

Establishing and developing ESOL local partnerships: An effective practice guide



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide aims to help ESOL providers of all sizes, working in all contexts, and other stakeholders who have an interest in ESOL to develop effective models and practices of partnership working. It was developed by Learning and Work Institute (L&W) on behalf of the Department for Education. L&W is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

The guide outlines:

- the benefits of ESOL partnerships and networks for (potential) learners, providers and other stakeholders,
- gives examples of how you can support the development of an ESOL partnership in your local area,
- ways in which collaboration might be enhanced,
- explores some of the challenges providers and other stakeholders may face and how to overcome them, and
- gives examples of possible ways in which outcomes and impact of partnership working can be recorded and measured.

It also provides a framework, which can be used as a tool to self-assess current strengths and weaknesses and overall level of development in your approach to partnership working.

Information in this guide draws on a rapid review of existing models and practice in the delivery of ESOL partnerships and networks and 37 depth interviews with ESOL providers and key stakeholders in 10 selected local authority areas across England.

The areas, chosen to illustrate different settings and practices in ESOL partnership working, are:

- Brent
- Bristol
- Ealing
- Leeds
- Leicester
- Luton
- Newham
- Oldham
- Sandwell
- Suffolk

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SUMMARY OF GUIDE

This guide is comprised of five sections.

Section one provides information on the benefits of partnership working for learners, providers and wider stakeholders. Throughout this section, real life examples are used to illustrate the benefits of working in partnership.

Section two gives key ways to support the development of an ESOL network in your local area. This includes enabling factors, such as: keeping it simple, identifying the gap, tapping into existing partnerships and working relationships, and funding, time and capacity.

It also covers critical success factors, identified as: clear and credible leadership, dedicated and consistent membership, clear aims and objectives, and having a common goal, building trust and promoting a sharing culture, inclusive and broad membership, engagement and communication strategies, and a single point of contact.

Section three provides some of the key challenges that might be encountered when trying to establish or develop a local ESOL network, as well as some suggestions on how to overcome these challenges.

Section four provides suggestions for ways to measure and evidence impact of working in partnership. For example, capturing enrolment, progression and learning outcomes, wider outcomes, provider impact and learner outcomes.

Section five provides a framework for collaboration which sets out examples of operational features and activities for partnerships at a variety of stages of development.

1. THE BENEFITS OF ESOL PARTNERSHIPS

Providers and stakeholders working in a variety of contexts reported that working in partnership was beneficial in a variety of ways. This section highlights the benefits of partnership working for learners, providers and wider stakeholders.

As establishing, developing or becoming involved in an ESOL partnership can present costs (namely in terms of time and capacity), it is important to share information about the benefits of partnership working and the positive difference that can be made through working in this way. Having this information can help outweigh the costs and encourage and incentivise taking this approach.



FOR LEARNERS

Increased opportunities to access (suitable) provision

ESOL networks which include a range of providers, including FE colleges and local authorities as well as third sector, community-based providers, can increase opportunities to access provision for all (potential) learners, and, in particular vulnerable groups, or those who may find more formal provision harder to access.

Community-based providers are often best placed to engage with these groups as they operate within the heart of communities and are a well-known presence there. They may have more flexibility to offer different non-formal and informal learning options than providers who are working within Adult Education Budget (AEB) eligibility criteria and funding rules.

Websites which contain information about the full range of available ESOL provision in the local area can be beneficial for learners, and others working to support them.

▶ Bristol ESOL Providers Group

Partners in Bristol set up the Learning English in Bristol website (<https://leb.community/>). It

contains information on ESOL provision in the city. The website allows a user to search for a class by provider, class or by using a map of the city to search by location.

▶ Leeds Migrant English Support Hub

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

Having an extensive network, with many 'access points' in the local area also maximises engagement opportunities for learners. Overall, this means learners have access to a wider range of provision at different levels, times, locations and formats, optimising their ability to access suitable provision.

Those in frontline roles are also well-placed to identify gaps in current offer or shifts in demand and communicate this to providers in the partnership. In response, providers can run courses that better meet learner need and are

more suitable to the types of learners in the local area.

In areas where Further Education (FE) and/ or Adult Community Learning (ACL) providers partner with community providers, consistent marketing, such as college logos, can increase visibility to (potential) learners by raising awareness about learning options and increasing the legitimacy of provision delivered in community settings. In these instances, learners have access to a known standard of provision and it can give them a sense of belonging to a wider learning community.

