

Evaluation of Poplar HARCA's ESOL Plus Childcare Programme, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

About Poplar HARCA

Poplar Housing and Regeneration Community Association (HARCA) is a Housing Association that aims to deliver affordable homes to people living in Poplar in Tower Hamlets, East London. Community regeneration is at the heart of its mission and the organisation provides a range of opportunities for residents and the wider community that seek to bring about lasting positive change. Among the activities it offers are vocational training, apprenticeships and employability skills, activities that boost health and wellbeing, digital skills and financial education, homework clubs, after school support and green initiatives. Tower Hamlets is the most deprived London borough with a large Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic, Refugee (BAMER) population.

In 2018, Poplar HARCA was one of two organisations awarded funding by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to deliver a one-year pilot English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Plus childcare programme. The goal was to meet the needs of learners with childcare needs who may otherwise find it difficult to access ESOL provisions. As well as seeking to enhance the language skills of these learners, it sought to help them to become more integrated in their communities, and to boost civic engagement and wellbeing. The GLA was seeking to gain insight into how to deliver a successful, sustainable, and potentially scalable, ESOL Plus provision for learners with childcare needs.

Poplar HARCA set out to deliver a provision that catered for parents, ensured local accessibility, offered a family friendly environment, had a crèche on site, and offered a timetable that fitted around school times and holidays. In addition to the term-time programme, holiday activities were to be provided for the whole family, including the school-aged children of learners.

Policy context

In a 2017 mapping exercise of ESOL provisions in London, eleven barriers to learning English were identified. One of these was a lack of access to appropriate childcare, as well as the location and timing of classes. Women are particularly impacted by this issue. Few ESOL providers in London provide a creche, which means that those with childcare needs who are seeking to improve their English are severely limited. Public spending on ESOL has reduced by 60 per cent since 2009 and this has affected providers' ability to offer childcare. There is a high level of demand for lower entry and pre-entry level ESOL provisions coupled with a shortage of accessible and affordable childcare.

One of the outcomes of the mapping exercise was a decision by City Hall to pilot ESOL Plus childcare provisions, in order to build a knowledge base that would enable the effective future design and delivery of ESOL catering for people with childcare needs, particularly women. The focus was to be not only on improving the English of these parents, but also on increasing their social integration. The GLA was looking to support pilots that were innovative, employed partnership working, and showed potential for scaling.

English has been identified as a strong enabler of social integration. Being able to speak English is crucial in terms of accessing employment and reducing social exclusion and

isolation. Statistics for Tower Hamlets show that 14.6% of women are unemployed compared to 6% in London. In Poplar, 45% of the local population is of Bangladeshi and Somali origin. Family size in Bangladeshi and Somali communities tend to be larger than average and a lack of childcare is seen to be a significant barrier to participation. The provision of ESOL therefore has a key role to play in addressing these barriers and facilitating a cohesive and integrated community.

Evaluation scope

This evaluation set out to:

- I. Measure the distance travelled by learners in the areas of English language, social integration, wellbeing and self-development
- II. Assess the level of resource required to deliver a good quality ESOL Plus childcare programme and evaluate the potential and feasibility for scaling this up
- III. Identify best practice, areas for improvements and recommendations for future ESOL Plus childcare programmes that can be shared with the sector

To the degree possible, the evaluation also sought to understand the benefits of this approach in comparisons to one only focused on achieving English language outcomes – i.e. ‘a straight ESOL approach’.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of findings

Poplar HARCA’s ESOL Plus childcare programme was delivered between July 2018 and July 2019. This included the recruitment of learners, assessment, enrolment and induction, and the recruitment of ESOL tutors and creche workers, between July and September 2018. Sixty learners were initially enrolled. Nine left following the induction, two dropped out within the first few weeks, and one further learner left after the first term, as she had a baby. The retention rate was more or less as anticipated and Poplar HARCA had purposely over-filled the programme to account for this level of drop out.

Forty-eight learners completed the programme. Forty-six were female (96%) and two were male (4%). The learners were aged between 21 and 55. They were predominantly from Asian/Bangladeshi backgrounds (79%) as well as being of Arabic, mixed, white and other ethnicities. Some of the learners had low levels of education in their home countries and many had high levels of need. Some learners faced challenges in their personal and family lives, making them vulnerable.

This evaluation found that Poplar HARCA had delivered an exceptional ESOL Plus programme, one that met and exceeded its targets as well as providing excellent insights and learning into how to deliver a successful provision of this kind in the future.

Key findings

- I. The greatest barriers that the learners had previously faced to learning English were childcare, the cost and availability of ESOL classes in their area, and a lack of confidence

- II. The learners had high aspirations for moving onto further and higher education and employment once their English had improved. Their aspirations had increased as a result of this programme
- III. Low levels of education in countries of origin had a significant negative impact on learners' capacity to learn English. Poplar HARCA went to significant lengths to ensure that learners with little education achieved the same outcomes as other learners, including through recruiting ESOL volunteers to support classes, providing additional one-to-one support, and providing training in basic comprehension skills
- IV. Despite having a short time period in which to carry out recruitment, recruitment was successful. It relied heavily on community outreach, including actively seeking out the parents of young children and speaking to them about the programme. Community outreach is a recommended approach to recruitment
- V. The assessment and placement process effectively met learners' needs. Future assessment days should include childcare
- VI. Meeting the needs of learners for whom a significant time period has elapsed since they had passed English language exams was challenging. These learners could not retake the exams and therefore had to progress to the higher levels despite not having the skills. Taking on such learners can place a burden on the provision and needs to be considered carefully
- VII. An induction held over two days helped with learner retention and boosted learners' confidence and commitment
- VIII. A comprehensive and impactful curriculum was developed. This curriculum can provide learning and best practice for other ESOL Plus provisions. The time needed to develop and deliver an effective ESOL Plus programme should not be underestimated. Achieving both the language and social integration and personal development outcomes is demanding
- IX. The programme had a measurable positive impact on learners' English language skills. The learners are now more confident speaking English and are much less likely to avoid situations they were previously afraid of
- X. The programme had a measurable positive impact on learners' social integration and personal development. Areas of improvement include self-confidence, independent use of public transport, use of the telephone, ability to make and attend medical appointments independently, increased engagement with children's schools, increased awareness of services in the community, and greater interaction with people from different communities. Learners report feeling less isolated and lonely and have better support networks
- XI. Understanding each learner's individual needs and experiences was central to the programme's success, as was the dedication of the staff team
- XII. Volunteers played an important role in the delivery
- XIII. An effective creche service was provided. One of the successes of the creche was that it was an 'integrated service' – i.e. it was not separate from the ESOL delivery. Attending to the needs of large numbers of very young children who are away from their parents for the first time can be demanding. Creche volunteers provided helpful support. Ongoing communication with parents about the creche activities and ethos is essential. Parents need ongoing reassurance and guidance

- XIV. Additional costs related to delivering this programme, e.g. volunteer coordination, administrative support and facilities costs were absorbed by Poplar HARCA's larger budget. This enabled them to deliver a high-quality service

