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# ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT PROVISION IN LONDON FOR JSA AND ESA WRAG CUSTOMERS

August 2012

**MAYOR OF LONDON**

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The Greater London Authority commissioned the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (*Inclusion*) to carry out this analysis and produce a final report. The two main researchers for *Inclusion* were Sarah Foster and Dr Pippa Lane. The questionnaires used as part of the research can be accessed as Appendices to the report at [Refugees and migrants | Greater London Authority](#)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (*Inclusion*) was commissioned by the Greater London Authority to examine pre-employment English language provision in London and how it can be improved to help support Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), and Employment and Support Allowance work related activity group (ESA WRAG) customers into work.

Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funding for teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) has undergone a number of recent changes including:

- A reduction in the national funding rate of 4.3 per cent
- A reduction in the programme weighting for ESOL from 1.2 to 1.0
- An end to the funding of ESOL in the workplace
- Withdrawal of the (£4.6m) Discretionary Learner Support Fund
- Full funding for learners on 'active benefits' (JSA and ESA WRAG)
- Eligibility for only 50 per cent fee remission for learners on 'inactive benefits', though ESOL providers can co-fund these learners.

This study focuses on provision for those learners on 'active benefits' who remain eligible for SFA full fee remission.

## **Effective ESOL provision for jobseekers**

ESOL provision was available at all levels from pre-entry upwards, though there appeared to be limited amounts of pre-entry level ESOL provision available. Some providers were focused on provision at particular levels, though further education (FE) colleges typically ran provision across the range of levels.

The FE college providers interviewed were all running a programme of 'mainstream' ESOL courses and alongside this the majority had also started to run short (typically eight week) ESOL courses specifically and solely for Jobcentre Plus (JCP) referred JSA and ESA WRAG customers.

The FE college mainstream ESOL programmes included a range of both discrete and embedded ESOL courses. At entry level, embedded courses typically involved the inclusion of soft skills development, IT and citizenship. At level 1 and 2, many FE colleges offered vocational courses with embedded ESOL. Non-FE college ESOL providers were much less likely to offer vocationally embedded ESOL courses and typically ran predominantly discrete provision or provision which included more generic employability skills. Some providers also offered employability support as an optional extra which could be accessed by learners who were accessing discrete provision.

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ESOL providers saw progression in English language ability, accessing vocational skills, moving closer to the labour market and job outcomes as aims of their provision. Whether job outcomes were an immediate or long term aim depended on what level their provision was at – there was a feeling that job outcomes are not a realistic immediate goal for students on lower level ESOL courses. In addition there was some tension between the aims of course completion and job outcomes, with negative funding implications for providers if learners left mid-way through a course to move into work.

Most ESOL providers were tracking retention, qualifications, progressions onto other courses and moves into work while students were studying. However no longer term tracking of job outcomes was taking place. Some ESOL providers had begun piloting job outcome tracking ahead of the implementation of job outcome incentive payments but there had been mixed success and ESOL providers were not sure how best to proceed.

Given that ESOL providers were not monitoring job outcomes, it is difficult to assess what elements of ESOL provision best prepare learners for work. Nonetheless, interviews with ESOL providers, and those who refer JSA and ESA WRAG customers for ESOL do provide some indications of what provision works well.

*Adequate course length.* Many FE colleges had been asked to set up ESOL courses specifically for JCP-referred JSA and ESA WRAG customers. Typically these were eight weeks in length at the request of JCP. Colleges felt that eight week courses were possible but challenging - with longer courses felt to be preferable and shorter courses unfeasible.

*Appropriate course hours.* JSA and ESA WRAG benefit rules restrict the number of hours for which individuals can attend courses and so it is important that providers running ESOL courses which may be of benefit to learners on active benefits ensure sufficient amounts of their provision is under 16 hours per week and thus can be accessed by them.

*Routeways onto entry-level provision.* There is a need for a greater number of options for pre-entry level ESOL provision, in order to ensure that individuals are at the level required to be able to undertake entry-level provision.

*Single level ESOL courses.* Ensuring the ESOL learners in one class are all at a similar ability level increases the effectiveness of provision.

*Consistency for learners.* There were numerous examples given of JSA and ESA WRAG learners moving from JCP to Work Programme (WP) support having to leave ESOL courses they are already enrolled on, only to be assessed as needing ESOL skills once on the WP and being enrolled onto another course. This is disruptive to learning outcomes and is an inefficient use of funding. Effective provision therefore needs to involve more partnership working to reduce disruption to appropriate course attendance when transitioning from JCP to WP.

*Flexible ESOL course structures.* Examples being developed included changing one year courses to three 12 week blocks so people can complete all or move on; roll-on, roll-off provision and offering

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ESOL support alongside a full range of mainstream courses. Such developments increase the options available, allowing for reduced waiting lists, greater personalisation and a reduced likelihood of benefit changes causing disruption to course attendance.

*Availability of both embedded and discrete ESOL provision.* Effective providers recognised that embedded ESOL courses could be useful but were not necessary for all. For some individuals requiring ESOL, English language skills were their only barrier to employment or were such a barrier that they require significant development prior to development of other skills

*Flexible integration of employability in discrete ESOL provision.* As noted previously, much discreet ESOL provision also included employability training, such as CV and application form writing and interview techniques. This was considered important in helping some customers more towards employment.

*Considering alternative approaches to further class-based ESOL training for customers on the WP.* Where JSA and ESA WRAG customers were reaching the WP and still presented with significant ESOL needs despite prior attendance on ESOL courses, new approaches were being trialled by some WP providers. Such approaches were in their infancy at the time of research and so would need to be monitored before conclusions were drawn on their effectiveness.