▶ **Oldham Lifelong Learning Service**

Oldham Lifelong Learning Service's main aim is to target the hardest to reach learners in the local area and meet their needs through the delivery of 'survival English' which fosters their ability to access local services (children's schools, hospital etc.) and integrate socially. They meet this need by working with a range of community providers who are situated in the heart of the community and have built a trusting relationship with these people. Liaising with their community partners also enables Oldham Lifelong Learning Service to identify (potential) learners' needs. They can then respond by putting on courses that aim to meet the identified need. For example, setting up pre-entry classes, content specific classes, or women only classes. Additionally, working in partnership enables them to offer a wider range of provision, including non-accredited, accredited and vocational courses, meaning more learners can access courses that suit them.

Increased opportunities to progress through (standardised) provision

Partnership working provides smoother transition and progression pathways for learners into higher ESOL levels and other provision such as Functional Skills, and employment.

When local authorities work with community partners and colleges, they can create coherent systems that facilitate seamless transitions, for example from community venues, to local authority learning centres, and to college.

▶ **Newham ESOL Exchange**

In Newham, one of the key benefits for ESOL learners is that, through the coordinated approach taken by the Exchange, they can access a standardised quality of provision and streamlined progression pathways.

This is achieved in a variety of ways. Firstly, the college and the local authority have a very trusting relationship and an agreement that they will target different learner cohorts based on level, so as to avoid competition. If one partner feels that a learner would be better suited in the other's learning environment, they will refer them.

'It's a partnership that works very well because we go out of our way to make sure we're not stealing learners or jeopardising one areas class for another, so we work very, very closely with them...[the] college, they do tend to be very focused on accreditation and achievement and qualifications and, if they have learners that need more time, we offer non-accredited bridging courses between the levels that they can place learners on, but then also we can swap somebody to them to achieve the higher courses.' Newham ACL

They also have an official partnership document (commended by Ofsted) which enables them to share community education buildings. They have ensured that the college logo is visible to learners at all these venues. This increases not only accessibility and awareness about the opportunities for learning at the point of entry, but also enables the learner to feel part of a bigger learning journey that has progression opportunities.

Additionally, the network coordinator plays a central role of marrying up providers with different remits so that learners can more easily access the 'next stage' of provision.

Increased opportunities to access wider provision or services

Partnerships consisting of non-ESOL service providers, including health services, faith groups, food banks, immigration services, domestic violence support, employment support, employers, working alongside ESOL providers, enable learners to be more efficiently signposted to service points that meet their wider needs. By being involved in an ESOL network, non-ESOL services can also improve their ability to refer service users to ESOL provision.

Some ESOL providers work in partnership with wider services to offer embedded ESOL courses such as Civic ESOL, or Health ESOL. This benefits learners as they gain a better understanding of local services available to them.





FOR PROVIDERS

Enhanced access to funding streams

Smaller providers involved in ESOL networks can access and benefit from funding streams which they otherwise may not have accessed. By working with their local authority, they can contribute to the bid writing process and secure funding. From the local authority's perspective, as well as saving time and money, a joint approach to bid writing can improve the quality of the final submission, making the process mutually beneficial.

For providers delivering AEB funded courses, working in partnership can help them to achieve learner enrolment targets and fully utilise the funding available to them.

Greater efficiency of delivery

Pooling resources, sharing learners and distributing provision can positively impact on provider time and capacity.

Opportunity to share

One of the main benefits for providers is the opportunity partnership working gives them to meet up, share ideas, good practice, challenges and solutions. This can be particularly beneficial for providers who tend to work in isolation.

Providing space to meet face to face (e.g. workshops, events and steering group meetings) most effectively facilitates sharing ideas.

▶ Suffolk ESOL Steering Group

One of the main reasons Suffolk ESOL steering group was set up was to provide support to local ESOL providers by giving

them an opportunity to come together and share practice.

Provider meetings are held once a term during which providers are invited to share information about the nature of their provision, their experiences of practice and learning, new resources and curricula used and any issues they are experiencing.

This opportunity is particularly beneficial for providers in Suffolk given that they are working across a relatively large and rural geographical area.

'The providers value the fact that they've got an opportunity to come together because quite often they're working in isolation, so that opportunity to just come and share, I think they really value that.' Suffolk LA

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

Improved knowledge and expertise

Networks and partnerships which provide a sharing platform can also act as a 'knowledge hub', enhancing providers' knowledge and expertise.

Having a variety of voices within a partnership can maximise this benefit as those working in

different settings have expertise in certain remits, or can shed light on the same issue through a different lens.

Through these conversations, providers can improve the robustness of their own systems and approaches to delivery, helping them to more easily reach targets for example.

