

# **The Newham ESOL Exchange - an evaluation**

A research report into the work of the Newham ESOL Exchange

Daniel Crowe  
Research Consultant on behalf of  
UCL's Institute for Global Prosperity

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UCL Institute for Global Prosperity



## Introduction

*“If people want to learn the language, don’t disenfranchise them”*

**Michael Potts, former ESOL Co-ordinator, Newham Adult Learning Service**

The scale of the refugee crisis unfolding before the world’s eyes in the summer of 2015 has put migration at the centre of not just national but international public policy. With the emergence of English as the global *lingua franca* and London as a leading world city, over the past few decades the lure of the UK’s shores has been strong. Net long-term international migration in the year ending March 2015 stood at 330,00. This is the fifth consecutive quarterly rise, and according to the Office for National Statistics at 28 per cent is a statistically significant increase and the “highest net migration on record.”<sup>1</sup>

This ensures that migration remains towards the top of the political agenda, often embroiled in a range of other policy issues including welfare and public services provision, access and reform, and economic and cultural integration. Of course the impact of immigration is most often felt locally, in the communities that become host and home to migrants, with the local authority the spatial level at which these and other issues play out. These range from how to facilitate entry into the labour market and integration into the local community, and in this context access to opportunities to learn English in the form of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision assumes a particularly important role.

According to the 2011 census, over four million people or eight per cent of the population in England do not have English as their main language<sup>2</sup>. Of these, 864,000 self-reported saying that they cannot speak English well or cannot speak English, over a third of whom or 320,000 live in London. The London Borough of Newham is home to eight per cent of these, equating to over 25,000 people and nine per cent of the borough’s population. This makes Newham the borough with the greatest need for ESOL provision in the UK. This is unsurprising given that only 59 per cent of people have English as their main language, the lowest proportion in the UK and with 104 languages spoken locally it is one of the most diverse parts of the country.

At the forefront of these issues in Newham is the work of the Newham ESOL Exchange (henceforth the Exchange). Helping meet the local need for ESOL provision has been the core business of the Exchange, with a primary focus on co-ordinating and improving the provision of ESOL classes in the borough, the Exchange now functions as a collaborative network of public, private and social sector organisations. Despite limited resources it has had a significant impact on the local ESOL landscape, and won recognition from further afield as an example of good practice. This evaluation report commissioned by the Institute for Global Prosperity at University College London (UCL) is the first external assessment of its work since its inception in 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778\\_414818.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_414818.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_302179.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_302179.pdf)

## What is an evaluation?

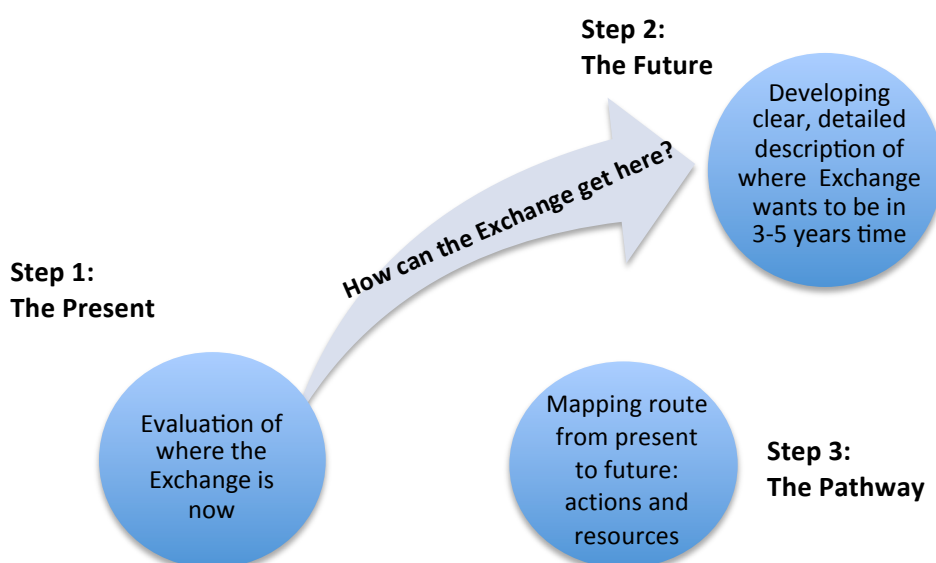
Evaluation is both a finished end information product and the process of research and analysis that created it. An evaluation seeks to ask and answer questions relating to value, impact, performance and achievement, identifying and interrogating the contributory or causal factors that are drivers or are obstacles to success and sustainability.

Whilst seeking to produce a judgement that is relevant to the present, an evaluation can be Janus-like in looking both to the past and to the future. According to Aston Mansfield, *“A good evaluation provides evidence of the impact of your work and information that can help you to improve your effectiveness,”*<sup>3</sup> whilst as UCL’s Public Engagement Unit puts it, *“evaluation is more than assessing and measuring; it helps set the stage for a culture of learning, change and improvement.”*<sup>4</sup>

This report presents the findings of research into the work of the Exchange over the past seven years. The research brief stated that, *“the goal of the study is to identify current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as well as future possibilities for the Exchange... and will give them a steer as they develop new strategic goals beyond their current remit”*.

It is hoped that the report goes some way to providing an overview of how the Exchange has evolved, as well as a snapshot of how it is perceived in the summer of 2015 by those stakeholders familiar with its work. Together with a set of recommendations and considered suggestions it aims to provide an evidence base to help inform and influence future strategic planning and development work, such as the basic three step pathway from Present to Future.

**Figure 1: A three-step pathway from Present to Future**



<sup>3</sup> Aston Mansfield Community Involvement Unit (2011) 'Evaluating on a Shoestring'

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/public-engagement/evaluation/toolkits/methods>

## Methodology

The research was governed by an interpretivist paradigm and used a qualitative methodology that sought to explore and better understand people's experience of the work of the Exchange, their perception of its values function and the impact it has had locally. This approach was based on a series of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders who had been involved with the work of the Exchange in some way either personally or through an organisation they were connected with.

Areas explored in the interviews:

- The interviewees' relationship and involvement with and experience of the Exchange
- Perceived values of the Exchange
- The function of the Exchange – and the benefits of involvement
- What the Exchange does well
- What the Exchange does not so well
- What the Exchange should do more of, less of, or better
- SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
- Areas for growth/diversification
- In 5 years time: what the Exchange might look like, what its vision might be and how to measure success

The wider context and policy environment in which the Exchange functions was established through an initial literature review conducted by UCL's Institute for Global Prosperity. This highlighted the dynamism of the ESOL landscape. Further information on the history of the Exchange and details of its internal workings was achieved through primary sources such as documents produced by the Exchange since its creation, detailing its policies, information on events and activities it has organised, and a range of resources produced for partners and learners.

Fifteen stakeholder interviewees were completed between June and July 2015 (out of an initial goal of between twelve and fifteen). The findings were presented to the Exchange for feedback in mid-September, with a revision process that sought to incorporate the feedback into this Final Report.

## Policy context

*“The real importance of ESOL is ensuring people who live in this community are in a position to gain employment”*

**Stephen Timms MP for East Ham**

The ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ benefits that are attributable to the ability to speak English have been well documented, and consideration of the broader role and benefits of accessible ESOL provision for both individuals, communities and UK society and the economy in general is outwith the scope of this report. It is however important to understand the policy context that led to the creation and growth of the Exchange, as what the Exchange does and how well it does it should not be viewed in isolation.

National policy and funding for ESOL in England is subject to fragmentation, opacity and confusion. Unlike in Scotland and Wales there is no national strategy for ESOL, which according to a recent DEMOS report has led to a *“poor understanding of the scale of need and of the quality of provision, as well as a dearth of information for potential learners.”*<sup>5</sup>

Whilst the policy and funding background has been in a state of considerable flux, the number of stakeholders involved and the diversity of ESOL provision and providers has created a complicated and confusing landscape that is changing all the time in terms of eligibility, accreditation, funding and governance. This makes it hard for ESOL providers, statutory and social sector partners and learners to adapt and respond.

Furthermore, at a time of rising levels of demand for ESOL, illustrated by large waiting lists at Further Education (FE) institutions around the country, Government funding has fallen by 40 per cent over five years,<sup>6</sup> creating a significant imbalance in the levels of supply and demand. The literature review identified many barriers in terms of funding, in particular a lack of clarity around fees and eligibility requirements, a bureaucracy around provision that has developed over time and an accompanying pressure from funders around the achievement of targets and success rates (eg in relation to employment).

Employment is the lens through which ESOL provision is currently viewed, with public funding mostly channelled towards certain types of learners with specific needs, in particular intermediate and higher level courses. A review of ESOL policy quoted in the Demos report concludes that *“At policy level ESOL students are viewed in terms of how they can become more economically productive. Predictably, with ESOL students positioned as migrant workers needing English to contribute to the economy, ESOL provision increasingly orients towards short, modular, employability-focussed courses.”*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Paget, A. and Stevenson, N. (2014) *On Speaking Terms: making ESOL policy work better for migrants and wider society*, London: DEMOS

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Simpson, J. and Whiteside, A. (2012) *Politics, policy and practice: ESOL in the UK and the USA*, King's College London Working Papers in Urban Languages & Literacies 87

Demos argue this position is reinforced by Job Centre Plus referrals of clients with poor English to ESOL providers for assessment and training, together with the mechanics and incentives of the Work Programme's Payment by Results Regime. All this has served to exclude many potential learners, such as those at a low entry level, and those unable to access public funds (eg spouses wishing to join their families in the UK for the first year of their stay).

Other groups affected by changes to the funding regime include low paid workers who are not entitled to free courses and may be unable to afford or attend paid-for courses (eg through inflexible or multiple jobs), and parents and carers with children due to a lack of childcare provision. Further exclusions due to a tightening of eligibility occurred in July 2015 with the Skills Funding Agency withdrawing ESOL funding for Jobseekers.

