LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

Volunteers, English language learners and conversation clubs

Research report

Becca Gooch and Alex Stevenson

June 2020

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE | Silver Until 2020

We are a Living Wage Employer

About Learning and Work Institute

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy, research and development organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

Stay informed. Be involved. Keep engaged. Sign up to become a Learning and Work Institute supporter: www.learningandwork.org.uk/supporters

Acknowledgements

Table of contents

Executive summary

Introduction and methodology

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) commissioned Learning and Work Institute (L&W) and Learning Unlimited (LU) to research and develop a range of products to support conversation clubs and other volunteer-led language learning activities.

The resources developed from this research are:

- A best practice model for conversation clubs.

- A resource pack for conversation club volunteers, including 15 units on a range of topics, with an introduction to the units.

- A volunteer induction pack, aimed at all volunteers working in English practice, outlining their roles, what to expect, and best practice.

- A guide for organisations on the appropriate use of volunteers, outlining the parameters of volunteer roles, best practice, practical and legal obligations, matching individuals to roles, recruitment and retention, training, and ongoing support.

- A conversation practice toolkit, containing a range of flexible, adaptable and authorable activities and resources to facilitate sessions in informal spaces.

The research for this project consisted of:

- A rapid literature review

- Depth interviews with 17 conversation club volunteers

- Depth interviews with 15 project leads of programmes using volunteers to deliver any form of English language learning

- Focus groups with 36 volunteers involved in a range of English language provision

- Structured observations of nine conversation clubs

Research findings

Volunteers play a vital role in the delivery of informal English language provision. The form this role takes varies drastically from provision to provision, and a broad range fed into this research.

Volunteers in the English language learning space tend not to be qualified ESOL professionals, with a few exceptions including volunteer ESOL teachers.

LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

Provision

Informal English language provision can take a multitude of forms, including conversation clubs; activity-based clubs; volunteer-led English lessons; drop-in sessions; and at home ESOL support

Volunteer-led informal English language provision is aimed at a range of participants, primarily asylum seekers, refugees, those from settled communities who haven't previously accessed any English language provision, and economic migrants. Asylum seekers are ineligible for ESOL provision funded through the Adult Education Budget until they have been in the UK for six months. This accounts for the popularity of informal provision being aimed at this group.

Who volunteers?

Retired people are a key group of those volunteering in ESOL, in particular retired teachers. These teachers aren't necessarily ESOL-qualified but have transferable teaching skills. In addition to ex-teachers, aspiring teachers are common volunteers, gaining experience in different settings.

Other key volunteer groups include job seekers and students, as they both tend to have more time to give to the provision, and they gain experience for their CV.

Additional notable groups of volunteers include those motivated by experience or by empathy. Many ex-ESOL learners themselves go on to volunteer at the provision that supported them, looking to give back and understanding the importance of such volunteering. Empathy might motivate those who have lived abroad and themselves struggled with learning another language, or those who are looking to help refugees or asylum seekers in some way.

Challenges and highlights in volunteering

The main challenges volunteers reported facing were cultural awareness and consideration; a lack of resources, space and other volunteers; education levels of participants, including managing different levels in one group; and attendance and turnover of participants

Despite the plethora of challenges associated with volunteering in English language provision, volunteers are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences. These highlights include:

- A sense of achievement when participants learn something from them

- A sense of achievement when participants get something other than learning English from their sessions – e.g. making friends and tackling social isolation

- Enjoyment from meeting new and different people

- Learning about new cultures and countries

- Learning new skills

- Volunteering helping with their own mental health

Benefits, challenges and obligations to working with volunteers

The primary benefit to working with volunteers identified by project leads is that they enable the projects to run, and to run well. Volunteers also tend to be from a range of backgrounds, and so bring different experiences, expertise and perspectives.

Despite the vital nature of volunteers in running informal English language provision, there were a few challenges identified. The major challenge was finding the time and resources to be able to effectively manage and look after the volunteers, which was closely linked to organisational funding.

There are also a number of practical obligations associated with working with volunteers, including: DBS checks, safeguarding training, rotas and scheduling, risk assessments of venues, and insurance.

Support

Support is key both for volunteers and for project leads who are working with volunteers, but the support provided for both groups varies hugely from organisation to organisation.

For volunteers, regular contact from the organisation and staff is key, both through formal meetings and being readily available on an ad hoc basis. Contact with other volunteers is also vital for keeping volunteers engaged and supporting their development.

Support with how to spot mental ill-health and then where to signpost people is also critical. It is not the role of the volunteers to take on the role of a caseworker or therapist, so effective signposting policies and practices are essential.

Financial support is the most challenging support to be able to provide for organisations, but funding travel expenses as a minimum is important to ensure all who want to volunteer are able to.

Resources

Many volunteers use resources they have found themselves via an internet search, which are often outdated or American and so require adaption. Some also reported created their own from scratch. Some organisations have more robust set-ups than others, having a wealth of resources available to their volunteers. For example, local authorities often have resource banks.

Learning through resources other than worksheets, through using physical aids such as whiteboards, maps or realia, or by going out on excursions, were described by volunteers as invaluable.

Overall, volunteers say they need resources to be short, easily digestible, and easily adapted to their situation. There is no such thing as one size fits all. Being available online is also key to volunteers. There is also a need to resources that aren't about "proper" language learning. Much volunteer led ESOL provision is focussed on getting people to a point that they can ask for what they need, not to have perfect grammar.

Depending on the organisation, some project leads do not have access to any resources to support them with working with refugees. Those who work in larger organisations, for example charities that work with volunteers in many capacities, have organisational guidelines and processes in place. For example, this sometimes includes safeguarding policies, recruitment and communications plans, and guidance for managing volunteers.

Research implications for the resources

The interviews and focus groups with volunteers, as well as the structured observations, have fed into the development of the conversation club resources. The units are short, three pages with additional picture or activity resources, and are designed so that any volunteer with any level of experience is able to use them. There are 15 units, which are all focussed on being dynamic activities, with no worksheets or similar, as requested by the volunteers. Similarly, the conversation practice toolkit is focussed on being dynamic activities, with no worksheets or similar, as requested by the volunteers.

Advice from the volunteers and project leads, as laid out in the research findings above, is included in the volunteer induction pack and guidance for organisations.

Following advice from the volunteers and project leads, all resources are concise, adaptable, and focussed on practical, useful language. They are easily accessible and freely available online for any volunteer or staff member working with volunteers to access.

The resources can be found here.

L&W LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

Introduction

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy, research and development organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

Learning Unlimited (LU) is a not for profit social enterprise that specialises in adult and family learning, ESOL and integration, literacy, numeracy and teacher education.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) commissioned L&W and LU to research and develop a range of products to support conversation clubs and other volunteer-led language learning activities.

Conversation clubs provide spaces for participants to practise their English language speaking skills in a friendly, supportive and informal environment. Informal volunteer-led provision takes a number of forms and there is no standard approach or model of training, resources or materials to which volunteers adhere.

There is huge value in volunteer-led learning. However, it has been made clear from the sector that informal volunteer opportunities should not replace formal language learning delivered by a professional. There is therefore a need for a range of products to provide advice for individuals and organisations on appropriate roles for volunteers in English language learning and support materials for volunteers.

The resources developed from this research are:

- A best practice model for conversation clubs.

- A resource pack for conversation club volunteers, including 15 units on a range of topics, with an introduction to the units.

- A volunteer induction pack, aimed at all volunteers working in English practice, outlining their roles, what to expect, and best practice.

- A guide for organisations on the appropriate use of volunteers, outlining the parameters of volunteer roles, best practice, practical and legal obligations, matching individuals to roles, recruitment and retention, training, and ongoing support.

- A conversation practice toolkit, containing a range of flexible, adaptable and authorable activities and resources to facilitate sessions in informal spaces.

The research for this project was commissioned to gain user insight and use this to inform the development of the resources. It looked at four key questions:

1. How do different types of volunteer-led English language programmes run?

2. What roles do volunteers play in this?

3. What resources are currently available and used, and what is missing?

4. What support currently exists, and what is missing?

The research sought to identify the specific challenges, opportunities and resource needs for volunteers and project leads in English language learning. The research questions were important to investigate as part of the project to ensure that these resources do not replicate existing available materials, and instead provide needed support as outlined by the users.

Methodology

There were 4 key research questions for this project.

1. How do different types of volunteer-led English language programmes run?

2. What roles do volunteers play in this?

3. What resources are currently available and used, and what is missing?

4. What support currently exists, and what is missing?

Research tools

The research for this project consisted of:

- A rapid literature review

- Depth interviews with 17 conversation club volunteers

- Depth interviews with 15 project leads of programmes using volunteers to deliver any form of English language learning

- Focus groups with 36 volunteers involved in a range of English language provision

- Structured observations of nine conversation clubs

Rapid review

L&W conducted a rapid literature review of existing evidence on good practice in running a conversation club, as well as information on the breadth of different roles occupied by volunteers in ESOL, suitable roles for volunteers, and best practice models for using volunteers, drawing on L&W and LU projects on volunteers in ESOL, and work undertaken by others.

The rapid review was conducted prior to commencement of the interviews, observations and focus groups, and fed into the design of the research and observation tools.

The rapid review on both conversation clubs and wider use of volunteers in ESOL can be found in annex A of this report.

Conversation club volunteer interviews

L&W engaged with 17 conversation club volunteers via telephone or face-to-face in-depth interviews. These volunteers were geographically spread around England, worked with a range of participants, had different motivations to volunteer, and differing levels of experience. Conducting interviews face-to-face and over the telephone allowed L&W to accommodate requirements of individuals and ensure no-one was excluded because of location or accessibility.

Interviews with volunteers were underpinned by in-depth topic guides, covering their volunteer role, the barriers they face, the highlights of volunteering at conversation clubs, what resources and topics they use, support they receive, and what resources and support are missing. Full topic guides can be found in annex B of this report.

Project lead interviews

L&W spoke to 15 individuals who either run projects that use volunteers, or act as the key volunteer contact or co-ordinator within their organisation. Throughout this report they are all referred to as 'project leads'.

The project leads were geographically spread across England, but more importantly represented a diverse range of provision that use volunteers in the English language space. These interviews were also conducted both over the phone and face-to-face, dependent on accessibility, location, and individual preference.

Interviews with project leads were underpinned by in-depth topic guides, covering how their organisation uses volunteers, the challenges and opportunities associated with using volunteers, recruitment, retention, training and support provided to volunteers, resources and support they use to work with volunteers, and gaps in this support. Full topic guides can be found in annex B of this report.

Volunteer focus groups

Five focus groups were conducted with a total of 36 volunteers. The volunteers occupied a range of roles within English language provision, from conversation club facilitators, to volunteer ESOL teachers, to those providing in-home language support

The groups were conducted in:

- Newcastle – with attendees from Newcastle and Sunderland

- Plymouth

- Birmingham – with attendees from across the West Midlands, and one attendee dialling in via Skype

- Waltham Forest, London

- Online – all attendees participating via Zoom

Offering the focus groups in a wide range of locations, as well as offering an online group, allowed all volunteers who wanted to attend to be able to contribute, no matter their location or ability to travel.

Focus group participants were offered a £20 shopping voucher as a 'thank you' for their time.

The focus groups with volunteers were underpinned by in-depth topic guides, covering their roles, challenges faced in delivering English language provision, specific challenges associated with working with refugees and asylum seekers, main positives to volunteering, resources used in the running of their provision, support received, gaps in support and resources, what a set of resources would look like, training and development wanted, and what health and wellbeing support is needed. Full topic guides can be found in annex B of this report.

Conversation club observations

Observations were undertaken at nine conversation clubs. The clubs are aimed at a wide range of participants, including six aimed at refugees and asylum seekers, one at settled communities who have been in the UK for a number of years, one at economic migrants, a women-only group, and one run by student volunteers as part of a UK-wide network. Most were aimed at a particular target cohort but were open to anyone with an English language learning need who wanted to attend.

The observations took place at clubs in:

- Nottingham

- Haggerston, London

- Hackney, London

- Redhill

- Wakefield

- Waltham Forest, London

- Bradford

- Bristol

- Leeds

Structured observations were undertaken by ESOL specialists, who either have extensive experience observing learning in a range of settings, and/or are appropriately qualified ESOL teacher trainers. An observation tool was developed to aid in the observations of the patterns of interactions, and how the activities and resources fed into these. These assisted in assessing what works to engage participants in conversation and English language practice and highlight examples of effective practice. The observation tool is included in annex B of this report.

Limitations of the research

It was not possible within this project to speak to all types of volunteers and organisations involved in the delivery of informal English language sessions. In addition, the constraints

of the voluntary sector in terms of capacity, funding and time meant some were unable to assist in the research. For example, three observations were planned and then cancelled due to funding and capacity difficulties of the organisations running the sessions. A number of project leads and volunteers were unable to find time to participate due to other priorities.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to reach and interview volunteers involved in the delivery of informal conversation clubs hosted on digital platforms such as Zoom, or organised through social media platforms, such as 'Meetup'.

Whilst acknowledging the gaps in the sample feeding into the development of the resources, L&W and L&U were able to speak to a wide range of volunteers and envision the resources being useful even to those who have not directly inputted into their development. For example, while L&W and LU were unable to interview groups run online, the materials are still suitable for use in this context.

Research findings

Volunteers

As part of this research L&W spoke to a number of volunteers from across a range of roles related to English language learning. This included interviewing 17 conversation club volunteers and conducting five focus groups with a total of 36 volunteers in a variety of roles.

Volunteer roles

Volunteers play a vital role in the delivery of informal English language provision. The form this role takes varies drastically from provision to provision. As part of this research, L&W spoke to a broad range, including[1]:

- Conversation club facilitator

- Conversation club assistant

- Qualified ESOL teacher

- Teaching assistant

- Classroom assistant

- Drop-in session facilitator

- Translation assistant

- Enrolment and registration

- Crèche support

- Befriender

- One-to-one language support

- Home ESOL support

- English language practice volunteer

- ESOL ambassador

Volunteers in the English language learning space tend not to be qualified ESOL professionals. Only volunteer ESOL teachers and three conversation club volunteers that were interviewed as part of the research were qualified, with the rest not having a formal ESOL teaching qualification. Instead those volunteers without formal ESOL qualifications provide additional support to paid teachers, or staff provision, such as conversation clubs,

---

[1] Volunteer titles as defined by volunteers

that otherwise would be unable to run. This is not always the case, however. A number of organisations provide ESOL classes with qualified ESOL teachers, who are volunteers.

Provision

Informal English language provision can take a multitude of forms, including:

- Conversation clubs

- Activity-based clubs, closely linked to conversation clubs, where an activity (e.g. cooking) or a trip provides participants with a context to practise English in a real-world setting

- Volunteer-led English lessons

- Drop-in sessions, with volunteers available for participants to come with any need, from help with an appointment, to just wanting a chat

- At home ESOL support, where volunteers help participants in a one-to-one setting for a variety of reasons, from caring responsibilities meaning the participant cannot attend other provision, to a need for confidence-building before attending group sessions.

Volunteer-led informal English language provision is aimed at a range of participants, primarily:

- Asylum seekers

- Refugees

- Those from settled communities who haven't previously accessed any English language provision

- Economic migrants

Asylum seekers are ineligible for ESOL provision funded through the Adult Education Budget until they have been in the UK for six months. This accounts for the popularity of informal provision being aimed at this group. Alongside this, course fees may be a barrier to participation in co-funded Adult Education Budget ESOL provision. Many conversation clubs were established to support resettled Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

Who volunteers?

The majority of volunteers participating in the research were retired, primarily because of the time commitments associated with volunteering. Within this, many are retired teachers. Mostly these are not ESOL teachers, but feel that they have the basic teaching skills to be able to assist in learning.

'Most volunteers, after all, are likely to be people who are retired or semi-retired.' (Project lead, Gloucester).

'If I was to stereotype slightly, it's sort of retired middle-class people helping the less fortunate.' (At home ESOL support volunteer, Sheffield).

'A large percentage of our volunteers are retirees, but early retirees, and they are just looking for something to do that they would be interested in.' (Project lead, Waltham Forest).

Conversation club volunteer: David[2]

David is a retired philosophy and religious studies teacher. Upon retirement, motivated by an increased awareness of people seeking asylum and refugees in his local area, he sought an opportunity to put his teaching skills to good use to help others. This led him to support in the setup of his local conversation club. He has volunteered at the club ever since, for the last six years.

Another key group volunteering in this space is aspiring teachers. Informal classes and other provision, such as conversation clubs, provide an opportunity to gain experience of supporting participants in different settings.

'For this year what we're finding is they are typically people who want to get into paid English language teaching.' (Project lead, Blackburn with Darwen).

'I'm learning a lot and at the same time I'm training as a teacher assistant.' (Volunteer classroom assistant, Plymouth).

As time is a mandatory pre-requisite for volunteers, job seekers are also key volunteers. Volunteering not only provides jobseekers with something to do but also boosts their CV with practical experience examples. Provision benefits, as jobseekers are able commit many hours, but it can represent a challenge for projects when volunteers leave once employment is secured, or are only motivated by job centre instructions.

'I have a lot of people who want to volunteer to put something on their CV, or the job centre have told them they need to volunteer and they're very unlikely to show up more than once or twice.' (Project lead, Blackburn).

'There are a lot of people who are retired, but a lot of us aren't. And a lot of us are actively looking for work, and we're trying to contribute to society while we're doing that.' (Classroom assistant, Newcastle).

---

[2] All names are pseudonymised

L&W LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

Students are also common volunteers, once again because of the time they have available. Similarly to job seekers, students also benefit from the CV boost that volunteering gives.

Conversation club: STAR network

Student Action for Refugees (STAR) is a movement of students at colleges and universities across the UK who are getting together to create a society where refugees and asylum seekers are welcomed and are able to thrive as equal members of the community. It was established by students at Nottingham University in 1994. Since its inception, STAR has worked on a range of projects, from homework clubs, to football clubs, to practical support.

Each year, around 2,000 student volunteers support around 4,000 refugees through 80-90 projects at around 50 universities and colleges across the UK. Conversation clubs make up the bulk of the student-led activity.

An additional notable group of volunteers is previous participants of English language provision who progress into a volunteer role. They may have previously participated in the provision or be at a higher level of language proficiency and volunteer with those at a lower level. This provides them with some work experience, and means new participants are potentially supported by someone who has been in a similar position, or even has the same first language as them, helping to overcome barriers. Further information on peer volunteers can be found in the literature review, in annex A of this report.

Conversation club volunteers: Hassan and Jamal[3]

Hassan and Jamal both attended their local conversation club when they first arrived in the UK and now both volunteer at the same club. They are very positive about the conversation club and the huge impact it has on people's lives.

Hassan was one of the first participants at the club, where they supported him to college where he then trained to become a barber. He now works as a barber in a nearby village but makes sure he can attend the conversation club each week to support people in the position he was once in.

Finally, there are volunteers who are motivated by empathy. Some have lived abroad themselves and so understand the importance of knowing the language to integration, and

---

[3] All names are pseudonymised

some have seen news stories about refugees or asylum seekers and want to do what they can to help.

> **Conversation club volunteer: Alice[4]**
>
> Upon retirement, Alice was looking for an opportunity to help people coming to the UK, motivated by a sense of empathy, that if it were her arriving in a new place she would want people to be nice and support her. This led her to volunteer to be an English language practice volunteer, which she's been doing for three years. She sees her role as more than language support, providing a friendly face and social contact.

Challenges and highlights in volunteering

There are numerous positives and negatives associated with volunteering in any circumstances, and some specific to volunteering in informal English language provision. Volunteers interviewed were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences, with the highlights far outweighing the challenges they face. This section lays out the key challenges and highlights faced by volunteers in the informal English language sector.

Challenges

Volunteers were asked about the challenges that they face as part of volunteering. This section outlines the key barriers.

Cultural awareness

Cultural differences between volunteers and those they are helping is a common challenge experienced by volunteers.