### **Role of partnerships in effective ESOL provision**

Good partnership working exists between JCP and ESOL providers across London, particularly at a strategic level. However, this is not always communicated and adopted at a local level.

Level of demand and number of referrals varies widely. It appears that SFA funding changes have meant that JCP is making a greater number of referrals at pre-entry level, but ESOL providers report that not all referred learners actually start on courses. Most ESOL providers are coping with the increased number of referrals.

As discussed above, JCP has requested shorter (often eight week) ESOL courses on a roll-on, roll-off basis and this demand appears to have been met widely across the capital.

WP prime contractors in London are split between those that have been referring clients with ESOL needs to external provision and those who have been delivering (limited) ESOL directly.

Those who have made referrals felt that referral processes were becoming better as the WP moved through its implementation phase. Some primes have strategic partnerships with FE colleges who deliver ESOL and refer to these providers.

All six London prime contractors have been in dialogue with the Association of Colleges and have piloted making referrals for ESOL to Hackney Community College. Subsequent to the referral pilot, links between WP providers and FE colleges are being developed at a local level across London. To promote this, a 'speed dating' event has been held for personal advisers and ESOL providers to make contact, understand each other's work and make referrals in the future.

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In the longer term, London primes hope to influence the content and nature of ESOL provision in London. They appear to be less concerned with shorter courses and more focused on ensuring that ESOL providers' employability elements of ESOL provision are employer led.

## Recommendations

- It was noted by respondents that there was not always enough pre-entry level ESOL provision available, and that this is needed before many individuals can access entry-level courses. Steps should be taken to ensure more pre-entry level ESOL courses are available.
- Good practice identified between JCP and ESOL providers should be applied consistently across London:
  - Local JCP offices should have named ESOL lead.
  - ESOL providers should have a presence in JCP offices to provide information about courses and conduct assessments.
- WP providers and ESOL providers should build upon the good referral links that are being developed so that these occur across London.
- Local authorities should consider the good practice identified in one London borough where the local authority ran a single ESOL advice service.
- *ESOL providers, JCP and WP providers should work together on the following:*

### *On referrals:*

- Referrals for ESOL training should be made at the appropriate time in customer journeys. For example, JSA claimants should be screened for ESOL needs and referred to ESOL provision at a point in their claim where they will have completed this prior to eligibility for the WP.
- Referrals for ESOL should be made in a consistent and streamlined manner.
- Learner assessments should establish individuals' literacy levels in their first language alongside their ESOL level, as this has important implications for the type of ESOL training required.
- Data sharing should be improved within the confines of data protection.
- More accurate estimates of numbers of referrals should be provided by local JCP offices for courses ESOL providers are running specifically for JCP. Without accurate estimates of demand there is a danger that courses will be undersubscribed, with negative financial impacts on ESOL providers. It may be worth considering whether JCP should share the financial risks with ESOL providers of running undersubscribed courses requested by JCP.

### *In design of ESOL provision for jobseekers:*

- ESOL providers should lead on methods of instruction and the length of courses appropriate for different levels.
- JCP and WP providers should lead on the choice of employability skills within ESOL courses in conjunction with local employers.
- Courses providing higher level ESOL training combined with vocational skills should be determined at the local level with the input of employers, to ensure that these courses best prepare customers for their local labour market.

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*In measuring job outcomes:*

- Job outcomes should be monitored in a way that is consistent and minimises duplication, and ESOL providers should be given advice and guidance in how to do this. Further work to determine how this can best be done is required.
- There is currently a perverse incentive, by which if a customer leaves a programme of study to enter work, this is counted as a failure for the learning provider. This disincentivises providers to help customers into work whilst they are in the middle of a course. For example, by the customer continuing to be funded to complete the programme of ESOL study.
- The current rule that JSA customers can only undertake long-term courses for a maximum of 16 hours per week may limit some customers' ability to develop the English language skills they need to enter employment. Consideration should therefore be given to relaxing this rule for individuals with more significant ESOL and other learning needs (particularly in the context of a move to employment outcome payments).
- The SFA and the Department for Work and Pensions should publish data on ESOL training take-up among JSA and ESA WRAG claimants in order to help stakeholders understand the effects of recent changes to ESOL funding.



# INTRODUCTION

*Inclusion* was commissioned by the Greater London Authority to examine pre-employment English language provision in London and how it can be improved to help support Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), and Employment and Support Allowance work related activity group (ESA WRAG) customers into work.

## Context

English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL) is an important service. It enables non-English speakers to secure employment in English-speaking environments and to understand the rights they have in work. It enables speakers of other languages who wish to start businesses to sell to English-speaking customers. Therefore, it is a tool for integration, community cohesion and employment that is crucial for building an inclusive society. In addition, ESOL classes are instrumental in fostering intercultural relations, tolerance and understanding. Tutors often provide significant pastoral support for students.