**Table 1: Evolution of ESOL policy and funding**

Year	Legislation/policy	ESOL and funding
2001	National <i>Skills for Life Strategy</i> , covering literacy, numeracy and language. Informed by the social cohesion agenda following the 2001 <i>Cantle Report</i> into the northern riots and 2000 Department for Education and Employment <i>Breaking the Language Barriers</i> report into ESOL as a key skill needed to enter the labour market.	ESOL is part of the strategy for skills and employment provision, benchmarked against national standards and managed through the ESOL Core Curriculum (Externally accredited ESOL Skills for Life qualifications in 2004). Funding via the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). From 2001 to 2008 spending on ESOL grew threefold to around £300m a year by 2008 <sup>8</sup> and the number of learners rose from around 150,000 to an estimated 500,000 by 2006, <sup>9</sup> as eligibility criteria begins to loosen.
2002	'Life in the UK' test introduced for citizenship applications	Test carried out in English, focussing attention on need to access learning opportunities.
2004	Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act introduces legal requirement for 'sufficient knowledge' of English in order to gain UK citizenship.	Applicants under the required level (Entry Level 3) able to complete and progress via ESOL courses
2007	Language (and UK life) knowledge extended to those seeking settlement rights or Indefinite Leave to Remain	ESOL for work qualifications are launched. European Integration Fund support available for ESOL initiatives promoting integration (until 2013) - but new eligibility requirements for accessing free provision. Funding refocused on priority learners (fees only waived for unemployed and those on income-related benefits), with more having to pay for classes.
2009	<i>A New Approach to ESOL</i> by BIS demotes ESOL's role within Skills for Life. For non-EEA migrants adoption of a points-based system with points awarded for English language ability.	Devolution of ESOL responsibilities to local authorities. Free provision restricted to those on means-tested benefits with dependents or not in employment. Austerity and local authority cuts impact upon ability to meet local demand for ESOL.
2010	Skills Strategy and Skills Investment Strategy launched, with changes in funding for ESOL. Skills Funding Agency (SFA) replaces LSC and assumes funding responsibilities for ESOL.	Learning and Skills Improvement Services (LSIS) help ESOL providers improve quality of their programmes and manage the Excellence Gateway portal. National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) voluntarily supports the strategic leads of the New Approach. Abolition of ability for low-level learners to take ESOL classes instead of Life in UK test.
2011		New funding policies for ESOL provision introduced, with free classes restricted to those on JSA or Employment Support Allowance. Implications for low-income workers and carers. FE colleges able to offer free courses to learners on non-employment related benefits but out of own budgets. ESOL funding decreased from around £210 million in 2008 to £130 million by 2013. <sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> DIUS (2009) *A New Approach to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)* London: DIUS

<sup>9</sup> Paget, A. and Stevenson, N. (2014) *On Speaking Terms: making ESOL policy work better for migrants and wider society*, London: DEMOS

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

## Diversity of provision and learning needs

*“There’s some elitism in ESOL... if you’re not one of the big players then your input isn’t seen as valuable”*

### **Interviewee**

Diversity in the ESOL world is multi-faceted. It can be seen in the range, type and nature of ESOL providers, the courses and sessions they run and the accreditation or not of the learning outputs, as well as the diversity of needs of ESOL learners and potential learners. ESOL providers range from large sub-regional FE colleges (accounting for around 70 per cent of funded students) providing full and part-time-time study to the smallest voluntary and community group running one or two hour classes at various points through the week. In between there is a range of provision that includes work-based and local adult and community learning as well as numerous private and social sector providers.

Provision can include non-accredited, internally and externally-accredited ESOL courses, catering to a range of learning needs and purposes, from beginners to Citizenship learning, with the aim of progressing from ESOL into mainstream learning. ESOL classes are taught at different levels, with Core Curriculum qualifications starting at entry 1, 2 and 3, through to Level 1 and 2 (with the latter equivalent to a GCSE grade A\* to C and Level C1 [Proficient User] of the Common European Framework of Reference). Opportunities to speak English for low level learners who may not be literate or numerate in their native languages through provision that the Exchange in its Directory refers to as ‘informal ESOL’ (such as conversation classes) are also a route into formally recognised ESOL learning.

One particular issue identified in the literature and arising out of the interviews is the tensions between classes taught by trained professionals and those taken by volunteers or students. ESOL itself may have initially had its origins and relied heavily on volunteer-led provision before becoming more professionalised, but some involved in ESOL are cautious of its embrace of such volunteer-led classes. Whilst recognising the value of volunteers in opening up access to learning opportunities, there is an emphasis by some on the importance of qualified teachers able to draw on the professional tools and techniques that expertise brings - and which volunteer-led classes may be unable to access.

Indeed, in worse case scenarios this can result in poor teaching that is detrimental to learners - although as several interviewees acknowledged, professional qualifications in teaching ESOL was not necessarily a guarantee of good quality teaching. The important role of the Exchange in bringing the diversity of provision together in Newham was mentioned by many of the interviewees. As one interviewee pointed out: *“bringing people together is the main function [of the Exchange]... people hadn’t been speaking to each other.”*



## London and Newham

*“Newham is an extraordinarily diverse community, but the majority of people belong to something, such as a faith group or a community organisation. This is a source of cohesion that characterises this community. And those faith groups and community organisations, where people feel comfortable, are a good channel for delivering the teaching of English.”*

**Stephen Timms MP**

For a number of years, London has suffered from a chronic shortage of ESOL provision,<sup>11</sup> but has also been the focus for a number of targeted ESOL initiatives, such as the London City Strategy pilot, a £11.4 million two-year project involving 12 providers across east, south east and west London in 2008-2011, aimed at parents with ESOL needs who are in receipt of benefits or tax credits and *“designed to demonstrate how work-focussed provision can support to sustainable employment”*<sup>12</sup> and the Greater London Authority’s exploration of targeting parents through school-based ESOL learning opportunities.

Newham has been a focus of several recent innovative approaches to community-based English language learning which have won funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) including the Tinder Foundation English My Way, the E3 Partnership and English through Social, Economic and Community Action and FaithAction Creative English<sup>13</sup>. A particularly successful programme has been the Speaking English with Confidence (SpEC) programme led by the London Local Education Authorities’ Forum for the Education of Adults that has involved around 750 volunteers in the development of informal English conversation clubs across 15 London boroughs.

Newham is a key area for the SpEC programme, organised locally by the City of London Corporation, and with 30 sites, 80 volunteers and 40 clubs it has the most provision out of four neighbouring boroughs. Sessions such as these, and the Newham Chatterbox clubs run by Newham Adult Learning Service (NALS) are seen as a valuable introduction to learning English for people who only have a basic command of English or do not speak it at all.

The need for informal learning opportunities such as these alongside formal ESOL provision is particularly pronounced in Newham given its unique demographics and the Exchange has played a particularly important role in facilitating their provision. This can be seen in how the Exchange helped the City of London’s SpEC co-ordinator to set up conversation clubs in some of the more remote and less accessible parts of the borough.

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<sup>11</sup> Cooke, M. (2006) Barrier or Entitlement? The Language and Citizenship Agenda in the UK, Language Assessment Quarterly 6 (1): 71-77

<sup>12</sup> Bellis, A., Sigala, M., Oakley, J. (2011) Evaluation of the London City Strategy ESOL Pilot: Final Report, Research Report 744. Sheffield: DWP

<sup>13</sup> Including Tinder Foundation’s English My Way, E3 Partnership and English through Social, Economic and Community Action

*“The Newham ESOL Exchange really helped me... I wouldn’t have been able to get to know Newham as well and wouldn’t have had the success I did in setting up conversation clubs without it.”*

**Martin Marguerie, SpEC Hub Co-ordinator**

**Table 2: Census 2011 Proficiency in English**

Area	Total	Main language is English (%)	Main language is not English Can speak English very well (%)	Main language is not English Can speak English well (%)	Main language is not English Cannot speak English well (%)	Main language is not English Cannot speak English (%)
England	51,005,610	92	3.3	3	1.4	0.3
London	7,809,942	77.9	9.8	8.2	3.5	0.6
Newham	292,396	58.6	15.9	16.7	7.4	1.3

Source: 2011 Census: QS204EW Main language (detailed), local authorities in England and Wales

The need for ESOL is growing - like Newham’s population. Since the census it has been estimated to have increased to 325,000 (attributed to a ‘hidden population’ comprised of unemployed, failed asylum seekers and others unable to access welfare payments), making it one of the largest boroughs in London. It is also identified as traditionally being the first place of residence for new entrants to the UK, with more than 22,000 adults from other countries receiving their National Insurance Numbers in the borough, the highest number in the country.<sup>14</sup> With over 165,000 foreign-born residents it has the second highest number in London (after Brent), as well as having the highest number of residents with only a non-UK passport. These make up a third of the population.<sup>15</sup>

With a high churn of residents, the borough is also identified as being “at the wrong end” of most socio-economic indicators relating to health, employment, and homelessness, with 30% of its Lower Layer Super Output Areas in the ten per most deprived in the country.<sup>16</sup> ESOL - or more accurately the tutors that teach and organisations that deliver provision are often at the forefront of responding to many of these issues. As one interviewee put it:

*“ESOL teachers are by definition social workers as well.... The Exchange is doing a frontline service in a diverse borough”*

**Martin Pinder, Hon. Secretary, Newham Partnership for Complementary Education**

Fortunately, the borough benefits from a unique and close collaborative relationship between the Council and Newham College, with NALS managing the College’s Community Education programme and NALS’ Head of Adult Learning also serving as a Director of the College of the Associate Faculty. Together they jointly run classes in five centres in Council and College buildings, and having identified a real need for

<sup>14</sup> Investing in the Big Society, Newham ESOL Exchange

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/london-census-profile>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/indicators/boroughs/newham/>

community education, in 30 smaller community and Children's Centres. This importance of locally accessible provision at the neighbourhood level was emphasised by several interviewees.

However, the huge demand for classes is unmet – something common to other local authorities, not just Newham. Interviewees reported that in Tower Hamlets there area around 700 people on a waiting list, whilst for Newham College the figure was posited at being between 500 to 700. In addition more are missing out, with greater numbers of people without access to public funds who are unable to take part in college provision. Furthermore, levels of unmet demand and need are set to increase with a significant decline in levels of informal provision due to the forthcoming withdrawal of funding for the unique SpEC programme. As argued by many interviewees, the role played by the Exchange has never been more critical.

## Strategy and situational analysis

This report will not dwell on why taking a strategic approach to organisational development can be of critical importance. However, it is clear that to be in a position to be able to capitalise on emergent opportunities or avoid potential threats the Exchange will need to embark on the *“process of defining its strategy or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy, including the capital and people.”*<sup>17</sup>

The strategic planning process will of course be the responsibility of the Exchange and its members, but in order to produce this study it is important to have a clear understanding of what is meant by strategy. For the purposes of this report, strategy is defined as *“the direction and scope of an organisation over the long term, which achieves advantage in a changing environment through its configuration of resources and competences with the aim of fulfilling stakeholder expectations.”*<sup>18</sup> Strategy can come in two broad forms, intended and emergent.

Intended strategy is the result of a planned approach whilst emergent strategy is an evolving, reactive response to events and opportunities as they occur and arise. In reality, given that the external environment within which an organisation operates is fluid and dynamic the strategy adopted by an organisation will often need to be a mixture of the two.