Headline recommendations

- A. Poplar HARCA's ESOL Plus childcare programme should be seen as a flagship programme for the sector, from which important lessons can be learned for future interventions
- B. Sufficient additional hours should be written into the contracts of ESOL tutors delivering ESOL Plus programmes, as both language and social integration goals need to be achieved and learners have high levels of need
- C. Future ESOL Plus childcare programmes need to take into account the "true costs" of delivering a service of this scope. Those that do not have access to the same level of resourcing as an organisation like Poplar HARCA should consider creative partnership arrangements
- D. Future ESOL Plus childcare programmes should factor in time and resources for pastoral support and signposting
- E. Volunteers play an important role – providing invaluable support to ESOL classes and the creche. Budgets of ESOL Plus programmes should account for the costs of coordinating and supporting volunteers
- F. External evaluation should begin at the start of the intervention
- G. Impact would be greatly increased through providing long-term funding of a minimum of three years, preferably five years. Organisations receiving long-term funding would undertake robust monitoring and evaluation throughout
- H. Investing in putting together a "resource bank" of ESOL Plus resources based on this and other similar programmes seems like a positive way of supporting future ESOL Plus programmes in the capital

Recommendations for Poplar HARCA

It would be recommended to factor in the following adjustments to future ESOL Plus childcare programmes:

- A. Provide childcare during the assessment day
- B. Provide information on the time commitment early, even on publicity materials if possible
- C. Invest more time in settling children into the creche at the start of the programme

- D. Factor in more paid hours for lesson planning and curriculum development for the ESOL tutors to account for the additional time needed to achieve social integration and other goals
- E. Prioritise recruitment of ESOL volunteers for the classroom as their support is invaluable when it comes to helping struggling learners
- F. Draw up a “Learner’s Charter” with learners as a creative approach to tackling lateness and attendance. Consult with other provisions in the area to learn from their successes when it comes to tackling this issue

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

This evaluation drew on qualitative data collected through group interviews with Poplar HARCA’s programme management team, ESOL tutors and a sample of 12 learners from across the different language levels (entry levels one, two and three). The sample of ESOL learners was chosen to reflect a mix of ethnic backgrounds, ages, number of years spent in the UK, immigration status, and educational level. Interviews were semi-structured. Open-ended questions were asked that allowed interviewees to discuss the evaluation themes in detail. The evaluation included observation of an ESOL class with a group of entry two level learners and analysis of learning outcomes, action plans and self-assessments of the learner sample, alongside case studies of learners collected by the ESOL tutors during the programme. The evaluation analysed data collected from a baseline questionnaire administered at the beginning and end of programme (completed by 40 learners), and data on learners’ backgrounds and achievements, covering e.g. ethnicity, education level, numbers of children and attendance. Data was collected in May 2019 and analysed between June and September 2019. The evaluation referred to the original funding application made to the GLA by Poplar HARCA, guidelines provided by the GLA, and a mid-term report to the GLA prepared by Poplar HARCA. To assess the impact of provision on the social integration of learners, the evaluator was guided by the GLA’s Social Integration Measures¹.

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ABOUT THE EVALUATOR

Dr Madeleine Mosse completed a PhD at the Centre for Peace, Trust and Social Relations (CPRS) at Coventry University in 2012. She has a background in international peacebuilding and community cohesion in the UK. Previous evaluations include for Who is Your Neighbour (WIYN) – a community dialogue project in Sheffield, Salmon Youth Centre in Bermondsey (London), Encompass – The Daniel Braden Reconciliation Trust (UK/international) and Aik Saath – Together as One (Slough). She wrote the report *“If you could do one thing...the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers”* published by the British Academy (2017), which informed the Governments Integrated Community Strategy Green Paper and

¹ GLA (2019) *Social Integration Headline Measures* <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/social-integration-headline-measures>

the Local Government Association (LGA) guidance on community cohesion. Prior to completing post-graduate studies, Madeleine was a Teacher of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in France and the UK and is CELTA certified. She therefore brings knowledge of English language education to the evaluation.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

About the learners

i. Cohort overview

Sixty learners attended the induction and 51 commenced the programme. Forty-eight learners completed the programme. These learners were between the ages of 21 and 55. Forty-six learners were female and two were male. All learners were parents. Four learners were employed, six had been unemployed for over 12 months, one had been unemployed for under 12 months, and 37 were economically inactive. Twenty-three of the learners had no previous recognised English qualifications. Twenty-two learners had creche-aged children and the remainder were parents of school-aged children. All were Tower Hamlets residents. The immigration status of the cohort covered British and EU citizens, those with indefinite leave to remain, and those on spousal visas. The learners were predominantly from Asian/Bangladeshi backgrounds (79%) as well as being of Arabic, mixed, white and other ethnicities. In future recruitment, Poplar HARCA would seek to recruit a more mixed cohort and would especially seek to include more learners from the Somali community.

ii. Learners' aspirations

Many of the learners were seeking to further their careers. They wished to complete further and higher education, and gain employment. A smaller number of learners were seeking to improve their English solely for everyday use.

iii. Educational background

Some learners had low levels of education (about a quarter of learners in entry level 1, for example) having only finished a few years of school in their countries of origin. Others had completed secondary or university education. The level of education that the learners had significantly influenced their English language learning ability. Those with little education struggled more with spelling, including spelling simple words. They lacked the experience of working on tasks independently, and found simple comprehension exercises challenging, such as finding words in a passage. They lacked the experience of preparing for exams. One learner in her fifties who had little education particularly struggled to keep up.

iv. Levels of need and vulnerability

The cohort had relatively high levels of need. Many were young parents who were finding their way in a new country for the first time and had limited support networks. Even those who had been in the UK for some time faced challenges during the programme. Among the difficulties encountered amongst learners were health issues, marital and family discord, homelessness, and problems related to their children – such as physical and mental health issues.

v. Barriers learners previously faced to learning English

Childcare was the greatest obstacle learners had previously faced to learning English, alongside the difficulty of finding free ESOL provisions. Having young children below school age made it almost impossible for them to attend English classes. Most learners' husbands worked fulltime and in cases where they had support from their extended family, this was insufficient to allow them to pursue English language learning. One woman explained how she had stopped attending ESOL classes in 2016 after giving birth to her first child. Though she had planned to return after her baby was born, with no free creche available, it wasn't possible. All of the learners described in detail the dual challenges of finding free or affordable English classes, and free childcare.

"...It's quite difficult for me because my husband is full-time working and I can't find anything free..." – Learner

"It was quite hard to find courses with childcare at the same time. Because you need to pay not only for course, but for childcare as well, and that's really expensive." – Learner

"Well, it's hard to find courses where you don't need to pay." – Learner

"For me I can't [join English classes] because just in my family, me and my husband and my son. So, my husband is working, so who would take care of my child?" – Learner

As well as the practical barriers, learners said that their lack of confidence had held them back. Without structured language learning they lacked the confidence to practice their English independently.

Staffing

Two experienced and highly dedicated female ESOL tutors with backgrounds in adult education and business English taught the classes. The key management team who oversaw the programme was comprised of: a Performance and Partnership Manager who acted as the overall Manager; an Employment and Training Manager who oversaw registration, screening, induction and monitoring, and provided learner and tutor support; a member of the Communities and Neighbourhoods Team who helped developed the service, oversaw recruitment and managed the creche workers; and a Projects and Partnership Officer who served as a liaison between the learners, tutors and wider staff team and provided face-to-face support to learners. Additional coordination and administrative staff also supported the programme.

