ESOL LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Case Studies

March 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

This publication has been produced by Learning and Work Institute and commissioned by the Department for Education.

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. We strive for a fair society in which learning and work helps people realise their ambitions and potential throughout life.

Our evidence, such as *Mapping English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Provision in Greater London*[1], suggests that there is a greater need for local co-ordination of ESOL learning opportunities to create 'joined up' provision, with a variety of language learning opportunities that meet the often differing requirements of learners, to support progression to further learning and employment, and help to create more integrated communities

The ESOL Local Partnerships project explored ways in which local co-ordination of ESOL can support effective delivery of a range of English language programmes and help remove barriers to language learning.

The project involved 37 depth interviews with key stakeholders in 11 local areas across the country. Interviewees included representatives from the local FE college, Adult & Community Learning Service, JobCentre Plus and other local ESOL providers and stakeholders.

Findings from the interviews, together with a literature review of existing models and practice in the delivery of ESOL partnerships and networks, have been used to inform the development of effective practice guidance which aims to help ESOL providers, and other stakeholders who have an interest in ESOL to develop effective models and practices in partnership working.

This publication presents the findings from six case study local areas to illustrate different types of ESOL networks and partnerships, in different contexts and including both established partnerships and those that are less well developed.

Each case study provides a detailed overview of the network or partnership including aims and objectives; how and why the partnership developed; the benefits for learners, providers and wider stakeholders; challenges experienced and how these are overcome; features of the partnership that are key to its success and options or plans to further develop partnership working.

Questions are included at the end of each case study, which are intended as reflective prompts to help managers and practitioners apply and adapt learning from the case studies in their own context.

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1   Stevenson, A, P. Kings and L. Sterland (2017) Mapping ESOL Provision in Greater London. L&W. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_esol_mapping.pdf

CASE STUDY 1:
BRISTOL ESOL NETWORK

An overview of the partnership approach

How and why the partnership developed

The Bristol ESOL Network was formed in 2014 as an informal network between ESOL providers in the city. It was set up in response to the dissolution of a previous ESOL providers' network that was run by Bristol City Council, which came to an end when funding ceased. Two members of the earlier group decided to set up a new group to keep ESOL providers connected.

Aims and objectives

The overarching aims of the group are to keep providers connected and informed of ESOL provision across the city, and to improve access to information about ESOL provision in order to better meet learner need. In addition, from a strategic perspective, it is felt that a provider network would strengthen the position of ESOL providers and ensure ESOL provision is kept on the political agenda and with access to future funding opportunities during the upcoming move of the city to a combined authority in 2019. On a more practical level, another aim of the network is to map and organise provision across the city, so that anyone wanting to find out about ESOL provision in their locality could easily access information on what is available.

Who is involved in the partnership

The core group of members includes JobCentre Plus, Bristol City Council, City of Bristol College, employability organisations such as Ways2Work, and third sector organisations including Big Issue, Ashley Community Housing, Bristol Refugee Rights, Borderlands, WEA, and representatives involved in the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme. Any interested organisation can attend meetings if they want to find out more about ESOL provision in the area. The group invites new partners to attend a group meeting if they become aware of any organisation they think would be interested in becoming involved.

Role of different partners; time and capacity management

The group is led by the British Life and Language Manager at Bristol Refugee Rights, who also does the administration for the group, including sending out invites, organising venues, circulating minutes and networking with new potential partners in between meetings. Each member offers a venue for a meeting, and meetings circulate round each other's venues. The group meets quarterly, but in the intervening time between meetings partners meet up and work together in pairs or smaller groups on any initiatives that they are pursuing.

Geography of provision

The group covers the geographical area of the City of Bristol, but they are looking to extend their coverage to include Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire, as these areas will form a combined authority with the City of Bristol from September 2019.

Funding

The group received some funding from the Controlling Migration Fund. This has been used for several initiatives, including setting up a website called Learning English in Bristol[2], which provides information on ESOL provision in the city, and is producing resources for volunteer tutors. However there is no funding of members' time to attend meetings or work on projects in the intervening periods.

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2   www.leb.community

Sharing of information, practice and expertise

The group is currently in the process of developing an ESOL strategy for Bristol, and is bidding for funding to set up an ESOL advice service, which will act as a hub of information and assessment of ESOL needs that can signpost people to the most appropriate provision for them. They are currently investigating the model which has been developed in other areas of the UK such as Camden and Hackney[3], to explore whether this model would also be suitable for Bristol.

Partners share information on challenges and issues they face, such as long waiting lists and spikes in demand. For example, when the area experiences increased arrivals of a certain cultural or language group, they can deal with the resulting demand in partnership. For example, one provider is assigned to ESOL provision in schools while another will do more work with adults in a particular geographical area that receives a group of refugees.

The sharing of information between providers allows the group to obtain a clearer understanding of how well provision is meeting need. As a group, they are able to identify common issues they face, such as the duplication of learners across multiple providers. The group is also a useful information source for any new organisation that is seeking to put on some ESOL provision, as they can easily find out what ESOL provision already exists and where the gaps are, to prevent new providers from duplicating existing provision and ensure that new provision will fill gaps and meet need.