Evidence suggests that to date whilst this appears to have been the path taken by the Exchange the current situation warrants a more planned approach, and a good starting point for this may be through a situational analysis. For an organisation in the private sector, traditional management theory would suggest any situational analysis consider three environments that are at play: the remote (or macro) environment, the operating (or competitive) environment and the internal environment. This way of thinking about the spheres of influence on an independent

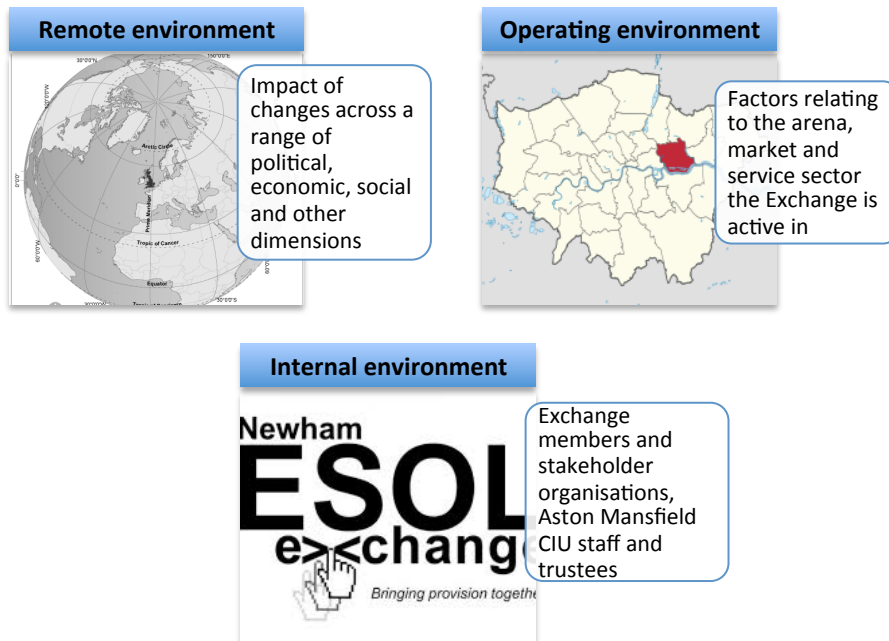
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<sup>17</sup> Bradford, R. W. and Duncan, J. P. (2000) *Simplified Strategic Planning*, Worcester, MA, USA: Chandler House

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, G., Scholes, K. and Whittington, R. (2008) *Exploring Corporate Strategy: Text & Cases*, Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Ltd

agency such as a commercial company to a certain extent is equally applicable to social sector organisations and even looser groups such as the Exchange.

**Figure 2: Situational analysis of the Exchange’s environments**



Analysis of the remote environment is particularly useful in identifying current and predicting future trends and issues, and assessing their potential impact on the organisation. A good approach for dissecting the remote environment is through a DEEPLIST analysis. This provides a more detailed and in depth analysis of a wider range of dimensions outside of the Political, Economic, Social and Technological aspects that feature in a PEST analysis, including Demographic, Ethical and Environmental, Legal, and Informational dimensions. A basic starting point for a DEEPLIST of the Exchange’s remote environment can be found in Appendix 1.

## What is the ESOL Exchange?

*“I haven’t come across an organisation like them... a good way of coming together and sharing best practice”*

**Joan Tardiel, Deputy Centre Co-ordinator, Harold Road Centre**

*“A brilliant example of how you don’t need a lot of money to make something of quality work”*

**Interviewee**

Convened by Aston Mansfield’s Community Involvement Unit (AM’s CIU) and reliant upon funding from Newham Council via NALS, the Exchange is not formally constituted or currently subject to governance arrangement as an organisation in its own right. Its origins lie in the recognition by NALS of the huge number of residents who spoke English as a second language in Newham with levels of demand for ESOL provision that the Council and its partner Newham College would be unable to meet, together with a mapping exercise of ESOL provision in Newham by AM that showed that a lot of local ESOL provision was not joined up.

With support and funding from NALS, the CIU took up the role of co-ordinating a group of statutory, private and social sector providers of ESOL. This became the Newham ESOL Exchange: a place where news, information and data on all things ESOL could be shared and exchanged. (In an early document its express function was arguably clearer when it was referred to as the Newham ESOL *Information* Exchange).

Upon its inception in 2008 the original concept behind the Exchange was predicated upon an initial consortium agreement signed by consortium members (nine at the start), in conjunction with a Steering Group nominated from consortium members which had strategic roles and obligations.<sup>19</sup> These provisions, however, no longer apply, with Exchange members now essentially defined as those individuals attending a bi-monthly meeting (either in a personal capacity or representing an organisation) or who have attended such a meeting in the space of a calendar year.

This has led to a fluctuation of membership numbers, with a May 2012 membership list detailing 41 people in the consortium (ie those who have attended), with 17, 19 and three from the voluntary sector, statutory and commercial sectors respectively, in addition to one national organisation and one consultant. This broke down into 26 organisations: 13 from the voluntary sector, 12 from the statutory sector and one commercial sector organisation.

The most recent figures based on attending the Exchange between May 2014 to April 2015 show 28 organisations as members of the consortium, with 20 from the voluntary sector and eight from the statutory sector. These numbers suggest a healthy membership in terms of organisational representation and well-attended meetings, but figures for more recent meetings in 2015 have been disappointing.

**Table 3: attendance at meetings in 2015**

<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Number of people (excluding AM)</b>	<b>Number of organisations (excluding AM)</b>
March 2015	10 (8)	7 (6)
May 2015	13 (9)	6 (5)
July 2015	9 (7)	4 (3)
September 2015	7 (5)	3 (2)

<sup>19</sup> Newham ESOL Exchange Terms of Reference Revised 12/3/08 and Consortium Agreement for Newham ESOL Exchange

The total numbers of people attending the May, July and September meetings in 2015 (but not included in the 'number of organisations' column) also include one representative from UCL for the purpose of this report, one tutor, and the volunteer for the web portal. It will remain to be seen whether low attendance of Exchange members is a new trend, and what action the Exchange can take to counter it and prevent it becoming embedded – although the recent lack of consistent, regular involvement by members may serve to make this more difficult.

It also highlights how the recent development of the Exchange has not been subject to long-term planning, with the Steering Group no longer operational to provide strategic and organisational oversight. This has had an impact on the evolution of the Group, as can be seen from contrasting its original purpose at inception with the range of functions it is engaged in today. Its stated aims in the 2008 Terms of Reference were clear and twofold:

- 1) *The Newham ESOL Exchange will work to make ESOL provision more effective in the Borough of Newham*
- 2) *The Newham ESOL Exchange will influence and negotiate locally, regionally and nationally, to improve communication and collaborative working between stakeholders involved in ESOL provision and participation*

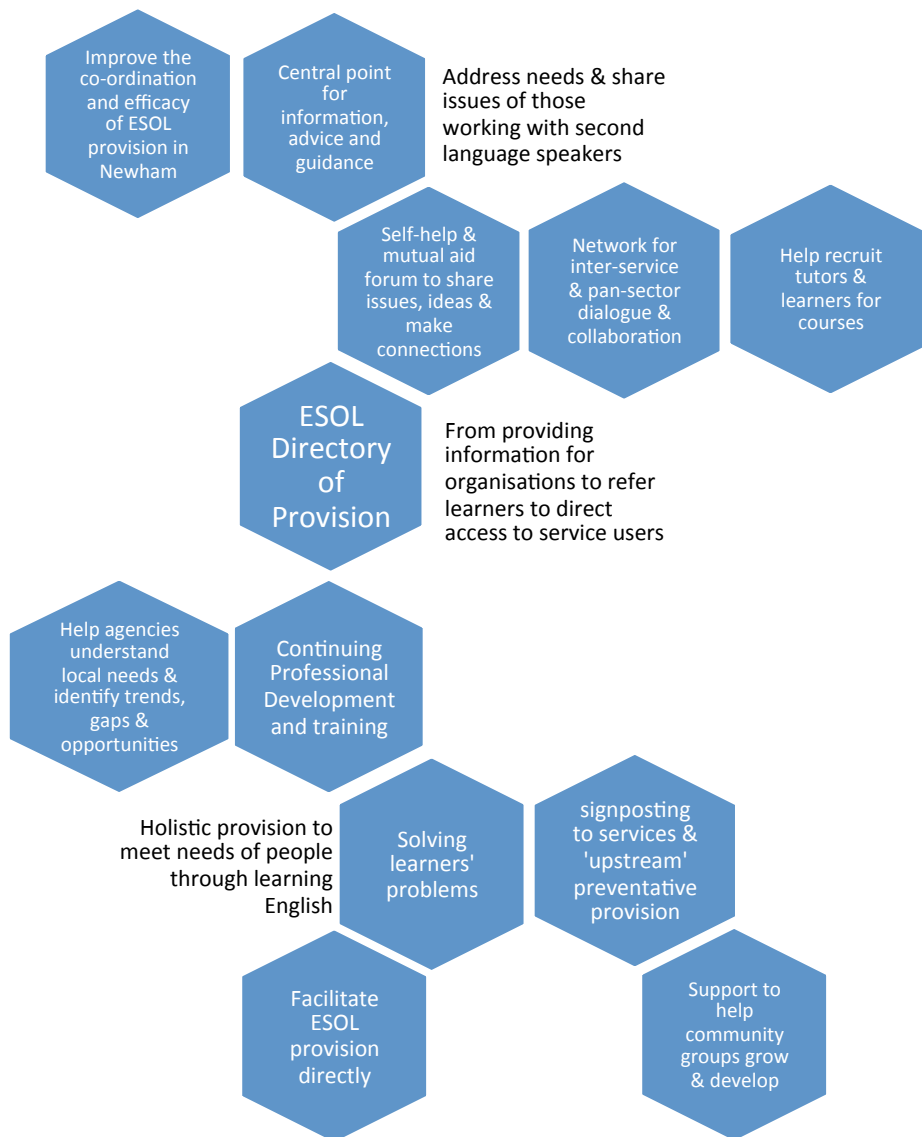
In contrast, and in practice, the function of the Exchange today appears to be highly subjective, meaning different things to its members and stakeholders. Whilst in broad terms its purpose still reflects a focus on making ESOL provision more effective through a networking process of information exchange, its multi-functionality makes it a fluid and ever-evolving group.

What the Exchange is and does – and how well it does it - very much depends upon the perspective of specific Exchange members, the nature of their involvement and depth of their or their organisation's relationship with the group, as well as the perceived benefits that participation in the Exchange and its meetings brings.

The interviews with stakeholders identified at least a dozen or so functions that the Exchange has fulfilled over the course of its existence - although their categorisation is of course open to interpretation, with many functions overlapping or interdependent. Others may be considered not to be a function of the Exchange *per se* but more a by-product or a somewhat ancillary activity.

Each of the twelve functions is accompanied by specific examples that were mentioned in the course of the interview process.

**Figure 3: A dozen functions of the Exchange**



**1. Improve the co-ordination and efficacy of ESOL provision in Newham**

The initial raison d’etre of the Exchange was to help cut through and clarify the situation about provision in Newham, due to the diversity and number of organisations involved. This was still reported as a key function, enabling members to get an overview of what was happening in the borough and a sense of trends, for example where classes have closed and organisations have withdrawn from a locality. This knowledge then enables key partners such as NALS to try to source funding to put something on in terms of ESOL provision in that area.