Although the cohort was almost entirely female, the wider staff team was mixed. No issues were experienced by the female learners consulted concerning attending activities led by males, despite some coming from more traditional backgrounds. It was accepted amongst those joining the programme that they were seeking to become more integrated, with most having aspirations to complete further and higher education and join the workforce. None of the learners consulted reported resistance from husbands or other family members about taking part. The team felt that having a mixed staff complimented the programme. It seems possible that some women in the area may not have accessed the provision because

of restrictive views about social mixing, however, it is not within the scope of this evaluation to assess this.

Volunteers

Three ESOL volunteers were recruited – one for each classroom. These volunteers were particularly helpful when it came to supporting learners who were struggling. All of the volunteers had a background in ESOL. The learners described the volunteers as ‘helpful’ and ‘friendly’ and observed that they had effectively reduced the workloads of their tutors. They recalled occasions where tasks had been difficult, and where the volunteers had helped them to understand them.

“[the ESOL volunteer] was really good at actually sitting with a bunch of students who needed the extra help and the extra push whilst the tutors were able to just carry on the classroom and guide them through the lesson” – Member of the programme management team

ESOL volunteers were recruited through the Do It volunteering website and the Tower Hamlets council website. They were interviewed by Poplar HARCA’s volunteer coordinator. These volunteers were seeking to gain experience so that they could get jobs in the sector in the future.

Volunteers were also recruited for the creche. These volunteers were completing childcare qualifications (see more on this below). In addition, in the region of three volunteers supported each holiday scheme for children and three volunteers helped run the digital skills activities. These volunteers were local residents who wanted to support Poplar HARCA’s work. Poplar HARCA sees volunteering as an opportunity to build community capacity and engagement. The Volunteer Coordinator played a crucial role in attending to the needs of volunteers, including overseeing recruitment, supervision, reimbursement of expenses, creation of a newsletter and an annual volunteer celebration. ESOL volunteers were recruited after the programme had commenced, partly because of the late funding decision. In the future these volunteers should be in place before the programme starts.

Learner recruitment

Poplar HARCA had limited time to undertake the recruitment of learners for the programme due to a late funding decision. Nonetheless, a thorough and determined recruitment process was implemented, which successfully drew in a large cohort of learners.

Recruitment relied heavily on leafletting, with flyers distributed at school gates, in local services, at community centres, in local parks and through letterboxes. The outreach team liaised with ten local schools. Because recruitment took place at the end of the school term, opportunities to interact with parents in schools were limited. To overcome this, the team adopted a proactive approach of soliciting parents in parks, speaking to them about the provision and handing out leaflets. Posters and banners were displayed in and around Poplar HARCA’s community centres and information was shared and displayed in local services, such as job centres, children’s centres, and the Linc Centre – a large community centre in Poplar. Some community events were held to promote the programme. The team liaised with New City College, a community college providing adult education in Tower Hamlets, to identify potential learners. The recruitment period lasted between two and

three weeks. The team emphasised that community outreach was key to their success. Despite this being the most time-consuming approach, particularly when it comes to going out and meeting parents in parks and community centres, it is well worth the effort. Community outreach activities also help with learner retention, as personal relationships are established between staff and learners from the outset.

“Outreach is the thing that takes the most time but makes the most difference. When people identify with a face and there's a bit of a relationship there, we find that they will tend to turn out.” – Member of the programme management team

The learners consulted were positive about recruitment. The most common way that they had heard about the provision was through a leaflet. Word of mouth was another common route, with family members or a neighbour having relayed the information to them. One learner had been referred by the Job Centre. Mention of the free creche in promotional material had sparked learners' interest, alongside the fact that the classes were free. Some learners said that they would have preferred to have known the time commitment required of them for the programme before they applied. Details of this could be included in future publicity materials.

A period of six weeks would have been preferable for recruitment, beginning in June and ending mid-July. This would allow for term-time contact with schools, enabling plenty of interaction with parents and teachers.

Enrolment and assessment

A week-long period of engagement activities was held, which allowed people to drop-in and speak to staff about the programme. Following this, a registration and assessment day was held for those who were interested. During registration, learners were required to complete two forms. The detailed enrolment form covered personal details (name, address, age, etc.), education and qualifications, equalities data, information regarding disabilities and additional needs, nationality and residency, employment details and information about how the learner had heard about the programme. A learner agreement was then signed covering e.g. data protection, attendance and personal conduct. A second monitoring form was completed to comply with Poplar HARCA's overall enrolment procedures.

Feedback from the learners about enrolment was mostly positive, however one learner commented that she had found filling out two different forms demanding, and some learners had been confused about which building to go to for the placement test and subsequently the classes. Although this does not appear to have been the general experience, it could be worth emphasising more clearly in future details of the locations for the different activities.

Learners were required to give details of any English qualifications held; however, many were unclear about their qualifications and the team needed to cross reference what learners told them with the government's Learning Records Database in order to see what other provisions had uploaded in terms of their qualifications. This was time-consuming and had not been anticipated. Some learners had achieved good levels of education in their

home countries, and therefore needed to be assessed to ensure that they weren't automatically put in lower levels just because they didn't have any recognised qualifications. Once assessment was complete, it was a complex logistical exercise to fit the numbers of learners with the creche places, as the ages of children determined how many creche workers would be needed according to the required worker-to-child ratios. An additional creche worker needed to be employed as many learners had younger children.

The learners were happy with the assessment process. Some learners said that having the assessment in the school holidays had posed difficulties for them as they needed to take their children along to the assessment and no childcare was provided. The learners would have preferred the placement test and enrolment to have taken place outside of school holidays, or for childcare to have been provided. It appears that, at the time of enrolment, some of the learners were still unclear about the number of classes they would be required to attend per week. They would have liked clearer information in advance of the enrolment process about the time commitment.

The funding criteria for qualifications is such that if a learner has already undertaken a qualification at a particular level, public funding cannot be used for the learner to repeat the same qualification at the same level. This meant that some learners who had previously passed exams, but who had not practiced their English for some time, needed to be placed in classes that did not reflect their ability. As a result of this some learners struggled. The alternative was to place learners in lower level classes that they had already passed, without them sitting the exams. The team opted to place learners in classes according to the exams they had passed and to give them additional support so that they could catch up. In the future the team reflected that they may limit the intake of such learners so as not to burden the tutors.

Induction

A two-day induction was held in the first week of the programme. The goal of the induction was to let learners know more about what to expect, and to enable them to get to know each other and the staff in an informal setting. The induction also aimed to help the children settle into the creche.

The induction made use of fun ice breaker games and other activities that forged bonds between the learners and established trust. Learners shared about their backgrounds, families, cultures and languages, alongside their visions and goals for the future. They found out about things they had in common, despite coming from different backgrounds. For example, a Spanish speaking woman from South America got to know a Bengali woman who had come to the UK via Spain and therefore spoke Spanish. Two Italian speakers met from different cultures. The warm-ups and ice breakers got people laughing and more relaxed, and helped them to feel less worried about their English. Team building games were an excellent tool, as they didn't require much language but got people working together. The induction helped staff to get a better picture of the learners and their levels. It was also an effective way to identify those who weren't committed or suited to the programme. The goal was for people to realise that it wasn't for them at this stage, rather than once it had begun, which would have been disruptive. The baseline questionnaire was administered during the induction.