"We do work in partnership in a way that we design curriculums and we share expertise around things like where we've got needs. If there's a

particular student group that Bristol Refugee Rights has identified, for example, sometimes we will work with them because we've got the capacity and one of the other providers hasn't" (Partner, provider)

Outcomes and Impact

For learners, partnership working by providers means that gaps in provision are identified and plugged so that provision can better meet their needs. Further, it ensures providers are aware of what ESOL provision is available, so that they can signpost learners to the most suitable provision for them.

"It really improves the signposting around the city, so we're far more aware of what each other is doing so we're not keeping hold of people simply because we think, 'Oh, well, we should be working with you,' when there are other people that can do it better." (Partner, provider)

Learners can also find the best provision for them by looking on the Learning English in Bristol website that the group set up, which contains information on ESOL provision in the city. The website allows a user to search for a class by provider, class or by using a map of the city to search by location. The group also acts as a conduit for information about ESOL provision to be cascaded to providers, who will pass that information on to learners at any opportunity, such as at jobs fairs and jobs clubs.
For providers, partnership working provides further opportunities for collaboration on other, mutually beneficial projects, such as running courses in partnership. The mapping of provision, which the group have collectively carried out, prevents providers from duplicating provision or 'reinventing the wheel' and ensures new provision meets learner need.

3   https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/content/hackney-english-advice-service

"For example, I know that the Community Learning team have got a lot of ESOL classes in South Gloucestershire, so myself as an organiser will therefore look for an alternative area to put on those types of classes." (Partner, provider)

Acting as a forum for formal partnership working to take place, providers who participate in the network can use their involvement as evidence of partnership working, which is often required in order to secure funding. More generally, the group provides a facility for providers to work together to solve problems, rather than having to tackle them alone, which is a more efficient and effective use of resource.

For wider stakeholders, the group is a useful resource for any organisation wanting to access all ESOL providers in the city and gain information on ESOL provision:

"When we were approached by the local authorities and they said, 'what we need is a committee or a group of ESOL providers,' and we said, 'Well, we've got one.' So, we came ready made to them… Big Issue were wanting to reach out…they were able to access all the ESOL providers in the city" (Partner, provider)

Challenges experienced in partnership working

The people involved in the partnership all have many other demands on their time, and the partnership has no ring-fenced funding or resourcing. This means that some partners may not attend every meeting or be as active in the partnership as they would like to be. In response to this challenge, some partners have changed the representative who attended meetings in order to send someone who was in the most relevant role and had the time to be involved. This meant that it took some time at the beginning of the partnership to form

an established group. There is a view among stakeholders that this is an inevitable stage of the organic process of 'bedding in' at the beginning of such a partnership.

Another challenge faced by a partnership of providers is that, inevitably, some providers are in competition with each other for learners. The group has sought to overcome this issue by emphasising and reinforcing the message that the purpose of the partnership is to work together to improve provision for learners, rather than to serve the needs of particular providers.

Critical success factors

One of the key critical success factors of the partnership is considered to be the opportunity to meet face to face at partnership meetings, not least due to the opportunity to socialise informally after the official business of the meeting is discussed, which allows partners to identify shared experiences and common aims. Further, because of the competitive relationship between some providers, care must be taken to establish trust between partners, by emphasising that the purpose of the group is to improve ESOL provision for learners rather than increase learner numbers for providers. Once providers feel they can trust other providers to use any information they share responsibly, they are more likely to be open about their practice and experiences and to listen to information from other providers. This facilitates positive outcomes for learners due to true partnership working.

"A learner might think they want to study at college but a provider in the network knows that actually a community course exists that would be better for them because have listened to what another provider has said about their provision." (Partner, provider)

Plans to further develop partnership working

Future plans to further develop partnership working include engaging with more organisations from outside the area. This could include representatives from neighbouring local authority areas, and from other cities. For example, they have found recent consultation with ESOL partners in the London borough of Hackney[4] useful in learning about their ESOL hub model.

Reflective questions

1. If you are a member of an ESOL network, have you considered applying as a partnership for small pots of funding for specific joint projects or resources?
2. If you are thinking of establishing an ESOL network, is there an individual partner who could act as the administrator for the partnership?

3   https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/content/hackney-english-advice-service

CASE STUDY 2:
LUTON ADULT LEARNING

An overview of the partnership approach

How and why the partnership developed

Luton Adult Learning (LAL) is the Luton Local Authority department that covers community learning, including ESOL provision. They run two strands of ESOL work: one is community learning that includes ESOL, which is contracted out to other community providers, and is aimed at learners who may find formal provision harder to access; while the other is direct delivery of formal ESOL provision, which is accessed by many learners. LAL engages new subcontracted providers 2-3 times a year through a tendering process.

Geography of provision

LAL operates across Luton.

Funding

LAL receives funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Roles of different partners

Each subcontracted provider is assigned a programme leader at LAL who is their single point of contact. The LAL programme leader visits monthly to carry out observations and is easily contactable between visits. The ESOL team have worked in consultation with various other partners. For example, they worked with employers in Luton to explore the key ESOL skills gaps of people applying for jobs.