Larger providers are sometimes able to support smaller organisations to build capacity more formally. Through training (e.g. CPD sessions) and sharing of resources, organisations are able to develop new strands of their support model. For example, creating a class at a new level.

Luton Adult Learning

Luton Adult Learning (LAL) subcontracts ESOL provision out to community providers. Community providers are assigned a programme leader at LAL, who is their single point of contact. The LAL programme leader visits monthly to carry out observations and is easily contactable between visits. Steering group meetings are held throughout the year. They provide training for the community providers at the beginning of each year.

Increased awareness and understanding of local need, available provision and gaps in provision

Through regular partner meetings, ESOL providers are better able to understand learner need, the provider landscape and the availability of provision.

Additionally, providers' knowledge of learners' wider needs, which may not be visible to the ESOL provider, can be improved through partnerships that include non-ESOL organisations. For example, services running in

the community such as food banks may help ESOL providers to better understand the reasons behind lateness or absence.

▶ Newham ESOL Exchange

A more recent aim of the Exchange in Newham has been to broaden its membership to include non-ESOL organisations. This was to facilitate a knowledge exchange between any organisation with an interest in ESOL and providers themselves. Broad membership enables providers to better understand the wider needs of ESOL learners, including in the areas of health, immigration, benefits and housing. Membership now includes representatives from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), children's and family centres, homeless charities, health services and domestic abuse support services.

Having food banks come to the Exchange, for example, helps ESOL providers understand why learners might be late to class or absent. It also helps them shape their provision around these needs, for example putting classes on in a particular venue or focusing on a particular theme in class. It also helps providers to signpost learners to wider services that are better placed to meet their wider needs.

They have been successful in engaging a broader membership by publishing updates about the Exchange in a community organisation's e-newsletter which reaches approximately 800 organisations across east London.

More recently, they have run a professional development session for ESOL tutors and

other practitioners called 'When Life Gets in the Way', which looks at identifying and responding effectively to barriers to learning such as poor housing and domestic violence.

Enhances ability to provide support

Increased knowledge, awareness and expertise can enhance providers' ability to provide support to (potential) learners.

Providers can recruit learners for whom the level, content and type of provision on offer is suitable.

Providers can offer an improved referral service as they can signpost learners to ESOL provision, or other support that best suits them, such as more flexible provision, or provision with childcare.

Providers' awareness of gaps in provision is also increased, enabling them to map provision and design provision to meet identified need, such as putting on classes at certain levels in response to the changing need of learners in the area. This awareness also enables providers to support other providers' whose classes are oversubscribed.

Being able to offer higher quality of provision can mean that achievement and retention rates are higher. Sustained participation in learning and good attendance in classes is also a follow-on benefit for learners.

Increased staff capability, capacity and morale

Networks can act as an informal source of support for providers which helps them to

overcome any challenges or issues they may face and motivates them in their practice.

Reduced likelihood of competition, duplication and oversupply of provision

According to their remit and expertise, providers working in partnership can each earmark cohorts to target provision at. For example, an FE college may target learners at a higher level, while a community provider may choose to focus on lower level learners. Once agreed, the instances of competition between providers are mitigated against. Additionally, this approach helps to avoid duplication of provision.

▶ Bristol ESOL Providers Group

One of the main aims of the Bristol partnership is to map and organise provision across the city, so that anyone wanting to find out about ESOL provision in their locality can easily access information on what is available.

The mapping of provision, which the group have collectively carried out, prevents providers from duplicating provision or 'reinventing the wheel' and ensures new provision meets learner need.

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



FOR WIDER STAKEHOLDERS

Increased awareness

Through attending network meetings, other stakeholders can stay informed about available ESOL provision in their local area as well as local residents' ESOL needs. This helps them to signpost service users to suitable ESOL provision in the area and plan and deliver services that support people with an ESOL need.

Access to provision that meets business needs

Employers can benefit from partnering with ESOL providers as it raises their awareness of available provision options that their employees can access, such as online or community provision. Employers who work closely with ESOL providers can access tailored provision to meet their business needs. For example, workplace-based provision, content focused on meeting an identified skills gap, and sector specific content.

▶ Ealing ESOL Start and Finish Group

The Ealing ESOL start and finish group consists of the local authority's adult community learning department (the ESOL provider) and a range of local employers. They meet 4 times a year.

By working together, the ESOL provider is able to understand employers' needs so that they can deliver provision suited to each employer context. For example, they take the time to understand the skills needs in certain workplaces and design courses to address specific needs.