The team concluded that, had there been more time, the induction would have taken place over two weeks, covering three or four days. All of the learners consulted spoke positively about the induction. It had helped them to feel more confident about joining the programme and helped alleviate their fears. As one learner put it, *“I thought that my English would be the worst!”*. The induction made her feel more at ease. The learners described the induction as fun, and despite it only taking place over two days, strong bonds were formed. Learners were happy with the level of information they received during the induction. The induction appears to have contributed to learner retention, as those who joined following the induction knew what to expect and were committed to completing the year.

Curriculum development

The curriculum was jointly developed by the programme management team and the ESOL tutors. It was designed around themes that allowed learners to achieve English language outcomes, develop skills and confidence, and become more integrated in their communities. Examples of themes covered included ‘understanding yourself’, ‘health and wellbeing’, ‘the services that are around you’ and ‘my future’. For ‘understanding yourself’, learners looked at culture and traditions and developed an exhibition. They made presentations and dressed in traditional costumes. For the ‘my future’ theme there was a focus on employability, volunteering, self-development and next steps. The curriculum was built around the requirement of the awarding body, Gateway Qualifications.

To incorporate the social integration outcomes into the curriculum, the team consulted the GLA guidance on social integration indicators and embedded these into the activities and monitoring. Because they know their community well, they identified outcomes specific to local people’s needs and incorporated these. For example, they wanted to strengthen the ability of learners to travel outside of the limited local area, use public transport, know what’s around them, be able to take their children to activities or go to the GP on their own, and talk to their children’s teachers. Some basic mathematics and digital skills were included in the curriculum, including using google maps on your phone, texting and using search engines. The curriculum was a balancing act between meeting the guided learning hours and achieving the language outcomes specified by the awarding body; and delivering an effective Plus programme that achieved personal development and social integration goals. They also sought to incorporate special activities during holidays, such as a Christmas Party and Halloween activities, and to make these available to the non-creche aged children of learners.

The curriculum was carefully thought out and comprehensive. Time was dedicated to developing the curriculum before the course began and adjusting it throughout to fit with learners’ needs and backgrounds. Continually adjusting the curriculum was essential.

“...as you go along, it's very important to adjust the curriculum and what you're teaching so that it fits their needs...I mean, it's an ongoing process of adjusting and overcoming whatever comes up, and I think that's what we did throughout.” – ESOL tutor

An important part of the process for the tutors was developing awareness and understanding of the learners' cultural backgrounds, perspectives and experiences, so that the teaching materials and themes were suitable and relevant. The time that went into this was significant.

"At times it was time consuming, but then when you come to the classroom and you see you get results, and they like it, and they are engaged [it makes it worth it]." –
ESOL tutor

Many learners had high aspirations in terms of completing higher education and entering employment. As much as possible, the tutors incorporated advanced writing skills into the curriculum, such as constructing complex sentences and activities to improve literacy. The time spent on developing the curriculum was significant and any future ESOL Plus programmes need to factor in sufficient time for planning. The planning involved is additional to that which would ordinarily be needed during a straight ESOL course.

It would have been preferable to recruit the ESOL tutors earlier in order to have a longer lead in time to develop the curriculum. The short lead in time was due to the late funding decision. However, because the ESOL tutors were highly motivated and willing to put in a lot of hard work to develop the curriculum, both at the start of the programme and throughout, a solid and impactful curriculum was developed in a short amount of time. Should Poplar HARCA continue to deliver the ESOL Plus programme, the curriculum is already in place and can be built upon. However, the ESOL tutors were keen to emphasise that any curriculum must be flexible and adaptable to each cohort's needs. The team and the ESOL tutors recognised that delivering on both the expectations of the examining board and what they wanted to achieve in terms of learners' personal development and integration goals was challenging. It's a credit to all those involved, particularly the tutors, that such an innovative and engaging curriculum was developed and delivered.

Programme delivery

i. Timetable

The classes were delivered Monday to Wednesday and were two and a half hours in length, including breaks. Additional activities were offered to learners and their children during school holidays.

Many learners said that they would have liked more classes. Even though the classes took place three days a week, which is already a significant time commitment, they would have preferred classes four days a week. Some expressed a preference for classes five days a week. This was surprising considering that these learners have busy lives and family commitments, however, it reflects the high levels of satisfaction and motivation. Some learners would have preferred the classes to be three hours in length. The tutors agreed that, providing that the resources were available, having more classes would be beneficial. The amount of Plus activities that needed to be embedded on top of achieving learning outcomes to pass exams meant that tutors were stretched at times.

All learners consulted reported that they had managed to fit the activities of the programme around their everyday commitments. This is impressive as it represents a significant time

commitment, particularly for learners with several children and other people to care for in their families. Nobody felt that they had been restricted by family attitudes and learners spoke positively of the support they had received from their husbands, and even their children at times. The learners said that their families were happy because they were learning English. Most of the learners felt that the homework did not infringe on their lives too much and that they could fit it around other commitments. One learner, who has three children, found the homework a challenge to complete on time. Another learner commented that previously her children had been quite demanding on her time, but now that she's learning, they respect the fact that she is busy, and they leave her alone to complete her homework.

Because of how the classes were timetabled, not all of the learners from across the levels mixed with one another. In the future, Poplar HARCA would organise the classes in such a way that there was more crossover and more opportunities for mixing. It was observed that the interaction of learners across the levels, and from different backgrounds, was supportive to learning and personal development.

ii. Supporting learners to succeed

Learners with low levels of education needed additional support. This included one-to-one support in the classroom with the help of volunteers, classes outside of the timetabled hours, and additional homework. Weaker learners were paired with stronger ones in the classroom to provide support. However, this couldn't be done all the time, as it would have held the stronger learners back. At the start of the programme it was necessary to spend time helping some learners get used to following simple instructions for learning exercises. Therefore, before teaching English even began, a certain amount of training was necessary.

The ESOL tutors emphasised that it was important to get to know the individual needs and backgrounds of each learner so that they felt encouraged to persevere with their learning, even when they faced challenges. The tutors spoke about creating a caring, loving and supportive atmosphere, where learners felt able to express themselves, and comfortable enough to reach out to tutors if they needed help. This motivated them to keep coming because trust was established. An atmosphere of reassurance and non-judgement was established in the classroom. Lessons needed to be planned sensitively. For example, one woman in the class had recently been through a divorce and is a single parent, so planning lessons that speak about the family unit in terms of husband and wife were inappropriate. Adapting class materials in this way to reflect the realities of the learners' lives was crucial.

The learners spoke very highly of the two ESOL tutors who led the classes. The teachers were described as 'understanding' and 'helpful' and the quality of the teaching was praised by all. The learners emphasised that the quality of teaching was better than anything they had experienced previously, in their home countries or the UK. The dedication of the tutors shone through in the evaluation. The learners felt that the tutors had got to know them as individuals and that they cared about them. They talked about teachers being 'stricter' in their home countries and in other classes they had attended in the UK. In contrast, in this programme they had appreciated the warm, friendly and relaxed atmosphere, which had supported their learning. One learner explained how she had noticed that whatever effort

she made with her language learning, she was praised for, and this helped to build her confidence.

iii. ESOL class activities

The learners commended the structure and content of the lessons and said that they had made greater progress in these classes than at any other time in their language learning. It was clear from speaking to the learners and observing a class that they were highly interactive and lively, with an excellent balance of learning across the skills. Learners said that they had especially enjoyed the competitive games that had kept them engaged. The imaginative projects and activities that had been set across the year, such as the recipe boxes, exhibition and Christmas party were all remarked upon favourably. The learners were impressed that the ESOL tutors had gone as far as to deliver additional one-to-one lessons for struggling learners. They remarked that their homework had always been carefully checked and that they were given a lot of feedback. The learners regarded the ESOL tutors as their advocates and said that they would help them should they encounter any problems in the programme or their personal lives.

iv. Plus activities

A range of effective and imaginative activities were delivered to promote the social integration of learners, tied to English language outcomes. The Plus components were both embedded in classroom-based learning and delivered as standalone workshops and activities. For example, the learners developed recipe boxes, using the popular “Hello Fresh” model of assembling boxes of ingredients for easy-to-prepare meals and producing recipe cards. As part of this, the learners went to the shops to purchase the ingredients with the ESOL tutors and sold the boxes in Poplar HARCA’s community café. In another activity, the learners got involved in a consultation on the creation of a new adventure playground in the park. They gave their views to the borough who came to deliver a workshop on this. Other activities included visiting the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green and preparing food for the Christmas party.