Functioning as a network can serve to bring an organisation to the attention of other Exchange members, helping build synergies, for example around the appropriate

placing of leavers. Tutors reported that because providers from the different sectors understand each other better there is not such a discrepancy now when doing this, with big providers such as NALS and the college able to signpost through the Exchange. In this respect the Exchange was described as a “scaffolding” to support the ability of smaller organisations to function as stepping stones to later provision.

Examples of how the Exchange has been helpful in securing the efficacy of provision include SpEC’s success in accessing venues and building links into the local community and Harold Road Centre’s hosting of a creative English class after introductions made through the Exchange. This networking function was described by interviewees as “*bringing organisations together under one banner*” and moving towards ESOL provision in Newham through a “*Team Newham*” approach.

## **2. Central point for information, advice and guidance**

Many interviewees pointed to what they thought was the Exchange’s invaluable role in providing information, learning, guidance, advice and being a “*way of finding out what’s happening and keeping people up to date where they won’t be able to do it themselves*”. When help was needed there was “*always someone to turn to*”, a supportive presence covering a range of topics from schemes of work and advice on lesson plans to checking availability and spaces in classes to help place clients. Key information channels were the Exchange meetings themselves as well as email communication and in particular email lists. These were found to be particularly useful and informative with links to things that members wanted to hear about.

## **3. Self-help and mutual aid forum to share issues, ideas and make connections**

*“It’s nice that a small organisation like the Exchange has a more human approach ... and that it’s not about targets, numbers and data”*

### **Interviewee**

The Exchange is perceived as a flexible space to explore and better understand the issues facing people involved in ESOL – a place where people can come together to “*bounce ideas around and help each other out*”. In functioning as a forum it enables its members to get to know Newham better as an area and to promote things that are going on in the borough, as well as generating solutions to problems identified by members themselves.

One interviewee pointed to the circular benefits of the Exchange, giving an example whereby one of the first students to leave an ESOL class run by an Exchange member went into volunteering, obtaining a placement at AM working on the website, outcomes that were mutually beneficial to all parties involved. Another involved a call-out to Exchange members to seek reviewers for language books, and as a result they were reviewed by a senior ESOL tutor through the Exchange network. Other examples of the practical benefits of such mutual aid included how the Job Centre Plus borough relationship manager was able to advise Exchange members on the



issues they were facing relating to the change in their client base and the people they were getting through their doors.

A clear example of the Exchange's self-help function to address member problems is the ongoing work by the Exchange to build a consortium to achieve accreditation for smaller local community groups and charities through the Gateway accreditation scheme. The achievement of a qualification in the form of a certificate, gained through an evidence building system of speaking, listening, reading and writing via participation in classes is something that many learners had requested - but which smaller providers on their own would be unable to obtain. Working through the Exchange as a central point for administration and registration could make such a system viable.

#### **4. Network for inter-service & pan-sector dialogue & collaboration**

Given the diversity of provision, the very act of bringing people together from different sectors was felt to be a key function and benefit of the Exchange, particularly in terms of overcoming perceived elitism in the ESOL world. Through the Exchange's work and ongoing support, regular meetings involving people from across the sectors and working together on joint projects it was thought that people involved in ESOL provision in Newham now understand each other's frameworks better, comparing favourably with other boroughs where barriers still exist.

#### **5. Help recruit tutors and learners for courses**

Many interviewees pointed to the successful role played by the Exchange in the recruitment of ESOL learners and tutors. NALS for example had recruited tutors through the Exchange and via its contacts with local people, asking for the submission of CVs. Connections forged through the network enabled members to meet and seek a response to particular recruitment needs, for example a request from a community organisation who wanted an ESOL teacher who also spoke French was able to be fulfilled because of the diversity of Exchange members and their links with local communities. Some providers such as Newham College were able to publicise aspects of their support package and 'get the word' out through the Exchange, such as the provision of crèche facilities for their courses.

Community Links' involvement with the Exchange also clearly illustrated the value of this function when embarking on an ESOL project funded by City Bridge and needing to recruit for the classes. Not only were they able to publicise these opportunities and recruit, interview and appoint all through the Exchange, but as a result of contacts made via their membership they were able to get the pay levels right for their new tutors and ensure that they were in line with elsewhere in the borough.

In addition, as part of the recruitment process Community Links used a micro-teaching session for entry Level 1 as a way of assessing the teaching ability of candidates, a technique they picked up through the Exchange. With the classes also published in the Directory, and further synergies created by being put in touch with

SpEC that resulted in two conversation clubs being run in Community Links hubs, all in all there is an example of five successful interlinked outcomes that were a direct result of the work of the Exchange.

## **6. The ESOL Directory of Provision**

The Directory is the flagship product of the Exchange, its production and distribution a core function. It is currently in the process of moving from a printed document to a searchable online tool. In its printed format it is sent out to local organisations and agencies such as the courts, police and GP surgeries, enabling front line public services, social sector providers and other agencies coming into contact with people with English language needs to help identify and refer to suitable ESOL providers and courses. Many interviewees pointed to the vital role of the Directory in collating and curating details of ESOL provision in the borough, pointing out that before the Exchange existed there was no such service or resource.

Originally the Directory functioned as a signposting service. An example of the value of this function is illustrated in its use by Job Centre Plus employees. All staff in Newham offices have access to the Directory, and use it to help direct those without recourse to public funds and where English is not a first language to sources of free support and ESOL provision. Although the Directory was originally created for this purpose of enabling agencies to signpost and refer learners to providers, it also caters for learners themselves to self-refer.

The first half of the printed Directory documents what is available in terms of ESOL courses and informal ESOL by area, outlining key information such as the level of learning, cost and eligibility requirements and documents needed to register, where, when and how to get there and provider contact details. A later section mainly for those signposting learners includes more detailed information about the provider organisations around enrolment, assessment and the curriculum. One thing the Directory does not do is recommend specific provision, ensuring it remains a neutral platform.

Its move online represents a significant change in its relationship with end users. Through an online new search functionality capable of real time updates (rather than through new editions of the printed Directory) the digital Directory becomes a tool enabling learners themselves (or people on their behalf) to search directly for appropriate, locally accessible ESOL provision. This represents significant new opportunities for the Exchange, its members and learners across. Through its work and change in functionality the Exchange will go some way to voluntarily meeting through social sector action and local authority support one of the key recommendations of the Demos report, namely that there should be a “*statutory requirement for local authorities to maintain an ESOL hub website*”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Paget, A. and Stevenson, N. (2014) *On Speaking Terms: making ESOL policy work better for migrants and wider society*, London: DEMOS

## **7. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training**

CPD and training are areas where members of the Exchange are keen for it to further develop its functionality and enhance its offer. A recent Exchange survey of CPD needs (May/June 2015) of qualified and trainee ESOL tutors, volunteers and ESOL class managers found that 90% of respondents (27 people) were 'definitely' (22 people) or 'probably' (five people) interested in the Exchange's CPD. It found plenty of scope for future topics, identifying 23 areas of interest.

## **8. Help agencies understand local needs & identify trends, gaps & opportunities**

A function that has developed as a result of bringing partners from the public, private and social sector together is its role as a networking and environmental scanning opportunity for who does what in the borough, gaining a collective sense of the needs of the area. By bringing and sharing a certain perspective, insight, expertise and professionalisms to the table, Exchange members are able to develop a common understanding of the borough and its communities.

This helps them not only identify current and emerging local needs and trends, and to be able to plan and respond appropriately, but it also gets people 'plugged into' the Council, other public sector partners, and the range of social sector, community and faith organisations active in Newham. In the words of one interviewee of this involves an "*understanding who the organisations and their members are, and who to work with.*"

## **9. Solving learner's problems**

*"if someone is worried about something they can't learn... the reality of teaching an ESOL person is if they've got issues it affects their attendance and learning"*

**Julie Day, English My Way Project Manager, British Council**

As a result of its other functions, on a more individual, personalised basis the Exchange is able to help those working directly with ESOL learners to support them with some of the issues that they might be facing. As many interviewees pointed out, ESOL students often struggle with a lot of things, such as housing, access to public services, and navigation through public and private sector bureaucracies, and teachers end up helping them out. One interviewee stated, "*with a class of 20 students, at every lesson one will stay behind and say 'I've had this letter [from a statutory service] can you help me fill this form in?'*" This is something that is seen as an intrinsic part of being an ESOL teacher.

From involvement in helping sort out specific issues and signposting services relating to an individual, to addressing more widespread problems, the Exchange has had a role to play in seeking solutions that build on its core strengths of creating and maintaining supportive relationships. From time to time for example, the local MP Stephen Timms has been able to suggest where a constituent could go to get help via the Exchange. Through its link with the DWP and ongoing dialogue with the

designated contact the Exchange was able to work to soften some of the issues faced by learners who were also claimants, such as remaining on existing learning provision without being sanctioned should attendance at a class conflict with requirements of the Job Centre.

#### **10. 'Upstream' preventative provision**

In an age of austerity and public service reform that has sought localist, demand management-led and preventative interventions (eg the Government's Troubled Families programme), ensuring people who are unable to speak English are able to access public services in an appropriate and timely manner that would otherwise be unknown or inaccessible to them can be regarded as a form of 'upstream' preventative provision. (Interventions 'upstream' can help prevent the need for often more costlier responses later on – or downstream.)

It was pointed out during the interviews that in Newham people can live in pockets of areas and get by without speaking English, leaving them not just at risk of exploitation (eg on issues such as receiving the minimum wage) but also to a cascade of problems such as housing, health, immigration and relationships with the authorities that are all compounded by an inability to speak English. ESOL providers and organisers for example have reported having schools and GPs coming to them because they have problems with people needing English to access services.

In the long term, learning English is of course a key route out of these issues, and investing in enabling people to learn English could also be regarded as a key measure of 'upstream' preventative provision. In the short to medium term, signposting to public services and helping and educating learners about their use and how to access them is a valuable role that may help drive down public sector costs (reduction in A&E visits) and improve wellbeing outcomes (eg high rates of vaccination take up creating herd immunity) and the Exchange through its links to providers and communities is in a strong position to help.

An evolving function therefore can be inferred from how the Exchange has involved local NHS agencies in its work, facilitating connections with ESOL providers and enabling them to invite NHS nurses into various classes and centres to signpost to services and give advice, eg around TB awareness and vaccination, registering with a GP and the appropriate use of A&E. As an adjunct to this work there is also the development of health resources via the Exchange for second language English speakers to address issues in a sympathetic way, eg diabetes, breast and prostate cancer, that are available to any provider of ESOL.

#### **11. Facilitation of ESOL provision directly by the Exchange**

Recently the Exchange through the CIU has itself started to facilitate ESOL provision by third parties, using AM's Durning Hall as a venue for ESOL providers to cater for the needs of parents who are there whilst their children are in maths and English

classes. This is a new function that represents a more direct involvement and intervention in shaping the local landscape of ESOL provision.