Sharing of information, practice and expertise

Steering group meetings involving LAL and other providers are held to share good practice and provide an opportunity for providers to discuss their experiences, challenges and needs. The steering group meetings also provide training at the beginning of each year, which stresses that

there can be no sharing of learners or learners repeating the same class with multiple providers, as this will not be funded.

LAL provides a clear prospectus so that subcontractors are aware of what is expected from their provision at the bidding stage.

Outcomes and Impact

For learners, LAL subcontracting to community providers means community providers can reach learners who would not access ESOL provision at all if this type of community provision was not available, due to barriers they face to more formal learning. The aim is that these learners will, in time, develop the confidence and skills to progress in their learning to more formal provision.

"The reason we target subcontracting provision is we've got learners who are in certain areas of Luton who won't walk out of that area to go to learning somewhere else. So, we get our subcontractors to teach within that area because they're based there, the learners know them, they don't feel like they're going to a school or a college and they're quite happy to go to their community centre and have those ESOL classes. The hope is that eventually, they'll have enough confidence to come away from there and then come in and do ESOL directly with a mainstream provider, or maths or English or whatever they do. But their starting point is to do something in the community, in the community that they live in." (Partner, other)

An additional outcome for learners who are referred by JobCentre Plus is that they are given a better chance of gaining employment by improving their ESOL skills.

For community providers, partnership working with LAL ensures that their provision, and recording of learning outcomes, is of the standard set by LAL. The partnership also brings community providers funding from LAL. For

LAL itself, partnership working with community providers brings them greater access to more learners who they would otherwise not be able to reach due to the barriers they face to the more formal provision of LAL. Furthermore, partnership working with referral agencies such as JobCentre Plus has meant that LAL has become a JobCentre Plus preferred provider, which boosts LAL's learner numbers further.

For wider stakeholders such as JobCentre Plus, they have built a trusting relationship with LAL, so that when they refer learners to them they can be confident that they are sending them to quality provision. Furthermore, JobCentre Plus can trust that learners who engage with LAL's provision will improve their chances of success in finding employment opportunities.

All provision records inductions, starts, attendance and progression in a standardised format set out by LAL, and this data is recorded on a centralised database. This information is vital in evidencing outcomes of practice that is used in funding applications, and in providing feedback to referral agencies such as JobCentre Plus of attendance rates.

Challenges experienced in partnership working

Challenges experienced with partnership working include inconsistency of a single point of contact at referral partners. Without a consistent and strong relationship between the LAL and a single point of contact, the referral agency is less likely to make referrals, which means that learners miss out on being referred to the most suitable provision for them. To overcome this challenge, the LA holds regular face to face meetings with the single point of contact

at the referral partner, as this is considered to be critical in establishing and maintaining strong relationships with partners and keeping referral rates high. A further challenge when working with less experienced community providers can be ensuring that procedures are followed and paperwork completed to meet LAL's requirements. However, with support from LAL, over time the providers learn what they are required to do and become proficient in satisfying the requirements of LAL.

Critical success factors

To help subcontracted providers understand what is expected of them, LAL provides clear information on this from the beginning of the partnership. For example, they explain in writing what data the provider needs to collect and provide as evidence of learning. An additional critical success factor is having a clear, lead role, here played by LAL, with robust record keeping systems to monitor and record performance and results.

Reflective questions

1. Do you think a document giving clear information about the partnership, and what becoming involved in the partnership entails for new members, would be useful in your network? Who could be involved in pulling this information together?
2. Does your partnership have a data collection or record keeping system in place? What do you think the benefits of developing/ improving an existing one would be? Is this feasible?

CASE STUDY 3:
SUFFOLK ESOL STEERING GROUP

An overview of the partnership approach

How and why the partnership developed

The Suffolk ESOL steering group was formed by two representatives of Suffolk County Council who, at the time, worked in community learning and equalities and inclusion respectively. Together, they identified a need to bring ESOL providers together to share practice. Engagement with new partners since then has occurred in an informal and ad hoc way, with new organisations invited through word of mouth by existing members.

Aims and objectives

The aims of the Suffolk ESOL steering group are to support local ESOL providers and provide them with an opportunity to come together and share practice. It is also to collectively map provision, consider how best to match learner need to the most suitable provision, and ensure that all learners with ESOL needs have access to provision.

Funding

The local authority and the university contribute the time and resource of their representatives to administering the group, but the group receives no other funding.

Who is involved in the partnership

The chair of the group for the last 7 years has been a representative from a local university who was involved in founding the group. Partners include providers of all sizes and types, including further education colleges and larger, local authority-funded providers, and smaller organisations such as faith groups. The group is open to any organisation that wants to attend, and many organisations which cannot attend receive minutes from the meetings.

"People are quite keen to join in. We have a number of organisations that don't attend regularly but always have the minutes, so some of the community groups that may not deliver ESOL but have an interest, so the Chinese community or the Bangladeshi Support Centre and people like that." (Partner, other)

Geography of provision

The group covers the county of Suffolk.