Some organisations include cultural considerations as part of their induction or training schedule, but for volunteers who don't get this, it is much wanted. One example given by volunteers was around asking participants about age, and experiencing that some people don't know and this can be distressing to be asked about.

'It would be nice to, like, have some information like, don't ask this because they don't know that. And about children, don't do that, don't do the other one. Because, it's important to them. So we're not disrespecting their culture.' (Volunteer classroom assistant, Plymouth).

'We could do with a lot of cultural awareness stuff, actually. Sometimes, you've got ten or fifteen different nations represented in a classroom. Everybody's got a different cultural

---

[4] All names are pseudonymised

background. Something upsets one person, but doesn't upset another.' (Volunteer classroom assistant, Newcastle).

While volunteer safety is of paramount concern to organisations, especially for volunteers going to participants' homes, there are examples of prioritising this over a cultural or human interaction consideration, making for awkward interactions between volunteers and participants. For example, one organisation instructs volunteers to not accept any food or drinks in people's homes, but this is impractical and volunteers felt this was rude and set everything off on the wrong foot.

'We were told that we were not allowed to eat or drink on premises, and that's been so difficult when you have very hospitable Syrians who make you cups of coffee and what are you supposed to do, say no. I've found that very difficult and I've breached protocol every single time. Because it just seems so rude not to have a cup of coffee.' (English Practice Volunteer, West Midlands).

Lack of resources
A lack of resources was raised by the majority of volunteers involved in the research in response to challenges they face in their roles. This varied hugely between provisions, but there were no volunteers L&W spoke to who had everything they wanted.

Many volunteers are developing their own resources for supporting learning.

'Another thing I used to do when I was starting out more was I would always just have a whole load of different sorts of magazines that I'd always bring with me. I'd have just, like, a bag with different types of magazines, just as a backup in case we ran out of anything to talk about, we could always whip out magazines and find photographs and advertisements and just starting talking.' (Conversation club volunteer, Waltham Forest).

Space is another key barrier to delivering quality provision.

'We need more classrooms, really. We've got plenty of helpers." (Volunteer classroom assistant, Newcastle).

Having an inappropriate number of volunteers to participants can also present challenges. From both volunteer and project lead interviews, the usefulness of working in at least pairs for delivering informal English language provision was highlighted. Not only does this make the experience more fun and less stressful for the volunteers, and more effective for participants to have more speaking time and focus on them, but from a practical sense it ensures that illness or other unforeseen factors do not prevent the session from running. This isn't feasible for all programmes, for example in home or one-to-one support, but dependent on the form of the provision, more volunteers made for a better experience for all. For conversation clubs, the ability to break into small groups to ensure everyone is able speak and get feedback is ideal.

'We always recommend that volunteers work in pairs. Partly because that makes it more fun for you as a volunteer, and it also gives you some cover if you can't be there for any reason.' (Project lead, UK-wide organisation).

'A lot depends on how many other volunteers there are here. If I'm the only one it's difficult.' (Conversation club facilitator, Bristol).

Education levels of participants

Volunteers and organisations report that a lack of previous education often means that participants do not have experience of being in a learning environment, and can struggle with focus, sitting and learning for a set period of time, and with understanding that regular attendance is likely to benefit language learning.

Some participants have low levels of literacy in their first language, making it substantially more complicated to learn a second one. This is seen as a particular challenge where the first language does not use the roman alphabet.

For conversation clubs in particular, attendees having no English at all presents a real challenge as they aren't easily able to get involved. With the exception of some who are also qualified or experienced to teach ESOL, most conversation club volunteers are not equipped to teach someone the very basics of English. Ideally, participants would be signposted to a formal class, but in reality this isn't always possible.

'It's really important to have a few people who can speak reasonably well, isn't it? If you just get everybody who's just, sort of, smiling.' (Conversation club volunteer, Waltham Forest).

Because of the informal nature of these types of provision, many do not have separate groups, streamed by language ability. This can mean volunteers are trying to run a session to support people with only one or two words in English, through to people who are almost fluent but attend to boost their confidence. This is a difficult balance to strike, though can be mitigated through having multiple volunteers in attendance in order to be able to split the group into ability levels.

'It's very difficult to manage the different levels.' (Conversation club volunteer, Waltham Forest).

'It's the diversity, the different levels, that is the most awkward […], to satisfy all needs. But this has got less and less with the number of volunteers that will adjust to whoever they happen to be sitting with.' (Conversation club volunteer, Reigate).

If there are big groups of participants who all have the same first language, this can help to overcome some of the issues through helping each other, but it can also lead to conversations occurring primarily in their first language and as such the participants not practising their English.

Attendance and turnover

As mentioned above, some participants struggle with structured classes and are not able to attend regularly. Volunteers at more informal and unstructured support such as conversation clubs also face the challenge of irregular attendance and high turnover of participants. This is particularly frustrating for volunteers who plan a session around a request from a specific volunteer, only for them not to attend the session.

'It seems, almost invariably, the case that somebody is really, really keen on discussing a particular topic, they might have a hospital appointment coming up and they're struggling with that. So, we plan a whole theme about going to the hospital and then they don't turn up. It's not so much a challenge, it's a frustration. I think my reaction to that is that I've stopped planning. Because it actually makes me, I let myself get quite despondent about, 'What is the point of planning on that, and they're not here'.' (Conversation club volunteer, Waltham Forest).

'People will say, 'I want to do this next week.' So, I'll prepare something on that, and then they're not there next week… You follow on from the thing you did a week before with a completely different set of people. So, that makes continuity a big problem. So, my planning is always-, each lesson now is just a one off, really, on the basis that nobody was there before.' (Volunteer ESOL teacher, Sunderland).

'We never know who is going to turn up. That's one of the features of teaching people who are in need in this kind of way. … almost every lesson there'll be a new student. It might be one, it might be two or three, it might be half a dozen. We just don't know.' (Conversation club volunteer, Bradford).

Highlights

Despite the plethora of challenges associated with volunteering in English language provision, volunteers are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences. The main highlight is the sense of achievement they feel when they see someone being able to do something they previously couldn't, and knowing they played a part in that.

'Being able to help [participants] and them coming back and thanking us for it.' (Conversation club volunteer, Bristol).

'I think some of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi ladies […] have rather shyly asked me about job applications and helping them prepare their CVs and that sort of thing. Of course, I do that. I just feel it's quite a privilege to be invited in a small way into their life to help them, help them move on, yes.' (Conversation club volunteer, Bristol).

'I think the main positive has been that I'm clearly seeing that I am having an impact.' (In-home ESOL support volunteer, North Yorkshire).

Participants also often attend for more than language learning reasons, with combating social isolation being a key reason. Volunteers also reported a sense of achievement in relation to this area, not only when participants learn.

'[T]here was a lovely lady from India who had been in [locality] for 36 years and was a grandmother and her husband was very poorly, so she basically didn't get out of the house a great deal apart from to go shopping. And she came along, I think, pretty much just to see a face or two, and could understand but couldn't produce a lot of English at all. But, it didn't really bother her, she was very much coming because I think she enjoyed the fact that we were women there, the majority of people were women there, who didn't feel threatening, we were quite close to her home so she got a bit of a walk, it was only an hour, it was warm and she wasn't forced to say anything beyond what she felt comfortable doing so, you know, she was happy to come along. How much she learnt, I'm not sure, but I think she came for very different reasons than other people did.' (Conversation club volunteer).

Volunteers also reported that they enjoy getting to meet new and different people, and learn about different countries and cultures. This also gives them a new perspective on and sense of belonging in their community.

'Doncaster is a place where in the past,… asylum seekers, if they have got refugee status, they have tended to leave Doncaster, just like the native inhabitants they leave Doncaster, but in the last I don't know what, four, four or five years, more people have stayed and it is now possible that, in Doncaster, to speak of I think a settled Sudanese community or a settled Eritrean community and a settled Syrian community, and, what I'm talking about then is some of the people I knew who started off in my English class they are now leaders of that community.' (Conversation club volunteer, Doncaster).

'The other [highlight] is a lady with the really, really poor English language. I used to see her on the bus regularly after that, everywhere and we could hardly talk to each other. I couldn't speak her language, she was struggling with English but we'd sit next to each other on the bus. If we saw each other on the bus, we'd go and sit next to each other and we'd just smile at each other or be showing each other photos on the phone of our families and everything. And then, I saw her at a community event the local sculpture park was running and she was down there with some of her friends. I introduced her to my husband and it was just lovely. We couldn't understand a word each other was saying but you know. I hope that's good for her that she's meeting people who are local and she passes them in the street and they're waving to her. So I hope it's made her feel better because it made me feel good.' (Conversation club volunteer, Wakefield)

A number of volunteers also spoke about how much they have learned themselves through volunteering with this group, and how much it has helped them.

'I think the best thing I've got is for… my own mental health and my emotional state. Coming here, discussing things with people and making friends as well as coming across wonderful people.' (Conversation club volunteer)

'I'm tempted to say it has changed my life because I feel that the people I have been introduced to, people from many parts of the world which I had never encountered before, people for whom I'm full of admiration really, it's opened my eyes to many situations in the world.' (Conversation club volunteer, Doncaster).

'I'm learning quite a lot quite quickly.' (Volunteer classroom assistant, Plymouth).

Project leads

In addition to talking to volunteers in ESOL provision, L&W also talked to 15 project leads about their experiences of working with volunteers. This section outlines the benefits, challenges, and realities of working with volunteers from the project lead perspective.

Benefits to working with volunteers

The primary benefit to working with volunteers is that they enable projects to run and run well.

'On a practical level, it increases our capacity to be able to deliver group sessions like that and to do one on one activities and it's another face for clients to know as well, which I think is really good.' (Project lead, Greater Manchester).

'They were the backbone of [the organisation] before we could-, for years, there were more volunteers than staff, and we're really grateful to them for helping… wouldn't get started without them.' (Project lead, Gloucester).

The project leads also report that using volunteers as part of an English language programme also brings together a wider range of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. They also bring with them a range of expertise.

'We couldn't ever afford the people who we get. We've got [a] speech and language therapist, teachers, teachers who've delivered ESOL, a massive range of experience with people that we couldn't pay their salaries.' (Project lead, Blackburn).

'So, we might have volunteers who've been language teachers in secondary schools, and we have volunteers with lived refugee experience, volunteers with different language skills and that really brings a lot more to these groups than we might be able to just as a staff team.' (Project lead, Greater Manchester).

Practical obligations

Project leads identified a number of practical obligations associated with working with volunteers for organisations to consider. These include:

- DBS checks

- Safeguarding training

- Rotas and scheduling

- Risk assessments of venues

- Insurance

- If children in attendance: make clear whose responsibility this is

- For home visits: having a point of contact for the volunteer, ensuring they call at the start and the end of the visit.

Challenges to working with volunteers

Despite the vital nature of volunteering in informal English language provision, project leads did identify a number of challenges associated with working with volunteers.

Finding the time and resources to effectively manage and look after the volunteers emerged as a key challenge to working with volunteers. This was closely linked to organisational funding challenges.

'The biggest challenge for us is resourcing it in the way we'd like and having enough staff capacity to provide the kind of support we would ideally like to provide for volunteers and as much training as we'd like to provide for them.' (Project lead, UK-wide programme)

Being aware of volunteer motivations is also a key aspect. Most are doing it for altruistic reasons, but there are instances of wanting to volunteer for selfish reasons, and this can lead to difficulties.

Guaranteeing volunteers show up each week was another challenge. While broadly volunteers are very reliable, they can't predict illness or other priorities. This can be mitigated against by having multiple volunteers registered to attend each session.

Recruitment and retention

Project leads reported that they experience few difficulties with recruitment and retention of volunteers, with turnover often only because of positive changes, such as a new job, or general life reasons, such as moving away.

A range of methods are used to recruit volunteers to programmes. These include:

- Word of mouth

- Wider promotional activities, for larger charities or organisations

- Advertising on own website

- Advertising on volunteering websites – locally, do-it.org, charityjobs, etc.

- Advertising through university societies

- Having sign-up sheets at fundraising events

- Social media

- Flyers

- Newsletters

- Organising partnerships with universities and colleges running teacher training

In addition to the above methods, many organisations report volunteers approaching them after seeing stories about refugees or asylum seekers in the news.

Word of mouth was commonly mentioned as their most effective method of recruitment, primarily through existing volunteers telling friends and families about their positive experience. English language provision associated with a major or high-profile charity also found general promotional activities to be a great recruiter, though this tactic is not available to the majority of provisions.

While social media often resulted in a large number of offers of volunteering, there was mixed feedback from the project leads interviewed about the quality and commitment of these volunteers.

Top tips

Project leads were asked what their top tips to others working with volunteers would be:

- Don't give up on them

- Don't neglect them – one training at the beginning isn't enough, they need ongoing support and development

- Be thankful – recognise their contribution

- Keep in contact

- Be available when they need you

- Pay attention to what information you put out at recruitment – expectation management

- Be clear about what is expected of them

- Don't expect too much – people are giving up their valuable time so can't expect them to go above and beyond

- Have a structured induction

- Have enough volunteers – people need to be able to take a holiday or call in sick and the session to still run

- Make sure they don't feel under too much pressure

Support

Support is key both for project leads working with volunteers and for volunteers themselves. The research shows that support received varies from organisation to organisation. However, support received by some volunteers echoed what other volunteers said they wanted. Support can come in many forms, from practical support with finances or signposting, to emotional support when working with vulnerable participants.

Support for volunteers

Key for volunteers is contact with their organisation leads and staff members. This can come both as regular, formal meetings, and staff being available to them on an ad hoc basis. As well as staff, volunteers expressed a wish to be connected with and have regular sessions with other volunteers to share experiences and best practice.

'We [the volunteers on the locality's CC programme] have regular, although not frequent, meetings of volunteers and we get together and talk about what our experience has been.' (Conversation club volunteer, Bristol).

'That's quite useful because you just, sort of, hear what everybody else's experience is. Part of it is just, 'Oh, I'm not getting it completely wrong then,' you know, it's quite reassuring to feel that other people are doing similar things, having, probably, some issues, I don't really feel I've had any major issues, so I think that's been quite reassuring.' (In-home ESOL volunteer, North Yorkshire).

Knowing how to spot mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and knowing where to signpost people to for a variety of things, from therapy to ESOL classes, is key for volunteers. It is not the role of an English language volunteer to take on the role of a caseworker or therapist. As part of this, organisations with good local networks with other language provision and organisations for migrants are better able to support their volunteers. For example, one organisation delivering English classes has teamed up with other providers and they all have one information sheet about everything available.

'One of the things that we've done, as a city, is to create a timetable across the week, so people can see what other classes are happening. So, we provide every day, there's the adult classes, there's college, but over and above that, there are courses being run in churches, there are conversation clubs, there's a number of other activities, and we make sure that people, learners, can go and access other things if they want to.' (Project lead, Gloucester).

Others have links with organisations such as the police and local legal aid providers, who have come in to talk to volunteers so that they know what to do and where to go in certain situations.

'The police came about the discrimination. It was really useful for them, like an authority, somebody to tell them… they explained what is not allowed, what certain behaviours are not allowed towards them and they will explain and give examples and act, and that was really useful for them to understand, acting what is not allowed. And some of the ladies, two or three, they opened and then they came and told the police officer what happened to them on the streets or something like that.' (Volunteer classroom assistant, Plymouth).

While this is a very valuable resource to have and use, there is a need to be careful about the partner organisations pitching the talk at the right level.

'We did have a guy I invited once who came to talk about jobs but that didn't go down well. He was supposed to help people write CVs but that didn't work. He had clearly never talked to a class of ESOL learners before and so his pitch was very much based at somebody who knew all the technical vocabulary that he was using, and it was just too complicated. It wasn't set out in a way that was friendly for people whose native language isn't English. I mean, it was a great idea, which was why we brought him along because everybody said, 'Yes, we want some help with CVs,' and there was a real need for it, but it needed to be done by somebody who understood how complicated that whole filling-in-a-form business was.' (Conversation club volunteer, Bristol).

Most organisations are able to support their volunteers with travel expenses, but there are some who aren't able to afford this which presents a huge barrier to some volunteers.

'We run on an absolute shoestring and that is a challenge… we just do not have the funds to be refunding volunteer travel. So, obviously, I don't want that to be a barrier to people but, for some people, that is a barrier.' (Project lead, Blackburn).

Some organisations also pay for lunch, as well as photocopying and printing services, but this is by no means universal.

One provider of adult education allows their volunteers to attend a free course once they have volunteered a certain number of hours. This demonstrates how appreciation to volunteers can be shown through whatever resources are available to the organisation.

'What we also do is we give them a free course if they, you know, finish their 25 hours. What we do after the training is, we ask them to do 25 hours of volunteering for us. Yes, and after they've done that then they have fulfilled all the requirements and then they're entitled to a free course with the service. One of them has just enrolled in a ceramics course. One has done several sewing courses with the service. That's quite an easy win for us as well because we get some more learners and it's really good for them too.' (Project lead, Waltham Forest).

Resources

This section looks at the resources currently used by volunteers and project leads, and what they identify as gaps.

For volunteers

A quick internet search provides many volunteers with resources to use. However, many of these resources are American (and therefore use American rather than British English), or outdated, so require adaptation. Many volunteers report doing this, or even creating their own resources for their sessions. This is potentially due to the prevalence of retired teachers involved in volunteering.

'I produce my own, you know, pretty much 100%, just because whenever I look at something else, it's always so unsatisfying.' (Volunteer ESOL teacher, Sunderland).

Volunteers in some organisations have resources provided to them by the organisation. For example, Talk English provide a Moodle (an online platform where resources can be shared), and many local authorities have resource banks.

Volunteers discussed the importance of learning not just through worksheets, and how vital physical aids are to assist them, for example, mini whiteboards, replica money, flashcards, diagrams, maps, and realia (real-life objects brought in to support learning).

'I do like the bag thing. Yes, that is a good one. A bag of kitchen utensils, or a bag of books, or a bag of things from the bathroom. The guessing game, you take one away and say, 'Which one's missing?' So, everybody has to remember.' (Conversation club volunteer, Waltham Forest).

The volunteers also reported that the ability to take the participants out on excursions was invaluable. It allows the participants to have an opportunity to contextualise their learning or to practise English in a real-world setting.

'I did the trips with the women's group that I was teaching within the community, and honestly, the outcome of that, I was really, really pleased with. Because I had them ecstatic, really jumping up and down, saying, 'Oh, I've never been out! I've never been out on my own without my mother-in-law or without my husband.' Or 'I have never been on the bus,' one of them, she said. And that was really, really satisfying for me to get them to do that, and get them to learn how to take the tickets and all that. And it was really good.' (Volunteer ESOL teacher, Newcastle).

'I took them to [museum in locality], which is a free museum, so they can go any time they like. However, we found that most people who lived in [locality] didn't tend to go to the centre of the town, either because public transport was too expensive or it just wasn't part of their cultural makeup to go on the weekend to visit a museum… It's really good, and I

think they were all really happy to be out of the classroom. They would definitely like to do another one, and I suggested one in the botanic gardens, but I think we need to wait for the weather to be a bit better. And to the art gallery. Again, it's a question of logistics and whether we can get a minibus to get people to and from places, and for people to commit. We did ask for a deposit of £1 for the bus, which I returned to everybody, just to make sure that they really would come, having laid on a minibus for them, and indeed everybody did come, with their children, which was nice.' (Conversation club volunteer, Bristol).

'We walked to the market and we went to buy different types of vegetables. So, they will learn and they receive £5, each one, or £3 or £4, something like that, and they took a note with certain vegetables and fruits and they have to buy it and ask and say, 'Thank you.' …it was really quite interesting.' (Classroom assistant, Plymouth).

Many volunteers are also making use of technology wherever they can. Google translate, while not perfect, is extremely useful for basic translation if communication breaks down in English. Duolingo was also cited as a useful tool for people to practise on their own at home. General Googling for pictures to illustrate what they are trying to get across was also key.