ESOL is delivered by a variety of different types of learning provider, including further education (FE) colleges, private providers, voluntary and community sector organisations and local authorities. However, in recent years, funding for ESOL provision has been reduced, leading, in some London boroughs, to a decline in provision. Whilst this research will examine provision for those who receive full fee remission (those on the 'active' benefits of JSA and ESA WRAG), these changes have had an important impact on the sector as a whole. For example, in Newham in the 2010–11 academic year, 50 different ESOL courses were being delivered from 38 venues. In the 2011–12 academic year this had fallen to just 26 ESOL courses delivered from 22 different venues.<sup>1</sup>

The changes to ESOL funding include the following:

- A reduction in the national funding rate of 4.3 per cent
- A reduction in the programme weighting for ESOL from 1.2 to 1.0
- An end to the funding of ESOL in the workplace
- Withdrawal of the (£4.6m) Discretionary Learner Support Fund
- Full funding for learners on 'active benefits' (JSA and ESA WRAG)
- Eligibility for only 50 per cent fee remission for learners on 'inactive benefits'. As discussed below, ESOL providers can co-fund these learners.<sup>2</sup>

In July 2011, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published an Equality Impact Assessment examining the effects of the changes, which led the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to

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<sup>1</sup> Newham ESOL Directory 2011,

[http://www.aston-mansfield.org.uk/pdf\\_docs/directory\\_of\\_esol\\_provision\\_2011.pdf](http://www.aston-mansfield.org.uk/pdf_docs/directory_of_esol_provision_2011.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> NIACE (2011), ESOL Policy Update, [http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/ESOL%20policy%20update%208%20Sep\\_0.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/ESOL%20policy%20update%208%20Sep_0.pdf)

announce some flexibility in August 2011, allowing providers to give full fee remission to those ‘who want to enter employment and need skills training’.<sup>3</sup> However, the SFA has not made additional funding available to pay for this, so providers have to find the money themselves.

The introduction of Universal Credit from 2013 will have implications for these funding arrangements, as income-based JSA and ESA WRAG will cease to exist. The SFA will need to find new ways of identifying eligible learners.

## Aims and Objectives

The aim of this project has been to examine pre-employment English language support in London for JSA and ESA WRAG customers (target learners) to support them into work.

The project had four objectives:

- To provide an overview of SFA funded ESOL provision for target learners
- To identify and provide evidence of effective English language provision for target learners
- To assess of the role of local partnerships/relationships in the effectiveness of models identified in objective 2
- To provide an evaluation of measures that support effective transition into employment.

## Methodology

In order to achieve the aim and objectives detailed in 2.7 and 2.8, above, the review has been undertaken using the methods summarised in the table below.

Information required	Rationale	Data sources
Description of different types of provision, including a) discrete and integrated/ embedded and b) national qualification framework levels	To provide an overview of SFA funded ESOL provision for target learners	Desk research Interviews with ESOL providers
Evidence of effective English language provision for target learners	To identify and provide evidence of effective provision	Interviews with ESOL providers
Evidenced examples of local partnerships leading to: a) tailored, discrete or integrated/embedded provision, b) best practice activities and c) effective referral processes	To assess the role and extent of influence of local partnerships/ relationships on effective provision	Interviews with Work Programme Providers, Jobcentre Plus and other stakeholders

<sup>3</sup> SFA(2011), 2011/12 Learner Eligibility and Contribution Rules. Version 2.1

[http://readingroom.isc.gov.uk/SFA/LearnerEligibilityandContributionRules\\_2011\\_12\\_12Aug2011\\_\\_June\\_revision\\_V2.1.pdf](http://readingroom.isc.gov.uk/SFA/LearnerEligibilityandContributionRules_2011_12_12Aug2011__June_revision_V2.1.pdf)

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### **Interviews with ESOL providers**

A total of 15 telephone interviews were conducted with ESOL providers, including Further Education (FE) colleges (eight completed), local education authorities (three completed), and private and voluntary providers of ESOL (four completed).

The interviews were in-depth qualitative telephone interviews and were each approximately 45 minutes in duration. Telephone interviews were chosen over face-to-face because this approach was most convenient for respondents, as well as cost effective.

### **Interviews with partners/referral organisations**

A total of nine interviews were conducted with Work Programme (WP) providers and other referrers (Jobcentre Plus, or JCP, and local authorities) involved with the referral of eligible learners for ESOL provision. Partners involved in interviews included strategic and operational staff within WP provider organisations, the manager of a local authority ESOL advice service and a JCP partnership manager.

Again, the interviews were in-depth qualitative telephone interviews and were each approximately 30 minutes in duration. In addition, one hour-long face to face interview was conducted with an executive director of a London prime contractor. This individual has responsibility for skills, including ESOL, within the London primes network.

### **Analysis**

Interviews were recorded (with permission) and the information analysed using a tabular framework approach.

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# OVERVIEW OF ESOL PROVISION FOR JOBSEEKERS IN LONDON

## **What is being provided**

The interviews with providers identified a wide range of ESOL provision targeted at, or accessible by, JSA and ESA WRAG customers.

Provision was available at all levels from pre-entry upwards, though there appeared to be limited amounts of pre-entry level ESOL provision available. Some providers were focused on provision at particular levels, with charities and local education authorities often focused on provision of entry-level ESOL courses. This was often done to begin engaging these customers with government services. FE Colleges typically provided ESOL from Entry Level 1 through to Level 2. Some FE Colleges also provided some pre-entry ESOL although this was less common.

The FE college providers interviewed were all running a programme of 'mainstream' ESOL courses and alongside this, the majority had also started to run short (typically eight week) ESOL courses specifically and solely for JCP-referred JSA and ESA WRAG customers. Whether JSA and ESA WRAG customers were able to access the mainstream courses in such instances varied. One college had been told by JCP that JSA and ESA WRAG customers could only attend the short JCP specific ESOL courses, although they had negotiated agreement that complete beginners could access their longer mainstream courses where this would be beneficial. Another college had set up the JCP specific short courses as a stepping stone into their mainstream provision. Other colleges were running the two alongside each other, with both types of provision accessible to JSA and ESA WRAG customers as appropriate.