Sharing of information, practice and expertise

Meetings are held every term (3 times a year), during which each provider talks about the nature of their provision and any issues they are experiencing.

"We meet up every term and then have an agenda, talk about what has been happening in Suffolk, how many students, how many classes, and then we sort of go around the table and talk about any issues that might be coming up that would affect us in terms of funding or other things."" (Partner, provider)

Although data on learners is not shared between providers, they do discuss their experiences of practice and learning, such as curriculum development:

"It's just about the opportunity to facilitate those conversations….like we had a meeting last week and even there somebody was saying something about some new information, about a particular curriculum that they like and have been using, and somebody else said, "I hadn't seen that, I'm going to go away and look at it now." (Partner, other)

Outcomes and Impact

Through explaining and sharing details of their own curriculum to other providers, the partnership enables providers to collectively work on streamlining learner progression. For example, learners on non-accredited provision can be signposted to the next level of accredited provision after completing their course, and learners engaging in part time provision can be signposted to other part time provision that they might want to access simultaneously.

"We don't actually work towards exams but we help other organisations who are working towards exams by following similar syllabuses but it means that we then feed students into other places who want to take exams" (Partner, provider)

The group does not record outcomes or impacts of their partnership working on learners. However, the group is of the view that partnership working has significant positive impacts on learners, as coordinated provision means they can be signposted to a greater amount and range of suitable provision, so that learners can progress in their ESOL skills more quickly.

"We have various students who would go to possibly as many as three different providers during one week who have therefore been able to move back from being an Entry 1 student, right the way through to an entry 3 student. Some of whom have gone on to pass the Citizenship exams or some whom have gone on to work in various contexts but because of the amount of English that they have been able to access." (Partner, provider)

By working in partnership, providers can more easily meet the needs of learners. For example, some of the more vulnerable learners who face particular barriers to learning can be signposted to groups that suit their needs, such as women-only ESOL classes, or more informal provision for refugees to build up their confidence before progressing to more formal provision. Furthermore, better signposting can improve learner progression routes to further ESOL learning opportunities:

"When you're working in partnership with groups... you can offer other classes for progression, so I was talking about like the driving course, and then we can also offer courses like community interpreting. So you've got learners who will then progress through their English language skills to then move on to community interpreting and then find a job within the community helping others being able to understand the driving test" (Partner, provider)

Providers have also experienced a range of benefits from their involvement with the group, including exposure to more funding opportunities. For example, providers in the group were allocated funding as a result of a bid that all members were asked to put in by the local authority. The network acted as a conduit through which the local authority could reach out to providers to offer them the opportunity:

"We wouldn't have received any of that funding unless we were involved in the partnership. [The representative from the local authority] put in one bid for the whole of Suffolk and then all of the organisations within Suffolk providing English language were asked to put in a bid to her and she put the money out to all of us. It was fundamental to be part of that partnership to get that money." (Partner, provider)

The local authority representative who submitted the overall bid for this funding explained that without the intelligence from the provider network, she would not have been able to submit a bid of such high quality.

"Being able to be successful in getting some Controlling Migration Fund money that five of the partners bid for and are now delivering different ESOL projects with, if we hadn't had that group in place it would have been much more difficult…if I hadn't got those relationships already to know the type of gaps that the providers had already got, that this sort of funding could help address, then I wouldn't have written the type of application that I did" (Partner, other)

Another key outcome for providers is the value of sharing information and learning with other providers.

"They… have value in coming together as a group to discuss what different levels they were delivering, where their gaps were, were there any issues with getting hold of tutors, which curriculum did they find was a good one to use, which exam boards did they like. Keeping all of those conversations going through the years has had its own value." (Partner, other)

Challenges experienced in partnership working

One of the challenges of sharing information on learners and referring learners from one provider to another, is that some providers' priority is full utilisation of their Adult Education Budget allocations, which requires them to focus on retaining and progressing their learners. This means that there are occasions where information is discussed at a higher level rather than in more detail.

"The training providers around the table don't want to give too much information away because they want to keep their students, keep their learners because of a certain amount of competition for learners because everyone is trying to get the same pot of money basically." (Partner, provider)

Additionally, the pressure on members' time and lack of funding means that they cannot attend meetings as often and engage to the extent that they would like to.

Critical success factors

Critical success factors include:
- The group is chaired and coordinated by two representatives from higher education and the local authority respectively. They therefore have a strategic interest in, and the time and capacity to co-ordinate the group, but are independent from day-to-day ESOL provision, which allow them to provide non-biased support for providers. Moreover, the chair and coordinator of the group have been in these positions for the life of the group and this continuity is a key contributing factor to its success.
- Meeting face to face to share experiences and practice is at the heart of the process of partnership working
- Building an atmosphere of trust (rather than competition) between providers to facilitate genuine information sharing and partnership working, with a focus on achieving the best provision to meet learner needs.

- Keeping the aims and operational scope of the group simple, so that it is not overly-demanding to become involved in the group, encourages participation.