Overall, volunteers say they need resources to be short, easily digestible, and easily adapted to their situation. There is no such thing as one size fits all. Being available online is also key to volunteers. There is also a need to resources that aren't about "proper" language learning. Much volunteer led ESOL provision is focussed on getting people to a point that they can ask for what they need, not to have perfect grammar.

Volunteers reported that useful resources should cover a wide range of topics, including:

- The local area

- Transport

- Getting a job

- Life in the UK – how the education system works, legal age requirements for different activities

- Clothes

- Daily routine

- Shopping

- Going to the doctors/dentist

- The weather

- Current affairs

- Food

- Cooking

- Sport

- Gardening

- Health

- Explaining household problems (e.g. X is not working)

- Animals

- School

They also highlighted the importance of being able to adapt according to what the needs are of the group, and any specific personal events or needs people may have.

For project leads

Depending on the organisation, some project leads do not have access to any resources to support them with working with refugees. Those who work in larger organisations, for example charities that work with volunteers in many capacities, have organisational guidelines and processes in place. For example, this sometimes includes safeguarding policies, recruitment and communications plans, and guidance for managing volunteers.

Outside resources were found through NCVO and do-it.org. NCVO in particular has a plethora of information and resources, including on creating volunteer roles, recruitment, volunteer management, safeguarding, and the legal obligations around having volunteers. These resources are generally viewed in high regard by project leads, but they are broadly focussed on volunteering, rather than existing in the unique environment of informal English language learning.

Project leads report that they would find useful, or would have found useful at the start of their project, basic guidance on what to include in an induction, information on how to support volunteers to run informal, participatory activity rather than formal classes, and information on how they can develop volunteers – either to move into teaching or in other ways.

In general, the main resource project leads wanted was funding. This would either provide staff more time to support volunteers, or enable greater training or resource support to volunteers. Funding sources are varied across different informal English language providers. Some are part of wider charities or local authorities, and so their funding is linked with this; some only operate on a project by project basis, as and when people want to or can fund them; some apply for more formal funding grants; and some don't have any funding, with the space provided for free and everything being run by volunteers.

Implications for the products

The research for this project has fed into the development of a number of products and resources aimed at volunteers, and project staff working with volunteers. These are:

- A best practice model for conversation clubs.

- A resource pack for conversation club volunteers, including 15 units on a range of topics, with an introduction to the units.

- A volunteer induction pack, aimed at all volunteers working in English practice, outlining their roles, what to expect, and best practice.

- A guide for organisations on the appropriate use of volunteers, outlining the parameters of volunteer roles, best practice, practical and legal obligations, matching to roles, recruitment and retention, training, and ongoing support.

- A conversation practice toolkit, containing a range of flexible, adaptable and authorable activities and resources to facilitate sessions in informal spaces.

The interviews and focus groups with volunteers, as well as the structured observations, have fed into the development of the conversation club resources. The units are short, three pages with additional picture or activity resources, and are designed so that any volunteer with any level of experience is able to use them. There are 15 units, covering a range of topics:

1. Shopping

2. Home

3. Family and friends

4. Culture and creativity

5. Health

6. Education and skills

7. Nature and the environment

8. Travel and transport

9. Training and work

10. Local history and landmarks

11. Food and cooking

12. Money

13. Having fun!

14. What's new?

15. Technology

The units are focussed on being dynamic activities, with no worksheets or similar, as requested by the volunteers.

Advice from the volunteers and project leads, as laid out in the research findings above, is included in the volunteer induction pack and guidance for organisations.

The volunteer induction pack is a concise document, outlining what is involved in volunteering, what is important to consider when volunteering, general information on learners you might work with when volunteering in informal English language provision, and specifics around volunteering and setting up conversation clubs.

The guidance for organisations is aimed at organisations using, or wanting to use, volunteers to support adult English language learning. It covers a range of topics, including how adults learn a new language and what helps them, how organisations can use volunteers to support the English language learning process, how to develop a volunteer policy and strategy, the legal requirements around using volunteers, safety concerns, resourcing, and tips to recruit and retain volunteers. It also includes signposting to other resources that organisations may find useful.

As with the conversation club units, the conversation practice toolkit is focussed on being dynamic activities, with no worksheets or similar, as requested by the volunteers.

Following advice from the volunteers and project leads, all resources are concise, adaptable, and focussed on practical, useful language. They are easily accessible and freely available online for any volunteer or staff member working with volunteers to access.

The resources can be found [here](#).

Wider implications

In the context of the Government's Integrated Communities action plan[5], and the development of a national strategy for English language learning for England, this research has wider implications for the development of policy and practice.

The findings demonstrate the value of English language conversation clubs, and other volunteer-led activities, as a distinct but complementary part of the overall 'ecosystem' of English language learning opportunities available to people who want to improve their proficiency. The informal nature of this provision has many benefits, such as allowing for flexibility and innovation in delivery, especially where it provides access to learning for those who may not, for a range of reasons, be able to participate in formal English language learning.

At the same time features of informal provision, such as a focus on conversational English, or the constraints of the skillsets of volunteers involved in the delivery, mean that it cannot replicate all of the features and benefits of formal learning. Many volunteers interviewed are clear that they do not view their roles as a replacement for formal ESOL teaching and learning.

The findings suggest that English language learning opportunities can be enhanced, where conversation clubs and other informal provision are connected to the wider English language infrastructure in a local area. Many areas have a local network, partnership or 'hub', involving a range of ESOL providers and other relevant stakeholders.

L&W has identified a range of benefits to local ESOL partnership working[6]. These include:

- Better matching of provision to learners' needs, helping to ensure that learners can access or are referred to provision for which they are eligible and which meets their needs, preferences and aspirations

- Development of progression routes, which support learners to move from informal learning into formal provision (if they wish), or which allow learners to participate in additional informal learning, to boost their confidence and help them to progress in formal provision

- Ability to join up with other local agencies, to provide wraparound support, signposting and referrals between services, and better understand the priorities and drivers for external stakeholders, which English language provision can support

---

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-communities-action-plan

[6] https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/resource/resources-to-support-the-development-of-local-esol-partnerships/

- Opportunities to work in partnership to apply for funding

- Opportunities to share effective practice between organisations, and provide learning and development opportunities for practitioners

This suggests that organisations offering conversation clubs and other informal provision should seek to make links with ESOL providers and any networks that operate locally. Similarly, existing networks, partnerships and individual ESOL providers should ensure that their scope and remit include working with providers of volunteer-led provision, to help realise the benefits outlined above.

Annex A – rapid reviews

A1 - Role of volunteers in English language learning
Written by Alexander Braddell

Introduction

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has identified

1. a gap in the market, and appetite for, advice on how volunteers should be involved in English language learning, and
2. that volunteers require appropriate training and support to be effective in their role.

MHCLG has therefore commissioned products that focus on the utilisation of volunteers to support language learning.

This rapid review has been undertaken to support the development of those products. It explores evidence regarding:

- Breadth of different roles occupied by volunteers in ESOL
- Suitable roles for volunteers
- Good practice models for using volunteers.

At a glance summary

- Volunteer support has been central to language learning by adult migrants, both in the UK and in comparable European countries, throughout the past 50 years

- Over that period, tried-and-tested practices have emerged in the use of volunteers to support language learning by adult migrants

- Those practices are consistent with up-to-date understandings of language learning by adult migrants, also with evidence-based models of good practice in volunteering more generally

- Current policy envisages use of volunteers to help learners who needs are best met through informal, community-based ESOL provision

- There are pros and cons to the use of volunteers, who do not constitute a workforce in the same sense as paid employees
  - Pros include the enrichment and enlargement of systems of support for English language learning
  - Cons are mostly associated with over-reliance on volunteers and/or under-resourcing of support for their deployment; related to this, there are concerns within the professional ESOL sector regarding the replacement of paid ESOL professionals with volunteers
- Volunteers occupy a wide range of roles in support systems for language learning by adult migrants, including roles that offer
  - Direct support to learners for intentional learning
  - Indirect support to learners for intentional learning
  - Support for incidental learning
  Also, roles that

- o Develop environments supportive of language learning / language socialisation
- o Support the use of volunteers in English language learning

- Practice recommendations for the management of language volunteers closely mirror research-based recommendations for generic volunteering

- Lack of resourcing may represent the most significant barrier to good practice

1. Context for the use of volunteers to support English language learning

1.1 Volunteers in English language learning

Migration to Britain over the last 70 years can be divided into two main phases: managed labour importation in the 1950s, 60s and 70s; followed, in the 1980s, by the unmanaged, post-Fordist migration associated with globalisation.[7] In the first phase, migrants came mainly from Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and south Asia. In the second phase, which continues today, migrants have come from a much wider range of countries and language backgrounds.[8]

In both phases, significant numbers of migrants have arrived with limited English language skills, leading to the emergence of policies and initiatives, at both national and local levels, designed to promote and support English language learning by adult migrants, usually within the contexts of integration, employability, and social cohesion.[9]

From the outset, volunteers and voluntary organisations have been key to the delivery of this support for English language learning. Initially, in the 1970s and 80s, most teachers of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) were volunteers and today, against a backdrop of funding reductions for ESOL,[10] volunteers continue to play an important role, particularly in the context of community provision.[11]

There is, consequently, considerable accumulated expertise in the UK regarding the use of volunteers to support English language learning by adult migrants. This is complemented by similar expertise in a number of comparable European countries, some of it readily accessible in English through international organisations such as the Council of Europe and multinational

---

[7] Gordon, I., Travers, T., and Whitehead, C. (2007), *The Impact of Recent Immigration on the London Economy*. London: The City of London/London School of Economics and Political Science. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/23536/1/Gordon_the_Impact_of_Recent_Immigration_On_The_London_Economy_author.pdf

[8] Rienzo, C., and Vargas-Silva, C. (2019), *"Migrants in the UK: An Overview," Migration Observatory briefing*. Oxford: COMPAS University of Oxford. https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Briefing-Migrants-in-the-UK-An-Overview.pdf

[9] Hamilton, M., and Hillier, Y. (2009), ESOL Policy and Change, in *Language Issues* Volume 20 Issue 1. Also: Rosenberg, S.K. (2007), *A critical history of ESOL in the UK, 1870-2006*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

[10] Foster, D., and Bolton, P. (2018), *Adult ESOL in England. Briefing Paper Number 7905, 25 April 2018*. London: Houses of Parliament, House of Commons Library. https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7905

[11] Higton, J., Sandhu, J., Stutz, A., Patel, R., Choudhoury, A., and Richards, S. (2019), *English for speakers of other languages: Access and progression, Research report*. London: Department for Education. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811750/English_for_speakers_of_other_languages.pdf

Stevenson, A., Kings, P. and Sterland, L. (2017), *Mapping ESOL provision in Greater London, May 2017*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute.https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_esol_mapping.pdf;

Learning and Work Institute (2018), *Mapping ESOL Provision in the West Midlands Region, November 2018*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. http://www.wmsmp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/18.12.12-Report-Mapping-ESOL-Provision.pdf

European programmes such as Erasmus – including several pieces of work identified by this review, prompted by the refugee crisis of 2015.

1.2 Recent developments in support for English language learning

Government support for English language learning by adult migrants focuses primarily on the provision of formal ESOL courses. In England, adult ESOL is funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through the Adult Education Budget (AEB), either centrally or through devolved arrangements. Learning delivered in the classroom up to and including Level 2 is free for eligible learners aged 19 and over who are unemployed and in receipt of certain benefits. Other learners are required to pay a contributory fee. No funding is provided for ESOL in the workplace.[12]

Outside of formal ESOL provision, some additional project-based funding has been allocated in recent years (by MHCLG) to support community-based provision, with a particular focus on improving the English language skills of certain categories of migrant women.

This support for community-based provision – the type of provision most likely to use volunteers – reflects a concern that formal ESOL provision is not always suitable for those it is intended to support, who require more flexible, tailored support.[13]

This is supported by evidence regarding the limitations of formal ESOL provision,[14] including:

- Shortage of publicly-funded ESOL provision
- Funding and quality assurance regimes that limit the ability of ESOL providers to reach certain types of learners, including early-stage learners, and learners in certain communities.

It is also supported by evidence[15] regarding the ability of community-based provision to:

- Address the needs of learners who find it difficult to access formal provision
- Take a more flexible approach to language learning
- Provide role-models to learners from within learners' own communities
- Offer progression routes for learners (particularly when co-ordinated with provision of formal ESOL and other services[16])

---

[12] Foster and Bolton (2018), op. cit.

[13] UK Government (2013), *New £6 million competition fund for English language learning*. **https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-6-million-competition-fund-for-english-language-learning**

[14] Higton et al (2019), op. cit.

[15] Patel, A., Hoya, C., Bivand, P., McCallum, A., Stevenson, A., and Wilson, A. (2018), *Measuring the impact of Community-Based English Language Provision, Findings from a Randomised Controlled Trial*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Impact-evaluation-of-CBEL.pdf

[16] Learning and Work Institute (2019a), *ESOL Local Partnerships, Case Studies, March 2019.* Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ESOL-Local-Partnership-Case-Studies.pdf

1.3 Integrated Communities strategy

In March 2018, the government published its Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper,[17] building on work by the Casey Review,[18] the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration,[19] among others.

In its section on support for English language learning,[20] the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper made proposals for:

- Development of a formal English Language strategy for England
- Additional community-based provision
- Support for improvements to English language learning in and beyond integration areas
- Local, volunteer-led, conversation clubs to provide informal English language learning opportunities
- An online hub to support volunteers in English language learning.

Consultation broadly affirmed these proposals,[21] and an Action Plan[22] was then published in February 2019, that made commitments to:

- New community-based English language provision
- Work (to be led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) to identify how to meet the needs of learners and volunteers in community-based English language conversation clubs.

---

[17] UK Government (2018), *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, Building stronger, more united communities.*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

[18] Casey, L. (2016). *The Casey Review. A review into opportunity and integration.*
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf

[19] Bell, R., Plumb, N., and Marangozov, R. (2017*), Integration not demonization: The final report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration's inquiry into the integration of immigrants*. London: APPG on Social Integration. https://socialintegrationappg.org.uk/reports/

[20] UK Government (2018), op. cit., pp35-42

[21] UK Government (2019a), *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, Summary of consultation responses and Government response, February 2019.* p16.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777160/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Government_Response.pdf

[22] UK Government (2019b), *Integrated Communities Action Plan.* p13.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778045/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf

2. Pros and cons associated with the use of volunteers in English language learning

Evidence suggests that the use of volunteers to support English language learning has both positive and negative aspects.[23] It is acknowledged that use of volunteers can significantly enrich support for English language learning. There is however concern regarding possible over-reliance on volunteers, leading to negative impacts on the availability, reliability and quality of support.

2.1 Positive aspects

These include:

- Greater availability of support for English language learning, including
  - Formal language instruction, i.e. teacher-led classes
  - Non-formal language learning, via e.g. conversation clubs, family learning groups
  - Informal language learning via social participation, e.g. in community groups, interest-based activities etc.
  - Raised awareness through 'championing' of support for English language learning, e.g. in workplaces
- Enhanced quality of learning support associated with
  - Personalisation –there are frequent references to the heterogeneity/ diverse needs of migrant learners, making it harder to group learners appropriately
  - Engagement in support for English language learning of individual volunteers with very high levels of commitment to and understanding of migrant learners

---

[23] The pros and cons noted here are evidenced in multiple sources ever since publicly-funded ESOL provision first emerged through Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. See Rosenberg, op. cit. More recent sources of evidence include:

Refugee Action (2016), Let refugees learn, Challenges and opportunities to improve language provision to refugees in England. London: Refugee Action. http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/letrefugeeslearnfullreport.pdf

Dawson, R. (2017a), *A Snapshot of English language teaching in seven voluntary sector organisations in 2017*. London: Merton Home Tutor Services. http://www.natecla.org.uk/uploads/media/208/16729.pdf

Dawson, R. (2017b), Notes of report presented as chair of NAVTE (National Association for Volunteer Teachers of English) to NATECLA (National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults) ESOL strategy progress meeting, 11 October 2017, London. https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6R-FCB1Z7tQcjN5MXNXQ2pwLXc/view

Jarvis, J., Fraley, K., and Porrelli, H. (2018), *Working with Volunteers in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Provision in Scotland*. Glasgow: Glasgow ESOL Forum/Education Scotland. https://education.gov.scot/improvement/research/working-with-volunteers-in-esol-provision-in-scotland/

Stevenson et al. (2017), op. cit.; also, Learning and Work Institute (2019b), *ESOL and Volunteering, Summary Report of the Expert Stakeholder Seminar, 20th March 2019*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ESOL-TF-group-report-FINAL.pdf

Learning and Work Institute (2019a), op. cit.

NATECLA (National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults) (2019a), *A Framework for Good Practice in Voluntary ESOL.* http://natecla.org.uk/uploads/media/208/16911.pdf

- Access to support for groups of learners who might not otherwise receive support (due to, e.g. not knowing how to access support, caring responsibilities, ill-health, financial hardship, work commitments, cultural considerations)
- Progression routes for English language learners
- Training opportunities for emerging English language teachers
- Opportunities to volunteer with associated benefits to individuals and society, including benefits to
    - Personal health and wellbeing
    - Learning, skills and individual progression
    - Integration, community development and social cohesion.

2.2 Negative aspects

Negative aspects are typically associated with an over-reliance on volunteers, where volunteers are in effect used to help compensate for the limitations of publicly-funded ESOL provision.

Problematic issues arising from this use of volunteers include variability – both geographically and over time – in the availability and quality of support for English language learning.

Clearly, services reliant on volunteers depend both on the availability of suitable volunteers, and on the capability of the service provider to deploy and manage those volunteers effectively – itself linked to the availability of resources for the service provider to recruit suitable volunteers, then train, match and manage them; again, by its nature, highly variable.

2.3 Volunteers as 'workers'

Related to this issue of reliability and variability, research on generic good practice by organisations to encourage, attract and retain volunteers, emphasises that volunteer workers cannot be treated as resource in the way that employees might be:

> This pinpoints the crucial point about volunteering – and the error of viewing and treating volunteers entirely as a 'workforce'. The essence, rationale and origin of the term is freedom – 'acting by choice, acting of (his) own free will, done or made without compulsion, freely given' (Chambers Dictionary). Anything that abrogates this spirit endangers the willingness of people to go on doing it. 'I establish before we get going the ground rules and standards of work we expect… it's very hard and you need a lot of tact – they could just walk out'. (Volunteer manager quoted in [Gay P. (2001), *Bright Future: Developing Volunteer Management*. London: IVR.]) [24]

2.4 Views of professional ESOL sector

Regarding use of volunteers in English language learning, the report of consultation on the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper noted:
> Some respondents were sceptical of the effectiveness of conversation clubs and volunteer-led learning. Respondents emphasised the value of volunteer-led provision, informal and

---

[24] Gaskin, K. (2003), *A choice blend, What volunteers want from organisation and management*. London: NCVO. p25. https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-choice-blend-what-volunteers-want-from-organisation-and-management

accredited ESOL provision and that they are complementary to each other. Respondents were supportive of the proposal to develop new resources to support volunteers.[25]

From a peak reached in 2006-07[26], mainstream funding for ESOL provision has declined very significantly over the last decade.[27] There is evidence of widespread concern within the ESOL sector regarding this, including perceptions that the skills of professional ESOL teachers are not valued and the ESOL sector as a whole is being marginalised.[28]

The presentations of good practice in the use of volunteers identified by this review (see section 3 and following) – which are mostly produced by or with ESOL professionals – consistently recommend that volunteers act under the direction of qualified professionals wherever possible. The following passage from one of the presentations is representative:

> **Does volunteering undermine professional language teaching?**
>
> The mention of 'volunteers' amongst teachers can cause concern in some European countries, where paid professional language teaching is losing jobs and funding and sometimes being replaced by volunteer provision. That is why this toolkit focuses explicitly on the work of paid teachers alongside volunteers.
>
> However, we know from our research that many unpaid volunteers across Europe are organising classes for refugees and often acting as teachers where no funding or paid teachers are available. Often these volunteer-run classes are the only provision that refugees have access to. Volunteer groups are also doing innovative work around informal language provision. We want to celebrate the generosity of the volunteers acting in this way.
>
> At the same time, we also want to make the case in this booklet for the importance of properly paid and trained language teachers. Professional teachers can offer a level of expertise and consistency that only the most dedicated and financially independent volunteers can match. They're therefore vital to supporting refugees to learn language and participate fully in the new communities in which they find themselves.[29]

---

[25] UK Government (2019a), op. cit., p16.