The FE College mainstream ESOL programmes included a range of both discrete and embedded ESOL courses. At levels 1 and 2, many FE colleges offered vocational courses with embedded ESOL. Popular examples included childcare with ESOL, hairdressing with ESOL and beauty with ESOL. A number of colleges appeared to be looking to grow the number and range of ESOL embedded vocational courses, and examples of potential future courses included security guard skills with ESOL and gardening with ESOL. Non-FE college ESOL providers were much less likely to offer vocationally embedded ESOL courses and typically ran predominantly discrete provision or provision which included more generic employability skills.

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Most discrete ESOL courses were reported to include employability skills, including soft skills development, IT and citizenship. Other employability skills provided in discrete ESOL courses included answering job interview questions and writing CVs and job applications. The majority of providers of discrete provision suggested that tutors would flexibly include these employability skills as was deemed appropriate (such as through talking in classes about how to find jobs). Only one ESOL provider interviewed suggested that they deliberately did not include employability in their ESOL provision and felt it would not be appropriate because in their view ESOL was the first step and employability training should follow afterwards.

Other providers offered employability support as an optional extra for learners who were accessing discrete provision. This included, for example, seeing careers advisers.

### **Provision aims and outcomes**

All the ESOL providers interviewed saw progression in English language ability, accessing vocational skills, moving closer to the labour market and job outcomes as aims of their provision.

Many providers articulated a recognition of the holistic benefits of improving the English language ability of their learners:

*'If someone is unable to speak English then she is consigned to a life on benefits... To get people to speak English is an investment against being socially excluded.'*

However, whether job outcomes were an immediate or longer term aim of providers' ESOL courses tended to depend on the level of provision. There were widely held views amongst the ESOL providers interviewed that job outcomes were not a realistic immediate goal for students on lower level ESOL courses (such as Entry Level 1 and Entry Level 2 courses).

There was also evidence of some tension between the aim of course completion and the aim of job outcomes. This is because there were negative funding implications for providers of SFA-funded ESOL provision if learners left a course before its completion, even if they moved into work. Many learners moving into work do leave courses they are attending, not only because their new work hours may prevent them from physically being able to continue to attend their course, but also because they would no longer be eligible for full course fee funding. The present funding arrangements therefore disincentivise training providers from encouraging their learners to enter jobs prior to course completion:

*'I'm in a really tricky place. I don't want to prepare them too well for a job in case they disappear.'*

Most providers interviewed were tracking retention, qualifications, progressions onto other courses and movements into work by current learners (i.e. where this resulted in a learner leaving a course). However, at the time of research, none of the providers interviewed were currently tracking longer term job outcomes achieved by learners after they had completed their learning and left the training provider. Many providers did however suggest that they were starting to look at the possibility of such

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monitoring and the key driving force of this appeared to be the forthcoming SFA plans for job outcome incentive payments (JOIP).

JOIP is described in the SFA Guidance Note Number 8 (from paragraph 24).<sup>4</sup> The aim of JOIP is to incentivise providers to ensure that learners achieve jobs and to ensure that these outcomes are reported to the SFA. In 2011–12 providers were able to attribute 2.5 per cent of their adult skills budget to working in a more job outcome focused way. JOIP is expected to be fully implemented in subsequent years, though the details of how these payments will be calculated have not yet been specified.

At the time of research, the providers interviewed appeared unsure of what mechanisms to use to measure job outcomes post-course completion. One provider had trialled sending out questionnaires to former learners but had limited success from this approach. Providers stated that learners did not generally tend to stay engaged with their service after they had finished their course(s). There was therefore some uncertainty and concern about how job outcome monitoring could be achieved and the resource implications of this:

*‘JOIP will be a nightmare. We don’t have the capacity to be calling everyone up and asking about whether they’ve got a job. A whole new admin team will be required.’*

The current lack of job outcome monitoring makes it difficult to assess which specific elements of ESOL provision are most successful for achieving the providers’ stated aim of job outcomes. Notwithstanding the concerns raised about how to achieve job outcome monitoring (see 3.12), many providers did recognise the value of introducing such monitoring but felt it was important that the aim of job outcomes for ESOL provision did not become the focus to the exclusion of people who could not work for some reason.

### **Components of effective ESOL provision for jobseekers**

*Adequate course length.* Many of the colleges interviewed described having been asked to set up ESOL courses specifically for JCP referred JSA and ESA WRAG customers. Typically these were eight weeks in length at the request of JCP. Colleges felt that eight week courses were possible but challenging – with longer courses felt to be preferable and shorter courses unfeasible. In one area a college had negotiated the set up of 12 week courses for JCP referrals and these were felt to result in better learning outcomes, including a qualification. In one area a college was not currently providing JCP specific courses as the request had been for four week courses and this was not felt to be a long enough period to achieve learning outcomes. Short courses were felt to be a particular challenge where the learners were complete English language beginners as *‘a short course [would] not make them job ready’*. One college running eight week JCP specific courses had agreed with JCP that complete beginners could be enrolled onto the college’s standard ESOL provision and complete a longer programme (usually a one year part-time programme), and this was felt to be more effective.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/SFA/Guidance\\_Note\\_8\\_FINAL\\_4\\_July\\_2011.pdf](http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/SFA/Guidance_Note_8_FINAL_4_July_2011.pdf)

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*Appropriate course hours.* Benefit rules restrict the number of hours that individuals can attend courses for. JSA customers, for example, can only attend two weeks of full time training out of 52 weeks and any learning undertaken for the remaining 50 weeks has to be less than 16 hours per week. ESOL providers running courses specifically for JSA and ESA WRAG customers had therefore designed their courses to meet the benefit rules. In addition, a number of providers running courses that were open to anyone with ESOL needs (including but not focused on JSA and ESA WRAG customers) had deliberately designed all their ESOL courses as part time so that JSA and ESA WRAG customers were not inadvertently prevented from accessing them.