Plans to further develop partnership working

Ideas for further partnership working centre around engagement with new partners. For example, greater engagement from the FE college would involve them referring learners who are not at a suitable level for their accredited courses to other providers for more suitable, entry-level provision. Furthermore, there are potential partners who are not currently involved in the steering group who

could be, as better links with ESOL providers would help them support their client base. For example, a housing service for a refugee resettlement scheme explains that all the refugee families they house have ESOL needs.

Reflective questions

1. If you participate in an ESOL network, or are considering developing one, how often do you (plan to) meet face to face? Do you think this frequency works well?
2. Do you feel that there is an atmosphere of trust in your local ESOL network? How do you think you and other members could further build trusting partnerships?

NEWHAM ESOL EXCHANGE

An overview of the partnership approach

How and why the partnership developed

The Newham ESOL exchange was set up in 2007 after a need was identified among community development workers for a centralised information point for local ESOL provision. Over time, the exchange has taken initiatives to grow and attract engagement from new partners, so membership is now made up of not only ESOL providers but also organisations that engage with potential ESOL providers. For example, it held a meeting with a special focus on engaging new partners, or former partners who had disengaged. This technique was highly successful in attracting many new partners and resulted in a new network of stakeholders that provide training and employability being set up as a result of this event.

Aims and objectives

The original aim of the exchange was that it would bring all providers that engage with ESOL learners together on one platform and thereby improve the coordination and effectiveness of provision. Prior to the exchange being set up, information on ESOL provision was available only from individual providers, meaning that neither providers nor learners were necessarily aware of the most suitable provision available for particular learners.

"There was no one place, so you sent them to a college or…You knew some agencies would probably be providing it but you had to go to each place and the information wasn't in one place and there was no coordination at all." (Partner other)

Over time, members have recognised that in order to most effectively support learners to access and progress through provision, learners' wider barriers - including in the areas of health, immigration, benefits and housing - need to be addressed. To meet this, the exchange's membership had broadened to include non-ESOL organisations and bodies. The exchange allows all members to share their experiences, becoming a repository of information for its members which increases understanding about learners' wider need *"to improve the coordination and effectiveness of ESOL provision in the borough. That was the original aim …in recent years because we began to realise that just looking at ESOL, for ESOL learners, was a bit limiting and that ESOL learners often… and ESOL tutors and anyone who's dealing with ESOL learners, often needs to be able to provide support or signpost in a whole range of other areas…. So we've done quite a lot of work around that, looking at things like, you know, health and education of children and helping people to understand the system and to help them sort legal status, getting advice and help with money and benefits and housing…"* (Partner other)

Who is involved in the partnership

The partnership involves a variety of large and small, voluntary and community, private ESOL providers and the local authority. There has been a broadening of membership since it was noted that the exchange was becoming dominated by ESOL providers in the education sector, so the group has since engaged with a more diverse range of partners in terms of sector and size, including local libraries and faith groups. It is also open to organisations that engage with ESOL learners and potential ESOL learners such as community centres and children's centres.

Geography of provision

The directory of ESOL provision produced by the exchange focuses solely on mapping provision within the borough of Newham. However, the events that they run are open to anyone in neighbouring boroughs.

Time and capacity management

When the exchange was first set up, a steering group met bi-monthly to plan the meetings and events of the exchange. However, as a result of declining attendance at meetings, members decided that instead of meetings, events with a specific focus would be more useful to attendees. Core members who form the steering group continue to hold regular meetings and oversee the direction of the exchange. As the exchange has evolved a number of sub groups have also formed to plan different streams of work, for example a professional development group.

Funding

The exchange receives funding from Newham Borough Council's adult learning service for one day a week of the coordinator's time to facilitate the partnership. However, the involvement of all other members is on a voluntary basis. The exchange also submits bids for funding in partnership and is currently bidding for funding from the Integrated Communities English Language Co-ordination Fund.

Outcomes and Impact

For learners, key outcomes include better access to suitable provision, standardised quality of provision, and more coordinated learning progression routes. In addition, the diverse learning needs of harder to reach learner groups, particularly those who suit a more informal learning style that is not focused on accreditation, are met through the broad membership of the exchange which includes smaller, more informal providers.

"…we're focussing on this constant, constant achievement for learners, and those that struggle are those that need more time and are starting to fall behind. So, the ESOL exchange is very important at making sure that there are still providers around who can provide that informal learning and that fun learning, or that comfortable learning environment for them" (Partner other)

For providers, the exchange provides a forum for them to learn about and from each other's practices and experiences. The broad membership enables ESOL providers to learn about other needs of their learners and makes providers better-equipped to signpost learners to both the most suitable ESOL provision and support in other areas of their lives that they might need. Furthermore, partnership working between providers avoids duplication, and therefore improves efficiency, of provision. In addition, in cases where exchange partners collaborate on funding bids they gain more leverage through partnership working, and funding that is won can be shared rather than competed for. Finally, the ESOL exchange runs a CPD programme for all ESOL tutors and volunteers in Newham, which helps to standardise the quality of provision across the borough. Much of this programme is delivered through peer learning.