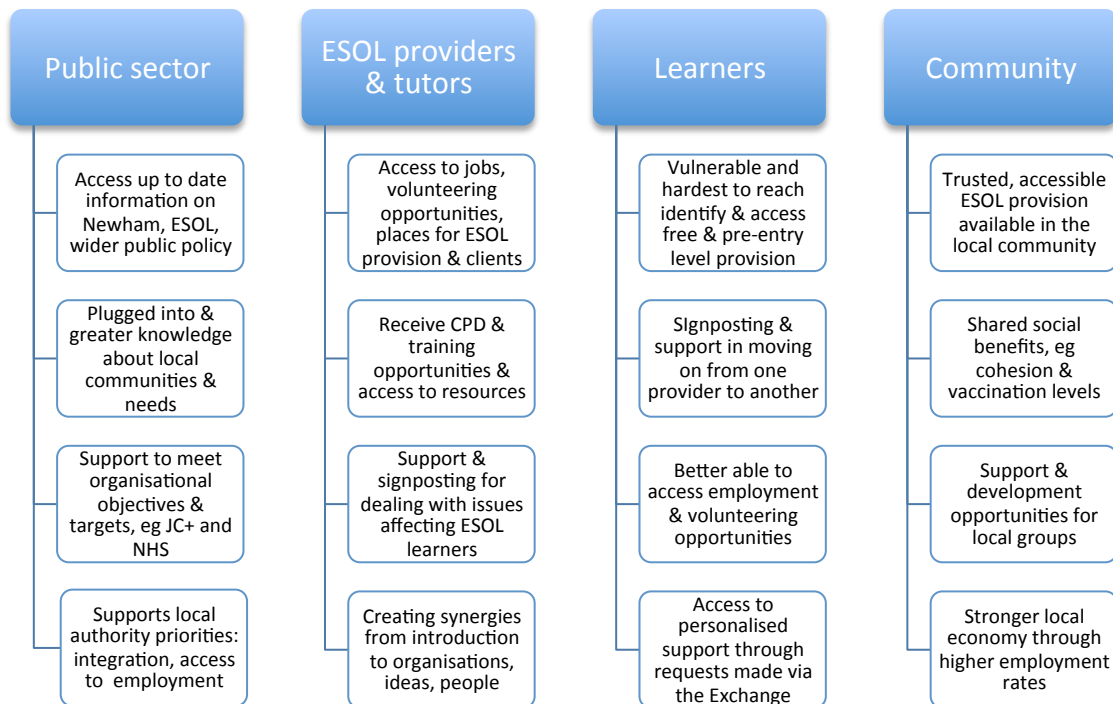
## 12. Support to help community groups grow and develop

As part of an extended package of support for local community organisations involved in and supportive of the work of the Exchange, AM’s CIU provides a range of helpful measures and infrastructure, from details of funding applications and advice on filling them in, to events that promote organisational sustainability and growth, such as the ‘Growing your group’ event in May 2015.

## Benefits

Discharging the (at least) twelve indicative functions of the Exchange that were identified through the interview process creates a panoply of direct and indirect benefits that reach into and ripple across Newham and beyond, impacting on numerous beneficiaries. As a mixture of activities, inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts these can be difficult to measure and quantify, as well as attribute to the work of the Exchange. A sample illustration of this using four categories of beneficiaries points to at least sixteen clear benefits.

**Figure 4: Illustrative benefits of the Exchange**



## Values

*"I don't know what their values are"*

### Interviewee

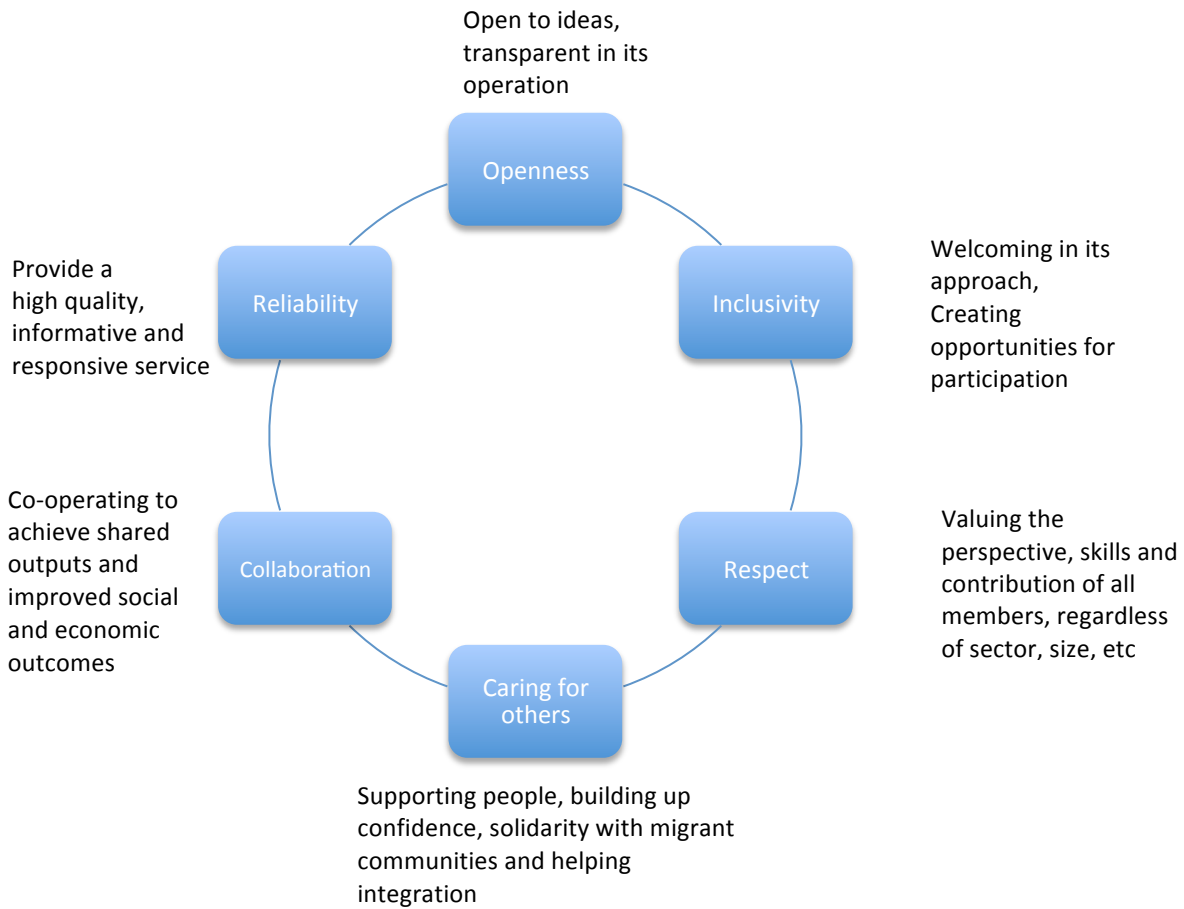
A key driver for the research lay in wanting to help the Exchange better understand its own values as an organisation. As well as looking at what an organisation does, it can be insightful to explore its ethos, or the underlying value-set that motivates its activity and the achievement of its objectives. Defining an organisation's values is often the first step in a strategic planning process, with the Vision, Purpose and Mission Statement of an organisation often traced back to an iteration of its values. More importantly, an organisation's values can permeate its operational culture and shape the behaviour of those involved in its work, impacting directly upon its performance and perception.

From the stakeholder interviews it is clear that through its activities and way of working the Exchange emerges as a values-led consortium, even if they are unstated and require elucidation. Numerous values were referred to in the context of the Exchange and its way of working, and it would have been possible to define the value-set and present the findings in a number of different ways. To some extent seeking to understand the underpinning values of the Exchange and report them in a comprehensible way is an exercise in collating and compositing.

Six key values emerged through the interviews:

- **Openness:** to new ideas, to new members, to new ways of doing things. Not being defensive and reflecting a commitment to innovation, with a communications framework that ensures that everyone is involved
- **Inclusivity:** a welcoming approachable and comfortable atmosphere that was largely created by the CIU team, with a policy that all are welcome to take part and contribute
- **Respect:** for the views, perspective, skills and contribution of others, regardless of the sector they are involved in or the size, profile and nature of the organisation
- **Caring for others:** commitment to helping and supporting people, based on a shared empathy and understanding of the situation facing migrants and a mission to promote integration within the local community and ensure that people are not left behind
- **Collaboration:** working together to provide a range of shared and mutually beneficial outputs as well as broader social and economic outcomes
- **Reliability:** consistency in providing accurate and timely advice and guidance, responding to requests and communicating with members

**Figure 4: the circular, self-reinforcing values of the Exchange**



## What the Exchange does well

*“very client focussed meetings, which is good”*

**Interviewee**

*“always something useful to pass on”*

**Cwti Green, manager of a local ESOL project**

*“the Exchange is top of the range for this type of organisation... 4 out of 5 stars, sometimes 5 out of 5”*

**Martin Pinder, Hon. Secretary, Newham Partnership for Complementary Education**

These questions sought to find out what interviewees thought were the things the Exchange did well, across a number of four core areas:

- administration of the Exchange and organisation of its activities
- communication of the work of the Exchange to its members, stakeholders, the local community and the wider world
- resources: in the form of information and publicity materials and events
- meetings: in terms of the core business function of the Exchange.

<b>Administration</b>
Excellent organisation of the Exchange's activities and events
Good recording of meetings and follow up of action points
Quality, extended package of wider support, eg details, help and advice on funding applications for small community groups

<b>Communication</b>
Excellent harvesting ESOL news and ideas and disseminating information and updates, especially via email
Timely response to ESOL related enquiries, requests for advice and finding the answers to questions and solutions to problems
Successful outreach work to contact new and migrant community groups

<b>Resources</b>
Production of quality information materials and well-researched resources, including downloadable ESOL resources, eg 'Setting up an ESOL class: good practice guide', produced in response to requests for advice on how to set up classes.
Development of self-help solutions to meet identified needs around ESOL provision, eg work on accreditation via Gateway
Very valuable events and workshops
The Directory: "comprehensive" with plenty of opportunity for people to find the right sort of provision

<b>Meetings</b>
Bringing together people from different backgrounds, sectors and organisations six times a year to talk, share and support each other
Building and maintaining professional and working relationships across sectors and between organisations
Creating a sense of comradeship, a place to relax by getting out of the day to day and talking with others about all things ESOL
Good activities and interactive sessions

## What the Exchange does not so well

*"If people don't turn up it doesn't work... It needs commitment."*

**Julie Day, English My Way Project Manager, British Council**

*"Who is going to step up and do things? There are not enough people to help"*

**Interviewee**

*"The Exchange has a very important function but it can't take flight"*

**Michael Potts, former ESOL Co-ordinator, Newham Adult Learning Service**



These were issues that interviewees felt that the Exchange was not doing so well, and where attention and effort was needed to improve its performance and do better. They cut across the same four dimensions of administration, communication, resources and meetings.