*Routeways onto entry-level provision.* It was noted that there was not always enough pre-entry level ESOL provision available to customers (in part as a result of funding requirements), and that there is a need for a greater amount in order to ensure that individuals could reach the level required to be able to enter entry-level provision.

*Single level ESOL courses.* Ensuring the ESOL learners in one class are all at a similar ability level was reported to increase the effectiveness of provision. (See 4.6 onwards for a discussion of referral processes.)

*Consistency for learners.* There were numerous examples given of JSA and ESA WRAG learners moving from JCP to WP support having to leave ESOL courses they are already enrolled on, only to be assessed as needing ESOL skills once on the WP and being enrolled onto another course. This is disruptive to learning outcomes and is an inefficient use of funding. Effective provision therefore needs to involve more partnership working to reduce disruption to appropriate course attendance when transitioning from JCP to WP.

*Flexible ESOL course structures.* Examples being developed included changing one year courses to three 12 week blocks so people could complete all or move on; roll-on, roll-off provision and offering ESOL support alongside a full range of mainstream courses. Such developments increase the options available, allowing for reduced waiting lists, greater personalisation and a reduced likelihood of benefit changes causing disruption to course attendance.

*Availability of both embedded and discrete ESOL provision.* Effective providers recognised that embedded ESOL courses could be useful but were not necessary for all. For some individuals requiring ESOL, a lack of English language skills was their only barrier to employment or was such a barrier that it required significant development prior to development of other skills. In addition, providers reported that more specific employability and vocational skills were only possible to embed with higher level ESOL courses.

*Flexible integration of employability in discrete ESOL provision.* As noted previously, much discreet ESOL provision also included employability training, such as CV and application form writing, and interview techniques. Some providers were also offering optional extra-curricular employability and job activity such as job and volunteering fairs, and careers advice. This was considered important in helping some customers more towards employment.

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*Considering alternative approaches to further class-based ESOL training for customers on the WP.*

Where JSA and ESA WRAG customers were reaching the WP and still presented with significant ESOL needs despite prior attendance on ESOL courses, new approaches were being trialled. For example, one WP provider believed that mainstream ESOL provision was not equipping customers with the language skills they needed to enter employment. This provider was helping individuals with significant ESOL needs to develop their soft skills and find work where they do not need proficient English language skills. However, it was hoped that customers' English language skills would nevertheless improve if they were put into new situations that would encourage them to speak English and where they were more exposed to English language speakers, such as a workplace. Such approaches were in their infancy at the time of research and so they will need to be monitored before conclusions are drawn on their effectiveness. It will be important to ensure that any such alternative approaches do not result in the stagnation of English language development as this has implications for the wider integration opportunities for individuals.



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# ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN EFFECTIVE ESOL PROVISION

## **Provision for pre-Work Programme learners**

This section focuses on ESOL provision for JSA and ESA WRAG customers supported by JCP. Interviews were conducted with a range of London-based ESOL course providers which JCP refer customers to, and with a JCP partnership manager. Details of the topics discussed in these interviews can be found in the topic guides in the appendix of this report.

### ***Partnership working***

There were some good examples of partnership working found between JCP and many FE colleges providing ESOL. This included a number of reports of regular partnership meetings between JCP partnership managers or provision team staff and FE college staff. These meetings were described as being used to agree referral processes, discuss current delivery including attendance and retention data, and plan future provision.

The quality of links between JCP and ESOL providers did vary, however. Some providers described difficulties in communicating with JCP in areas where there appeared to be no named individual overseeing ESOL referrals. In such instances, it was suggested that having a dedicated ESOL contact in each JCP office would be beneficial. This would help not just JSA and ESA WRAG claimants, but also those on other benefits with ESOL needs.

In another example, some FE colleges with links into JCP at regional, district and local office levels felt that decisions agreed at the strategic regional or district level are not always communicated to and adopted at the local office level. In such instances, it was suggested that it would be helpful to meet with both the strategic and operational JCP staff at the same time, to ensure ESOL provision discussions and decisions are fully agreed and adopted and not disjointed.

Specific examples of the role of partnership working on provision and referral processes are described in the relevant sub-sections below.

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### ***Referral processes***

A number of FE colleges described that, for the courses they run for JCP customers, college tutors spend time in the local JCP offices providing information on the ESOL courses and conducting the ESOL assessments. Where this was happening it was felt to be extremely beneficial and had improved assessment accuracy, course starts and retention levels. However, one FE college did report that they used to have a presence in local JCP offices and found this useful, but that this had been stopped by JCP. They are hoping to reinstate this practice shortly.

Where ESOL providers did not have a presence in JCP offices, the level of communication between provider and JCP in relation to referrals varied. For some, their only contact with JCP was the letter of referral that customers brought with them, whereas other JCP offices appeared to call providers with referral details. There were a number of challenges described in relation to referral processes including: referral peaks and troughs; limited course information given to customers by JCP; limited information on referrals passed to providers by JCP (data transfer issues); and a lack of screening and assessment of customer learning needs by JCP. These problems with referrals had a negative impact upon the customers, who tended to want to start on a course quickly. One ESOL provider told us: *'we've had students in tears because they are so desperate to start and they've got caught in this hideous cycle of not getting anywhere.'* The research suggests that such issues are successfully overcome when ESOL providers are able to have a regular presence in JCP offices.