Four classes were offered to specifically help learners develop their digital skills. Learners had appreciated the opportunity to improve these skills, however, some learners said that they would have preferred more challenging activities. At the same time, they acknowledged that some learners within the group had no digital skills and did not know how to turn on a computer. One learner consulted had opted not to attend the classes because she already has good digital skills. The learners suggested that in future, the classes should be split, so that both basic and advanced skills were offered. They suggested that advanced skills could be learnt through being set specific tasks that were carried out independently. Baseline survey results show that 10 per cent of learners reported that their digital skills had improved as a result of the programme.

The team reflected that there were areas that in the future they would focus on more. One of these was around “next steps” – spending more time on supporting the learners with employability. Other areas were parenting skills, mental health and stress.

v. Examinations

The Gateway examining board allows learners to retake exams as many times as necessary. This allowed the weaker learners to pass exams on the second attempt. The team observed that the learners benefited from the experience of taking the exam, even if they failed first time round. There were some occasions where the programme team and tutors needed to advocate for the learners, in cases where the examiner wanted to fail a learner, but the team felt that this was unjustified. They were able to discuss the result with the examiner and appeal the decision successfully.

vi. Attendance and lateness

One concern raised by all consulted, including learners, was about attendance and lateness. Punctuality had been a difficult issue to handle throughout the programme. On the one hand, staff were eager to support the learners to overcome challenges they faced in their personal lives in order to complete the course, and this included being lenient when issues arose that made them late. Learners were genuinely late or absent due to, for example, having to accompany family members to medical appointments, children being ill, or cases where they had to attend their children's schools. However, the team felt that sometimes learners could have avoided lateness. They took the approach of sitting down with learners and explaining the importance of attendance for both themselves and their children. They emphasised the positive impact of early years education on their children's development. The good rapport staff had with learners meant that they could speak with them honestly about the issues and help to overcome them. They also tried to implement a system whereby if a learner was late three times they were excluded from the programme, however this proved difficult to enforce and the team were reluctant to push it as they were eager to see the learners succeed.

"I think it's a really hard one, because we're dealing with such vulnerable groups who are eager. And individually, all of them want to stay in learning and we don't want to lose them." – Member of the programme management team

The team concluded that in future their options included being stricter at the start of the programme, so as to set a more severe tone, and consulting with other ESOL providers to get tips and advice on how they handle attendance, as they are aware that the problem is endemic. They also discussed including more employability skills in the course and highlighting punctuality as a part of this. The ESOL tutors spoke about the importance of being lenient and understanding of learners' needs when it came to attendance. They were sensitive to the fact that these learners often have challenging personal lives. Their approach was to come alongside the learners and seek to understand their personal circumstances. The learners said that they appreciated it when the staff understood why they had been late. They gave examples of situations where they had been late. For example, one woman spoke about the difficulties she faced with her young son who sometimes didn't sleep through the night and the challenge of getting him out of the house on time. The learners with young children had all faced challenges such as these, as many of them had children under the age of three.

"A lot of stressful situations. Like everyone has children, it's hard. Because children might be ill, might be unwell, they might [not] want to eat breakfast..." – Learner

However, the learners also expressed concern that they were causing problems for the tutors by being late or missing multiple classes. The learners made suggestions for how lateness might be handled in the future. They suggested that from the outset there should be firm rules, and that the class should decide on the rules together and agree with the staff to abide by them. In effect this would form some sort of “learner’s charter”. Attendance was carefully monitored through registers. These records show good attendance by the majority of learners, as well as patterns of sporadic and sustained absence amongst some learners.

Monitoring learners’ progress

All learners completed ‘individual action plans’ throughout the programme. These allowed staff to understand the barriers learners faced to achieving their goals, to understand the support that learners needed, to see what actions had been taken to achieve their goals, and to plan future actions, particularly around accessing employment. These action plans provided a useful opportunity for staff to help learners to remain focused and to understand their needs better. They provided opportunities for signposting to services and other activities specific to individual needs. They also provide useful data for monitoring and evaluation. Learners also completed satisfaction surveys, which were administered three times across the year.

Programme impact on English skills

i. Impact on learners’ English language skills

During the evaluation, learners were asked to provide an assessment of their English language skills at the start of the programme, using a scale of one to ten, and to compare this to their levels now. All of the learners gave very low scores for their levels at the start, with some saying that they were a zero. This assessment says more about how learners viewed their abilities rather than their actual skills, as many were in the higher classes. All of the learners felt that they had improved significantly as a result of the classes. For example, the learners said:

“So, for me, when I started it was 1 and now, I think 8.”

“Before is 1, or zero. Now is 5.”

“I would say before maybe 3 or 4 because I learnt already on ESOL course but now I say maybe 7 or 8.”

“I feel like my English improved a lot because when I started, I could speak in sentences, but I wasn’t fluent ... I could speak with other people and I could understand them quite well, but if they were non-native speakers mostly. And I felt uncomfortable with native speakers because of their accent, strong accent especially old people. Now I can speak with them without any difficulties. And my writing improved a lot in the course.”

All 48 learners passed the English reading exams on the first or second attempt, which is impressive. Twelve learners either were not ready to take, or did not pass, one or more of the other exams (speaking, listening or writing), and are in the process of preparing for take/retake these.

Case studies

Case Study One – Entry Level Two Learner

T is a learner from Bangladesh who has made efforts to overcome challenges throughout the course and to improve her language skills. The first challenge T dealt with was related to her family life. When she joined the course, she had a two-month old baby and another very young child to look after. For a while, she found it hard to balance motherhood duties and worries, with the responsibility of doing well in the course, due to lack of time and proper rest. However, she managed to organize her routine with support from her husband in such a way that she attended the course regularly while dad looked after the baby. She allowed herself the necessary time to do her homework and also rest. T. was supported with advice on managing her own time and routine. Driven by a strong desire to grow, develop and get her qualification, she is now very happy with her accomplishments, to be part of the course, and have such supportive friends.