<b>Administration</b>
Opening up agenda to members with advance notice – instead of decisions by AM
Following up on issues/proposed actions raised by member when not attending following meeting(s)
Use of surveys to find out what members want from the Exchange which may not always be followed up
Need to explore new ways and methods of sharing within the meeting

<b>Communication</b>
Promotion of the Exchange and maintaining visibility of its work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to the general population, eg using Newham Mag, posters in libraries, ‘word of mouth’ channels</li> <li>- to local ESOL providers</li> <li>- to policy and decision-makers in local and central government</li> <li>- to social sector and statutory organisations</li> </ul>
Promotion and accessibility of the Directory, particularly for potential service users
Integration and alignment with public services, eg GP surgeries, Newham Workplace
Use of social media, eg Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp

<b>Resources</b>
Attracting funding: have made numerous funding applications but often unsuccessful. What are the lessons to learn from this?
Getting support for specific issues can take too long
Training and CPD: not enough focus and support
Multi-media and digital tools and resources, building on the Directory’s move online

<b>Meetings</b>
Introducing itself to organisations, networking and inviting them to meetings (eg educational institutions)
Exploring ways to encourage regular attendance
Rotating chair and venues (this is recognised as a laudable aim if performing well but it may negatively impact upon effectiveness of meetings and regular attendance)
Meetings can be slow, taking too long on internal business and repetitive issues such as funding
Need to explore new ways and methods of sharing within the meeting
Diversity: lack of some ethnic minority members; low numbers of private sector providers as members

## What the Exchange should do more of?

*"It's about being visible and accessible ... but not so much about the meetings"*

**Interviewee**

*"Not realistic to ask them to do more with the funding that they've got... Anything I suggest will be reliant on funding which they haven't got – getting more funding will be reliant on Anne getting the funding to get more funding"*

**Cwti Green, manager of a local ESOL project**

*"they are doing the right thing... but too slow"*

**Interviewee**

Given the limitations on the funding, many interviewees felt that it was not practical for the Exchange to be able to do any more than it already did. Given the multiplicity of functions, however, others however felt that there were some areas where the Exchange could do more. These are a mixture of practical actions that could potentially achieve a big impact for what might represent a small initial outlay and more sustained, targeted activity.

**Figure 5. Five areas where the Exchange could do more**



### 1. Client Focus

Having a greater focus on improving outcomes for ESOL learners in general, is an area that it was felt could be developed further, and to some extent the Exchange is already engaged in this, such as through working with the NHS inclusion teams. Should the Exchange's work to administer the Gateway accreditation for smaller providers be successful then identifying options and provision to move clients on in terms of their learning and other needs through a package of support could be a next step for the Exchange, supported and endorsed by statutory services.

## **2. Showcase event**

In order to promote the work of the Exchange to stakeholders and potential members, partners and funders, and to try to raise its profile locally, across London and nationally amongst policy makers and decision takers, the Exchange could hold an annual showcase event. This was mentioned by some interviewees as an event that the Exchange had done well in the past and would be good to revisit, capitalising as it did on its organisational and administrative strengths and enabling it to reach out to all of its members, the local community and further afield and to clearly demonstrate the value of its work.

## **3. Database expansion**

Building on the success of the Directory and its move online, some respondents thought that the Exchange could also maintain a database of ESOL tutors and teachers, together with their specialisms. This would enable it to promote itself as a repository of all things ESOL in Newham, potentially opening up new areas of activity. Interviewees also raised the prospect of adding a rating functionality to the Directory (akin to Tripadvisor), enabling learners to give simple, online feedback on their experience of the classes they have attended. Such a move towards a 'quality control' function could be contentious, changing the nature of the Exchange and its Directory, but could be something that many learners – and indeed providers – would value.

## **4. ESOL development**

Due to its knowledge of the borough and the needs of its communities and residents the Exchange was felt to be in a good place to work with its members and partners to support the setting up of classes under its auspices. Whilst interviewees did not want to step on toes or duplicate activity it was felt that with a good overview of ESOL provision this would not be a risk, and any interventions would involve working to organise provision in those communities where there was a gap in the availability of formal ESOL and conversation clubs. This can be seen as following on from its recent facilitation of classes at AM's Durning Hall.

## **5. Training and CPD**

Training and CPD is an issue that many interviewees felt was something that the Exchange should do more of, and which had the potential to help it make new connections, broaden its membership and raise small amounts of income. As well as being a regular part of each of the Exchange's two-hour meetings, (and potentially at times forming a significant component of them), some interviewees suggested specific CPD-only sessions outside of the Exchange as something that it could do more of, such as through Twilight sessions.

## SWOT

Strengths	Implications
Will always be a need for a group like this in Newham. No apparent competitive threat in the operating environment: no similar organisation does what the Exchange does	Solid argument for continued funding from Newham Council and greater collaboration across the statutory and social sectors, but important to keep innovating and relevant
Hosted by a professional voluntary organisation with good management, administration and excellent community outreach	AM's CIU is the critical factor behind the success of the Exchange and care must be taken to secure its future
Knowledge, organisational and problem solving skills and commitment of Anne Crisp, AM's Community Development Worker	Emphasises need to share knowledge and expertise, avoid over-dependence on key employees and ensure succession planning
Good relationship with some statutory partners such as the Council and NHS as well as the voluntary and community sector and national organisations, eg British Council	Maintenance and refresh of relationships can ensure work of the Exchange remains current and opens up potential for new collaborations and partnerships
Community roots of AM and the Exchange and the trust this engenders	Strong proposition from which to develop further activities and build support
Growing database of contacts and connections in the Network	Opportunity to refashion mutually-beneficial relationship with contacts and seek new partnerships
The production of the Directory; status as a central repository of information and email dissemination	Very strong core proposition from which to build but which as a resource needs to be carefully stewarded
Face to face bi-monthly meetings, with a welcoming and supportive environment	Important to ensure that meetings remain a relevant and attractive proposition: a 'don't miss' event in the diary that generates benefits for all members
Cross-sector makeup of all those working with second language speakers	Need to ensure that membership remains genuinely cross-sector, building on successful outreach work
Looks at Newham as a whole and not through organisational or service lens	Key strength that could be diluted – or built upon - should focus of the Exchange change to encompass other areas of activity
Work is known outside of the borough, eg mentioned in the context of creating similar groups in the London Boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets, and referenced in the context of creating the Leeds Migrant Support Hub (MESH)	Good starting point for collaboration and learning opportunities with other London partnerships and on a national basis

<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Implications</b>
Uncertainty over the depth and nature of links with other statutory organisations such as JC+, schools, college (relationship with individual, not the organisation). Some larger stakeholders don't seem to go to meetings	Important to build links with and buy-in from the organisation rather than (inherited) relationships being dependent upon cultivation of personal contacts. Failure to re-engage larger stakeholders on basis of consistent attendance will undermine its remit
Low-profile of the Exchange and the Directory: restricted to those 'in the know'	Change from focus on agencies to increasingly on end-users not reflected in wider profile and access (eg adoption of social media). More needs to be done to publicise its work
Reliant on core group of members who are prepared to attend and participate on regular basis (either as volunteers or in a professional /representational capacity)	Continuing dependence on core group will undermine its functions and may promote 'group think'. Need to explore motivation of members and implications (eg those from statutory organisation may have more access to resources etc than volunteers) as well as why members do and don't come to meetings
Lack of clarity over what the Exchange does: its purpose and function	Uncertainty over what the Exchange does will confuse communication of key messages and may hamper retention and recruitment
Bi-monthly daytime meeting format may exclude some in participating	Look at other (digital?) ways of involving potential members and assess options for when (and where) is best to hold the meetings
Variable quality of the meetings, eg time spent on administrative matters and discussion around its inner workings	Mixed performance of meetings (in terms of content, conduct) and assumption of certain amount of existing knowledge could make meetings hard to follow, deterring new members from coming back
Inconsistent attendance militates against consistency and commitment to action (eg a member says they will do something or the time and date of next meeting is arranged around them - but they don't turn up)	Key issue that weakens effectiveness of the Exchange which needs to be addressed as soon as possible as part of any future strategy
Little engagement with local authority Elected Members (including Elected Mayor)	Explore ways to achieve local political commitment and will to support the Exchange
Stretched staff, time, resources and a 'shoestring budget' mean inherent restrictions on capacity (eg inability to go to conferences to find out about developments and to publicise the work of the Exchange.)	Ongoing weakness that can only be overcome through a multi-year budget and development plan. Engage in targeted funding applications to secure modest and sustainable growth, eg through funding for a development worker
Lack of effective strategic and operational steer and governance arrangements	No proper planning means that any development of the Exchange will be unfocussed and ad hoc from year to year
Common knowledge exists between statutory and non-statutory sectors as a result of the Exchange but more work may be needed to deepen understanding between them	Important that this area of work remains on the Exchange's agenda or it will undermine one of its primary functions
Potential diversity issue in terms of attendance at meetings (predominantly female, and white British and Afro-Caribbean)	Explore whether this reflects gender and ethnic minority participation in organisations involved in ESOL, and reasons for lack of East European and Asian members
No consistent approach to recruiting new members	New residential developments across Newham may create additional demand for provision and necessitate a response from the statutory sectors and support for social sector activity

Opportunities	Implications
Many statutory services will have an interest in the Exchange to help access potential clients to meet their objectives (eg GP surgeries)	Seek to strengthen and formalise links with existing and potential partners as part of any future strategy
Expansion of CPD provision for tutors, supplemented by charging of nominal fees and use of donations (eg provision such as the London South Bank University-run course about teaching literacy skills to low-level learners)	OFSTED expectation of regular CPD puts the Exchange in a good place to support ESOL-related CPD within Newham and neighbouring local authorities
Representational role for organisations dealing with migrant communities	Would involve a significant re-orientation of its work and change of direction
Brokerage role in opening up space for ESOL clubs and classes	Opportunity to work closer with statutory organisations to help do this, eg with library service, and with local social sector groups, building on knowledge and overview of activity in the borough.
Recruitment, training and placement brokerage role for ESOL volunteers (eg volunteers who do 30 hours of training get a City & Guilds Level 3 certificate)	Volunteers may be set to play a bigger role in ESOL provision, and the Exchange could work with partners to develop a volunteer brokerage role, or through a project specifically for those studying ESOL to do volunteering
Harness role of volunteers to support the Exchange	Co-ordinated support of volunteers could be used to promote the work of the Exchange
Provision of an ESOL standard or vetting procedure for entry into the Directory - potentially via use of online feedback or rating system by learners	A move online opens up scope for an interactive Directory that goes from providing information about available provision via listings to one that can facilitate feedback or ratings system by learners
Accelerate and enhance accreditation work through the Gateway	Lack of accreditation capability for smaller ESOL groups is key opportunity to strengthen ESOL offer across the borough and demonstrate the value of collaboration and the work of the Exchange, though creating additional obligations and risk
Broaden scope and reach of the Exchange through link up with organisations and statutory agencies outside of Newham	Such a move would of course imply a fundamental change to the function of the Exchange with implications for AM and Newham Council
Refugee crisis highlighting the need for ESOL: opportunity to re-launch the organisation and its role	The role of ESOL in integration for new migrants could assume greater prominence and the Exchange should be in a position to respond to the impact of the crisis
Learn from others: Leeds learned from the Exchange – can now learn from MESH; closer work with neighbouring boroughs and similar groups, eg in Hackney	Contact and building a relationship with MESH and other groups could generate significant new opportunities and the potential to create a ‘meta’ Exchange