The level of demand for ESOL courses from JCP that different ESOL providers experienced varied greatly. Some described a great increase in demand, particularly at the pre-entry level. This linked to JCP staff reports that the fee remission and SFA funding changes had enabled them to refer a higher number of JSA and ESA WRAG customers needing ESOL provision (possibly because fewer people on inactive benefits have been able to access ESOL training, thus freeing up more capacity).

For ESOL courses run for JCP customers, most ESOL providers interviewed described no issues with meeting demand. In fact, in most cases, challenges were more likely to occur in relation to JCP over-estimating the number of people they would refer to courses and/or referring large numbers but with many not starting on courses or dropping out midway. It was suggested that if the financial risk and penalties incurred by providers for this were shared by JCP, they would be more likely to work to reduce such occurrences. For example, one ESOL provider told us:

*'There is no financial penalty on JCP if the courses don't run, because [the courses] are funded through the SFA which is our core funding. The penalty is on us if we don't hit our targets and obviously we can't afford to run classes on very low numbers and that doesn't bother them. If it was their contract they would make sure the students arrived.'*

Other providers had experienced higher demand for ESOL from JCP and were running more courses to meet this demand. A smaller number of providers reported challenges in meeting demand and, correspondingly, having lengthy waiting lists. Where they occurred, issues with meeting demand were mainly at pre-entry level. These FE colleges felt that they were unable to secure adequate funding to run more pre-entry level ESOL.

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One local authority ran a single ESOL advice service through which ESOL referrals were routed. This minimised waiting lists for ESOL courses as colleges advised the ESOL advice service of available places and the advice service was then able to match these places with learners. The advice service had also developed a common application form for ESOL applications across the borough so there was no duplication and the process was therefore quicker and more streamlined. This local authority is in an area of moderate to high ESOL need, in common with many of the areas discussed in this report.

### ***Current provision***

A large proportion of ESOL provision for pre-WP JSA and ESA WRAG customers in London was provided by FE colleges, although some of the other ESOL providers also described working with JCP referred learners.

There were examples of JCP involvement in decisions on the length and intensity of courses. Involvement did not extend to decisions on course teaching methods and this was felt to be appropriate (with the role remaining with the experts within the colleges and other providers). Examples of changes to provision included the set-up of eight week long ESOL courses for JCP referred learners, and the development of 'roll on/off programmes' that provide a short course that learners could be referred to and start on the following week.

The majority of the providers interviewed were meeting JCP requests for shorter ESOL course provision. Significantly improving English language ability on short courses was felt by many to be a challenge, however, and there was a general consensus that greater funding flexibility to allow for extended ESOL provision would be beneficial for learner outcomes. For example, one ESOL provider told us:

*'The simple message that we get from regional right down to centre manager is that they want short sharp interventions, they don't care how they get the people off the books as long as they're off benefit. That's the message that we get on a daily basis. Jobcentre Plus don't seem to be interested in providing longer term support for those individuals.'*

One FE college reported that their local JCP offices had requested four-week long ESOL courses for their customers. The college felt this was not a sufficient period to achieve any outcomes and so was not meeting this request. They were in discussions with JCP around the feasibility of eight week courses.

The majority of providers were delivering both discrete and embedded ESOL courses and were delivering courses at all levels. Generally, providers reported that ESOL provision at lower levels could only meaningfully include employability in relation to soft or general skills (e.g. confidence and answering interview questions). It was also suggested that embedded ESOL courses are not always as popular with learners, who often believed language was their primary barrier to employment or preferred to commit to an ESOL course first and then access other skills provision once their language skills had improved.

Measuring job outcomes as a consequence of ESOL courses was not something that any of the providers interviewed were doing at the time of research. A significant number were looking to set up

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such systems, however. There was strong recognition from ESOL providers that an important goal of provision was employment, but some raised concerns over the perverse incentive that if a learner left a course to enter employment, this was counted as a failure for the provider.

Another issue raised by many ESOL providers was the removal of learners by JCP mid-way through ESOL courses so they could be referred to the WP or other mandatory activities. Providers felt that more forward planning should go into decisions about which JCP customers were referred onto ESOL courses and/or when they were referred to the WP, to prevent such disruption to individuals' learning.

### **Provision for Work Programme learners**

This section is based on interviews with five of the six London prime contractors of the WP, as well as ESOL providers. Details of the topics covered in these interviews can be found in the appendix of this report.

#### ***Current practice***

Most prime contractors in London appeared to screen for ESOL needs during their initial customer assessment. Primes seemed confident that their screening was adequate and working well, although one prime reported that it found it difficult to identify customers who were illiterate as well as having ESOL needs. Estimates of the level of ESOL need among WP customers in London varied from 10 to 40 per cent across contract package areas<sup>5</sup> with particular offices sometimes having a much higher need. One East London prime contractor reported that in one of its offices, 98 per cent of customers had ESOL needs.

Prime contractors reported that the level of ESOL need varied between customers, with some needing pre-entry level ESOL and others needing higher level courses. Some prime contractors reported that JCP had good referral relationships with ESOL providers, and that customers often came to the WP having completed pre-entry level ESOL training.

There was a clear split between prime contractors that delivered ESOL in-house and those who referred customers to ESOL providers. Prime contractors delivering in-house told us that they had not developed referral relationships with ESOL providers because in the past their Department for Work and Pensions contracts had not been long enough to warrant referring customers for training. The ESOL delivered in-house by primes appeared to be for short periods of time. This training was focused on key vocabulary for particular jobs and to ensure that customers could understand, for example, health and safety instructions. More often for these prime contractors, if a customer was identified as having ESOL needs, advisers tried to find them 'appropriate work,' defined as work conducted in a language that the customer spoke. Some WP subcontractors also attempted to broker jobs for their customers where English language was not needed but included other support alongside this (such as peer support sessions) that was conducted in English.