Another challenge T overcame successfully, especially in speaking, was a lack of self-confidence and an over-concern with how she would be perceived by others when she spoke in class. This prevented her from getting engaged in speaking activities. When approached in regard to her participation to speaking lessons, T was certain that she was making huge language mistakes at which other learners would laugh, and that her ideas and opinions were silly and did not count. When asked to give an opinion or answer a question in class T would often say “No, not me!” to avoid speaking. She was first encouraged to believe in herself and her ideas and to express herself, as in the classroom no one would judge her for what she thinks, and different opinions help us learn from each other. Additionally, she was persuaded to deal with language mistakes one at a time. For example, she was given sequential focus targets like using verbs correctly or making full sentences for set periods of time. This way, she focused only on these when she was speaking in class, while also being praised for the valuable experience and personal thoughts she shared with others. Step by step, T began feeling more and more confident and appreciated in class. By the time we started Speaking and Listening mock exams, she had already proved willingness to take initiative in speaking tasks, disagree with others, and give reasons for her views. A lot of her nervousness and stage fright faded away so that in the exam T demonstrated great focus and control of language, thus passing the exam. T says that she is extremely proud of herself and she feels blessed with the friends she has made in the class.

Case Study Two – Entry Level Three Learner

M is a learner who was in higher education in her native language and is determined to pursue career and training courses to have a rewarding job. She is aware that a lower

level of English language knowledge prevents her from accessing these courses and has made incredible efforts to overcome all challenges and be successful in the ESOL course.

To begin with, M had a hard time at home because her children have been dealing with health issues (severe asthma) and bullying in school. M had to leave class many times because she was called by the school and informed there were problems with her children. She either needed to go to the emergency room, as her son had a severe crisis, or attend a meeting with her daughter's therapist, teachers or advisors. We could see M was often under pressure or absent-minded as a result of these personal preoccupations. We all made sure she was encouraged and supported all the time, even if she was not always open about her problems. Although M missed many lessons, she was always encouraged to ask for advice with homework or for clarification with what she did not understand from the classroom materials. She made sure all her overdue homework was eventually done and that she was up to date with the classwork. M benefitted greatly from being understood and supported. But the merit for her success in the last exam is all hers because she managed to dedicate so much effort and time to keep up with the course requirements.

M was a very shy person and always nervous to speak. However, she was also a fighter for her own ideas and opinions. So, when she felt discouraged to argue or expand on a topic because she thought she was making too many mistakes, we insisted that she spoke and re-formulate because we were listening, and we really wanted to know her views. At first, she was hesitant and retreated but, step by step, she became more open and now her colleagues even prompt her to give her ideas as they are always valuable and accurate. She now feels very comfortable in class with both her colleagues and the tutor.

M's hard-work and motivation to develop herself and her language skills were evident in the speaking and listening exam, where she fought hard to persuade others of her ideas while also enabling a pleasant group discussion. She successfully passed the exam.

Programme impact on learners' social integration

i. Social integration before the programme

The learners spoke about the difficulties they had faced prior to the programme as a result of not being able to speak English. They described being reliant on others to complete simple tasks, particularly on their husbands and children.

"Before, if I go anywhere – like an appointment or shopping – I always told my husband "come with me, please come with me!""

"Before, when I go anywhere, it's like I feel so 'unrespectful' – or I don't know what's the word. It's like I'm so shy, and oh my god I can't speak English, but she can speak English, or he can speak English."

Fear was another common sentiment expressed by the learners in relation to not being able to speak English, accompanied by feelings of isolation.

"I'm scared because I can't speak English. How [can I] speak with another person, how [can] I go anywhere, if I don't know how to speak English?"

One woman spoke about the challenges she faced as a young parent alone with a child at home.

"I felt like not depressed, but not in really good mood before I started [the] course. Because I spent a lot of time with my kid at home. We attended some children's groups but still... Maybe one hour per week or two hours per week, and it's so few. And I had only one friend [...] and she was quite busy as well, so I was isolated."

ii. *Getting out and about and accessing services*

Learners described numerous ways in which the programme had helped them to get out and about and to access services. Some learners said that they had previously been afraid to go to the shops on their own and now felt confident to do so. One learner explained how she now feels confident walking in the street because if she gets lost, she can ask somebody the way. Previously she was afraid to go out on her own. The learners explained that they feel more confident travelling on public transport. The baseline questionnaire showed that 30 per cent of learners have increased in their ability to use public transport independently. One learner said that she still found trains and tubes difficult because it's easy to get lost, however overall the learners are more confident.

"I'm travelling more freely. So now I can travel without my husband, for example. I can hire a taxi, and so on, and travel with my child." – Learner

The whole team has observed that the learners are now more able to travel around the area by bus or train and to use the google maps app on their phone. They were now more confident taking their children out and about and had told their tutors about things they had been up to.

"Things like "I went to the GP and it was easier for me this time" or "I was able to tell them about my problem in an easier way." – Member of the programme management team

The majority of learners consulted said that they were now able to visit the GP independently.

"Before I came here, I was like, I don't have any confidence. [...] if I talked to anyone it's like, first I think "oh my god"....what [am] I going to say to this man or to this lady? So, I was very unconfident, but now it's like I feel like I'm 100% confident. I can speak to anyone easily and I can speak to a doctor – anyone, whoever." – Learner

Survey results show that almost half of the learners (45%) recorded an increased knowledge of what services are available to them in the local community, with 31 per cent showing significant improvement in this area. Forty-five per cent of learners said that they were now more confident in accessing health services independently.

iii. Communication

Using the telephone was a common area where learners had made improvements, including making appointments over the phone. Learners spoke about difficulties they had previously faced speaking on the phone. They had found it difficult to understand what was being said to them and making phone calls was challenging. One learner said that she used to ignore her phone. Though some learners still found phone calls challenging, others had overcome their fears and actually enjoyed speaking on the phone in English. This was reflected in the baseline survey findings, where 28 per cent of learners reported improvements in this area.

One learner explained how she now felt able to speak to her neighbour, whereas previously she had hurried past her and just said hello, not because she was being rude, but because she was scared that she wouldn't be able to understand her. Overall, the learners feel much more confident interacting with others. One learner even commented that her children now tell her off for chatting too much!

"At their school as well...My kids are pulling me, "Mum you don't have to talk to everybody!"" – Learner

This finding was reflected also in the survey, which showed that forty-three per cent of learners rated themselves as having improved in their ability to speak to people from different communities, with twenty-three percent showing significant improvement in this area. The ESOL tutors had noticed that the learners' texting had also improved, as they sometimes texted the teachers if they will be late or absent for a class.

"So, they can give more details, they can explain in a clearer manner why they're going to be missing and what's happening with them." – ESOL tutor

When asked how often the learners spoke in English outside of the classes, the common response was that they spoke English at least a little every day, even if it was just with their husbands or children.

iv. Engagement in children's education

The women with school-aged children were now able to talk to their children's teachers. One learner explained how previously she would have got her husband to speak to the teacher, and now she can do it herself.

"When I went to my kid's school I want to talk with [the] teacher. Because sometimes I don't know what she says, so, ok I'll get my husband to talk to her. But now I can just speak to her and understand what she wants to say about my daughter, everything she wants her to do, anything..." – Learner

Learners spoke about now being able to help their children with their homework. One woman explained that previously her young daughter would ask her what something meant in a book she was reading, and she wouldn't know the answer. Now she understands the reading books, and this makes both of them happy.

"She said before, "Mummy you don't speak English", "Mummy you don't understand [what] I want to say". But now she says, "Mummy speaks very good!"" – Learner

Survey results show that twenty-six percent of learners were now more confident when it comes to contacting their child's school independently.

v. *Confidence*

The ESOL tutors and staff have observed that the greatest impact they have seen on the learners was an increase in self-confidence. They are more assertive now and better able to express themselves.