[26] National Audit Office (2008), *Skills for Life: Progress in Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy*. London: National Audit Office. p22. https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/0708482.pdf

[27] Foster and Bolton (2018), op. cit.

[28] 'Many respondents spoke of funding cuts, short term funding and the lack of importance placed on ESOL, despite the importance of English language learning to the integration agenda promoted by the government.' NATECLA (2019a), op. cit., p5.

See also: Action for ESOL http://actionforesol.org/ ; and, Action for ESOL (2012) *The ESOL 2012 Manifesto, A statement of our beliefs and values*. London: Action for ESOL. http://actionforesol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/ESOL-manifesto-leaflet-v4b-online.pdf

[29] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), *Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees*. p4. https://volunteersinlanguagelearning.eu/

3. Presentations of good practice in the use of volunteers in English language learning

3.1 Evidence for models of good practice

This review identified six research-based presentations of good practice regarding the use of volunteers to support English language learning:

- 'Learning English - Volunteers Matter', a set of resources produced by NIACE in 2008 for the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), based on extensive consultation and piloting with voluntary sector organisations[30]
- NATECLA's recent framework for good practice in voluntary ESOL, based on extensive consultation with voluntary sector providers of ESOL[31]
- The Glasgow ESOL Forum-Education Scotland investigation of volunteer support for ESOL provision in Scotland, based on an extensive survey of organisations and individuals involved in volunteer-supported provision[32]
- Two recent Erasmus+ projects, 'Volunteers in Migrant Education (VIME)'[33] and 'Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu',[34] which brought together partners with considerable relevant expertise from the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark and Slovenia (VIME); and the UK, Denmark, Germany, Austria and Belgium (Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu)
- Council of Europe Toolkit for volunteers providing language support for refugees[35]

These presentations of good practice start from a similar understanding of language learning and how to support it, particularly in relation to the barriers adult migrants face; they identify similar benefits from the use of volunteers, envisage similar roles for volunteers, and make very similar recommendations regarding the recruitment, deployment and management of volunteers, and the relationship of volunteers to professional teachers.

---

[30] NIACE (2008), *Learning English - Volunteers Matter*. Leicester: NIACE.

[31] NATECLA (2019a), op. cit.

[32] Jarvis et al. (2018), op. cit.

[33] VIME Project (2018a), *Roles and competences of Language Volunteers in Migrant Education*. www.languagevolunteers.com/

[34] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit.

[35] Council of Europe (2018), *Language support for adult refugees: Council of Europe toolkit for volunteers providing language support for refugees*. Council of Europe LIAM (Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants) project. https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-support-for-adult-refugees/home

They are consistent with other, more limited descriptions of good practice reviewed[36] and with guidance issued by a number of voluntary ESOL providers.[37] They are also consistent with the more general guidance on working with volunteers offered by NCVO (The National Council for Voluntary Organisations) through its standards and its evidence-based 'Knowhow' website.[38]

This suggests that there is already a well-established and widely agreed model of good practice in the use of volunteers to English language learning – as might be expected, given long involvement of volunteers in English language learning in the UK, and similar types of learning elsewhere in Europe.

In addition to the practical resources available from the NVCO Knowhow website, five of the six presentations also offer practical resources: the NIACE resource, the NATECLA framework,[39] the Erasmus projects, 'VIME' and 'Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu', and the Council of Europe Toolkit.

Likewise, open-access resources relevant to use of volunteers to support English language learning are available online from organisations such as LASSN (Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network).[40]

Beyond these items, the review also identified:

- Several European models of volunteer support in the workplace,[41] including a particularly well-developed model operating in Sweden[42] (and offering resources available in English[43]),

---

[36] Refugee Action (2016), op. cit.; Krumm, H-J. (2016), *Refugees need language – how can volunteers give support?* Strasbourg: Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/09000016805a7033; Dawson (2017a), op. cit.; also: Learning and Work Institute (2019b), op. cit.; Barnard, H., and Patel, H. (2015), *TimeBank Talking Together Programme Final Evaluation Report.* www.timebank.org.uk/sites/timebank.org.uk/files/TT%20evaluation.pdf; Tongue, C. (2016), *An evaluation of LASSN's English at Home service.* Leeds: LASSN. https://lassn.org.uk/english-at-home/; and Beech, J. (2015), *An evaluation of befriending at Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network.* Leeds: LASSN. https://lassn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Final-Befriending-Evaluation-060915.pdf; Elliot, S., (2016) *Evaluation report.* London: Merton Home Tutoring Service. https://mhts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MHTS-Evaluation-Report.pdf

[37] See for example: SAVTE (Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English) http://savte.org.uk/volunteering/; LASSN (Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network) https://lassn.org.uk/

[38] https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/; for standards see https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/quality-and-standards

[39] NATECLA (2019b), *Resources for volunteer ESOL teachers.* https://www.natecla.org.uk/content/668/For-volunteer-ESOL-teachers

[40] LASSN https://lassn.org.uk/

[41] For a German example, see: Köhler, U. and Leinecke, R. (2018), *Deutsch am Arbeitsplatz - Betriebliches Sprachmentoring.* Hamburg: passage GmbH. https://languageforwork.ecml.at/ResourceCentre/tabid/4074/InventoryID/233/language/en-GB/Default.aspx (Describes how L2 learning at the workplace can be supported by colleagues, instructors, and supervisors.)

[42] Vård- och omsorgscollege https://www.vo-college.se/sprakombud

[43] ArbetSam approach (2013) https://languageforwork.ecml.at/ResourceCentre/tabid/4074/language/en-GB/Default.aspx

and the Language for Work Network resources, which include competences for volunteer supporters[44]

- Scandinavian projects that produced approaches based on social models of language learning[45] and an Erasmus+ project that focused on support for self-directed learning[46]
- Research-based proposals on the use of volunteers, carried out for the GLA in 2012-13[47]
- Numerous short descriptions of practice related to the use of volunteers to support language learning by adult migrants[48]
- Guidance aimed 'third parties' to support effective communication with migrants in ways that will foster language learning by the migrant.[49]
  Note that this guidance overlaps with the Scandinavian social models referred to above.

3.2 Understandings of language learning that underpin presentations of good practice

A set of understandings about language learning by adult migrants, and ways to support it, runs through, and underpins, the various presentations of good practice in the use of volunteers.

Figure 1 below summarises understandings of how adults acquire an additional language, and useful aims for systems designed to support the language learning process.

Figure 1. Understandings about language learning and how to support it

---

[44] Language for Work Network **https://languageforwork.ecml.at/**

See also Braddell, A., Grünhage-Monetti, M., Portefin, C., and Sjösvärd, K. (2018), *Language for work – a quick guide, How to help adult migrants develop work-related language skills.* Graz: European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe. **https://languageforwork.ecml.at/Portals/48/documents/LFW-quick-guide-EN.pdf?timestamp=1554984122695**

[45] Clark, B., and Lindemalm, K. (eds) (2011), *Språkskap – Swedish as a Social Language.* Stockholm: Ergonomidesign, Folkuniversitetet and Interactive Institute https://sla.talkbank.org/pubs/sprakskap.pdf; see also, Icelandic village http://languagelearninginthewild.com/project/the-icelandic-village/

[46] ALL-SR Erasmus+ (2014-16) https://www.itta.uva.nl/learnerautonomy/learner-autonomy-48; see also, Braddell, A (2017), *Citizens' Curriculum guide to non-directive coaching.* Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/LW-Coaching-Report-V6-13.7.2017.pdf
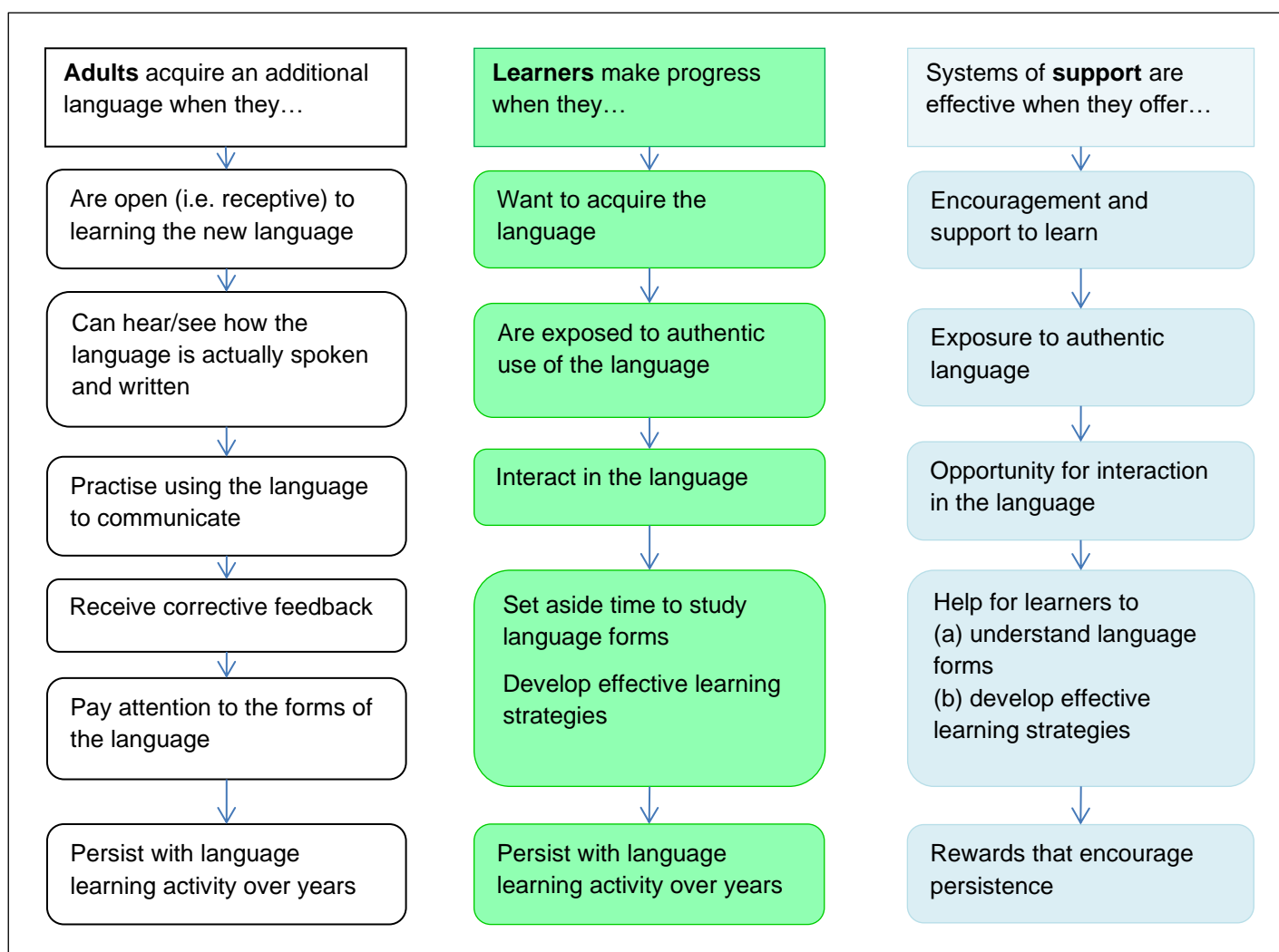
[47] NIACE (2012), *English Language for All.* London: GLA (Greater London Authority). https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/english_language_for_all.pdf; GLA (2013), *Migrants in low-paid, low-skilled jobs: barriers and solutions to learning English in London.* London: GLA. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/barriers_and_solutions_to_learning_english.pdf

[48] See, for example, All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration (2016), *Interim report on integration of migrants.* APPG: All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration. pp13,18. https://socialintegrationappg.org.uk/reports/

[49] Hobart, Clare (2015), *Lowering Language Barriers.* London: Chalmers & Byrne Training Ltd. http://www.chalmersbyrne.co.uk Sample available at http://www.chalmersbyrne.co.uk/sites/chalmersbyrne.co.uk/files/attachments/Look%20Inside%20-%20Lowering%20Language%20Barriers%20handbook.pdf

Grünhage-Monetti, M., and Nispel. A. (2019), *Communicating with migrants Guide for staff in job centres and public services.* Graz: European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe. https://languageforwork.ecml.at/Portals/48/documents/LFW-communication-public-services-EN.pdf

Adults acquire an additional language when they…	Learners make progress when they…	Systems of support are effective when they offer…
Are open (i.e. receptive) to learning the new language	Want to acquire the language	Encouragement and support to learn
Can hear/see how the language is actually spoken and written	Are exposed to authentic use of the language	Exposure to authentic language
Practise using the language to communicate	Interact in the language	Opportunity for interaction in the language
Receive corrective feedback	Set aside time to study language forms	Help for learners to (a) understand language forms (b) develop effective learning strategies
Pay attention to the forms of the language	Develop effective learning strategies	
Persist with language learning activity over years	Persist with language learning activity over years	Rewards that encourage persistence

Related to these understandings of the language learning process, the presentations identify a set of broad domains or contexts for this learning:

- Intentional English language learning – formal, non-formal and informal
    - Formal, publicly-funded ESOL provision, where groups of learners receive a course of English language instruction/tuition from a qualified teacher, in a classroom

    - Non-formal English language learning in settings outside of formal ESOL provision, where learners seek to improve their English language skills through study and/or practise of language forms, with or without the support of an English language teacher (who may or may not hold English language teaching qualifications)

    - Informal English language learning in settings where learners, alone or in groups, undertake activities other than English language learning, but with the intention of improving their English language skills, again with or without the support of a qualified/unqualified English language teacher. When offered by a provider with the conscious goal of enhancing participants' English language skills this might characterised as a form of embedded learning (examples identified by this review include 'creative' activities such as cookery and gardening and sports). When undertaken by learners independently of any provider, this becomes a form of self-

directed/autonomous learning, such as joining a resident's association in order to practise interacting in English.[50]

These various types on intentional learning activity may or may not involve the use of digital technology and the internet.

- Opportunities for incidental English language learning (i.e. learning that occurs from activities where learning is not the primary goal) that arise through what may be termed 'social participation', including activities linked to and/or arising from:
  - o Everyday domestic life, e.g. shopping, interacting with family, friends, neighbours
  - o Work (paid or unpaid), including activity associated with both task and role
  - o Leisure
  - o Education and training other than English language learning
  - o Community life and being a citizen/resident, e.g. dealing with taxes

Social participation also supports 'language socialisation', the process by which the learner comes to understand how to use a language effectively in a given social context.

These understandings of the language learning process and its various contexts are consistent with current research-based understandings of second language acquisition by adult migrants.[51]

---

[50] Miller, L., Braddell, A., and Marangozov R. (2013), *Migrants in low-paid low-skilled work in London. Research into barriers and solutions to learning English.* Falmer: Institute for Employment Studies. p13. https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/migrants-low-paid-low-skilled-work-london

[51] Beacco, J-C., Krumm, H-J., Little, D. and Thalgott, P. (eds) (2017), *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants, Some lessons from research*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton / Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/the-linguistic-integration-of-adult-migrants-lessons-from-research-l-i/168070a67f

Van Avermaet, P. (2019), *Social participation is a shared responsibility*. Council of Europe Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM) 4th Intergovernmental Conference. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/4th-intergovernmental-conference

3.3 Understandings of learner motivations and barriers for English language learning

Also underpinning the presentations of good practice are research- and practice-based understandings regarding motivations and barriers for English language learning by migrants.

Perceived motivations include (in no particular order):

- Social integration/participation (including access to public services, gain settled status/Citizenship)
- Work (i.e. find employment and/or progress career)
- Be able to support children
- Improve literacy
- Further study

Perceived barriers for migrants include (again, in no particular order):

- Difficulty finding information about suitable provision
- Lack of suitable provision, including level and accessibility (cost, time, location) – this may be further complicated by:
  o Caring responsibilities
  o Work commitments (e.g. requirement for long and/or anti-social hours, with long travel-to-work times, associated with low-income, insecure employment)
- Lack of effective personal learning strategies
- Lack of support and encouragement to engage in and/or persist with English language learning
- Lack of support and encouragement to engage in English language learning
  o at home
  o at work
- Lack of confidence to:
  o Interact in English
  o Take part intentional English language learning
  o Engage in activities offering English language learning opportunities

These understandings are well-supported by the research evidence.[52]

---

[52] See for example:

Paget, A., and Stevenson, N. (2014), *On Speaking Terms: making ESOL policy work better for migrants and wider society*. London: Demos. https://www.demos.co.uk/files/On_speaking_termsweb.pdf?1408395571

Higton et al (2019), op. cit.

GLA (2013) op. cit.

Miller et al (2013), op. cit.

4. Roles for volunteers in English language learning

The review identified evidence of volunteers supporting English language learning in range of roles. These are summarised in table 1, and then described more fully below. Please note:

- Categorisations are indicative only: roles may overlap; one volunteer may combine several roles
- Most roles may be undertaken in a range of settings (e.g. college, community, workplace, learner's own home, etc.); a 'classroom' can be anywhere, including in a learner's home, one-to-one
- Some roles are particularly well-suited to migrant learners themselves; all roles may be undertaken effectively by suitable migrants

Table 1. Roles identified for volunteers in English language learning

Volunteer role	Where	Function
Roles that offer direct support to learners for intentional learning		
ESOL at Home teacher	Learner's home	Plan and deliver ESOL lessons to learners at home
Classroom teacher	ESOL classroom	Plan and deliver ESOL lessons to classroom groups
Classroom assistant	ESOL classroom	Support classroom instruction by assisting teacher
Classroom participant	ESOL classroom	Support classroom activities
Language support	Non-ESOL classroom	Support learner(s) in other education contexts
Language coach	Flexible	Support learner(s) to work on their learning goals
Literacy coach	Flexible	Support learner(s) to work on their literacy goals
Learning coach	Flexible	Support learner(s) to develop learning strategies
Learning partner	Flexible	Support learner(s) to work on their learning goals
Group facilitator	Flexible	Support groups of learners to develop skills
Assessment volunteer	Flexible	Support assessment of individual's learning needs
Roles that offer indirect support to learners for intentional learning		
Administrator	Flexible	Provide administrative support
Crèche worker	Flexible	Provide support with childcare
Roles that offer support for incidental learning		
Interpreter	Flexible	Provide support with translation
Language mentor / buddy	Flexible	Provide on-demand language support to learner
Befriender	In the community	Provide social support to individual learner
Activity facilitator	In the community	Facilitate activities in the community for learners
Roles that develop environments supportive of language learning / language socialisation		
Learning champion	Community/workplace	Advocate for and support language learning
Community liaison	Community/workplace	Develop opportunities for language learning/ language socialisation in the local community / workplace
Roles that support the use of volunteers in English language learning		
Volunteer management roles	Provider	Support volunteer recruitment, training, deployment,

The subsections below offer further detail on the roles, drawn from the presentations of good practice identified previously. Note that most roles can be referenced in multiple sources. The references included here are exemplary only.