Additionally, by participating in the group,

employers' awareness of local, available provision is increased, meaning they can more effectively support their employees who might benefit from accessing provision locally.

Increased capacity to tackle local issues

Local ESOL partnerships have the potential to enhance local capacity through innovations in service delivery and collaborations on projects to address specific issues – this can include accessing additional funding to invest in services in the area.

Through working in this way, wider social benefits can be seen. For example, schools who partner with ESOL providers can also notice benefits; as parents' engagement in learning can have a positive impact on their children's development, behaviour and confidence.

Enhanced reputation

Being a reliable and consistent member of an ESOL network can give wider stakeholders a 'trusted' or 'known' status within the local community. This enhances their reputation and gives them increased access to sources of information and support.

Employers who partner with ESOL providers can also enhance their reputation as they are supporting their employees to upskill and increase opportunities for progression.

Increased visibility of local ESOL provision, providers and related services

Partnerships can raise the visibility of ESOL provision and related services in the local area. Overall, this may lead to further improvements such as links with other organisations.

2. WAYS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ESOL PARTNERSHIP IN YOUR LOCAL AREA

This section provides practical advice and examples of steps, providers and stakeholders have taken to establish and then sustain and develop an ESOL partnership.

You can pick and choose the suggestions based on what would suit your local area, the resources you have available, your current level of partnership working and the aims of your partnership. You don't have to put all the examples in place to establish or develop a partnership, and not all of these may be appropriate to your local context.

Enabling factors

The following have been identified as common and key enabling factors that help to establish a partnership.

1. Keeping it simple

- Having one or two key stakeholders who have the will and capacity to initiate and drive the partnership forward.
- Meeting face to face, regularly throughout the year on the same dates so that they become anchors in members' diaries.
- Taking informal approaches; providers value an opportunity to come together and discuss their practices (such as waiting lists, levels, curriculum), challenges faced and ideas to overcome them.

2. Identifying the gap

Identifying the gap in your local area helps to develop aims and approaches of partnership working that respond to the local need. For example, many partnerships have been established in response to the recognition that hard to reach groups' needs were not being sufficiently met, and a strong desire to meet them.

3. Tapping into existing partnerships and working relationships

Building ESOL partnerships by drawing on and tapping into existing contacts in the sector can be easier than building a network from scratch.

Effective practice example: Representatives from local authorities in both Ealing and Leeds found an effective approach to engaging new partners in their local ESOL network was to draw on established contacts in working groups and partnerships that had some cross over with ESOL. For example, inviting contacts from their Migration Partnership, or the Skills, Employment and Productivity group. This was seen as more valuable than starting from scratch.

4. Collaborative approach to accessing funding

Funding is a key enabling factor that providers and stakeholders identified when establishing any network. Although not essential, accessing funding can be an effective way in which a partnership can be established or developed. A collaborative approach to applying for and securing

funding can also be effective as it can save time and capacity.

Effective practice example: Bristol ESOL Providers Group put in a joint bid and recently received funding from the Controlling Migration Fund. This has been used for several initiatives, including setting up a website called Learn English in Bristol, which provides information on ESOL provision in the city, and producing resources for volunteer tutors.

The group is currently in the process of developing an ESOL strategy for Bristol, and is bidding for funding to set up an ESOL advice service, which will act as a hub of information and assessment of ESOL needs that can signpost people to the most appropriate provision for them.

Critical success factors

The following have been identified as critical factors; elements of and approaches to partnership working that make a partnership or network sustainable, able to increase in scope and able to continue to meet the needs of the local area and therefore maintain relevance and value.

1. Clear and credible leadership

Partnerships working effectively, and with longevity tend to consist of a member who holds a key leadership role. It is particularly effective when there is continuity in leadership.

Effective practice example: Suffolk ESOL steering group is led by a representative from

the university and another from the local authority. They can act as 'honest brokers' as they are from bodies not directly involved in ESOL. Being slightly removed from the issue means they are less emotionally affected by challenges, enabling them to provide unbiased leadership.

Effective practice example: Newham ESOL Exchange is led by a paid co-ordinator. This post holder has time and capacity to dedicate to running the network. They can co-ordinate the dissemination of communication activities (minutes from meetings), materials and resources, and organise and run events, steering groups, and workshops.

2. Dedicated and consistent membership

Having a dedicated and committed membership means that partners are more able to build trust which facilitates sharing of ideas, knowledge and expertise. This can also mean the partnership is more likely to be sustainable.

Engagement from key decision-makers in the local area can generate support for and promote the network, facilitating its sustainment and growth. This can be done through developing good relationships with people.