"The idea was that we improve the quality across Newham for all ESOL tutors, rather than keeping it internal just for Newham College Tutors and the NALS tutors…we work with the ESOL exchange to make sure that the training CPD that they offer, which is open to every tutor in Newham, mirrors what we teach our own tutors so that everybody is working to the same standard, whether they teach in a local church or a local faith organisation, or a community centre or whether they be teaching in one of our big places" (Partner other)

For wider stakeholders, the exchange provides a central point of contact to all ESOL providers in the area, which can be useful for stakeholders involved in setting up new provision.

Challenges experienced in partnership working

Challenges faced by the exchange include ad hoc participation of some partner organisations, with patchy attendance at meetings and a high turnover of different individual representatives from organisations.

It is thought that this has been driven mainly by a lack of capacity and time that organisations can spare to become more involved but is further hindered by staff turnover in the partner organisation and a lack of effective handover to a new representative from the organisation in the partnership. The exchange has tried to avoid these challenges by encouraging partners to send a consistent representative to meetings, to strengthen the involvement and commitment of particular individuals.

"You get someone who's engaged and they may still be part of the same organisation but somehow when they move seats or roles it's not passed to the next appropriate person. That's been really frustrating." (Partner other)

Critical success factors

Critical success factors are considered to include:

- A broad membership of the exchange, which provides greater opportunity to meet the needs of all learners, as not all those with ESOL needs want or need the same type of learning. Broad membership also allows the exchange to meet ESOL learners' needs in a more holistic way, by putting learners in contact with a range of non-ESOL services such as health and family support.

- Factors which engender trust and respect between providers, to facilitate true partnership working. These factors include putting learners and their needs at the forefront of provision planning, while also emphasising that the partnership will protect providers and not threaten their learner numbers.

"It's a partnership that works very well because we go out of our way to make sure we're not stealing learners or jeopardising one area's class for another, so we work very, very closely with them." (Partner other)

- The coordinator has been in the role for the eleven years that the exchange has been operating, and this continuity of leadership is highly valued. Moreover, the exchange is coordinated by a representative from a local umbrella organisation that does not deliver ESOL. This means that while they have a strategic interest in ESOL, they can act as an independent and an honest broker. This has helped to gain the support and trust of the members.
- Members were shown the benefits of partnership working early on so that they were incentivised to give up their time. For example, complimentary provision could be matched up with each other by recognising simultaneously the needs and offer of different organisations.

Plans to further develop partnership working

Future plans for further partnership working include developing a 'one stop shop' central assessment point, aligned with the Hackney model[5], where all potential ESOL learners go

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5   https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/content/hackney-english-advice-service

to be assessed and signposted to provision that best meets their needs, with live tracking of their entry point and progression. They also plan to deliver a single assessment model. In turn, this would involve developing more robust monitoring and evaluation capacity so that impact can be evidenced, and lessons learned.

"What we are trying to do is get a bit more co-ordination...where all students go into the same place, it is all co-ordinated and then they are told which centre to go to....We do it the opposite way around, they come to whichever centre they want to, they get assessed individually and independently by the team in each centre, usually placed within that centre." (Partner provider)

A further aim for the future is to deliver a single assessment model. In turn, this would involve developing more robust monitoring and evaluation capacity so that impact can be evidenced and lessons learned.

In addition, the exchange would like to develop better links with particular partners. These would include employers, to facilitate employer engagement for ESOL learners who are seeking work experience or greater understanding of

the labour market in the UK, and the local FE College. The local college works in a separate partnership with the local authority's adult learning service to develop the strategic direction for ESOL across the borough and ensure that provision is suitable for learners. Although this aim is similar to that of the ESOL exchange, the two partnerships do not currently pool resources and work together, and yet involvement of the FE College is crucial for future development of the work of the exchange.

Reflective questions

1. If you participate in partnership working, which organisations are currently involved in your local ESOL network? If you are wanting to develop a network, which organisations are you planning to engage with? Do you think the organisations involved represent the holistic needs of ESOL learners?
2. Do you have, or have you considered appointing a network co-ordinator? If so, do you think they are/will be able to fulfil the role of being an honest broker?

LEEDS MIGRANT ENGLISH SUPPORT HUB

ESOL Partnerships in Leeds

Leeds contains a number of ESOL partnerships, both well-established and in the process of developing.

For example, Leeds Adult Learning run the Social Integration Curriculum partnership, involving meetings between their adult learning programme manager and providers of non-accredited ESOL provision in the city. Leeds Adult Learning created a non-accredited social integration ESOL curriculum, and now works in partnership with providers of this curriculum to monitor how the curriculum is working. The partnership offers the opportunity to provide feedback on the curriculum and share experiences and best practice with other tutors.

An ESOL strategy partnership is currently being set up by Leeds City Council, in order to develop a more coordinated, strategic approach to ESOL provision in the city. Funded by the Controlling Migration Fund, the partnership aims to map provision, better understand and manage supply and demand, identify gaps in provision, and to reduce duplication. It is hoped that the partnership will involve a wide range of partners including ESOL providers and other key stakeholders.

The ESOL strategy partnership will be partly informed by work undertaken by a third partnership, the Migrant English Support Hub (MESH). This partnership is the main focus of this case study.