"I can see them willing to speak and willing to state their opinions and willing to, you know, bring up arguments, or simply to stand up and go to the whiteboard and write one of their own sentences to get feedback from others. At first it was complete silence. There was complete silence and they wouldn't dare to, you know, just say what they thought. I think it has built up a lot of their confidence, at least this is what I can see. They're telling jokes and there is a joyful atmosphere in the classroom. That wasn't there at the beginning." – ESOL tutor

vi. *Support networks and friendships*

The staff team observed that the learners now have improved social networks.

"...they're becoming friends and they're talking and they're socialising. We want them to be able to have support networks. That was one of the things we did in the curriculum was, you know, if you have a problem, who do you go to for support? So hopefully they've got some more friends too." – Member of the programme management team

The learners all said that they had made new friends during the programme and had more people they could turn to if they needed help and support.

vii. *Sense of belonging*

The learners were asked some questions to help determine how much they felt at home in London and to get a sense of how deep their sense of belonging in the UK is. The learners had different feelings about this issue. Most learners concluded that they did feel that London was their home. Others missed their countries of origin and felt that these represented their true homes. The main reason for not feeling like London was their home was that their parents and extended family members remained in their countries of origin. Other learners concluded that their husbands and children were their family, and this made London feel like home. The learners agreed that the programme had contributed to them feeling more at home in London because they felt less lonely and isolated, had better support networks and more friends, and were able to move more freely around the city.

Learners' plans for the future and next steps

The most common desire expressed by learners for their future development was to have more English classes. They were determined to develop their language skills and felt that their future was dependent on them having better English. Some learners have advanced

qualifications from their countries of origin and were frustrated that their lack of English was preventing them from progressing with their careers. All learners consulted spoke about some kind of career progression. Some had ambitious plans, for example, one young learner was planning to pursue medical studies, another with a degree in law was hoping to complete a master's degree once her English was good enough, and another wanted to become a qualified teacher or translator. Four learners have progressed into employment and further education during the programme, and others are actively looking for employment.

The learners had found the employability session useful and had received help with their CVs. The tutors observed that the learners were now able to engage in "critical active learning" – i.e. taking control of their learning experiences and goal setting. They had gained a sense of accomplishment through the programme and this feeling of achievement was motivating them and driving them forward to set and achieve new goals.

Signposting to other services

Some signposting took place during the programme. Some learners had found themselves in difficult personal circumstances, including one case of homelessness and one of domestic violence. In these cases, the ESOL tutors and wider team had stepped in to assist. The team are aware that, had they not been on hand to help, they may not have had anybody to turn to. The trust that had been built up between learners, tutors and staff allowed learners to reach out for help. Although signposting to other services did not take up a substantial amount of time for the team, it is an important area of the work that needs to be factored into future ESOL Plus programme design.

Creche and holiday activities

i. Creche

The creche was offered to children aged one to five years old. Initially the team had expected to need two creche workers, however, three creche workers were appointed as learners had younger children than anticipated who required a higher staff ratio. Creche workers were supported by three volunteers who were working towards childcare qualifications. The volunteers were essential in supporting the creche. The volunteers also benefitted, as the experience contributed to them gaining early years qualifications. Two of the volunteers had their assessments in the creche whilst undertaking their studies.

From the outset, the team set out to foster a positive culture in the creche, one where the needs and development of the children were considered as important as those of the parents. The creche workers were encouraged not to see themselves as delivering a service in a bubble, but to see the creche as a part of the programme overall. This included getting to know the parents and understanding the whole ethos of the programme.

Providing the creche service presented a number of challenges, which were overcome through the dedicated efforts of the team. Many of the children were young and this was the first time they had been away from their mothers. It took some months before some of the children settled. Initially, parents got into the habit of coming down during breaks to check on their children and this unsettled them further. A blanket ban was imposed on

visits. The creche workers were initially somewhat overwhelmed by the neediness of the children and requested parents' help in settling them, which disturbed their learning. Once this was stopped the children began to settle. Some learners considered dropping out of the programme because their children weren't happy, however the team invested time in reassuring them that their children were going to be OK. They particularly sought to impress upon learners the benefits of early years education in terms of their children's overall development and future outcomes. During the programme, among the concerns raised by learners about the creche were that there weren't enough toys and that they weren't getting a snack. The team sat down with the parents to understand their perspectives and to explain the rationale behind their approaches. Ongoing communication with the parents about the creche was essential to keep them on board.

All learners consulted were positive about the creche. It had given them the freedom to pursue their English language learning and they were immensely grateful for this. A lot of experiences were shared about the stress of leaving their children, with some facing challenges in the first weeks and months as their children were slow to settle. One woman explained how for the first two months she found it difficult to concentrate in the classes, as she was always thinking about her son. She would hear a child crying in the garden below and worry that it was her child. Some of the learners explained how at the beginning their children didn't want to stay in the creche, but now they don't want to leave, they ask to stay longer.

"Sometimes my son [doesn't] want to go with me. He wants more time. He likes [the creche] too much!"

One issue that concerned some learners was that nap times were disturbed by the creche. Although an area for children to sleep in is provided, they felt that their children didn't sleep because it is too noisy, and they wanted to play with the other children. They raised the possibility of there being a separate room for sleeping and questioned the rule whereby children must be removed from pushchairs when they arrive even if they are sleeping, as this tends to wake them up. This is something the team could reflect on for future programmes and discuss with parents. In the future, the team would spend more time on getting to know the mothers and children together and on settling the children in.

ii. Holiday activities for children

The school aged children were invited to join activities during school holidays. Activities were offered for a week during Easter, a week during Christmas and during Halloween. These activities were for all local residents and provided opportunities for social interaction, English practice and general family support as an enhancement to the ESOL lessons. The learners consulted were positive about these activities.

Resources, budget and logistics

Poplar HARCA had excellent facilities in place to deliver this programme. This includes state of the art training rooms, IT facilities, outdoor spaces, a training kitchen, and a community café. These assets supported the organisation to deliver a high-quality service. All of the learners spoke positively about the facilities.

“Yeah, the facilities are so good here. Everything you need you have...Everything's nice.” – Learner

A strong support team was in place to help with delivery. In addition to the staff directly involved in delivery, were additional staff members that included administrative staff, a volunteer coordinator and children's workers who led the holiday activities. The additional creche worker who needed to be employed was funded from Poplar HARCA's core funds. Funding required for trips was reduced through corporate sponsorship, such as getting free tickets for the DLR.

The team remarked that before starting the programme they had underestimated the time commitment involved and not anticipated how demanding it would be in terms of taking on everything from exam administration, to invigilating and ensuring that all quality processes were in place for Ofsted. A significant lead in time and funding to cover set up should be integrated into design for new service providers.

Interaction with the GLA

The programme team spoke positively about their relationship with the GLA and had received the support they needed. They were happy with the grant application process and appreciated the interview stage that followed on from the written application. An earlier funding decision would have been preferable, so that everything could have been put in place earlier.