3. Clear aims and objectives, and having a common goal

Clear aims, objectives and having a common goal is key to sustaining partnership working. Communicating these goals clearly can help to foster a culture of shared rather than competing priorities.



There is evidence, this task, along with managing partners' expectations, can be done effectively by the partnership co-ordinator.

Additionally, providing opportunities for members to provide feedback on the overall objectives and direction of the partnership fosters ownership of decision-making and thus encourages commitment which in turn sustains the momentum of the partnership.

Setting goals in this collaborative but guided way and ensuring that procedures to capture information on the extent to which aims are being met means the partnership is more able to respond to the needs of the local area and to continue to play an effective and valued role in organising and delivering ESOL.

Effective practice also includes partnerships which focus on learner-centred aims and set practical, solution-focused goals to overcome problems.

Having clear aims and objectives also ensures that messaging and external

communication about the partnership is simple and effective. This can help to increase awareness about the partnership and support its growth.

Effective practice example: Luton Adult Learning provides clear information in writing to all subcontracted community partners from the outset of the partnership. For example, they provide information on what kind of data providers need to collect to evidence delivery, practice and learner outcomes. Clear working protocols help to manage expectations and improve the efficiency of working overall.

4. Building trust and promoting a sharing culture

Breaking down silo working, and competitive practices are key success factors to partnership working. While it can take time and effort, there are ways to facilitate this. Holding events, workshops, professional development sessions and other opportunities that promote sharing knowledge, good practice and the benefits

of working in partnership help to build trust. Once providers and other stakeholders see that other members are comfortable sharing ideas, information, and resources, a sharing culture can be more easily fostered.

Effective practice example: Despite not operating a formal partnership, Brent ACL hosted a CPD session for ESOL teachers delivering sessions in libraries across the local area. This involved inviting the tutors to observe ACL tutors in practice. They found that this promoted a sharing culture and reduced competition.

5. Inclusive and broad membership

Being inclusive can help any interested organisation to feel welcome and encouraged to become a member of the partnership. It can also promote a wider working culture in the local area based on sharing, listening, joined-up thinking and collaboration. Conversely, excluding certain organisations or providers could exacerbate working in silos.

Having a broad membership also means that ESOL providers can draw on other organisations' expertise, for example those who work with a similar cohort but provide a different service, such as health and immigration services or faith groups, and vice versa.

By drawing on each other's funds of knowledge, recognition that all members can contribute added value and expertise in a particular area, regardless of size and remit is promoted.

Effective practice example: Members of the Bristol ESOL Providers Group includes JobCentre Plus, Bristol City Council, employability organisations such as Ways2Work, and third sector organisations including Big Issue, Ashley Community Housing, Bristol Refugee Rights, Borderlands, Food Without Borders, and representatives involved in the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme. Any interested organisation can attend meetings if they want to find out more about ESOL provision in the area. The group invites new partners to attend a group meeting if they become aware of any organisation they think would be interested in becoming involved.

6. Engagement strategies

Engaging new members in a partnership can help it develop. Effective approaches to engagement include:

- Clear messaging of aims and remit of network
- Highlighting benefits of partnership working
- Holding networking and engagement events

7. Communication strategies

Effective communication is at the heart of successful partnership working. Providing a non-threatening, non-competitive space for providers can enable them to share more profoundly and transparently. This approach to communication can yield benefits for providers and therefore build a successful network.

Clear communication also benefits learners as providers have better awareness of referral and progression pathways, and available alternative provision.

8. Single point of contact / one stop shop

A single point of contact can be available for different service offers and provide a variety of functions. Having a one stop shop makes identifying and accessing provision more straightforward for the learner and lends credibility to providers who are part of the service. For example, a website can provide a 'one stop shop' for (potential) learners to find up to date information about all ESOL classes in their local area, enabling

them to find accessible and appropriate provision that best meets their needs. Other services might assess and support learners in a standardised way and enable them have access to the same information about provision. Services might also be able to record and track learner information and journeys so that learner need, provision availability and progression pathways are monitored. Consistent marketing makes this service more accessible to (potential) learners. Regularly updating any information on websites or shared platforms is valuable.



3. CHALLENGES TO PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND WAYS TO OVERCOME THEM

This section explores some of the challenges of establishing and developing an ESOL partnership, as well as some practical suggestions on ways and approaches to overcome them. As with the sections above, challenges may vary depending on the context in which you are working and the resources available to you, so you may feel that some challenges are not applicable to you. The proposed solutions are ideas to help you with partnership working, rather than a definitive guide.

