ITS commitments, and the purpose of the project is similar to what the purpose of the EqIA would be – i.e. measuring the impact of ESOL coordination on Londoners with protected characteristics. As the overall project budget (excluding the evaluation cost) is less than £150,000, a separate EqIA will not be conducted.

Conflicts of interest

- 4.6. No one involved in the drafting or clearance of this decision form has any conflict of interest.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. Approval is sought to spend up to £185,000, from the ASF budget, on funding an 18-month ESOL coordination pilot and its evaluation. The spend is across three streams of work:
- £70,000 as a contribution to the costs of London Borough of Ealing (on behalf of the WLA) delivering its SRP-level ESOL SPOC pilot
 - £65,000 as a contribution to the costs of the London Borough of Camden delivering its borough-level ESOL SPOC, and that of the London Borough of Islington – i.e., the Camden and Islington EAS
 - £50,000 for the evaluation of the outcomes of the funded pilot activity.
- 5.2. The proposed spending is financed by external funding drawn from the Management & Administration ASF 2026-27 budget, approved under cover of MD3482, which is part of the GLA's Integrated Settlement.
- 5.3. This project also closely aligns with the Supporting Londoners to Benefit from Growth core objectives, set under MD3395.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1. The foregoing sections of this report indicate that the decisions sought concern the exercise of the GLA's general powers, falling within the GLA's statutory powers to do such things considered to further, or that are facilitative of, or conducive or incidental to, the promotion of social and economic development and wealth creation in Greater London. In formulating the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought, officers must comply with the GLA's related statutory duties to:
- pay due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people
 - consider how the proposals will promote the improvement of health of persons, health inequalities between persons and to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the UK
 - consult with appropriate bodies.

- 6.2. The decisions also concern the exercise of functions set out in the amended Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, specifically s100 provision of financial resources. This enables the GLA to allocate funding for training and educational purposes.
- 6.3. In taking any decisions sought, the Director must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty – namely the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010; and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (race, disability, sex, age, sexual orientation, religion, gender reassignment) and persons who do not (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). To this end, the Director should have particular regard to section 3 (above) of this report.
- 6.4. If the Director makes the decisions sought, officers must ensure that:
- the award of grant funding is made fairly, transparently, in accordance with the GLA's equalities requirements and with the requirements of GLA's Contracts and Funding Code and funding agreements are put in place between and executed by the GLA and the London Boroughs of Ealing and Camden before any commitment to fund is made
 - the evaluation services required are procured by TfL procurement in accordance with the GLA's Contracts and Funding Code and contracts are put in place between and executed by the GLA and contractors before commencement of such services supplies or works.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

- 7.1. The next steps are set out below:

Activity	Timeline
Grant variation to WLA contact	September 2026
Announcement	October 2026
Delivery start date	October 2026
Procurement of evaluators contract	By January 2027
Procurement of Camden & Islington SPOC contract	By April 2027
Final evaluation start and finish	February 2027-May 2028
Delivery end date	April 2028
Project closure	June 2028

Appendices and supporting papers: None.

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will be published either within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Strategic Programmes

Does this decision seek approval for activity falling within the remit of a programme delivery plan? YES

If YES, which programme/s does this fall within: Supporting Londoners to Benefit from Growth

Part 1 – Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under the FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to confirm the following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Louise Yu has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Assistant Director/Head of Service:

Roxanne Ohene and Ayo Akande have reviewed the documentation and are satisfied for it to be referred to the Sponsoring Director for approval.

✓

Financial and Legal advice:

The Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal, and this decision reflects their comments.

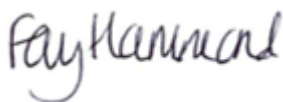
✓

Mayoral Delivery Board

A summary of this decision was reviewed by the Mayoral Delivery Board on 28 September 2026.

CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.



Signature

Date 28 September 2028