Threats	Implications
Reliance on core group of dedicated members	Dependence on one particular group of regular members could jeopardise future of the Exchange should their circumstances change (eg become too busy in day jobs or change employment) and they fall away
Reliance on historical funding and support from NALS officers	Any NALS restructure or reprioritisation of Council funding will jeopardise the Exchange so imperative to explore additional funding and income streams
Access to funding is always an existential threat, with lack of clarity over NALS' £7,500 grant	Mitigate risk through formalised relationship and exploration of scope for multi-year funding arrangement/Service Level-type Agreement
Potential for tension between AM's CIU and Council's Community Neighbourhood Units	Dialogue and closer working between AM's CIU and the Community Neighbourhood Units could create strong synergies and enhance reach and impact of both – but failure to communicate could lead to duplication, gaps in provision and tension
Reliance on AM's CIU and heavily dependent on one Community Involvement Worker, their knowledge, skills and expertise	Continued maintenance by AM of the CIU at current staffing and resource is minimum requirement for continued existence of the Exchange
Ongoing costs and resource implications for maintenance of website and digital Directory to keep it functioning, relevant and up to date	Essential to have planned capacity and resources for upkeep of digital infrastructure
Keeping ESOL provision inclusive and accessible given changes in entitlements	Significant implications for what the Exchange can do to respond to the changing ESOL landscape, eg with impact on membership, production of the Directory
No 'face' to the group to promote its work locally and no ensuing sense of shared 'ownership' by its members	An issue highlighted by interviewees that could be addressed through a 'One Stop Shop' and/or a spin out strategy

## Growth and diversification

*"I wouldn't say it's an issue of diversification, because it's doing its core business well"*

**Interviewee**

*"Funding is really difficult... if it could get funding for a Development Worker, even for 18 hours a week, it would help the Exchange to create their own network, raise their profile and seek ears to bend... it could be independent"*

**Interviewee**

*"It's a lot easier if there's a face to an organisation, and there's an opportunity to talk to them and ask questions"*

**Michael Potts, former ESOL Co-ordinator, Newham Adult Learning Service**

Following on from exploring what the Exchange could do more of, and mindful of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing it, interviewees were asked

their thoughts about growth and diversification. Some of these ideas emerged when exploring the opportunities facing the Exchange and can be seen as a potential menu of options for the Exchange to look at, many reflecting cross-cutting themes and areas that could be investigated in collaboration with members and partners.

Funding is an issue that was raised by many interviewees, accompanied by a recognition that there were no easy answers. Whilst there were a number of practical suggestions for creating small revenue streams (eg around charging and donations for CPD, something that it was reported that organisations such as the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults do), many of the more ambitious options would involve considerable change and uncertainty, and required initial investment to get them off the ground.

### **Technology**

- Online store/shop of resources and materials

This would involve the Exchange through control of its own online presence pulling together all the resources and materials the Exchange has produced on ESOL, together with additional tools and training targeted at tutors. It could serve as both a platform for sharing and collaboration, eg through a noticeboard type function with news updates as well as an online shop, retailing ESOL and other language and learning related products.

- Expanded real time Directory with learner feedback and rating of provision  
Picked up in the section on what the Exchange could do more of, this would involve building on the Exchange's move online, branching out into new sorts of functionality of benefit to core target users, eg teachers and tutors, and learners.

- Digital ESOL provision

New arrangements for teaching ESOL using digital technology were identified as a potential growth area that the Exchange could explore involvement in, as smartphone usage to access the internet, mobile applications and use of online educational courses and resources continue to grow. Examples given in the interviews include digital ESOL teaching to older people through self-learning.

### **One stop shop**

Face to face contact was felt by some to be the key thing missing from the Exchange and its work, and many interviewees supported the creation of an accessible ESOL shop or drop in centre, an idea that had been raised by Exchange members in the past. Such a one stop shop could serve as the central destination point in the community for professionals, tutors, public sector organisations, learners and community organisations to access everything related to ESOL in Newham and beyond. It could function alongside, and be complementary and supplementary to the online resource in the form of an expanded and enhanced Directory.



Open to the public, it would serve as a space to share resources, obtain advice and guidance and all the information needed on learning English, informal and formal. If linked up with some of the other suggestions for growth, eg expansion beyond Newham and spinning-out, and based in a central and easy to get to location such as Stratford, it could serve as an East London ESOL hub. A 'one stop shop' type service also has the scope to go beyond ESOL, helping signpost people to other public services, solve problems and serve as a support service for migrants in relation to employment and citizen issues. This represents a development of the functions that the Exchange is already engaged in.

### **Volunteering**

- Harness volunteers and ESOL students for internal Exchange projects and growth of ESOL provision

Whilst recognising the contribution of organisations in Newham that promote volunteering, some interviewees thought that there was scope for more voluntary opportunities for people doing ESOL. Acknowledging that this is often a big ask, it was felt that there could be projects specifically for those studying ESOL to do volunteering, backed up by a central place for help and support. (SpEC reported that it had recruited around 400 volunteers through an advert. As the programme was coming to an end, and with volunteers still on its books, many keen to stay involved and with a number of hours to complete, it was suggested that some could potentially transfer engagement to the Exchange.)

If the Exchange could access more volunteers it would be able to build on its success in moving the Directory online, promoting the work of the Exchange, supporting events and meetings and also development of language clubs and classes. Suggestions here included the creation of a Timebank-type system, with the sharing of skills and use of credits through a system that the Exchange could potentially set up and administer. The training and observing of ESOL volunteers could become an additional component of the Exchange's activities, moving beyond infrastructure provision.

### **New services**

- Support other learning initiatives, eg supplementary schools, community learning programmes and personal and professional development courses

Potential growth areas for the Exchange were mentioned in the context of new services, looking for example at how it could work with partners such as Newham Council to reach out to supplementary schools in order to try and encourage and promote opportunities for ESOL classes and provision for the parents of children at those schools.

Supporting other community learning programmes could also feature as part of any diversification strategy, such as the personal and professional development courses for individuals that are run by Newham Council and funded by the SFA. There is anticipation that there may be a future emphasis on greater involvement by the

community in these courses which could open up a possible role for the Exchange, eg by using local knowledge to help inform the Council and its partners of community needs in certain areas, particularly in the context of improved employment readiness.

### **Beyond Newham**

- Branch out into neighbouring boroughs with similar ESOL issues

Extending the reach and scope of the Exchange beyond Newham's boundaries was seen as a practical way for the Exchange to grow, particularly given the fact that many of the neighbouring boroughs have similar demographics and dimensions of need in relation to ESOL. Like other needs, language requirements take no notice of local administrative boundaries, and whilst local provision in the community is undoubtedly valued some interviewees reported learners travelling across boroughs to access ESOL courses and classes.

Given the ongoing pressure on public sector budgets together with the growing refugee crisis and London's continued ability to suck in labour from across the globe the absence of ESOL-type organisations in many other parts of London means that there is a clear rationale for combined, collaborative action on a multi-borough basis. It is not hard to imagine the potential for a multi-borough or pan-London Directory of ESOL provision, enabling people to identify and access more courses and classes that may meet their needs at a time and in a location that is convenient for them.

- Look to work with organisations with similar mission and ethos on a pan-London basis

Building on the existing contacts and relationships that the Exchange and its members have with individuals and organisations in other boroughs across the capital (eg local authority officers, social sector organisations, ESOL tutors) the Exchange could work even closer with other organisations on joint projects and ESOL-related matters. This would involve ongoing networking, meeting people and sharing what is going on in different parts of London, and the Exchange is in a prime position to take the lead on this type of activity.

### **In five years time...**

*"I would love for ESOL not to be an issue - but if still around would want to see it [the Exchange] as a more holistic service embedded within organisations like the NHS, Newham Workplace job brokering service, and for ESOL signposting to be more of a natural conversation"*

**Interviewee**

*"I hope the Exchange is still going. A measure of success is that it is still functioning. I'd like to see it get sustainable, long-term funding or it won't be there in five years"*

**Interviewee**

Thinking forwards five years hence, interviewees talked about where they thought the Exchange might be and the sort of things it might be doing. Cognizant of the financial situation faced by the Exchange and that any future development was dependent on access to finance and funding, interviewees were encouraged to think realistically about their ideal vision for the Exchange and what a successful, sustainable Exchange might look like.

#### **Still here, still going, still functioning**

- Supported by Newham Council with formalised funding arrangements
- Access to sustainable, long-term funding
- Growing list of contacts to spread and share information
- More members involved in the work of the Exchange

#### **Bigger, better Directory**

- More than 50 providers listed
- Accredited/quality assured (via learner feedback/ratings)
- Real time information updates (by ESOL providers themselves) online
- Skill Sharing facility and listing and accreditation of Tutors

#### **More responsibilities and higher profile**

- Recognised as a leader and exemplar of best practice
- Embedded within public and voluntary sector provision for migrants
- Could be a replacement for NALS should it not exist as a Council service

#### **Permanent base and One Stop Shop**

- Permanent base offering face to face support and guidance for learners and everyone involved in formal and informal ESOL and related issues
- Information on all things ESOL, eg jobs, classes, volunteering, training
- Provision of classes, language assessments, eligibility checks, etc

#### **Operating beyond Newham's boundaries**

- Recognition that ESOL needs and learners are not constrained by local authority and public sector boundaries
- Working in partnership with ESOL providers, other organisations such as Hackney ESOL Advice Service, local authorities and the GLA on an East London / pan-London collaborative basis

#### **New partnership and governance arrangements**

- Open up governance and ownership arrangements to a wider group of stakeholders and partners (eg like Leeds Migrant English Support Hub with consortium membership including the University of Leeds)
- Formalised collaborative arrangements with stakeholders securing buy-in

#### **Enhanced digital educational resources**

- Better website dedicated to ESOL with access to providers' classes remotely
- Support and development for students to learn on their own and collaboratively through digital technology

### **Spinning out**

This was an area that interviewees felt it was important for the Exchange to come together and talk about, providing information on what this might involve and discussions and debate on the pros and cons of such a move.