1. Time and capacity beyond the day job

Providers and stakeholders reported that an overall decrease in AEB funded ESOL provision had resulted in them feeling stretched. Participating in partnership working was seen as a challenge to carry out beyond the day job.

Solutions:

- Having a dedicated member in a coordinator role, potentially in a paid position. The role does not necessarily need to be undertaken by an ESOL provider.
- Holding meetings at dates, times and regularity that suits members.
- Building relationships with decision-makers and key players in your local area who can support the partnership financially and/or politically.
- Keeping the aims and structure of the partnership simple and achievable.

2. Funding

A lack of funding dedicated to supporting the development of an ESOL partnership was reported as a significant challenge. It can mean there is little ability to establish a network from scratch. Alternatively, in areas where partnership working is more established, it can hinder the development or scope of the network.

Funding constraints may also impact on providers' willingness to work collaboratively. For example, providers may be incentivised by their funding stream to enrol or progress learners within their provision, regardless of its suitability.

Solutions:

- Partnership working which facilitates open communication between providers can help different kinds of providers understand each others' priorities and constraints and help to identify ways to mitigate these.
- Working in partnership can improve access to funding streams, for example through collaboration with the local authority and/or other providers in your local area to source alternative funding. This can help to create new kinds of provision which addresses gaps in the local offer.

3. Engagement of 'key' players

Engagement of key players, including local authority or FE sector representatives can be a challenge. Without their engagement, partnerships can lose momentum and in some cases, ultimately, cease to exist. Their engagement therefore can be quite crucial.

Solutions:

- Tapping into existing steering groups, run by the local authority or college for example, working in similar remits and who have existing contacts with key bodies.
- Ensure that the value of partnership working is clearly communicated to these key players. An effective way to do this could be by celebrating 'small' achievements which demonstrate the added value of working together. Another effective approach could be to demonstrate the economic benefit of partnership working.
- Fostering a trusting culture, which might be achieved by 'modelling' certain behaviours such as sharing information.
- Holding awareness raising events.

4. Lack of formal strategy

The absence of a formal strategy, such as setting objectives and monitoring progress against them can affect partnership development. While there is evidence that informal approaches to partnership working can be effective too, it may limit the scope of the partnership.

Solutions:

- Deciding which approach works most effectively for your area, based on the aims of the partnership, the resources available and the members' expectations. Many respondents explained that partnerships started informally and have organically developed to a stage where members are keen to formalise their practices.

- Keeping it simple; scheduling regular, consistent meetings and workshops, taking minutes and sharing them, and communicating with partners effectively from the outset can be an easy way to formalise processes.

5. Fluctuating membership and inconsistent points of contact

Inevitably, partnership membership can wax and wane as people retire, change roles or structures change. This can impact on the momentum of a partnership. While these changes cannot be avoided, maintaining interest and investment can be done.

Solutions:

- Keeping membership broad but having a small dedicated core steering group consisting of people who are genuinely committed.
- Ensuring that the partnership is of value to its members by requesting their feedback and listening and responding to their views on the needs and gaps in the local area.
- Inviting non-ESOL organisations to deliver sessions on their services can encourage their participation.

6. Ability to share data

Providers can face challenges sharing learner data, mainly because of new data sharing agreements and GDPR. This has impacted on providers' ability to record and share learner data, thus hindering their ability to live map learner journeys (individual access points, outcomes and progressions). This has clear implications for

their ability to quantitatively evidence the impact of partnership working.

Solutions

- Thinking about setting up a data sharing agreement between core partners. Doing this from the outset may mitigate against issues later on.

7. Conflicting provider/wider stakeholder aims

Partnerships can bring together a wide range of organisations who all have their own, sometimes competing priorities. Aims and priorities sometimes conflict, which may disrupt partnership working.

Solutions:

- Clearly communicating the partnership's shared goal. Focusing on a shared goal of supporting learners to access suitable provision can work well. Open communication can also help providers understand each others' priorities and help to identify ways to mitigate this over time.
- Holding workshops which can facilitate an equal knowledge exchange. Sessions hosted by a neutral organisation or co-ordinator can help to avoid conflict of interests.

8. Normalised approach to working in silo

Some providers felt that working independently was the norm in their local area. This approach has clear implications for opportunities to work collaboratively.

Solutions:

- Providing opportunities for sharing information, knowledge, and resources, including network meetings and workshops can foster collaborative outlooks and willingness to participate and reciprocate.
- Evidencing the advantage and benefits of working in partnership can incentivise participation in a network.