SCALING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This programme could be scaled and replicated in other parts of London. Key lessons from this evaluation in relation to scaling and replication are outlined below.

i. Take a long-term approach

The pilot has achieved the goal of testing the practicalities of such a programme and of drawing out useful lessons learnt. Future programmes would benefit from being at least three years in length, preferably five years. This would allow learners to achieve higher levels of English and to progress into further and higher education and vocational training, and to access employment. It would enable children to reap the benefits of early years education and prepare them for school. It would allow for a deeper evaluation of impact on both learners and their children and would build a stronger evidence base for future interventions. The provision would become embedded in the community and would have a significant transformative impact on integration and wellbeing. The resources involved in setting up and delivering this successful pilot were significant, therefore a year of delivery is short considering the level of commitment.

ii. Be aware of the “true” or “hidden” costs of delivering a high-quality ESOL Plus programme

Beyond the immediate costs of paying the ESOL tutors and creche workers, and covering other delivery activities, there are significant support costs. These include programme management, volunteer coordination, administrative support, and monitoring. These need to be built into budgets. Time and resources need to be allocated to programme set-up,

familiarisation with examination board requirements, putting in place quality processes, and staff recruitment.

iii. Create a positive, committed, learner-centred culture

This programme was successful because a positive learner-centred culture was established by the team. The ESOL tutors took time to know and understand the learners. A non-judgemental and supportive atmosphere was fostered in the classroom, so learners grew in confidence and made great strides in their development. The team displayed high levels of commitment, passion and drive. Future programmes should take a similar learner-centred approach, with a focus on quality.

iv. Take into account the extra time needed for lesson planning

Sufficient additional hours should be written into the contracts of ESOL tutors delivering ESOL Plus programmes, as both language and social integration goals need to be achieved and learners have high levels of need.

v. Foster strong communication between teams

With different facets of the programme taking place at once, effective communication between teams is essential. There needs to be clear channels of information passed between, for example, creche workers, the wider team and ESOL tutors. This would be all the more important if the provision was scaled up to accommodate more learners, and if it took place across multiple sites.

vi. Factor in the additional support required by learners

Low levels of education in home countries mean that some learners are likely to struggle. Additional support in the classroom can be provided by trained ESOL volunteers, and through additional one-to-one support sessions timetabled into the programme. Careful consideration needs to be given to where to place learners who have previously passed qualifications but have not sustained their English, so as not to burden tutors. Some learners will inevitably need support with personal issues, including signposting to other services.

vii. Resource the creche appropriately

New provisions should budget appropriately for creche workers, taking into account that learners may have younger children, requiring a higher staff ratio. Creches should be ready for high levels of need amongst children who are leaving their parents for the first time. Adequate time needs to be factored in for settling children at the start of the programme. Volunteer support in the creche can be invaluable.

viii. Harness the power of partnerships and shared resources

Where a service provider does not have in place the resources to deliver all aspects of the programme themselves, creative partnerships could be established. For example, a community centre could partner with a children's centre.

ix. Deploy and support volunteers across the service

Volunteers supported the programme. Volunteers should not be seen as an "optional extra" but as an intrinsic part of the provision. Volunteer coordination and support should be costed into the budget.

x. *Build evaluation into programme design*

Future programmes should build external evaluation into design from the outset. This would allow for outcomes to be measured more systematically. For example, the external evaluator would design and administer surveys (helping to ensure consistency in responses) and conduct interviews at strategic points. The monitoring data collected through this programme was very good as it provided a detailed profile of each learner and of their learning journey.

xi. *Use this programme as a model for future provisions and utilise its resources*

Poplar HARCA's ESOL Plus childcare programme should be seen as a flagship programme for the sector, from which important lessons can be learned for future services. Investing in putting together a "resource bank" of ESOL Plus resources based on this and other similar interventions seems like a positive way of supporting future ESOL Plus programmes in the capital.

COMPARISON TO STRAIGHT ESOL APPROACH

The learners reported that the impact of the programme on their language skills and social integration had been greater than in other English courses they'd attended – both in their home countries and ESOL provisions in the UK. This was firstly down to the culture and quality of the intervention. The tutors and wider staff team had established a learner-centred environment heavily focused on meeting individual needs. Learners received individual attention and tailored teaching materials and methods. The Plus activities were outwardly focused – taking them out of the classroom and into the community. They put them in situations where they had to interact with others and engage in things that they had previously found challenging, such as using public transport and shopping. As their confidence grew, so they became more confident doing these things independently. All of the learners with children under the age of five who attended the programme are highly unlikely to have joined had it not been for the free creche provision, therefore we can conclude that a straight ESOL approach would not have been suited to them.

Research into straight ESOL programmes have shown that they also positively impact the wider lives of learners. For example, they have been shown to enhance knowledge and understanding of the world, increase self-esteem and self-confidence, and positively impact education and work, making friends, leisure and relationships, communication, travel and technology². However, no study has been carried out comparing an ESOL Plus programme such as this with a straight ESOL approach. The closest we have is a study of community based ESOL provisions carried out by MHCLG in 2018³. In this study, a control group of people not attending any ESOL classes was compared against those attending the ESOL provisions. Like this programme, the ESOL provisions studied had some focus on achieving social integration and independence goals, in that the curriculum was built around themes

² See e.g. British Council (2014) *The impact of English on learners' wider lives*
https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub_E085%20Impact%20of%20English%20on%20learners%27_A4_web_FINAL.pdf

³ See MHCLG (2018) *Measuring the impact of Community-Based English Language Provision*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/690084/Measuring_the_impact_of_community-based_English_language_provision.pdf

(such as health and shopping) and there were opportunities for learners to mix in the community. However, there were fewer activities built in than the Poplar HARCA programme. The study examined impact over a period of 11-weeks – a much shorter period to that examined for this evaluation.

Similar to the findings of this evaluation, the study found that those attending the ESOL provisions interacted more with people from different backgrounds than those who didn't attend any ESOL courses. Likewise, they were also more confident in speaking to healthcare professionals and in accessing services. However, in contrast to the findings of this evaluation, no significant difference in the levels of confidence in using public transport or in talking to people at their child's schools was recorded. This evaluation found that 26 per cent of learners scored themselves as more confident in contacting their child's school and 30 per cent had improved in confidence in using public transport. This evaluation also picked up an increased sense of belonging amongst learners as a result of the programme, despite them expressing mixed and complex views and emotions about this issue. However, in the case of the MHCLG study, there was no conclusive evidence that this was the case.

Without the data available it is difficult to draw final conclusions on the different impacts of the two approaches. However, based on what learners tell us about their previous experiences of straight ESOL provisions in comparison to this programme and, to a lesser degree, on the findings of the MHCLG study, we can conclude that the extra efforts invested in the Plus activities by Poplar HARCA had an impact on learners' social integration and independence that wouldn't have been there had they attended a straight ESOL programme or one with fewer Plus activities. More research in this area to compare the two approaches would allow for more conclusive evidence to be collected.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation found that Poplar HARCA had achieved, and in some cases, exceeded its targets. The programme both improved the English language skills of learners and enhanced their social integration and personal development. In summary:

- The programme was effective and achieved and exceeded its outcomes in English language and social integration
- There was a high level of satisfaction amongst learners
- The programme is scalable, and lessons learnt from it can be applied to future interventions
- A longer-term approach of three or five years would allow for a more transformative impact
- The "true" costs of delivering a high-quality programme of this kind need to be taken into account, covering e.g. volunteer coordination, monitoring and community outreach
- As far as it is possible to judge, the Plus approach appears to have a greater impact on social integration and personal development than a straight ESOL approach, however, more research needs to be done in this area to draw firm conclusions