- Spun out by Aston Mansfield as an independent organisation
- Formally constituted as a separate legal entity with Trustees or a Board, eg Community Interest Company, Charitable Incorporated Organisation or Society for Community Benefit. If the latter, the members could be the shareholders
- Operating with a trading arm and charitable status

### **Less need for ESOL?**

It was suggested that ESOL may not be an issue: with greater education in English around the world, what if there is a future scenario where fewer and fewer people need to learn English? Whilst this might not occur within a five-year timeframe, it could be a conceivable outcome if taking a longer-term view.

### **What does success look like?**

*“It deserves to become an example of best practice known for what they’ve done and for others to follow suite”*

**Interviewee**

*“to become more established, with the funding to do more marketing so it can become more well known in East London, with more people accessing the services”*

**Interviewees**

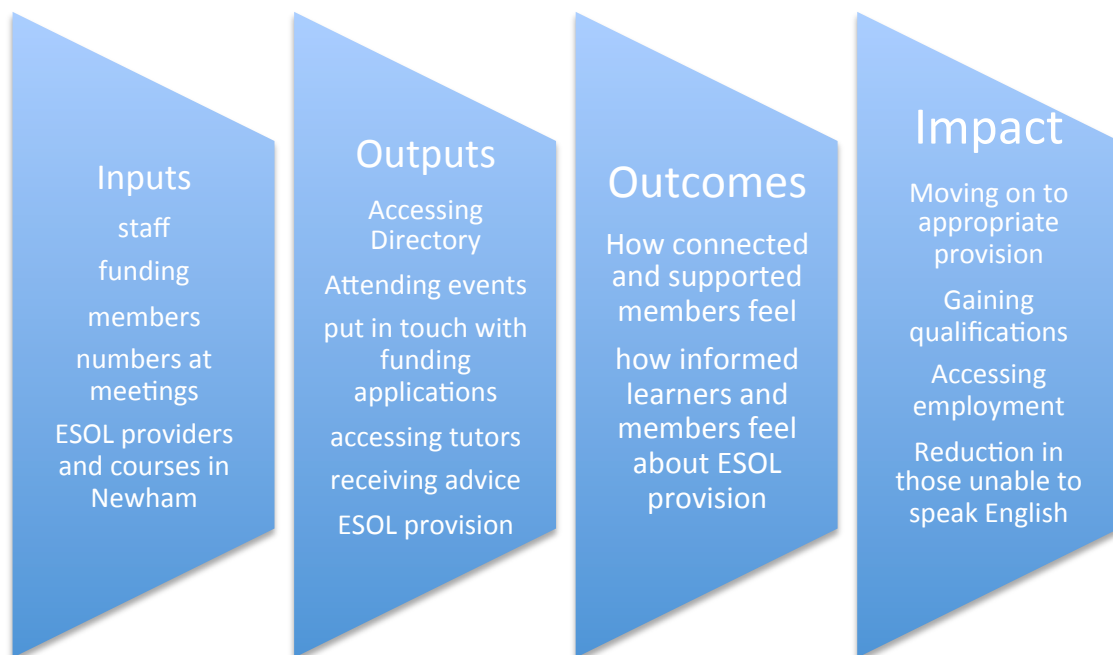
If talking in terms of outcomes and impact, measuring success is a difficult proposition for the Exchange. Successful outcomes relate not just to the core function of the Exchange as to whether ESOL provision in Newham is better co-ordinated and more effective as a result of this, but how the Exchange is doing with regards to the number of its other functions that have developed over the years. Of course, whilst the Exchange does not directly provide ESOL classes and courses, its work does have an impact on the numbers of people who are taking ESOL, and as a result will achieve success in education, employment or as a citizen – or have better access to public services in a timely and appropriate fashion. These outcomes and wider impacts are not only difficult to quantify, but also to attribute.

One interviewee observed that *“it is a success already if UCL has heard of the Exchange”* and the external reach of the Exchange, its voice and its work is indeed one way of quantifying its impact. On this basis it is arguable that the Exchange has had a not insignificant impact. For example the notes from the MESH mini conference in Leeds in June 2014 that brought the city’s ESOL providers together to discuss their next steps reported that *“a vimeo about MESH that was inspired by Newham ESOL Exchange was shown that highlighted funders, key partners and*

learners.”<sup>21</sup> Further evidence of its impact can be seen in the Exchange’s participation in work at the London level, with the Directory referenced in the feasibility study commissioned by the Greater London Authority on ESOL in London.<sup>22</sup>

When asked about what success looks like and how to measure it, interviewees suggested a number of metrics that could be used by the Exchange as part of any future strategic planning process. Many of these are quantitative, such as the inputs and outputs, but some such as the outcomes are qualitative.

**Figure 6: Measuring success**



<sup>21</sup> <http://www.leeds.gov.uk/LearningEnglishInLeeds/Documents/Conference%20Summary%20Report.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/English%20Language%20for%20All.pdf>

## Recommendations

These seven recommendations represent some initial steps that could be taken by the Exchange as preparation for any strategic planning process.

- 1) Re-establish contact with all former members of the Exchange and seek to re-engage them with the work of the Exchange against the backdrop of the refugee crisis
- 2) Organise an event (in collaboration with key partners) around the theme of the refugee crisis and the role of ESOL to demonstrate the important work of the Exchange, reactivate past members and recruit new members. Potential for a Newham-only or a wider East London focus.
- 3) Re-establish a Steering Group drawn from the current active and engaged members, with ability to co-opt others according to skills, experience, etc, in order to scope a strategic planning process
- 4) Convene a workshop inviting all past Exchange members to co-create a draft value set, vision, purpose and new mission statement for the Exchange, which could send out for consultation
- 5) Steering Group to set out a strategic planning process to create a three year strategic plan for the Exchange, involving a rebrand and relaunch
- 6) Produce a new set of values, vision, purpose and mission statement together with a new branding for the Exchange
- 7) Reconfigure the Exchange's ambassadorial roles and recruit for a high-profile Advisory Council of experts, supporters, advocates and fundraisers

## Suggestions for consideration

These are a series of suggestions that the author believes the Exchange and its members ought to consider as part of any strategy development and planning process.

### Administration

- Explore scope for collecting, maintaining and analysing data on ESOL learners and leavers and progression details for those providers and courses listed in the Directory
- Conduct an options appraisal on future governance and constitutional arrangements for the Exchange, in particular with regard to their potential to support any future spin-out. This should include an assessment of the Society for

Community Benefit and Community Interest Company forms alongside that of the (relatively new) Charitable Incorporated Organisation model.

- Establish contact with all similar organisations, in particular MESH in Leeds, and work to secure a learning exchange

### **Communication**

- Develop the use of social media to 'get the message out' (after it has been reformulated)
- Explore low-cost filming and streaming of events or use of apps such as Periscope to live broadcast
- Begin process of rebranding the Exchange alongside adoption of values, vision and mission statement, with potential for a new name and new logo (the current logo with the finger on the X is suited to a digital click-through culture and in tune with the new online Directory but may not resonate with a new values, purpose and mission, etc).

### **Resources – and funding**

- Prioritise seeking funding for an Exchange Development Worker who is skilled at networking to help broaden the reach of the Exchange, raise its profile and recruit members, and take lead in implementation of the strategic development plan.
- Build an internal ask of what the Exchange and its members want in terms of core running costs, and on a sliding scale what additional monies might enable it to do
- Seek to open negotiations with the local authority with a view to securing a multi-year funding agreement, ringfenced to the work of Exchange and still initially hosted by AM but enabling any future spin-out
- Revisit past unsuccessful funding applications and develop template and resources to seek (modest) funding from grant-giving sources
- Consider use of crowd-funding for certain (high-profile or strategic) events and activities

### **Meetings**

- Look at new ways of working for Exchange meetings, eg having a consistent Chair, trialling the use of a central and easily accessible venue, setting out the time and date for Exchange meetings for that year in advance and notifying members with an email reminder system.
- Organise special themed meetings of the Exchange, possibly outside of the normal meeting times, covering areas of interest for members and prospective members, and going beyond the borough to bring in speakers from other organisations.
- Plan a series of CPD events in conjunction with another like-minded organisation, such as Hackney ESOL Advice Service, covering new and emerging issues, eg digital ESOL teaching, self-learning etc

## Appendix 1 Constructing a DEEPLIST

<b>DEMOGRAPHIC</b>	"Highest net migration on record" (ONS) with long-term international migration to the UK in the year ending March 2015 of 330,000
	Newham has high churn and numbers of new arrivals, with "probably the highest population of refugee and asylum seekers in London" <sup>23</sup>
	One of the youngest age structures in England and Wales <sup>24</sup>
	Over 25,000 people (9% of Newham's population) cannot speak English well or cannot speak English
<b>ECONOMIC</b>	Anticipated £22 billion investment in East London area around Newham, creating 35,000 homes and 100,000 jobs <sup>25</sup>
	Newham has the highest unemployment rate in London at 12.6% (April 2014-March 2015) <sup>26</sup>
	Newham has highest proportion of residents paid less than the London Living Wage at 37% <sup>27</sup>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL &amp; ETHICAL</b>	Ongoing refugee crisis maintains press focus on migration and issue of integration raises ethical questions on nature of support for new arrivals. Potential to further shift attitudes to care and support for migrants, with growing voice of initiatives that seek to 'unlock' capabilities and promote integration. Opportunity to make case for better understanding of scale of need for quality ESOL provision
<b>POLITICAL</b>	Austerity, public service reform and the political focus on immigration makes spending on migrants (non-contributory welfare) a politically sensitive issue - but opportunity to address criticism of migrants not speaking English by demonstrating work to help people learn English and integrate
	EU referendum campaign is accompanied by continued tough political rhetoric on migration making the case for continued expenditure on ESOL provision more difficult
	Refugee crisis highlights absence of national ESOL strategy in England
	Withdrawal of funding for professionally-taught ESOL courses
<b>LEGAL</b>	Rules on learning English for eligibility for benefits (2013) and speaking fluent English (up to GCSE Grade C) for customer-facing public sector jobs employment (2015) despite a reduction of Government funding for ESOL 40% since 2010
<b>INFORMATIONAL</b>	Local authority's emphasis on learning English and withdrawal of foreign language news and magazines places greater onus on integration through learning English – potential argument for ploughing savings into ESOL provision and support for online ESOL Directory
	Lack of information on accessing ESOL provision for learners, agencies and support organisations
<b>SOCIAL</b>	Renewed debate on multi-culturalism and social cohesion
<b>TECHNOLOGICAL</b>	Digital revolution, smartphone technology make it easier to track and monitor progress and performance of ESOL students, eg through apps, enabling longitudinal evaluation of impact of ESOL provision
	Big Data has exited the Hype Cycle and into 'market definition' Big Data tools to collate, analyse and accurately map current and future needs for ESOL provision

<sup>23</sup> Data from Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2010 – Draft, August 2010, quoted in Investing in the Big Society, Newham ESOL Exchange

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/indicators/boroughs/newham/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.newham.com/invest/home/home/0,10,0,0.html>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157255/report.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/indicators/topics/low-pay/low-paid-residents/>