4. POSSIBLE IMPACT EVIDENCE AND MEASURES

Data to support evidencing and measuring the impact of ESOL networks and partnerships will need to be carefully selected to ensure it is well-matched to the partnership's aims, objectives and the outcomes it is intended to deliver. For example, a network that is focused on sharing practice would require a different set of measures to a partnership that runs a single point of contact scheme for referrals to ESOL provision. Some possible measures are suggested below.

Sharing of data is likely to require establishing the appropriate protocols and agreements, with due consideration to privacy and data protection laws.

1. Keeping it simple

- Enrolment data – including programme type, levels and learner characteristics (which may need to go beyond those captured by the Individualised Learner Record in Education and Skills Funding Agency provision).
- Waiting list data (where available) – include learners waiting, waiting times, levels required (if known).
- Capturing number of referrals to ESOL provision via different channels i.e. Job Centre Plus, National Careers Service or local authorities.
- Tracking learners' education and/or employment destinations.

2. Wider Outcomes

- Use of 'social metrics' tools to measure improvements in health, wellbeing, confidence, integration and other outcomes of participation in learning.

● Provider Impact

- A range of qualitative and where possible quantitative data on the impact on practice (e.g. staffing time and costs on enrolment and initial assessments); systematic capture of feedback of impact on staff roles e.g. better able to cater for learners needs in classes, feel better equipped to signpost ESOL learners appropriately.

● Learner Experience

- Where relevant, qualitative and quantitative data on the learner experience e.g. through satisfaction surveys, focus groups, feedback forms. This may need to consider accessible language versions and translation / interpretation where required.

5. FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATION

This framework for collaboration describes operational activities and features of ESOL networks and partnerships at different levels of development. These start from 0 – No Networks or Partnership, then progress through 1 – Emerging and 2 – Consolidating to 3 – Established. The examples are indicative and not intended to be exhaustive of all the possible activities a network or partnership may conduct. The examples and level of development are organised in relation to identified success factors in partnership working: time and capacity, working protocols, adding value, visibility and evidencing impact. A final section looks at the operational features and activities of ESOL partnerships through the lens of the impact on the learner's experience. The framework could be used as a starting point for self-assessing the level of partnership working within an ESOL provider or local area, and/or to inspire ways in which an existing partnership could develop.

COLLABORATION FRAMEWORK - EXAMPLES OF OPERATIONAL FEATURES AND ACTIVITIES

Success Factor	0 – No Networks or Partnerships	1 – <i>Emerging</i> Networks and Partnerships	2 – <i>Consolidating</i> Networks and Partnerships	3 – <i>Established</i> Networks and Partnerships
TIME AND CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some useful sharing of information and expertise takes place between providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership or network provides useful opportunities to share information, expertise and practice, and discuss current issues and challenges, for those who attend.. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership or network provides highly valuable opportunities to share information, expertise and practice, and discuss current issues and challenges, which benefits participants, the wider participant organisations and a range of local stakeholders. The partnership may develop aspects of joined up service delivery (e.g. co-location of services, mapping of provision, creating a centralised information resource), or collaborate with a view to securing funding to do so in future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular, scheduled meetings and events take place, attended regularly by all relevant partners and stakeholders. Additional capacity to address specific issues and manage aspects of delivery is created, for example through working groups or 'task and finish' activity to support the partnership as a whole. The partnership may secure additional capacity through external funding or formal in-kind contributions from participant organisations (e.g. with administrative support, staff time) to deliver specific projects, or support the ongoing viability of the partnership.

Success Factor	0 – No Networks or Partnerships	1 – <i>Emerging</i> Networks and Partnerships	2 – <i>Consolidating</i> Networks and Partnerships	3 – <i>Established</i> Networks and Partnerships
WORKING PROTOCOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meetings notes are circulated to partnership or network participants. ● Mailing lists and communications channels are in place but may be ad hoc or incomplete. ● More formal protocols – including on data sharing – are largely absent; there may be a need to clarify the current remit and terms of reference of the partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working protocols appropriate to the activities of the partnership are developed, agreed by all participants and regularly reviewed. This includes data sharing agreements for operational and impact measurement purposes. ● Meetings and action points may be formally recorded and circulated to partnership members. ● Administrative support arrangements and partnership communications arrangements are agreed and in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extensive and appropriate working protocols and communications arrangements are in place. ● There are clear strategic and operational plans in place for the delivery of the partnership's activities, which are monitored, reviewed and updated regularly.