4.1 Roles that offer direct support to learners for intentional learning

- **Teacher** – May be expected to hold (or be working towards) an appropriate English language teaching qualification.[53] There is evidence of newly qualified English language teachers volunteering as part of a pathway into paid employment.[54]

- **Classroom assistant** – Works inside the classroom, directed by the professional teacher, providing extra help for individuals or small groups; may also work outside the classroom with individuals or small groups to reinforce classroom instruction by teacher, and/or help learner(s) address needs identified by teacher.[55]

- **Classroom participant** – Takes part in classroom learning activities, e.g. helping the teacher present a new activity by taking a role in a dialogue with the teacher; acting as interlocutor with learners in speaking and listening activities; taking on parts in role plays (e.g. job interview) to add authenticity. Note that as well as being helpful to learners and the teacher, this role may be used to introduce new volunteers to the ESOL classroom, to learners, and to the learning process.[56]

- **Language coach** – Able to organise language learning activities independently (possibly with guidance from teacher); works to help learners achieve their own language learning goals.[57]

  Language coaches may support learners with specific needs; provide time-limited intense tuition to every learner in the class, in turn; focus on a specific task such as reading, conversation or preparation of a text or questions, or even on assessment of students' needs.[58]

- **Literacy coach** – Similar to language coach, but focuses on literacy. May be expected to hold (or be working towards) qualification relevant to adult literacy/ESOL literacy teaching/learning support.[59]

- **Learning coach** – Use reflective discussion to help learner(s) to develop effective learning strategies. This role focuses on raising the learner's awareness and confidence.[60]

- **Learning partner** – Helps individuals or small groups to practise using language through e.g. roleplays, discussion activities, language games.[61] Uses attentive listening to offer

---

[53] Jarvis et al. (2018), op cit., p4ff

[54] Jarvis et al. (2018), op cit., p4

[55] VIME Project (2018b), op. cit., pp10-11

[56] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., p37

[57] VIME Project (2018b), op. cit., pp10-11

[58] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., p37

[59] Jarvis et al. (2018), op cit., p3ff

[60] Braddell (2017), op. cit., pp29-35

[61] NATECLA (2019a), op. cit., p2

learners one-to-one (or one-to-two) motivational support; related to learning coach.[62] Help learners to practise English on a course and/or in a conversation group; accompany them on class activities outside the classroom.[63]

- **Group facilitator** – Support informal conversation and activity groups to develop skills and practice speaking English, e.g. in conversation circles or clubs,[64] also in classroom and other settings.

- **Assessment volunteer** – Helps with initial assessment of learner needs. May include visiting learners at home.[65]

4.2 Roles that offer indirect support to learners for intentional learning

- **Administrator, Crèche worker, etc.** – Supports the provision of learning activities (e.g. classes, conversation groups, etc.) in ways other than direct language work with learners, including admin support and support to enable participation by learners with caring responsibilities, ill health, etc.[66]

4.3 Roles that offer support for incidental learning

- **Interpreter** – Supports communication with learners in wide range of settings, as required.[67]

- **Language mentor / buddy** – Provides one-to-one support, including, but not limited to, conversation practice for learners.[68]

  Offers 'social' support, for example helping the adult migrant to understand official letters and complete forms, or explaining processes that they need to go through as part of their new daily life. In the workplace, may help colleague to understand work processes, instructions.[69]

  Helps individual to move on to further learning or employment, helps with English language learning through informal conversation.[70]

- **Befriender** – Forms a supportive relationship with a specific learner. May include visiting learner at home, introducing the learner to the local area, helping with official correspondence, practising conversational English, helping the person to make

---

[62] Braddell (2017), op. cit., pp29-35

[63] Talk English Friend. https://www.talk-english.co.uk/introduction/become-a-friend/

[64] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., pp18-23; SAVTE (Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English) http://savte.org.uk/volunteering/

[65] SAVTE ibid.

[66] Jarvis et al. (2018), op. cit.; NATECLA (2019a), op. cit., p8ff

[67] Jarvis et al. (2018), op. cit., p4

[68] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., pp31-33

[69] VIME Project (2018b), op. cit., p10

[70] NIACE (2008), op. cit., Part 2

appointments, accompanying the person on visits to other agencies, helping the person to make connections within the community.[71]

- **Activity facilitator** – Supports or organises activities for learners such as cooking, crafts, drama, sports, visits to local facilities (i.e. libraries, museums, town hall, schools, job centre, etc.), local walks, social events, etc., that build confidence and social networks, while offering opportunities for language learning.[72]

4.4 Roles that develop environments supportive of language learning / language socialisation

- **Learning champion** – This is an advocacy role that can include learner engagement, learner support, peer mentoring, community development, organisational development, campaigning and lobbying (e.g. for resources and support). Learning champions may be based in the community or in a workplace.[73]
- **Community liaison** – Develops links within the community (including workplaces) to maximise opportunities for language learning/ language socialisation, e.g. by working with local service providers and businesses.[74]

4.5 Roles that support the use of volunteers in English language learning

- **Volunteer management roles** – Ranges of roles that support the volunteering process itself, including: volunteer recruitment, training, matching of volunteers with roles and learners, management and support, etc.

---

[71] LASSN (Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network) https://lassn.org.uk/befriending/

[72] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., pp24-29

[73] NIACE (2008), op. cit., Part 2; VIME Project (2018b), op. cit., pp10-11; NATECLA (2019a), op. cit., p2; Workers Educational Association (WEA) www.wea.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/workplace-learning-advocates; Unison https://learning.unison.org.uk/branch-education-team/support/esol/; See also Sjösvärd, K and Braddell, A., (2017), Using workplace learning to support the linguistic integration of adult migrants – lessons from a decade of work in Sweden. In Beacco, J-C., Krumm, H-J., Little, D. and Thalgott, P. (eds) (2017), *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants, Some lessons from research*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton / Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/the-linguistic-integration-of-adult-migrants-lessons-from-research-l-i/168070a67f; Language advocates (Språkombud) Vård- och omsorgscollege https://www.vo-college.se/sprakombud; ArbetSam approach (2013) https://languageforwork.ecml.at/ResourceCentre/tabid/4074/language/en-GB/Default.aspx

[74] Clark and Lindemalm (eds) (2011), op. cit.; Miller et al (2013), op. cit.; Hobart, Clare (2015), op. cit.; Sjösvärd and Braddell (2017), op. cit.; Krumm (2016), op. cit.; Kukulska-Hulme, A., Gaved, M., Jones, A., Norris, L., and Peasgood, A. (2017) Mobile language learning experiences for migrants beyond the classroom. In Beacco, J-C., Krumm, H-J., Little, D. and Thalgott, P. (eds) (2017), *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants, Some lessons from research*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton / Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/the-linguistic-integration-of-adult-migrants-lessons-from-research-l-i/168070a67f; Salmon, M., and Trace, N. (2015), *Talk English – a whole community approach to learning English and integration.* London: British Council, BBC. https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/continuing-professional-development/cpd-teacher-trainers/talk-english-whole-community-approach-learning-english-and-integration

---

LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

4.6 Peer volunteers: Learners as volunteers

Volunteering can offer learners a progression route, and many of the roles identified here are potentially suitable for previous or current learners. As language volunteers, learners can add significant value to English language support systems in a number of ways, including:

- Being an 'expert by experience' with valuable perspectives to offer not only to other learners, but also to those offering support for language learning
- Being a powerful role model to other learners and volunteers
- Having access to target communities of potential learners.[75]

Learner-volunteers also bring linguistic resources that can enable multilingual approaches to many aspects of the learning and support process, in and beyond the classroom. The use of learners as volunteers also supports agendas around equality, diversity and inclusion.[76]

---

[75] NIACE (2008), op. cit., Part 2; Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., p34

[76] Learning and Work Institute (2019b), op. cit., p4

5. Practice recommendations for volunteers in English language learning

5.1 Generic good practice in the management of volunteering

Research on generic volunteering[77] offers a model of volunteer involvement with four stages:

- Doubter – is outside volunteering
- Starter – has made an enquiry
- Doer – has begun volunteering
- Stayer – is a long-term volunteer

The research identified eight 'pressure points' where organisations can overcome or minimise barriers to volunteering:

1. Image and appeal of volunteering
2. Methods of recruiting volunteers
3. Recruitment and application procedures
4. Induction into volunteering
5. Training for volunteering
6. Overall management of the volunteering
7. The ethos and culture of the organisation
8. The support and supervision given to volunteers

The research (published in 2003) made recommendations for organisations, as set out in table 2 below.

Table 2. Volunteer role progression, pressure points and actions[78]

Doubter to starter		
Needs of volunteer	*Pressure points*	*Effective actions*
Positive image of volunteering	Image and appeal	General publicity and promotion of volunteering
Awareness of variety of volunteering and volunteers		Regular advertising – press, posters and leaflets
		Targeted promotion to sub-groups
		Innovative approaches and media
Messages and invitations to volunteer	Methods of recruitment	Carefully crafted messages
		Outreach, talks, roadshows, presence at events
Easily obtained information		Active promotion in schools, workplaces etc.
Easy access to volunteering		Multiple points of access, gatekeeper networks
		Clear information on literature and websites
		Greater promotion of websites and databases

---

[77] Gaskin (2003), op. cit.

[78] Reproduced from Gaskin (2003), op. cit., pp28-9

LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

		More visible and more inviting volunteer 'bureaux'
		Support for volunteer ambassadors

Starter to doer		
Needs of volunteer	*Pressure points*	*Effective actions*
Positive initial experience	Recruitment and application procedures	Well-staffed reception, walk-in/call-in access
Responsive and interested staff		Attractive leaflets/handouts to take away
Personalised approach		Friendly, efficient initial response

Starter to doer (continued)		
Needs of volunteer	*Pressure points*	*Effective actions*
Procedures efficient but informal		Informal but efficient interview process
As few delays as possible		Individualised matching to opportunities
Being given choices		Volunteer role descriptions, charter
		Vetting and other delays fully explained
		Referral to other opportunities/organisations
Understanding how things work	Induction to volunteering	Orientation to organisation and personnel
Feeling equipped and confident to begin volunteering		Clear explanations of policies and procedures
		Clear explanation of expenses system
		Informal, friendly style
		Taster sessions, shadowing
		Up-to-date induction pack
Having the necessary skills for the role	Training for volunteering	Useful, appropriate, convenient initial training
		Indication of future training opportunities
		Certification and accreditation options

Doer to stayer		
Needs of volunteer	*Pressure points*	*Effective actions*
Relevant training for the role	Training	Useful, appropriate, convenient ongoing training
Opportunities for progression, further skills development		Certification and accreditation on offer
Good organisation, communication	Overall management	Well-organised volunteer systems
		Efficiency combined with informality
Degree of commitment respected		Flexibility to accommodate other commitments
Personal constraints accommodated		Respect for cultural or age-related concerns
		Development of volunteers as managers

Feeling comfortable, welcome	Ethos and culture	Pro-volunteering culture in organisation
Feeling contribution is useful		Staff training at managerial and operational levels
Sense of being part of the organisation		An inclusive ethos without discrimination
		Volunteers help shape organisational culture
		Ensuring organisational capacity to consult and respond to volunteers
Not worrying about costs, transport, safety, etc.	Support and supervision	Personal line of support for every volunteer
Knowing help, support is available from staff, other		Light-touch supervision
		Clear, regular reimbursement of expenses
volunteers		Conveying of appreciation, value
Not feeling pressured, allowed		Facilitating volunteer socials, peer support
flexibility without guilt		Efficient systems for monitoring and progression
		Entirely non-exploitative approach to volunteers
Stayer		
Needs of volunteer	*Pressure points*	*Effective actions*
Ability to transfer to other volunteering opportunities	Overall management	Referrals, networks and databases that enable geographical transfer
Life cycle changes	Support and supervision	Allowing changes of role and degree of commitment within the organisation

Organisational resourcing, as well as management expertise, is implicit in a number of the actions recommended to address the pressure points.

Recent research into generic volunteering[79] characterised a 'quality volunteer experience' as:

- Inclusive – welcoming and accessible to all
- Connected – giving the volunteer a sense of connection to other people, to a cause and/or an organisation
- Voluntary – it is something the volunteer has freely chosen to do
- Flexible – taking into account how people who volunteer can give their time and fitting around their circumstances
- Balanced – not overburdening those who volunteer with unnecessary processes
- Meaningful – resonating with people's lives, interests and priorities
- Impactful – making a positive difference
- Enjoyable – providing enjoyment and making people feel good about what they are doing

---

[79]McGarvey, A., Jochum, V., Davies, J., Dobbs, J., and Hornung, L. (2019), *Time Well Spent, A National Survey on the Volunteer Experience, Summary Report January 2019*. London: NCVO. p20.
https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy/research/time-well-spent

In addition to management expertise, a requirement for adequate resourcing is also implied here.

5.2 Good practice in the management of language volunteers

Consistent, structured and on-going support for volunteers is widely promoted in presentations of good practice in English language volunteering. It is also noted that this support carries implications for resourcing, and that lack of resourcing is a significant barrier for many organisations.[80]

5.2.1 Understandings of the management process

The volunteer management process was presented as journey in several sources.

Example 1.[81]

> Starting the Journey – Recruiting volunteers
>
> Keeping on track – Training and supporting volunteers
>
> Steps to success – Recognising and rewarding
>
> Reaching potential – Managing volunteers

Example 2.[82]

1. Plan recruitment process internally
2. Advertise volunteer opportunity in local newsletter
3. Receive and process applications via email
4. Contact all applicants to invite them for interview or explain that they're not invited
5. Interviews or induction and training session for suitable applicants
6. Set up one-to-one meetings between teachers and volunteers
7. Volunteering begins
8. Volunteer coordinator meets volunteer and teacher separately to review how it's going every term and is on hand for support if/when needed
9. Volunteering ends
10. Volunteer exit interview

Constituent elements of the process are typically identified as follows:

- Recruitment
- Selection
- Induction
- Matching of volunteer to role/client
- Support (supervision, training)
- Quality monitoring (including 'counselling out' of unsuitable volunteers)

---

[80] See for example: Learning and Work Institute (2019b), op. cit., p4ff; NATECLA (2019a), op. cit.; Jarvis et al. (2018), op. cit.

[81] NIACE (2008), op. cit., Part 3

[82] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., p58

LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

- Reward and recognition
- Volunteer development

5.2.2 NATECLA framework recommendations

The recent good practice framework from NATECLA[83] for organisations using volunteers offers a consensus view for voluntary ESOL. In addition to the stipulation not to replace professional teachers with volunteers to save money, the framework recommends that organisations:

- Belong to a local network of providers, to facilitate referrals
- Make efforts to recruit volunteers from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and local backgrounds
- Develop and follow standardised policies and procedures, including
  - Application process and interview, following up of references
  - Allocation of volunteers to appropriate roles, with signposting of those not ready for language volunteering to other volunteer opportunities (e.g. admin support)
  - Training led by suitably qualified, experienced workers (preferably employed) that is tailored to the experience and planned role of the volunteers, and covers safeguarding (including e.g. domestic abuse, FGM, forced marriage and hate crime); confidentiality; and guidance on maintaining boundaries and signposting
  - Agreement with volunteers regarding commitment to regular CPD and participation in quality processes (in addition to any other aspects of the volunteer's role)
  - Regular assessment of the impact of the volunteer's work, including learner feedback
  - Guidance for volunteers on record-keeping (and the sharing of those records with learners)
- Monitor learners' progress by regular discussion with learner and volunteer.

Note on policies, procedures

Glasgow ESOL Forum makes available a range of policies and procedures related to volunteers.[84]

5.3 Practical barriers and enablers for the use of English language volunteers

The review identified a range of practical issues regarding the use of volunteers. Examples are listed in table 3 below.

Table 3. Examples of barriers and enablers for good practice in the use of English language volunteers[85]

Policies and procedures	
Barriers	*Enablers*
Finding time to develop and/or maintain (review and update) policies relevant to language volunteers	Sharing the development and updating of policies and procedures with other organisations
Recruitment	

---

83 NATECLA (2019a), op. cit.

84 http://www.glasgowesol.org/volunteer-policies

85 Jarvis et al. (2018), op. cit.

Barriers	*Enablers*
Lack of resources for publicity, staff time required for recruitment, support and training of volunteers	Word of mouth, social media, newspapers
Low number of volunteers at different times of the year	Initial interview with each volunteer
Recruiting suitable volunteers	Higher-level ESOL learners in volunteering roles
Recruiting diverse volunteers	Networking with e.g. adult basic skills provision, schools, community organisations etc.
Rejecting unsuitable volunteers	Shadowing for volunteers while waiting to be matched
Managing initial expectations	Policy, procedure for counselling out
Keeping volunteers engaged while waiting to be matched	

Induction and other training	
Barriers	*Enablers*
Lack of resources for training	Having different training courses for different requirements/ tutor roles
Volunteers not attending all required sessions	Sharing training with other organisations
Providing training at times that suit volunteers and staff	Volunteer input into training

Support	
Barriers	*Enablers*
Lack of resources for support	Volunteer team meetings, support sessions, 1:1 support (informal/ structured) linked to action plan
Supporting volunteers to deal with challenging situations e.g. trauma	Access to shadowing, training
Meeting diverse needs/expectations of volunteers	Peer support e.g. opportunities for volunteers to share experiences, strategies
	Self-assessment forms and questionnaires to evaluate volunteer experience
	Ensuring on-call support via e.g. email/phone
	Regular newsletters, updates
	Ensuring volunteers are aware of learner progress

Measuring impact	
Barriers	*Enablers*
Volunteers resistant to 'paperwork'	Written learning plans and progress records
	Consistent approach to evaluation (processes, frequency, method), formal and informal approaches

5.4 Volunteer induction

Both the NIACE resource and Volunteers in language learning.eu offer guidance on what to cover in induction.[86] This is consistent with other sources reviewed and includes:

- Introduction to the organisation, e.g. its work, ethos and history
- Explanation of process for placing volunteers
- Role boundaries, including boundaries with professional teachers
- Expectations of volunteers, including standards, rights and responsibilities

---

[86] NIACE (2008), op. cit., Part 3; Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., pp62-3

- Confidentiality and other key policies
- Monitoring and evaluation processes
- Introduction to theory and practice of language learning and support
- Initial guidance and training on working with learners, with feedback.

5.5 Volunteer training

Training can enhance the skills of volunteers and also their motivation and resilience; it can also reduce demands from volunteers for individual support from the organisation. Organisations may offer volunteers two to four training sessions per year.[87]

Examples[88] of training topics for volunteers working directly with learners include:

- ESOL learning and related issues (e.g. barriers to learning)
- Understandings of language learning
- English language awareness
- Planning and delivery of support for support for language learning, including learning needs analysis, support aims and objectives, approaches, techniques, resources for support
- Literacy issues and approaches to support for literacy development
- Engaging and motivating learners
- Boosting confidence and self-esteem
- Cultural awareness
- Trauma in the classroom
- Learner referral pathways, signposting
- Volunteering issues (e.g. expectations, role boundaries)

The NIACE resource and both Erasmus projects (VIME and Volunteers in language learning.eu) offer detailed guidance on training, support by profiling of competency requirements for certain roles.[89]

The Council of Europe toolkit for language volunteers offers a substantial bank of training resources.[90]

---

[87] Jarvis et al. (2018), op. cit., p8

[88] Jarvis et al. (2018), op. cit.

[89] NIACE (2008), op. cit., Part 3; VIME Project (2018c), *Training*. https://www.languagevolunteers.com/#Training; Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit.

[90] Council of Europe (2018), op.cit.

5.6 Needs of volunteers

Some typical needs of individual volunteers can be inferred from the practice recommendations for volunteer management.

- **Prompt response** – Individuals may volunteer for very different reasons (for example: CV-building, career development, occupation in retirement, commitment to a particular cause or issue, desire for social interaction, etc.) but whatever the reason, individuals are likely to welcome a prompt, affirming response from the organisation they first contact it, as a potential volunteer.

- **Speedy route into practical activity** – Individuals are then likely to want a clear, speedy route into practical activity with the organisation, whether that be actual volunteering or some form of training.