An overview of the Migrant English Support Hub partnership approach

Aims and objectives
The MESH group in Leeds was founded with the aim of setting up a website with information on all ESOL provision in the city.

How and why the partnership developed
In March 2010, the ESOL Working Group of Leeds City Council called for research to investigate the match, or mismatch, between ESOL need and ESOL provision in Leeds, as a step towards enabling the Council to meet its coordinating responsibility. A pilot project in 2010-11, the Harehills ESOL Needs Neighbourhood Audit (HENNA), was carried out by researchers from the University of Leeds and the Refugee Education Training Advice Service (RETAS). The audit identified a need for ESOL provision to be less fragmented and better coordinated, via a central online information hub, to inform learners and providers of what provision was available and where. This became the impetus for creating the Learning English in Leeds (LEL) website; learning providers and other stakeholders came together as MESH in order to do so.

In the early stages of the website's formation, the group approached all ESOL providers in Leeds and offered them the opportunity to be listed

on the LEL website. Some of these providers wanted to be more involved and so joined the management group. Further, over the life of the group they have held two networking events to which all ESOL practitioners and stakeholders in the city were invited. These events generated new partnerships, as some attendees expressed an interest in becoming involved. Members of the management group have also identified new partners to approach and invite.

My colleague suggested that we invite … a big organisation in Leeds, Learning Partnerships. [A representative] had already been to this launch event for MESH and was very interested. So, we just approached him and he was very happy to be included, and then we didn't have the private language school on board initially, so, it was just a case of contacting them and saying, you know, 'This is who we are, we'd appreciate your input and experience if you'd be happy to join us.' (Partner provider)

Who is involved in the partnership
MESH is a registered charity with a board of trustees. Currently it has four trustees, chaired by a senior lecturer in language education at the University of Leeds. MESH currently employs one part-time development worker, who is also an ESOL practitioner.

The LEL website has a steering group of twelve people, chaired by the Chair of MESH's board of trustees. Membership of the steering group comprises a range of organisations, including RETAS, the Leeds City Council translating and interpreting service, the Migrant Access Project, and a range of ESOL providers.

Time and capacity management
Leeds City Council provide the group with a venue for meetings, and with administrative support, including typing up and distributing

minutes and sending out invitations. The group meet every 4-6 weeks, and in between meetings the development worker works on updating the website for one day per week.

Geography of provision
Currently, the website covers the area of Leeds only, but from April 2019 it will expand to cover the rest of Yorkshire and Humberside. This will be as part of an 18-month project in partnership with Migration Yorkshire, funded by the Vulnerable People's Resettlement Scheme.

Outcomes and Impact
The key outcome of the partnership is the development of the Learning English in Leeds website. This provides a 'one stop shop' for adult migrants and advisers to find up to date information about all ESOL classes in Leeds, enabling them to find accessible and appropriate provision that best meets their needs.

Through the use of Google Analytics, the group can measure use of the LEL website (for example, there are around 3000-4000 visits a month), although they are not yet able to measure how many of the website's users go on to access ESOL provision. However, anecdotally, providers have reported learners approaching them after finding out about their provision on the LEL website, suggesting that the website is effective in promoting learners' access to ESOL provision.

For learners, partnership working between providers gives them better access to a broader spectrum of support than ESOL provision alone. For example, a further education college worked with another partner to put on a trip to the Yorkshire Dales for ESOL students, many of whom had never travelled outside of the city and seen the countryside in the UK. The website itself is a key resource for learners to find out

about the most suitable ESOL provision for them, for example, a class that is based near their home and so does not require them to travel long distances.

For providers, partnership working enables them to learn about the opportunities offered by other providers that their own learners can benefit from. For example, one provider identified organisations through the group who could provide enrichment opportunities for their ESOL students. Also, potential providers are able to gain a sense of the provision that exists locally, so that they are not duplicating services.

For wider stakeholders, their involvement in the group gives them a better awareness and understanding of the nature of ESOL provision available to their client group, so that if they refer clients to providers they can be confident that they will receive good quality provision that meets their needs.

Challenges experienced in partnership working

The amount of resource and funding available for the partnership has often not been as much as partners would have liked, which has sometimes made it difficult for partners to be able to devote as much time to partnership initiatives as they would ideally have been able to. Further, information sharing faces the limitations imposed by data protection regulations and the tendency of providers who are in competition with each other to be wary of sharing any commercially sensitive information. The group has tried to overcome this obstacle by

emphasising the benefits of partnership working for the partners involved. It notes that over time, partners have learnt to develop a more trusting relationship, as their understanding grows of how partnership working can be mutually beneficial to all those involved.

Critical success factors

One critical success factor has been the availability of a number of very small grants. Securing this funding enabled the recruitment and retention of a development worker (two at the very beginning) to undertake the initial mapping activity. A further small grant enabled the development of the current LEL website. Throughout the work, full use of has been made of limited resources and it has benefited from the goodwill of a wide range of partners.

A further critical success factor in partnership working is seen to be making partners aware of the mutual benefits that partnership working can bring. It is noted that it can take time to overcome an initial suspicion between providers who are in competition with each other, and that highlighting key benefits to partners can help motivate them to commit their time to the partnership.