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<sup>5</sup> There are two contract package areas for the Work Programme in London: East London and West London. Each contract package area has three prime contractors.

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Most prime contractors who referred customers to external ESOL provision expressed a preference for standalone rather than embedded courses. This was because it was felt that most customers needed to develop their English language skills before they went on to vocational training. One prime, however, felt that ideally they would integrate external ESOL provision with their in-house employability training.

Primes who referred to external provision felt that referral processes were becoming better as the WP moved through its implementation phase. Some primes had strategic partnerships with FE colleges who delivered ESOL and referred to these providers. Other primes felt that there was a lack of availability of provision and that it was difficult to make referrals because of long waiting lists.

Those primes who referred to external provision tended to be happy with its quality and felt that it met the needs of their customers. None of these prime contractors had been involved with designing the ESOL provision. Some prime contractors reported that there was a shortage of provision of pre-entry level ESOL, though they were happy with it when they managed to find places for their customers. The reason that some prime contractors did not refer customers to external ESOL provision was not that they were concerned about shortages of provision or poor quality provision, but because they had not developed referral relationships with ESOL providers at a strategic level. This is likely to change in the near future.

### ***Future plans***

Prime contractors in London reported meeting regularly to discuss collaborative work arrangements. One of their three priorities for collaboration was skills and within this, the three key areas of concern were literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

The London prime contractors had been in dialogue the Association of Colleges in order to understand the learning provision for which different WP customer groups were eligible and what referral mechanisms would work for both WP providers and FE colleges. London primes believed that these relationships would be important to the success of the WP. Further to this dialogue, a referral pilot had been run between London prime contractors and Hackney Community College. Whilst limited in scope (involving testing referrals to ESOL courses of a small number of customers), this was seen to be a success and primes were keen to make better use of FE provision for their customers across the capital in the future.

Subsequent to the referral pilot, links between WP providers and FE colleges were being developed at a local level. To promote this, a 'speed dating' event was held for personal advisers and ESOL providers to make contact, understand each other's work and help make referrals in the future.

In the longer term, London primes hoped to influence the content and nature of ESOL provision in London. They reported that this would partly be informed by what existing ESOL provision prime contractors saw leading to job outcomes. In addition, London prime contractors hoped that ESOL provision would become increasingly employer led; specifically, prime contractors hoped to broker conversations between ESOL providers and employers so that ESOL provision prioritised the particular English language and employability skills needed by employers. Given that WP providers are paid for

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securing sustained job outcomes for their clients, it will be vital that ESOL providers receiving referrals from them encourage and record job outcomes of customers.

The existing perverse incentive whereby ESOL providers were penalised if learners failed to complete their course because they had entered employment was a concern to London primes. WP providers seemed less concerned than JCP with the length of provision and were not pushing for very short ESOL courses. This was because WP providers had two years to work with their customers and could justify referring people to relatively long courses if they were convinced that there was a good chance of the person moving into work. This is potentially very positive given that ESOL providers argued that longer courses have greater benefits for learners. Given that ESOL courses for JSA claimants were for less than 16 hours per week, it will be important to ensure that those referred to long ESOL courses are still receiving the full range of support to which they are entitled, from both ESOL and WP providers.

### ***Perspective of ESOL providers***

Most ESOL providers interviewed had not received any referrals from WP providers and it was common for ESOL providers to report that they had had no contact with WP providers. Some were unconcerned about this, as they felt that they received adequate referrals from elsewhere and, indeed, were already at the limit of what they could provide. A small number of FE colleges were in the early stages of setting up referral arrangements with prime contractors and were very positive about the potential of these partnerships.

Some ESOL providers were concerned that they received referrals from JCP but that when these customers were moved onto the WP that they were withdrawn from their courses because of compulsory attendance at WP training. It was not clear whether this was restricted to particular areas or prime contractors. WP providers admitted that this did sometimes occur. This was because WP providers believed that at the point of referral it was often useful to make radical changes to the activities that customers were undertaking. WP providers would be hesitant to accept guidance that customers should be kept on any course they had been referred to by JCP. This is because such guidance would undermine the 'black box' model of provision in the WP. Instead, WP providers suggested that for JSA claimants, screening and referral to ESOL provision should be at a point in their claim giving enough time so that the ESOL course was completed prior to eligibility for the WP. Results of any ESOL screening and suggested training needs should also form part of the 'warm handover' between JCP and WP provider to ensure limited disruption for individuals.

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# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Conclusions

- ESOL is an important service. It enables non-English speakers to secure employment in English-speaking environments and to understand the rights they have in work. It is a tool for integration, community cohesion and employment that is crucial for building an inclusive society. In addition, ESOL classes are instrumental in fostering intercultural relations, tolerance and understanding.
- Good partnership working existed between JCP and ESOL providers across London, particularly at a strategic level. This high level buy-in did appear to be crucial for the building of strong partnerships. However, it was equally important that this was also communicated and adopted at a local level, and this was not always felt to be occurring sufficiently. Indeed, there were some areas where relationships between ESOL providers and JCP staff could sometimes become strained.
- The level of demand and number of referrals varied widely. It appeared that SFA funding changes have meant that JCP is making a greater number of referrals at pre-entry level, but ESOL providers report that not all referred learners actually start on courses. Most ESOL providers are coping with the increased number of referrals.
- As discussed above, JCP had requested shorter (often eight week) ESOL courses on a roll-on roll-off basis and this demand appeared to have been met widely across the capital.
- WP prime contractors in London were split between those that have been referring clients with ESOL needs to external provision and those who have been delivering (limited) ESOL directly.
- Those who had made external referrals felt that referral processes were becoming better as the WP moved through its implementation phase. Some prime contractors had developed strategic partnerships with FE colleges which delivered ESOL and referred customers to these providers.
- All six London prime contractors had been in dialogue with the Association of Colleges and had piloted making referrals for ESOL to Hackney Community College. Subsequent to the referral pilot, links between WP providers and FE colleges were being developed at a local level across London. To promote this, a 'speed dating' event had been held for personal advisers and ESOL providers to make contact, understand each other's work and help make referrals in the future.
- In the longer term, London prime contractors hoped to influence the content and nature of ESOL provision in London. They appeared to be less concerned than JCP with shorter courses and more focused on ensuring that ESOL providers' employability elements of ESOL provision were employer led.