  This route needs to make **minimal bureaucratic demands** on the individual; and also to respect and accommodate the individual's **personal circumstances** (e.g. in relation to the time the individual can offer the organisation.

  Any **extended delays** between the individual first contacting the organisation and then being offered some active involvement may lead the individual to lose interest in volunteering for the organisation, and possibly for volunteering in general.

- **Tactful guidance towards a suitable role** – An individual may need tactful and positively-framed guidance as to which volunteering roles are actually suitable for that individual. Organisational processes, including role descriptions, training and shadowing, can help to make suitability more self-evident to individuals.

- **Training** – Training needs will be **role-related**, and reflect an individual's previous experience, but, once in a suitable role, most individuals are likely to want some training if only to be clear about their role and responsibilities.

  Individuals who directly support learners, and who do not have previous ESOL experience, may feel they need at least a basic understanding of the process of **second language acquisition** by adult migrants, and how to support it. Individuals may also want guidance on how to teach (or at least explain) **English language forms**. Individuals supporting learners with limited literacy may feel they need training in how to support **literacy development**.

  In addition, individuals may also feel they need training in a range of more **generic skills**: group facilitation and classroom management (including ways to cope with mixed ability groups); coaching and mentoring skills; intercultural communication skills; safeguarding and guidance on supporting learners who may have experienced traumatic episodes; befriending; also boundary-setting, personal security and confidentiality; and signposting learners to appropriate sources of information, advice and guidance.

  Individuals may want **refresher training** on at least an annual basis.

- **Ongoing feedback and support** – In addition to training, an individual is likely to need some degree of ongoing support. This may include **supervisory support** and/or **mentoring**, enabling the individual to discuss and reflect what they are doing, including any issues that may have arisen. Related to this, individuals are likely to want opportunities to give and receive **peer support** with other volunteers; and individuals will almost certainly want **feedback** from the organisation on the impact of their volunteering on the organisation's clients.

Such feedback constitutes a form of **recognition**, which individuals are likely to value. In addition to the intrinsic **reward** of the volunteering activity itself, individuals may welcome opportunities for **personal** or **career development** through, for example, qualifications or additional responsibilities within the organisation for which the individual is volunteering.

- **Practical requirements** – Individuals will want to feel adequately resourced for their role, in terms of **facilities, equipment**, and **materials**.

  Individuals may also require **reimbursement** of any **expenses**, such as travel expenses, for example.

- **Clear arrangements, good communication** – In relation to all aspects of the volunteering experience, the individual will want arrangements with the organisation to be clear and consistent. As part of this, the individual will expect good communication from the organisation.

Sources referenced

Action for ESOL (2012) *The ESOL 2012 Manifesto, A statement of our beliefs and values*. London: Action for ESOL. http://actionforesol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/ESOL-manifesto-leaflet-v4b-online.pdf

Action for ESOL http://actionforesol.org/

All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration (2016), *Interim report on integration of migrants*. APPG: All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration. https://socialintegrationappg.org.uk/reports/

ALL-SR Erasmus+ (2014-16) https://www.itta.uva.nl/learnerautonomy/learner-autonomy-48

ArbetSam approach (2013) https://languageforwork.ecml.at/ResourceCentre/tabid/4074/language/en-GB/Default.aspx

Barnard, H., and Patel, H. (2015), *TimeBank Talking Together Programme Final Evaluation Report*. www.timebank.org.uk/sites/timebank.org.uk/files/TT%20evaluation.pdf;

Beacco, J-C., Krumm, H-J., Little, D. and Thalgott, P. (eds) (2017), *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants, Some lessons from research*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton / Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/the-linguistic-integration-of-adult-migrants-lessons-from-research-l-i/168070a67f

Beech, J. (2015), *An evaluation of befriending at Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network*. Leeds: LASSN. https://lassn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Final-Befriending-Evaluation-060915.pdf

Bell, R., Plumb, N., and Marangozov, R. (2017*), Integration not demonization: The final report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration's inquiry into the integration of immigrants*. London: APPG on Social Integration. https://socialintegrationappg.org.uk/reports/

Braddell, A (2017), *Citizens' Curriculum guide to non-directive coaching*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/LW-Coaching-Report-V6-13.7.2017.pdf

Braddell, A., Grünhage-Monetti, M., Portefin, C., and Sjösvärd, K. (2018), *Language for work – a quick guide, How to help adult migrants develop work-related language skills.* Graz: European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe. **https://languageforwork.ecml.at/Portals/48/documents/LFW-quick-guide-EN.pdf?timestamp=1554984122695**

Casey, L. (2016). *The Casey Review. A review into opportunity and integration.* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf

Clark, B., and Lindemalm, K. (eds) (2011), *Språkskap – Swedish as a Social Language*. Stockholm: Ergonomidesign, Folkuniversitetet and Interactive Institute https://sla.talkbank.org/pubs/sprakskap.pdf

Council of Europe (2018), *Language support for adult refugees: Council of Europe toolkit for volunteers providing language support for refugees*. Council of Europe LIAM (Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants) project. https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-support-for-adult-refugees/home

Dawson, R. (2017a), *A Snapshot of English language teaching in seven voluntary sector organisations in 2017*. London: Merton Home Tutor Services. http://www.natecla.org.uk/uploads/media/208/16729.pdf

Dawson, R. (2017b), Notes of report presented as chair of NAVTE (National Association for Volunteer Teachers of English) to NATECLA (National Association for Teaching English and other Community

Languages to Adults) ESOL strategy progress meeting, 11 October 2017, London.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6R-FCB1Z7tQcjN5MXNXQ2pwLXc/view

Elliot, S., (2016) *Evaluation report*. London: Merton Home Tutoring Service. https://mhts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MHTS-Evaluation-Report.pdf

Foster, D., and Bolton, P. (2018), *Adult ESOL in England. Briefing Paper Number 7905, 25 April 2018*. London: Houses of Parliament, House of Commons Library. https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7905

Gaskin, K. (2003), *A choice blend, What volunteers want from organisation and management*. London: NCVO. https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-choice-blend-what-volunteers-want-from-organisation-and-management

GLA (2013), *Migrants in low-paid, low-skilled jobs: barriers and solutions to learning English in London*. London: GLA. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/barriers_and_solutions_to_learning_english.pdf

Glasgow ESOL Forum http://www.glasgowesol.org/volunteer-policies

Gordon, I., Travers, T., and Whitehead, C. (2007), *The Impact of Recent Immigration on the London Economy*. London: The City of London/London School of Economics and Political Science. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/23536/1/Gordon_the_Impact_of_Recent_Immigration_On_The_London_Economy_author.pdf

Grünhage-Monetti, M., and Nispel. A. (2019), *Communicating with migrants Guide for staff in job centres and public services*. Graz: European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe. https://languageforwork.ecml.at/Portals/48/documents/LFW-communication-public-services-EN.pdf

Hamilton, M., and Hillier, Y. (2009), ESOL Policy and Change, in *Language Issues* Volume 20 Issue 1. Also: Rosenberg, S.K. (2007), *A critical history of ESOL in the UK, 1870-2006*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

Higton, J., Sandhu, J., Stutz, A., Patel, R., Choudhoury, A., and Richards, S. (2019), *English for speakers of other languages: Access and progression, Research report*. London: Department for Education. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811750/English_for_speakers_of_other_languages.pdf

Hobart, Clare (2015), *Lowering Language Barriers*. London: Chalmers & Byrne Training Ltd. http://www.chalmersbyrne.co.uk Sample available at http://www.chalmersbyrne.co.uk/sites/chalmersbyrne.co.uk/files/attachments/Look%20Inside%20-%20Lowering%20Language%20Barriers%20handbook.pdf

Icelandic village http://languagelearninginthewild.com/project/the-icelandic-village/

Jarvis, J., Fraley, K., and Porrelli, H. (2018), *Working with Volunteers in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Provision in Scotland*. Glasgow: Glasgow ESOL Forum/Education Scotland. https://education.gov.scot/improvement/research/working-with-volunteers-in-esol-provision-in-scotland/

Köhler, U. and Leinecke, R. (2018), *Deutsch am Arbeitsplatz - Betriebliches Sprachmentoring.*Hamburg: passage GmbH. https://languageforwork.ecml.at/ResourceCentre/tabid/4074/InventoryID/233/language/en-GB/Default.aspx

Krumm, H-J. (2016), *Refugees need language – how can volunteers give support?* Strasbourg: Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/09000016805a7033

Kukulska-Hulme, A., Gaved, M., Jones, A., Norris, L., and Peasgood, A. (2017) Mobile language learning experiences for migrants beyond the classroom. . In Beacco, J-C., Krumm, H-J., Little, D. and Thalgott, P. (eds) (2017), *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants, Some lessons from research*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton / Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/the-linguistic-integration-of-adult-migrants-lessons-from-research-l-i/168070a67f

Language for Work Network https://languageforwork.ecml.at/

LASSN (Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network) https://lassn.org.uk/; https://lassn.org.uk/about/; https://lassn.org.uk/befriending/

Learning and Work Institute (2018), *Mapping ESOL Provision in the West Midlands Region, November 2018*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. http://www.wmsmp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/18.12.12-Report-Mapping-ESOL-Provision.pdf

Learning and Work Institute (2019a), *ESOL Local Partnerships, Case Studies, March 2019.* Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ESOL-Local-Partnership-Case-Studies.pdf

Learning and Work Institute (2019b), *ESOL and Volunteering, Summary Report of the Expert Stakeholder Seminar, 20th March 2019*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ESOL-TF-group-report-FINAL.pdf

McGarvey, A., Jochum, V., Davies, J., Dobbs, J., and Hornung, L. (2019), *Time Well Spent, A National Survey on the Volunteer Experience, Summary Report January 2019*. London: NCVO. https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy/research/time-well-spent

Miller, L., Braddell, A., and Marangozov R. (2013), *Migrants in low-paid low-skilled work in London. Research into barriers and solutions to learning English.* Falmer: Institute for Employment Studies. https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/migrants-low-paid-low-skilled-work-london

NATECLA (2019b), *Resources for volunteer ESOL teachers*. https://www.natecla.org.uk/content/668/For-volunteer-ESOL-teachers

NATECLA (National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults) (2019a), *A Framework for Good Practice in Voluntary ESOL.* http://natecla.org.uk/uploads/media/208/16911.pdf

National Audit Office (2008), *Skills for Life: Progress in Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy*. London: National Audit Office. https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/0708482.pdf

NCVO Knowhow https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/

NCVO standards https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/quality-and-standards

NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) (2008), *Learning English - Volunteers Matter*. Leicester: NIACE.

NIACE (2012), *English Language for All*. London: GLA (Greater London Authority). https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/english_language_for_all.pdf

Paget, A., and Stevenson, N. (2014), *On Speaking Terms: making ESOL policy work better for migrants and wider society*. London: Demos. https://www.demos.co.uk/files/On_speaking_termsweb.pdf?1408395571

Patel, A., Hoya, C., Bivand, P., McCallum, A., Stevenson, A., and Wilson, A. (2018), *Measuring the impact of Community-Based English Language Provision, Findings from a Randomised Controlled Trial*. Leicester:

Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Impact-evaluation-of-CBEL.pdf

Refugee Action (2016), Let refugees learn, Challenges and opportunities to improve language provision to refugees in England. London: Refugee Action. http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/letrefugeeslearnfullreport.pdf

Rienzo, C., and Vargas-Silva, C. (2019), *"Migrants in the UK: An Overview," Migration Observatory briefing*. Oxford: COMPAS University of Oxford. https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Briefing-Migrants-in-the-UK-An-Overview.pdf

Salmon, M., and Trace, N. (2015), *Talk English – a whole community approach to learning English and integration.* London: British Council, BBC. https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/continuing-professional-development/cpd-teacher-trainers/talk-english-whole-community-approach-learning-english-and-integration

SAVTE (Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English) http://savte.org.uk/volunteering/

Stevenson, A., Kings, P. and Sterland, L. (2017), *Mapping ESOL provision in Greater London, May 2017*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute.https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_esol_mapping.pdf;

Talk English Friend. https://www.talk-english.co.uk/introduction/become-a-friend/

Tongue, C. (2016), *An evaluation of LASSN's English at Home service*. Leeds: LASSN. https://lassn.org.uk/english-at-home/

UK Government (2013), *New £6 million competition fund for English language learning.* https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-6-million-competition-fund-for-english-language-learning

UK Government (2018), *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, Building stronger, more united communities.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

UK Government (2019a), *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, Summary of consultation responses and Government response, February 2019.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777160/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Government_Response.pdf

UK Government (2019b), *Integrated Communities Action Plan.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778045/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf

Van Avermaet, P. (2019), *Social participation is a shared responsibility*. Council of Europe Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM) 4th Intergovernmental Conference. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/4th-intergovernmental-conference

Vård- och omsorgscollege [Health and Social Care Colleges] https://www.vo-college.se/sprakombud

VIME Project (2018a), *Roles and competences of Language Volunteers in Migrant Education*. www.languagevolunteers.com/

VIME Project (2018b), *VIME Framework*. https://www.languagevolunteers.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/VIME_Framework_oct2018.pdf

VIME Project (2018c), *Training*. https://www.languagevolunteers.com/#Training

Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), *Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.* https://volunteersinlanguagelearning.eu/

Welsh Government (2018), *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) policy for Wales.* Cardiff: Welsh Government. https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-11/english-for-speakers-of-other-languages-esol-policy-for-wales.pdf

Workers Educational Association (WEA) www.wea.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/workplace-learning-advocates

Workers Educational Association (WEA) www.wea.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/workplace-learning-advocates

A2 – English language conversation clubs
Written by Alexander Braddell

Introduction

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has identified

3. a gap in the market, and appetite for, advice on how volunteers should be involved in English language learning, and
4. that volunteers require appropriate training and support to be effective in their role.

MHCLG has therefore commissioned products that focus on the utilisation of volunteers to support language learning, including through 'conversation clubs'.

Conversation clubs offer learners an opportunity to practice their English language speaking skills in a friendly, supportive and informal environment. Currently, conversation clubs are inconsistent and of varying quality. Informal volunteer-led provision takes a number of forms and there is no standard approach or model of training, resources or materials to which volunteers adhere.

This rapid review has been undertaken to support the development of those products. It explores evidence on good practice in running a conversation club.

At a glance

- Conversation clubs are a long-established feature of the international English language learning landscape. Sometimes referred to as English clubs, their core function is to provide a relaxed and friendly setting for learners to practise using English

- Conversation clubs for ESOL learners in the UK generally serve one or more of three functions:
  - o Additional opportunity for learners to practise speaking English
  - o Highly structured and supported group learning for learners with very no or very low level English language skills, not easily catered to by mainstream ESOL provision
  - o Befriending support for migrants, in particular refugees and asylum seekers

- Closely related to English language conversation clubs are activity-based clubs, where an activity (e.g. cooking, or gardening), or a trip (e.g. to a local library, or health centre) provides learners with a context to practise English and/or real-world opportunity to practise classroom learning

- Many ESOL providers offer conversation clubs alongside standard college or community-based provision; the government's 2013 English language competition led to the development of new conversation/activity clubs for low-level learners in areas prioritised, many of which continue

- Conversation clubs offer learners three key outcomes: gains in confidence; gains in language skills; support for integration, including enlarged social networks; also, they can offer low-level learners a route into formal provision and higher level learners a route into volunteering

- The use of volunteers in conversation clubs adds value in relation to capacity, personalised support for learners, enrichment of learner experience, support for social integration, volunteering opportunities (including for learners), community development

- Benefits to volunteers include social contact, learning and personal development, training and career development

- Sources describe two core models of practice, one for learners with no or very low level English language skills, including defined groups of learners, the other for learners with English language skills at a level to allow at least basic conversational interaction

- Both aim to create a safe, supportive, reassuring, respectful environment, informal and collaborative, that builds learner confidence; both aim to help learners extend their social networks; and both aim to offer learners supported opportunity to engage activities that help develop speaking skills.

- Conversation clubs targeted at very low-level learners tend to be instructional and prescribed in relation to content and format, with a focus on pre-set topics related to everyday life and community participation; these clubs may include excursions into the community designed to reinforce learning and introduce learners to community participation in English

- Conversation clubs targeted at learners with at least basic conversational skills focus on ensuring opportunities for learners to practise speaking; content and format is negotiated with learners to maximise relevance and value to learners

- There are three principal roles for volunteers in conversation clubs:
  - Club organiser or leader – volunteer who takes responsibility for running the club
  - Learning support volunteer – volunteer who provides additional support to individuals and groups during sessions and excursions, including as a language mentor/befriender
  - Proficient speaker participant– volunteer who participates as a member of the local community, enabling learners to practise with a proficient speaker; may also act as a befriender

- Key enablers for effective volunteer-led English language conversation clubs include:
  - Strong local partnerships with organisations relevant to the integration of the target learner group
  - Coproduction of the club with learners through consultation and local partnerships
  - Provider clarity regarding aims, objectives and methodology for conversation club
  - Management systems for the club that are consistent with club aims and objectives
  - Volunteer clarity regarding aims, objectives and methodology for conversation club, and how to support those aims and objectives
  - Effective volunteer coordination
  - Adequate resourcing for
    - Volunteer recruitment, induction, training, support
    - Suitable venues, facilities, and any required support, e.g. childcare
    - Activities, excursions, including their planning and preparation
  - Recruitment of suitable volunteers
  - Adequate training and on-going support for volunteers

o Effective quality assurance systems to monitor and support volunteer-led provision

1. Context and background to English language conversation clubs

1.1 Integrated Communities Strategy and Action Plan

In March 2018, the government published its Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper.[91] In its section on support for English language learning, the Green Paper noted that:

- English language learning opportunities should be tailored to the needs of learners with different motivations, starting points and levels of confidence

- Engaging women with very limited English language skills from segregated communities in English language learning constitutes a particular challenge

- Findings from a randomised controlled trial of community-based English language classes[92] show a positive impact on language proficiency and social integration outcomes

- Conversation clubs have an important role to play in the overall system of support for English language learning, including
  o Providing a supportive and friendly environment for learners to practise and consolidate their learning; and
  o Supporting integration by bringing together learners and volunteers from different backgrounds.

The Green Paper also noted that conversation clubs are most effective when participating learners are also attending a community- or college-based ESOL course.

Among its proposals, the Green Paper included:
- New community-based provision aimed at people with little or no English
- New England-wide scheme to support and increase volunteer-led provision of conversation clubs.