Linked to this, it is viewed as important that the group maintains a focus on the key aim of the partnership of improving learners' access to ESOL, and on why they need to achieve this aim. Because all members have a will to achieve this objective, the partnership's momentum is maintained.

"I think, an openness to really work together for the benefit of people learning English, rather than people being territorial about, you know, 'This is my patch and I don't want you taking my students" (Partner provider)

Another critical success factor is considered to be input from representatives from the City Council, who can provide the group with a strategic overview of relevant issues such as migration in the city.

Plans to further develop partnership working

Local Authorities in Yorkshire and Humber, collectively through Migration Yorkshire, are commissioning MESH to expand the LEL site to become a 'Regional ESOL Provision Resource' for the whole region. This regional resource will support a new website and new development workers to identify and engage with providers, map provision and run networking events, commencing March 2019. Longer term aims of the regional resource are to develop self-access locally-relevant learning materials for students on waiting lists and self-access teaching materials and guidance for inexperienced ESOL teachers, especially those working in the voluntary sector and in informal provision.

Reflective questions

1. Would your area benefit from the mapping of local ESOL provision? Are there any existing maps or lists upon which this could be built?

2. If you are a member of an existing ESOL partnership, have you considered establishing it as a charity? Would this bring any benefits to learners or stakeholders in your local area?

CASE STUDY 6:
NEW MIGRANTS MULTI-AGENCY GROUP

An overview of the partnership approach

How and why the partnership developed

The New Migrants Multi-Agency Group developed several years ago from an existing asylum and refugee partnership. The meetings cover a wide range of issues that relate to the needs of migrants in the area, including ESOL provision.

During a group meeting several years ago, a lack of awareness of what ESOL provision was available in the area was identified as an issue. This led to an offshoot meeting of ESOL providers, where they discussed gaps in provision, funding, bidding together and ways forward. One of the actions taken by this sub-group was to undertake an ESOL provision mapping exercise, which led to the development of a leaflet containing information on ESOL classes. This leaflet has since been updated annually and is shared with all partners of the New Migrants Multi-Agency Group to distribute to the potential learners they work with.

Aims and objectives

The aim of the partnership is to help settle new migrants arriving in the area in to their new community, by ensuring that all partners are aware of the range of support and services available to migrants in the area. It also aims to identify and address any issues or challenges that partners are experiencing, and support them in any way possible, such as by informing them of new sources of funding.

Who is involved in the partnership

The group is composed of a range of partners who reflect the various needs of new migrant groups (such as refugees, asylum seekers or EU migrants) including representatives from local ESOL providers and relevant statutory, non-statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

Partners become involved in the group for a variety of reasons. For example, one partner - a representative of a local college – started attending in order to find out what other provision is available to their learners, and to tell other partners about the provision the college can offer. This helped to facilitate the signposting of learners to and from their provision.

Partner Roles and Capacity

The group is an informal, un-constituted network of partners which currently meets quarterly. and there is an opportunity for partners to mingle informally after the meeting.

Sharing of information, practice and expertise

The key information shared in meetings are updates by partners on relevant activities and issues in order to raise awareness and facilitate discussion. Partners will discuss the type of provision or service each can offer to refugees or new arrivals and how to solve issues that have been raised. For example, an update on school places available to migrant children, or an update from the volunteer service on opportunities they have for refugees. However, the group do not share data on individual learners.

Outcomes and Impact

The impact of partnership working on learners is that they are given a good understanding of how to access ESOL provision and navigate the support system very soon after they arrive. This understanding is underpinned by the awareness of the range of provision available that all partners gain by attending meetings and hearing about what other partners provide, information that they can then pass on to potential learners.

The impact of the partnership on providers is that they can offer a better service to their clients because they are able to signpost them to other provision in the area, which enables them to support a wider range of people with diverse needs. Additionally, one member described how they had referenced the group when asked to provide evidence of partnership working. The partnerships formed at meetings prompt some partners to collaborate on other initiatives together, or to submit funding bids in partnership. For example, a number of partners worked together to explore funding opportunities in order to increase the availability of local ESOL provision.

For wider stakeholders, the meetings keep them informed of provision in the area, which they too can pass on to potential learners that they work with.

Challenges experienced in partnership working

The key challenge faced by the partnership is that they lack the capacity to do more, because they are not a formal group with an allocated resource. This means that there is limited capacity for partnership working outside of the meetings, and because the partnership does not focus exclusively on ESOL provision, it does not have sufficient capacity to comprehensively address all issues with ESOL provision.

Critical success factors

A critical success factor of the partnership is that the area has enjoyed strong partnership working historically, so many of the agencies were already well connected. These pre-existing partnerships act as building blocks on which partnership working can be developed further

Reflective questions

1. If you participate in partnership working, what information is shared amongst members? Are there further details of local opportunities, services or provision which would be beneficial for learners or members, or a wider range of stakeholders who could be invited to disseminate additional information?
2. If you are thinking of establishing an ESOL network, are there any existing partnerships in your local area on which you could build?