## Recommendations

- It was noted by respondents that there was not always enough pre-entry level ESOL provision available, and that this is needed before many individuals could access entry-level courses. Steps should be taken to ensure more pre-entry level ESOL courses are available.

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- Good practice identified between JCP and ESOL providers should be applied consistently across London:
    - Local JCP offices should have named ESOL lead.
    - ESOL providers should have a presence in JCP offices to provide information about courses and conduct assessments.
  - WP providers and ESOL providers should build upon the good referral links that are being developed so that these occur across London.
  - Local authorities should consider the good practice identified in one London borough where the local authority ran a single ESOL advice service.
  - *ESOL providers, JCP and WP providers should work together on the following:*

#### *On referrals:*

- Referrals for ESOL training should be made at the appropriate time in customer journeys. For example, JSA claimants should be screened for ESOL needs and referred to ESOL provision at a point in their claim where they will have completed this prior to eligibility for the WP.
- Referrals for ESOL should be made in a consistent and streamlined manner.
- Learner assessments should establish individuals' literacy levels in their first language alongside their ESOL level, as this has important implications for the type of ESOL training required.
- Data sharing should be improved within the confines of data protection.
- More accurate estimates of numbers of referrals should be provided by local JCP offices for courses ESOL providers are running specifically for JCP. Without accurate estimates of demand there is a danger that courses will be undersubscribed, with negative financial impacts on ESOL providers. It may be worth considering whether JCP should share the financial risks with ESOL providers of running undersubscribed courses requested by JCP.

#### *In design of ESOL provision for jobseekers:*

- ESOL providers should lead on methods of instruction and the length of courses appropriate for different levels.
- JCP and WP providers should lead on the choice of employability skills within ESOL courses in conjunction with local employers.
- Courses providing higher level ESOL training combined with vocational skills should be determined at the local level with the input of employers, to ensure that these courses best prepare customers for their local labour market.

#### *In measuring job outcomes:*

- Job outcomes should be monitored in a way that is consistent and minimises duplication, and ESOL providers should be given advice and guidance in how to do this. Further work to determine how this can best be done is required.
- There is currently a perverse incentive, by which if a customer leaves a programme of study to enter work, this is counted as a failure for the learning provider. This disincentivises providers to



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help customers into work whilst they are in the middle of a course. For example, by the customer continuing to be funded to complete the programme of ESOL study.

- The current rule that JSA customers can only undertake long-term courses for a maximum of 16 hours per week may limit some customers' ability to develop the English language skills they need to enter employment. Consideration should therefore be given to relaxing this rule for individuals with more significant ESOL and other learning needs (particularly in the context of a move to employment outcome payments).
- The SFA and the Department for Work and Pensions should publish data on ESOL training take-up among JSA and ESA WRAG claimants in order to help stakeholders understand the effects of recent changes to ESOL funding.

## Other formats and languages

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### Chinese

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### Hindi

यदि आप इस दस्तावेज की प्रति अपनी  
भाषा में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया निम्नलिखित  
नंबर पर फोन करें अथवा नीचे दिये गये  
पते पर संपर्क करें

### Vietnamese

Nếu bạn muốn có văn bản tài liệu  
này bằng ngôn ngữ của mình, hãy  
liên hệ theo số điện thoại hoặc địa  
chỉ dưới đây.

### Bengali

আপনি যদি আপনার ভাষায় এই দলিলের প্রতিলিপি  
(কপি) চান, তা হলে নিচের ফোন নম্বরে  
বা ঠিকানায় অনুগ্রহ করে যোগাযোগ করুন।

### Greek

Αν θέλετε να αποκτήσετε αντίγραφο του παρόντος  
εγγράφου στη δική σας γλώσσα, παρακαλείστε να  
επικοινωνήσετε τηλεφωνικά στον αριθμό αυτό ή ταχυ-  
δρομικά στην παρακάτω διεύθυνση.

### Urdu

اگر آپ اس دستاویز کی نقل اپنی زبان میں  
چاہتے ہیں، تو براہ کرم نیچے دئے گئے نمبر  
پر فون کریں یا دیئے گئے پتے پر رابطہ کریں

### Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinizde  
hazırlanmış bir nüshasını  
edinmek için, lütfen aşağıdaki  
telefon numarasını arayınız  
veya adrese başvurunuz.

### Arabic

إذا أردت نسخة من هذه الوثيقة بلغتك، يرجى  
الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو مراسلة العنوان  
أدناه

### Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦੀ ਕਾਪੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ  
ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਹੇਠ  
ਲਿਖੇ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਰਾਬਤਾ ਕਰੋ:

### Gujarati

જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજની નકલ તમારી ભાષામાં  
જોઈતી હોય તો, કૃપા કરી આપેલ નંબર ઉપર  
ફોન કરો અથવા નીચેના સરનામે સંપર્ક સાધો.