Following consultation,[93] an Action Plan was published in February 2019, with commitments to:

- New community-based English language provision

---

[91] UK Government (2018), *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, Building stronger, more united communities.*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

[92] Patel, A., Hoya, C., Bivand, P., McCallum, A., Stevenson, A., and Wilson, A. (2018), *Measuring the impact of Community-Based English Language Provision, Findings from a Randomised Controlled Trial*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Impact-evaluation-of-CBEL.pdf

[93] UK Government (2019a), *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, Summary of consultation responses and Government response, February 2019.*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777160/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Government_Response.pdf

- Work (to be led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) to identify how best to meet the needs of learners and volunteers in community-based English language conversation clubs.[94]

These commitments build on work begun in 2013, when the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) launched a competition[95] to identify new, community-based approaches to English language learning and integration. Funding was awarded to six projects, three of which included some form of volunteer-led English language conversation club:

- Speaking English with Confidence – London Local Education Authorities Forum for Adult Education
- #TalkEnglish – Manchester Adult Education Services
- English My Way – Tinder Foundation, with BBC Learning English and the British Council[96]

1.2 Background to English language conversation clubs

Conversation clubs are a long-established feature of the broader, international landscape of English language learning. Sometimes referred to as English clubs, their core function is to provide a relaxed and friendly setting for learners to practise using English.[97]

Within the context of UK ESOL provision, conversation clubs – or their equivalent – generally serve one or more of the following functions:

- Space for learners to practise speaking English, often (but not necessarily) with support and guidance from a teacher and/or proficient speaker; this sort of conversation club may be offered by an ESOL provider to learners enrolled in formal provision to reinforce/extend classroom learning (i.e. provide extra practice of language functions or forms being studied in class); or it may be offered as a drop-in facility, open to non-enrolled learners (of any level and background) wanting additional speaking practise.[98]

- Introduction to English language learning for learners with very limited English language skills, not easily catered to by mainstream ESOL provision; this sort of conversation club offers informal, but structured group learning, generally topic-based and focused on life skills (related to e.g. shopping, health, children's education, etc.), often with some initial

---

[94] UK Government (2019b), *Integrated Communities Action Plan.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778045/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf

[95] UK Government (2013a), *New £6 million competition fund for English language learning.* www.gov.uk/government/news/new-6-million-competition-fund-for-english-language-learning

[96] UK Government (2013b), *Thousands to benefit from exciting new ways of learning English.* www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-to-benefit-from-exciting-new-ways-of-learning-english

[97] Ewens, T. (2013), *English clubs.* London: British Council, BBC. www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/english-clubs

[98] Stevenson, A., Kings, P. and Sterland, L. (2017), *Mapping ESOL provision in Greater London, May 2017.* Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. p28. www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_esol_mapping.pdf ; for an example of an unrestricted drop-in club, see Bristol City Council, *ESOL Conversation Club - Bristol Learning City.* www.bristollearningcity.com/portfolio-items/esol-conversation-club/

literacy learning, and using approaches (e.g. simple drills, photo prompts, role play, games, etc.) long-established in the context of non-accredited ESOL provision.[99]

- Befriending support for migrants, in particular refugees and asylum seekers; this sort of conversation club offers migrants the opportunity to practise English with local volunteers with a focus on confidence-building and social integration.[100]

Closely related to English language conversation clubs are activity-based clubs, particularly in the context of learners not in formal provision, and/or learners needing support for social integration. In this kind of club, an activity such as cooking, craft work, gardening, or a trip in the locality (e.g. to a library, a health centre, or a supermarket), provides learners with a context to practise English, and/or a real-world opportunity to practise language learned in the classroom.[101]

Sources reviewed[102] suggest that English Language conversation clubs (in the range of formats outlined above) are currently or recently have been:

- Widely available in areas prioritised by the 2013 DCLG English language competition;[103]
- Provided by a range of organisations, including local authorities, mainstream ESOL providers, and voluntary sector organisations; Talk English and English My Way remain highly visible.
- Sometimes offered as open-access drop-ins, sometimes requiring formal enrolment, sometimes restricted to a particular type of learner (e.g. women-only groups, or groups of similar ability);
- Often held in informal community settings, accessible to learners, sometimes with crèche facilities;

---

[99] Stevenson et al. (2017), *op. cit.,* pp39-40; for practice example see Anchor Project, *What we do.* www.anchorproject.org.uk/what-we-do/; for examples of approaches, see SpEC (2014), *Volunteer Speaking English with Confidence (SpEC) Club Leader Training Programme, Training and Resource Toolkit*. London: City of London, LEAFEA.; also Robinson, A. (2017), *Helping Beginners Learn, A guide for those volunteering with ESOL learners*. Middlesbrough: North East Migration Partnership. http://www.natecla.org.uk/uploads/media/208/16731.pdf

[100] For practice examples, see Sheffield Conversation Club, *About us.* www.conversationclub.org.uk/about-us; Leeds Migration Partnership (2019), *Return of Conversation Cafe – Wednesday Afternoons at Leeds Playhouse.* https://migrationpartnership.org.uk/return-of-conversation-cafe-wednesday-afternoons-at-leeds-playhouse/; City of Sanctuary, *Drop Ins.* https://cityofsanctuary.org/group-activities/drop-ins/; Xenia https://xenia.org.uk/

[101] For practice examples, see Merton Home Tutoring Service, *Time to Talk.* https://mhts.org.uk/learners/time-to-talk/; Chrysalis Family Centre, *Sew and Talk: English for beginners.* https://chrysalisfamilycentre.wordpress.com/free-sewing-classes/; Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, *Our services.* www.covrefugee.org/gethelp; Talk English, *Learn English with us.* https://www.talk-english.co.uk/introduction/learners-introduction/ ; see also Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), *Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.* pp24-27. https://volunteersinlanguagelearning.eu/

102 Higton, J., Sandhu, J., Stutz, A., Patel, R., Choudhoury, A., and Richards, S. (2019), English for speakers of other languages: Access and progression, Research report. London: Department for Education.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811750/English_for_speakers_of_other_languages.pdf; see also *Sources reviewed for provider presentations of conversation clubs to learners and volunteers* section in this report

[103] UK Government (2013a), op. cit.; this includes 15 London boroughs and 14 areas outside of London.

- Mostly free to the learner, but not always;[104]
- Sometimes explicitly instructional; sometimes explicitly non-instructional;[105]
- Typically supported by volunteers, and, in many cases, volunteer-led;
- Promoted to learners as an informal, welcoming place to practise speaking English, improve confidence, meet new people, and 'enjoy fun activities';
- Promoted to volunteers as a valuable volunteering opportunity with training and on-going support.

Conversation clubs offer learners three key outcomes: gains in confidence; gains in language skills, including contextual knowledge and awareness (language socialisation); support for integration, including enlarged social networks.[106] They can also provide low-level learners with a route into formal ESOL provision.[107]

---

[104] See for example provision from the London Borough of Redbridge advertised as costing £10 for 12 sessions. https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/jobs/work-redbridge/esol-conversation-clubs/

[105] See for example Xenia, *Xenia's values*. https://xenia.org.uk/what-is-xenia/; also Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., pp76-77.

[106] Sorgen, A. (2015), Integration through participation: The effects of participating in an English Conversation club on refugee and asylum seeker integration. *Applied Linguistics Review* 2015; 6(2): 241–260. De Gruyter Mouton. https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/alr.2015.6.issue-2/applirev-2015-0012/applirev-2015-0012.xml

[107] Stevenson et al. (2017), *op. cit.,* pp58-60

2. Value of volunteers in English language conversation clubs

2.1 Value of volunteers to learners and the integration process

The use of volunteers in conversation clubs adds value in relation to:
- Capacity
- Personalised support for learners
- Enrichment of learner experience
- Integration into local communities
- Volunteering opportunities
- Community development.

The expansion of conversation clubs (or their equivalent) associated with Speaking English with Confidence, Talk English, and English My Way (the DCLG competition winners), has relied heavily on volunteers. Other providers of conversation clubs appear equally reliant on volunteers.

Within conversation clubs, use of volunteers enables a degree of personalised learner support that might not otherwise be possible.[108] Particularly in the context of clubs aimed at very low-level learners from defined communities, this personalisation may include the use of volunteers able to communicate in community languages.[109]

Volunteers add a diversity to the group that enriches learners' awareness of language and culture. Volunteers also make available to the group a broader range of social networks, life skills and life experience than would otherwise be available. This, and the bonds that volunteers form with learners in and beyond the groups, supports the integration process.

A further way that volunteers support the integration process is simply by the act of volunteering to support the learners. The fact that the volunteers do this as volunteers, and not for a wage, demonstrates to the learners a welcoming commitment to their integration on the part of the local community.[110]

2.2 Value of conversation club volunteering to volunteers

Provider presentations to potential volunteers promote conversation club volunteering as stimulating and rewarding, with opportunity for social contact, learning and personal development, as well as training and career development.[111]

Accounts from volunteers themselves are consistent with this, and also highlight that providing this sort of volunteering opportunity can play a part in learner progression (peer volunteering) and community development initiatives.[112]

---

[108] Salmon, M., and Trace, N. (no date), *How much do your learners use English outside of the classroom?* London: British Council, BBC. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/how-much-do-your-learners-use-english-outside-classroom

[109] Redbridge Institute (no date) *Volunteers needed*. London: Redbridge Institute. https://www.redbridge-iae.ac.uk/media/1986/efe-ambassador-flyer-final.pdf

[110] Sorgen (2015), op. cit.

[111] See for example London Borough of Enfield, *ESOL Conversation Club Volunteer*. https://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/libraries/esol-conversation-club-volunteer-libraries.pdf

[112] Warcup, K., and Archard, R. (2016), *English conversation support sessions at The Chrysalis Centre, Moss Side.* Manchester: University of Manchester. http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-

3. Presentations of practice

3.1 Descriptions of practice identified

This review identified a range of practice descriptions for English language conversation clubs, including:

- Sociological study examining the impact of conversation club participation on the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers in Sheffield[113]
- Volunteer account of participation in a conversation club in Manchester[114]
- Research-based accounts of
  - Provision of conversation clubs in a London-borough[115]
  - Speak English with Confidence provision[116]
  - Talk English provision, including Talk English classroom groups and activity clubs[117]
- Provider recommendations from expert seminar on use of volunteers in ESOL provision[118]
- Provider presentations of Talk English and English My Way-BBC Learning circles approaches[119]
- Extensive volunteer training materials developed to support Speak English with Confidence provision and English My Way-BBC Learning circles approaches[120]

---

content/uploads/2016/06/Chrysalis-student-report.pdf; SAVTE (Sheffield Association for the Teaching of English) (2019), Annual Report 2018-19. Sheffield: SAVTE. pp7-8. http://savte.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/SAVTE-Annual-Report-2018-2019.pdf; see also Harrison, M., and Carbines, F. (2015), BBC Social Enterprise Project. London: BBC. https://eltjam.com/bbc-social-enterprise-project/; Tinder Foundation (2015), *English My Way Phase 2 Evaluation: Interim Findings Report*. Sheffield: Tinder Foundation. p10. https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/research-publications/emwinterimfindingsreport.pdf

[113] Sorgen (2015), op. cit.

[114] Warcup and Archard (2016), op. cit.

[115] Stevenson et al. (2017), op. cit. pp58-60.

[116] Paget, A., and Stevenson, N. (2014), *On Speaking Terms: making ESOL policy work better for migrants and wider society*. London: Demos. p25.
https://www.demos.co.uk/files/On_speaking_termsweb.pdf?1408395571

[117] Patel et al. (2018), op. cit.

[118] Learning and Work Institute (2019), *ESOL and Volunteering, Summary Report of the Expert Stakeholder Seminar, 20th March 2019*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. pp4,5.
https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ESOL-TF-group-report-FINAL.pdf

[119] Talk English. https://www.talk-english.co.uk/; Salmon, M., and Trace, N. (no date), op. cit.; Salmon, M., and Trace, N. (2015), *Talk English – a whole community approach to learning English and integration*. London: British Council, BBC. https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/continuing-professional-development/cpd-teacher-trainers/talk-english-whole-community-approach-learning-english-and-integration; English My Way, Learning circles. https://www.englishmyway.co.uk/learning-circles; BBC Learning English, *English My Way*. http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/emw/unit-1; Harrison and Carbines (2015), op. cit.; Tinder Foundation (2015), op. cit., p8.

[120] SpEC (2014), op.cit.; BBC Learning English, op. cit.

- Provider presentations of more specialised types of conversation group, some with resource materials, including workplace discussion groups in Sweden,[121] mother-and-baby groups in the UK[122] and Germany,[123] and conversation clubs in parks[124]
- Partial descriptions by providers of practice (some presented as case studies, and several with participant endorsements), designed to inform stakeholders[125]
- Numerous very brief outline descriptions within provider presentations to potential learners and/or volunteers, in the context of e.g. website listings and volunteer role specifications[126]

The review also identified:

- Presentations of good practice models (with resource materials) from two recent Erasmus+ projects, 'Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu'[127] and 'Welcome, Language Clubs for Life Skills';[128] which brought together partners with expertise from the UK, Denmark, Germany, Austria and Belgium (Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu); and the UK, Sweden, Italy, Czech Republic and France (Welcome). Note that the Welcome project took as its starting point the Speaking English with Confidence project (also referencing the US Brooklyn Library model)[129]
- Research-based analysis of ESOL learning relevant to practices in conversation clubs[130]

---

[121] Aldrecentrum (2013), *Project ArbetSam - to support employees in elderly care*. Stockholm: Aldrecentrum. **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VX_rc5tJxI**;

Berg, M., and Hertin, M. (Eng. trsl. by Braddell, A., and Sjösvärd, K.) (2014), *The learning workplace, A guide for teachers*. Stockholm: Aldrecentrum. pp58-61; https://languageforwork.ecml.at/Portals/48/HtmlTagFiles/e6490928-33cf-4450-8ffe-062758d51644.pdf; Hertin, M., Lahti, K., and Söderström, M. (Eng. trsl. by Braddell, A., and Sjösvärd, K.) (no date), *Development programme for reflective discussion leaders*. Stockholm: Aldrecentrum. https://www.aldrecentrum.se/sites/default/files/Global/ArbetSam/ArbetSam%20in%20English/reflective_discussion_leader_training_10_januari.pdf

[122] LuCiD (ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development), (no date), *English Language Teaching for non-English speaking mothers*. Manchester: University of Manchester. **http://www.lucid.ac.uk/what-we-do/impact/english-language-teaching-for-non-english-speaking-mothers/**

[123] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., pp70-71.

124 Young Foundation. #refugeeswelcome in parks. https://youngfoundation.org/projects/refugeeswelcome-in-parks/; Rishbeth, C., Blachnicka-Ciacek, D., Bynon, R., and Stapf, T. (2017), #refugeeswelcome in parks: a resource book. Sheffield: University of Sheffield. https://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/refugeeswelcome-in-parks-resource-book.pdf

[125] See *Appendix 1. Practice descriptions*

[126] See *Sources reviewed for provider presentations of conversation clubs to learners and volunteers* at end of report

[127] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit.

[128] Welcome, Language Clubs for Life Skills (2018a), *Toolkit*. https://www.welcomelanguageclubs.eu/en/language-club-toolkit/

[129] Welcome, Language Clubs for Life Skills (2018b), *Introduction to the WELCOME project*. https://www.welcomelanguageclubs.eu/en/about-the-project/

[130] Higton, J., Sandhu, J., Stutz, A., Patel, R., Choudhoury, A., and Richards, S. (2019), English for speakers of other languages: Access and progression, Research report. London: Department for Education. pp21-22, 26, 40-41, 63, 66-8. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811750/English_for_speakers_of_other_languages.pdf

- Practitioner research report on participatory ESOL approaches, relevant to conversation clubs[131]
- Brief practice descriptions and recommendations from North America and Ireland[132]
- Relevant resources within the Council of Europe Toolkit for volunteers providing language support for refugees[133]

---

[131] Bryers, D., Winstanley, R., and Cooke, M. (2013), *Whose Integration?* London: British Council. https://esol.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/Whose%20Integration_0.pdf

[132] **Mass Literacy Foundation** (2016), *Inspirational librarian helps adult learners through English Conversation Circles.*
Boston: Mass Literacy Foundation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ6HNkuh78s; Kaleda, J. (2012), *ESL Conversation Clubs Best Practices*. OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) WebJunction. https://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/ESL_Conversation_Club_Tips.html; Peabody Institute Library, *English Language Learner, Conversation Circles*. https://www.peabodylibrary.org/ell/; Brooklyn Public Library, *English Conversation Group Leader, Help Adults Learn to Speak English*. https://www.bklynlibrary.org/learn/immigrants; Loxely, A., and Lyons, Z. (2013), *Evaluation of Fáilte Isteach Project*. Summerhill: Third Age Ireland. http://www.thirdageireland.ie/assets/site/files/default/FI_TCD_Final_Report.pdf

[133] Council of Europe (2018), *Language support for adult refugees: Council of Europe toolkit for volunteers providing language support for refugees*. Council of Europe LIAM (Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants) project. See resources 19, 33, 36, 40, and 54. https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-support-for-adult-refugees/home

3.2 Practice approaches

Within the sources identified, there are two core models of practice:

1. Model of practice for learners with no or very low level English language skills, including defined groups of learners (e.g. women from segregated communities, or, learners with low literacy from language communities that do not use the Roman alphabet)

2. Model of practice for learners with English language skills at a level to allow at least basic conversational interaction[134]

Examples of the instructional model include Speaking English with Confidence, Talk English (with its classroom groups and activity clubs) and the BBC English My Way Learning Circles; examples of the participatory model include the Xenia workshops.[135]

The two models have important features in common, but also differences. Both aim to create a safe, supportive, reassuring, respectful environment, informal and collaborative, that builds learner confidence; both aim to help learners extend their social networks; and both aim to offer learners supported opportunity to engage activities that help develop speaking skills. The differences between the two models relate to session structure and input.

For learners with no or very low level English skills, sessions are typically highly structured and focused on pre-set topics, with resources to support practice by learners of specified language forms. In this sense, sessions are instructional and provider-led. These clubs may also include excursions into the community designed to reinforce learning and introduce learners to community participation in English.

For learners able to interact in English with some degree of independence, the structure and content of sessions is negotiated between learners and provider, with a view to ensuring sessions address learner priorities as fully as possible. In this sense, sessions are participatory and learner-led.

---

[134] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., p18 suggests level B1 of the Council of Europe CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference: *'I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).'* See Council of Europe, *Self-assessment grid - Table 2 (CEFR 3.3): Common Reference levels.* https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-2-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-self-assessment-grid

[135] See appendix 1 for more information on Talk English, BBC Learning Circles and Xenia.

Figure 1. Core models of practice in English language conversation clubs.
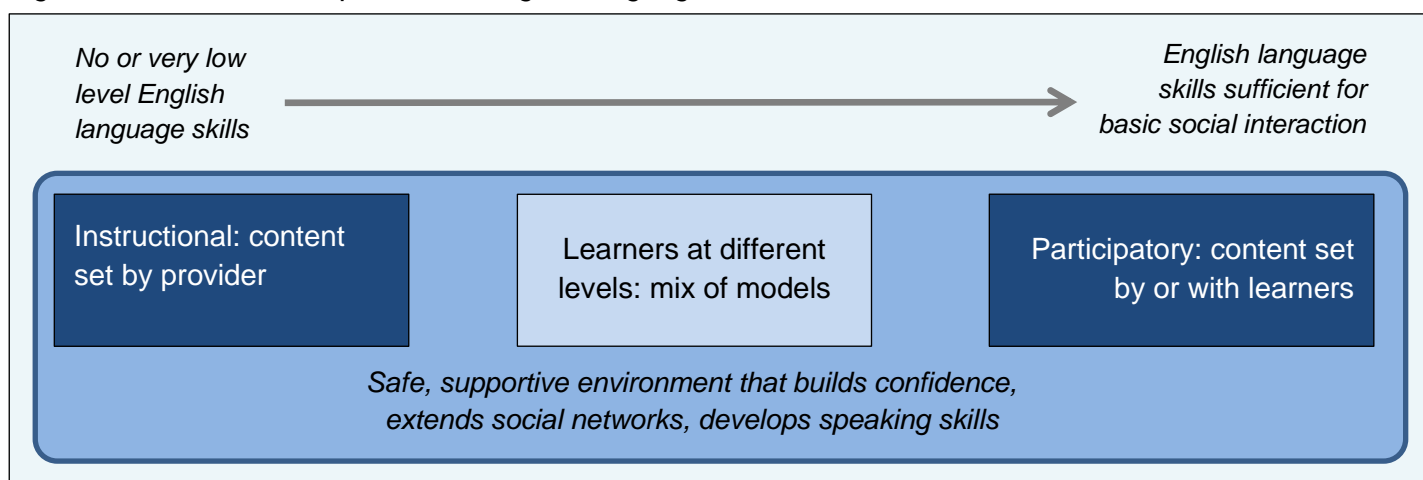
These models are indicative only; sources reviewed suggest that many conversation clubs (particularly open-access, drop-in clubs) are likely to combine elements of both approaches.