Success Factor	0 – No Networks or Partnerships	1 – <i>Emerging</i> Networks and Partnerships	2 – <i>Consolidating</i> Networks and Partnerships	3 – <i>Established</i> Networks and Partnerships
ADDING VALUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some useful sharing of information and expertise takes place between providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership or network provides useful opportunities to share information, expertise and practice, and discuss current issues and challenges, for those who attend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership or network provides highly valuable opportunities to share information, expertise and practice, and discuss current issues and challenges, which benefits participants, the wider participant organisations and a range of local stakeholders. The partnership may develop aspects of joined up service delivery (e.g. co-location of services, mapping of provision, creating a centralised information resource), or collaborate with a view to securing funding to do so in future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The activities and objectives of the partnership – e.g. joint delivery of services, reducing duplication of provision, maintaining information sharing platforms, delivering an ESOL IAG / assessment service - are integrated with, and critical to, the routine business of participants' organisations. The partnership makes effective use of data held by participant organisations, and other relevant information (such as local authority data) to support its work. This could include intelligence on local needs to inform curriculum planning, or tracking information to improve efficiency of enrolment and waiting list systems (e.g. tracking availability of provision, referrals made, enrolments, oversubscription, progression), sharing data where appropriate to do so The partnership actively develops opportunities for further collaborative working, for example through the delivery of additional funded projects.

Success Factor	0 – No Networks or Partnerships	1 – <i>Emerging</i> Networks and Partnerships	2 – <i>Consolidating</i> Networks and Partnerships	3 – <i>Established</i> Networks and Partnerships
VISIBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The work of the partnership is known to its participants, however it may not be visible to external stakeholders, or internally within participant organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The role of the network or partnership is well known and understood, within its participant organisations (including staff at all levels) and key local stakeholders. securing funding to do so in future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In addition to being visible to and within participant organisations, the partnership is increasingly visible externally, through brand development activity. ● The partnership engages externally with wider audiences and stakeholders, for example through representation on a range of other relevant local networks, meetings, policy forums etc in the local setting. For example, one member might represent the local ESOL partnership in strategic discussions on skills policy with the local or Combined Authority.
EVIDENCING IMPACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is limited formal evidence of the difference that the partnership or network makes in the local area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some evidence of impact is available, relevant to the activities of the network or partnership. This might relate to engagement and participation of local organisations, feedback on partnership events, or records of the outcomes of collaborative actions taken as a result of sharing information / practice. Some data is shared to evidence the impact of collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The partnership systematically records the outcomes and impact of its collaborative working and any shared delivery activities, sharing data appropriately between partners. Where appropriate, evidence of impact is shared widely with relevant stakeholders, for example through annual or project reports. ● The partnership seeks opportunities to use the impact evidence to secure further support, funding and operational changes that benefit the partnerships objectives, from a range of local decision makers.

Success Factor	0 – No Networks or Partnerships	1 – <i>Emerging</i> Networks and Partnerships	2 – <i>Consolidating</i> Networks and Partnerships	3 – <i>Established</i> Networks and Partnerships
LEARNER EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learners may be simply turned away from provision, due to ineligibility for funding stream or lack of capacity. ● People with ESOL needs accessing other local services e.g. JCP, health services, are not signposted or referred to provision due to a lack of awareness of the local offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learners who are ineligible for funding or cannot be accommodated may be informally signposted to other providers or sources of IAG. This may not fully take account of their circumstances and learning needs. ● Learners may be on waiting lists at more than one provider. It may not be clear what this means in terms of the likelihood of being able to start a suitable course. ● People with ESOL needs may be given information about ESOL classes by other local organisations which have links with individual providers, but this is limited or does not fully take account of their circumstances (e.g. eligibility for funding). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learners may be accurately signposted to other provision which is more likely to meet their needs, or provided with appropriate IAG. ● Learners may be on waiting lists at more than one provider, though joined up working may have reduced the extent of this. It may not be clear what this means in terms of the likelihood of being able to start a suitable course. ● External stakeholders support people with ESOL needs, through ready access to a range of information about local provision, supporting referrals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learners' needs are identified (e.g. through a common initial assessment) and they are matched to provision that meets their needs. The learner experience is improved through removing the need for repeated assessments and multiple visits to different providers. ● If no provision is available, learners are clear about the next steps e.g. when they are likely to be able to join a course. Learners may be offered an alternative in the short term (e.g. a conversation club). ● Links with external stakeholders are well developed, with clear referral mechanisms and joined up delivery. Learners' language needs are considered and addressed alongside other needs when accessing local services.

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