Table 1. Talk English presentation of positives and negatives associated with its approach[136]

Use of volunteers	
Positive	*Negative*
• Double staffing volunteers – peer support, more attention for learners • Built community partnerships • Good attendance and enthusiasm from learners • Volunteers achieving qualifications and/or experience enabling progression	• Limitations of volunteers – expectations, quality • Volunteer drop out • Managing attendance of learners due to informality
Talk English Friends (i.e. language buddy, befriender)	
Positive	*Negative*
• Enables learners to build independence • Builds confidence and relationships • Offered range of roles and flexibility to volunteers • Additional support in classes, cafes and activities • Role for higher level ESOL learners (E3+)	• Time-consuming to match learners and volunteers 1:1 • More risk in 1:1 matching • Less control for coordinators
Activities (i.e. group excursions into the community)	
Positive	*Negative*
• Takes learning out of the classroom • Authentic opportunities to use English (travel, directions etc.) • Broadens horizons	• Some activities require lots of planning, including getting learners to them at first

---

[136] Reproduced from Salmon, M., and Trace, N. (2015), op. cit.

- Good partnerships built with cultural orgs.
- Popular with learners and volunteers
- Include learners up to Entry 3

Development of 'patient listeners' in local services (i.e. support for social language learning/language socialisation)

Positive | *Negative*

Positive	Negative
• Easily engaged public and third sector organisations in different areas	• Harder to engage with private sector
• Great feedback from participants and organisers	• Following up impact of training
• Challenges attitudes, builds cohesion and understanding	
• Involves the wider community in supporting people to learn English	

3.3 Scope of guidance for volunteer-led conversation clubs

Several of the sources identified offer detailed guidance on effective practice in volunteer-led conversation clubs.

Tables 2 and 3 below summarise the scope of guidance from two sources; the first is for conversation clubs aimed at low-level learners, the second for conversation clubs aimed at learners with at least basic conversational skills.

Table 2. Scope of guidance from Speaking English with Confidence Training and Resource Toolkit [137]

Volunteer Speaking English with Confidence (SpEC) Club Leader Training Programme *Items covered in SpEC Training and Resource Toolkit*
Purpose of SpEC Clubs Volunteer accreditation overview Setting up and running your SpEC Club   - Principles and best practice   - Safeguarding   - Facilitation   - Skills and tips   - Logistics, regulations, reporting   - Session Planner Template   Host organisation roles and responsibilities Further reading and support   - Preparing to support learning   - SpEC Club session planning   - Preparing for an ESOL session   - Facilitation skills   - Fun activities to introduce English language learning   - Pronunciation   - Functional English   - Everyday English and conversational topics   - Let's practise what we've learned   Topic-based resources to use with learners (range of prompts, activities, etc.) Volunteer training resources   - Skill Scan and SWOT: City & Guilds Level 3 Award for Learning Support Practitioners (6259-03)   - Skill Scan and SWOT: Literacy, Language, Numeracy and ICT   - Volunteer Learning Plan and Portfolio   - Volunteer Reflective Learning Log

---

[137] SpEC (2014), op. cit.

Table 3. Summary of guidance from Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu [138]

Guidance for volunteers	
Topic	*Guidance describes*
Issues to consider prior to volunteering	Motivations (altruistic, instrumental), distinction between 'help' and 'solidarity',[139] personal capacity/limitations (time, skills), benefits of volunteering through an organisation (as opposed to independent volunteering)
Support for learning	How to support language learning without 'teaching'
Skills for volunteers	Key skills needed by volunteers (listening, questioning, language awareness, modelling)
Feedback, error correction	When and how to give constructive feedback
Learning environments	Creating and sustaining psychological environments conducive to learning, including environments where learners and volunteers feel safe (boundary-setting, etc.)
Supporting a teacher	Constructive behaviours when supporting a teacher, issues to be aware of
Conversation club	Aims, objectives, organisational practicalities, ways to structure sessions, constructive behaviours for volunteers, challenges, reflection for volunteers
Activities, trips	Aims, objectives, organisational practicalities
Participatory pedagogy	Learner-led approaches, benefits to development of language skills and integration
Multilingual pedagogy	Benefits to language learning and integration of encouraging multilingualism and linguistic pluralism in learning contexts
Learning activities	Sample resources for use with learners
Guidance for volunteer co-ordinators	
Practical strategies to help resolve common issues related to:	
Issues to consider prior to recruiting volunteers; Safeguarding; Tasks, responsibilities of a coordinator; Volunteer journey; Volunteer recruitment; Coordination basics; Volunteer induction; Matching volunteers; Volunteer retention; Monitoring, evaluation; Asking a volunteer to leave	

---

[138] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit.

[139] '*Solidarity means acting by their* [i.e. learners] *side, at their invitation.*' Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., p6.

3.4 Representative sample of guidance for volunteers from good practice presentations

3.4.1 Conversation clubs for learners with no or very low level English language skills

In its section on principles and best practice, the SpEC Training and Resource Toolkit[140] states that clubs should be:

- learner-focused
- about 'learning through doing'
- focused on the community
- sociable and fun.

Practical recommendations include

- Divide learners into small groups for discussions and activities.
- Be flexible, abandoning activities that fall flat, and embracing those that resonate with the group. If participants find something to talk about – that you hadn't planned on – let them take control of the topic and see where it goes.

In addition to topic-based materials supplied,

- Use resources and examples that are specific to London and your particular local area
- Encourage learners to bring in their own resources/stimuli/content (for example, family photos, pictures from home, newspaper articles, children's school work, clothes/fabric and artefacts)..
- They may also be things that are specific to a cultural community (for example, artefacts from home and their importance to life in London/the UK).
- Try to organise visits to local places of interest, or invite people from the local community in to talk to learners.

To encourage sociability,

- If possible, schedule time at the beginning and end of sessions for learners to chat to each other.

Regarding the role of the volunteer in the learning process, the SpEC toolkit promotes facilitation (rather than teaching) and includes guidance on the facilitation process and relevant skills.

3.4.2 Conversation clubs for learners with at least basic conversational skills in English

In its guidance to volunteers, Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu notes that by allowing learners to talk about subjects of their choice, conversation clubs 'not only promote language progress but also allow for an exchange of knowledge and experience. Participants may exchange questions and knowledge about local services, facilities and institutions or collectively discuss issues they face and potential solutions.'[141]

Clubs should be

- Open to learners to join at any point
- Free of any requirement that learners commit to attending every session.

Practical recommendations include that conversation club providers should:

---

[140] SpEC (2014), op. cit., p16.

[141] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., p18.

- Consult with target learners on regarding suitable time, location, frequency, format and objectives of the proposed club
- Promote club to organisations providing other services to target learners, to influential individuals within or close to learner communities
- Recruit as volunteers successful learners from within learner communities
- Investigate whether target learners would value certificates of attendance (e.g. to demonstrate involvement in English language learning, being proactive about integration, etc.) and if so how best to organise the creation and issuing of such a certificate
  Caveat: Any use of certification should be consistent with maintaining an informal, relaxed environment, with no pressure placed on learners to attend
  Note that volunteers (including learners who have progressed to volunteering) might also value certification of their involvement, and/or a reference from the provider organisation.

To promote regular attendance

- Hold the club at the same time, location, and interval (e.g. weekly)
- Choose a time and location that suits the learners – consider physical, social, psychological accessibility, e.g. is the venue easy to get to, available at a time when learners are able to attend, equipped with facilities that enable attendance (e.g. crèche), perceived as friendly, welcoming, safe by learners
- Maintain a dialogue with learners regarding these and other aspects of the club, including the organisation, content and format of sessions, and the effectiveness of support offered
- Ensure volunteers are suitably trained and supported (e.g. offered informal supervision)

3.5 Roles for volunteers in conversation clubs

Sources reviewed indicate three principal roles for volunteers in conversation clubs:

- Club organiser or leader – volunteer who takes responsibility for running the club
- Learning support volunteer – volunteer who provides additional support to individuals and groups during sessions and excursions, including as a language mentor, or befriender, e.g. a Talk English Friend[142]
- Proficient speaker participant – volunteer who participates as a member of the local community, enabling learners to practise with a proficient speaker: may also act as a befriender (most frequently referenced in relation to clubs focusing on support for refugees and asylum seekers)

3.6 Guidance for volunteers on common issues

Good practice presentations identify a number of issues related to session planning and management. These are summarised in table 4.

---

[142] Talk English, *Volunteer as a Talk English Friend* . https://www.talk-english.co.uk/introduction/become-a-friend/

Table 4. Summary of guidance for volunteers on common issues in good practice presentations[143]

Issue	Guidance
Mixed levels, wide variation in ability level	Initial assessment of language level
Higher level/more confident learners dominate	Sub-division into small groups during session
	Open discussion of issues with learners
	Club is also about sociability, if learners enjoy the club, they may not mind ability gaps
Lack of interest in an activity	Follow the direction learners take
Conflicts between learners (including cultural/ideological conflicts)	Ground rules for mutual respect[144]

Table 3. Summary of guidance on common issues (cont.)

Issue	Guidance
Use of languages other than English by learners	Encourage multilingualism that promotes learning and sociability; discourage multilingualism that promotes disharmony within the group
Irregular attendance by learners	Tolerate when there is no agreed expectation that the learner attend regularly; follow up when there is an agreed expectation
	Plan sessions flexibly to accommodate irregular attendance
Volunteering load	Wherever possible assemble a team of volunteers to share the volunteering load - but ensure that individuals are clear about their personal roles and responsibilities for each session.
	Sharing of the workload should be consistent with ensuring some consistency of approach for learners

[143] Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit.; Welcome, Language Clubs for Life Skills (2018a), op. cit.

[144] See ground rules proposed by Conversation Café, a US-based native-speaker discussion forum, to manage conflict. Conversation Café, *The Complete Hosting Manual*. www.conversationcafe.org/the-complete-hosting-manual/

4. Key enablers for effective volunteer-led English language conversation clubs

Sources reviewed suggest that key enablers for effective volunteer-led English language conversation clubs include:

- Strong local partnerships with organisations relevant to the integration of the target learner group

- Coproduction of the club with learners through consultation and local partnerships

- Provider clarity regarding aims, objectives and methodology for conversation club (note: these should be consistent with the results of learner consultation)

- Management systems for the club that are consistent with aims and objectives for club, e.g. if club is designated for learners at a given skill level, some form of initial assessment is in place

- Promotion of club to learners and volunteers that is consistent with aims and objectives for club

- Volunteer clarity regarding aims, objectives and methodology for conversation club, and how to support those aims and objectives

- Effective volunteer coordination

- Adequate resourcing for
  - o Volunteer recruitment, induction, training, support
  - o Suitable venues, facilities, and any required support, e.g. childcare
  - o Activities, excursions, including their planning and preparation

- Recruitment of suitable volunteers

- Adequate training and on-going support for volunteers

- Effective quality assurance systems to monitor and support volunteer-led provision

Sources referenced

Aldrecentrum (2013), Project ArbetSam - to support employees in elderly care. Stockholm: Aldrecentrum. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VX_rc5tJxI

BBC Learning English, *English My Way*. http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/emw/unit-1

Berg, M., and Hertin, M. (Eng. trsl. by Braddell, A., and Sjösvärd, K.) (2014), *The learning workplace, A guide for teachers*. Stockholm: Aldrecentrum. https://languageforwork.ecml.at/Portals/48/HtmlTagFiles/e6490928-33cf-4450-8ffe-062758d51644.pdf

Bristol City Council, Community Learning, *Volunteers needed*. https://communitylearningwest.net/volunteeresol/

Bristol City Council, *ESOL Conversation Club - Bristol Learning City*. www.bristollearningcity.com/portfolio-items/esol-conversation-club/

Brooklyn Public Library, *English Conversation Group Leader, Help Adults Learn to Speak English*. https://www.bklynlibrary.org/learn/immigrants;

Bryers, D., Winstanley, R., and Cooke, M. (2013)*, Whose Integration?* London: British Council. https://esol.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/Whose%20Integration_0.pdf

City of Sanctuary, *Drop Ins.* https://cityofsanctuary.org/group-activities/drop-ins/

Conversation Café, *The Complete Hosting Manual*. www.conversationcafe.org/the-complete-hosting-manual/

Council of Europe (2018), *Language support for adult refugees: Council of Europe toolkit for volunteers providing language support for refugees*. Council of Europe LIAM (Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants) project. https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-support-for-adult-refugees/home

Council of Europe, Self-assessment grid - Table 2 (CEFR 3.3) : Common Reference levels. https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-2-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-self-assessment-grid

Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, *Our services*. www.covrefugee.org/gethelp

English My Way, Learning circles. https://www.englishmyway.co.uk/learning-circles

Ewens, T. (2013), *English clubs*. London: British Council, BBC. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/english-clubs

Fáilte Isteach, *Volunteer with Fáilte Isteach*. www.thirdageireland.ie/failte-isteach/get-involved/volunteer-for-failte-isteach

Harrison, M., and Carbines, F. (2015), BBC Social Enterprise Project. London: BBC. https://eltjam.com/bbc-social-enterprise-project/

Hertin, M., Lahti, K., and Söderström, M. (Eng. trsl. by Braddell, A., and Sjösvärd, K.) (no date), *Development programme for reflective discussion leaders*. Stockholm: Aldrecentrum. https://www.aldrecentrum.se/sites/default/files/Global/ArbetSam/ArbetSam%20in%20English/reflective_discussion_leader_training_10_januari.pdf

Kaleda, J. (2012), *ESL Conversation Clubs Best Practices*. OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) WebJunction. https://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/ESL_Conversation_Club_Tips.html;

Learning and Work Institute (2019), *ESOL and Volunteering, Summary Report of the Expert Stakeholder Seminar, 20th March 2019*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ESOL-TF-group-report-FINAL.pdf

Leeds Migration Partnership (2019), *Return of Conversation Cafe – Wednesday Afternoons at Leeds Playhouse*. https://migrationpartnership.org.uk/return-of-conversation-cafe-wednesday-afternoons-at-leeds-playhouse/

London Borough of Redbridge. https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/jobs/work-redbridge/esol-conversation-clubs/

Loxely, A., and Lyons, Z. (2013), *Evaluation of Fáilte Isteach Project*. Summerhill: Third Age Ireland. http://www.thirdageireland.ie/assets/site/files/default/FI_TCD_Final_Report.pdf

LuCiD (ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development), (no date), English Language Teaching for non-English speaking mothers. Manchester: University of Manchester. http://www.lucid.ac.uk/what-we-do/impact/english-language-teaching-for-non-english-speaking-mothers/

Mass Literacy Foundation (2016), Inspirational librarian helps adult learners through English Conversation Circles. Boston: Mass Literacy Foundation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ6HNkuh78s

Merton Home Tutoring Service, *Time to Talk*. https://mhts.org.uk/learners/time-to-talk/

Patel, A., Hoya, C., Bivand, P., McCallum, A., Stevenson, A., and Wilson, A. (2018), *Measuring the impact of Community-Based English Language Provision, Findings from a Randomised Controlled Trial*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Impact-evaluation-of-CBEL.pdf

Peabody Institute Library, *English Language Learner, Conversation Circles*. https://www.peabodylibrary.org/ell/;

Redbridge Institute (no date) *Volunteers needed*. London: Redbridge Institute. https://www.redbridge-iae.ac.uk/media/1986/efe-ambassador-flyer-final.pdf

Rishbeth, C., Blachnicka-Ciacek, D., Bynon, R., and Stapf, T. (2017), #refugeeswelcome in parks: a resource book. Sheffield: University of Sheffield. https://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/refugeeswelcome-in-parks-resource-book.pdf

Robinson, A. (2017), *Helping Beginners Learn, A guide for those volunteering with ESOL learners*. Middlesbrough: North East Migration Partnership. http://www.natecla.org.uk/uploads/media/208/16731.pdf

Salmon, M., and Trace, N. (no date), *How much do your learners use English outside of the classroom?* London: British Council, BBC. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/how-much-do-your-learners-use-english-outside-classroom

Salmon, M., and Trace, N. (2015), *Talk English – a whole community approach to learning English and integration.* London: British Council, BBC. https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/continuing-professional-development/cpd-teacher-trainers/talk-english-whole-community-approach-learning-english-and-integration

SAVTE (Sheffield Association for the Teaching of English) (2019), Annual Report 2018-19. Sheffield: SAVTE. http://savte.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/SAVTE-Annual-Report-2018-2019.pdf

Sheffield Conversation Club, *About us*. www.conversationclub.org.uk/about-us

Sorgen, A. (2015), Integration through participation: The effects of participating in an English Conversation club on refugee and asylum seeker integration. *Applied Linguistics Review* 2015; 6(2): 241–260. De Gruyter Mouton. https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/alr.2015.6.issue-2/applirev-2015-0012/applirev-2015-0012.xml

SpEC (2014), *Volunteer Speaking English with Confidence (SpEC) Club Leader Training Programme, Training and Resource Toolkit*. London: City of London, LEAFEA.

Stevenson, A., Kings, P. and Sterland, L. (2017), *Mapping ESOL provision in Greater London, May 2017*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_esol_mapping.pdf

Talk English, *Learn English with us*. https://www.talk-english.co.uk/introduction/learners-introduction/

Talk English. https://www.talk-english.co.uk/

Tinder Foundation (2015), *English My Way Phase 2 Evaluation: Interim Findings Report*. Sheffield: Tinder Foundation. https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/research-publications/emwinterimfindingsreport.pdf

UK Government (2013a), *New £6 million competition fund for English language learning.* www.gov.uk/government/news/new-6-million-competition-fund-for-english-language-learning

UK Government (2013b), *Thousands to benefit from exciting new ways of learning English.* www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-to-benefit-from-exciting-new-ways-of-learning-english

UK Government (2018), *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, Building stronger, more united communities.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

UK Government (2019a), *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, Summary of consultation responses and Government response, February 2019.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777160/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Government_Response.pdf

UK Government (2019b), *Integrated Communities Action Plan.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778045/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf

Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), *Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.* https://volunteersinlanguagelearning.eu/

Warcup, K., and Archard, R. (2016), *English conversation support sessions at The Chrysalis Centre, Moss Side.* Manchester: University of Manchester. http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Chrysalis-student-report.pdf

Welcome, Language Clubs for Life Skills Toolkit (2018a). https://www.welcomelanguageclubs.eu/en/language-club-toolkit/

Welcome, Language Clubs for Life Skills Toolkit (2018b), *Introduction to the WELCOME project.* https://www.welcomelanguageclubs.eu/en/about-the-project/

Xenia https://xenia.org.uk/

Xenia, *Xenia's values*. https://xenia.org.uk/what-is-xenia/

Young Foundation. #refugeeswelcome in parks. https://youngfoundation.org/projects/refugeeswelcome-in-parks/

Sources reviewed for provider presentations of conversation clubs to learners and volunteers

Bradford: Bradford Council, *Education and training*. https://www.bradford.gov.uk/your-community/welcome-to-bradford/education-and-training/; Anchor Project www.anchorproject.org.uk/what-we-do/;

Bristol: Bristol City Council, Community learning. https://communitylearningwest.net/esol-conversation-clubs/; Bristol City Council, *Learning English in Bristol*. https://leb.community/; Voscur, Find a job. https://www.voscur.org/jobs; Bristol Learning City. https://www.bristollearningcity.com/portfolio-items/esol-conversation-club/; Can do Bristol. https://candobristol.co.uk/activity/esol-conversation-club; Avonmouth Children's Centre. www.avonmouthcc.co.uk/event/esol-conversation-club/2016-12-06/

Leeds: Learning Partnerships, English for Speakers of Other Languages. http://learningpartnerships.org.uk/current-projects-and-courses/english-for-speakers-of-other-languages/; Leeds Migration Partnership, *Conversation Café, Leeds Playhouse*. https://migrationpartnership.org.uk/return-of-conversation-cafe-wednesday-afternoons-at-leeds-playhouse/

Leicester: Leicester City Council, Volunteer in libraries. https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/libraries-and-community-centres/libraries/volunteer-in-libraries/; English conversation group facilitator. https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/177740/english-conversation-group-facilitator.pdf

London

– **City of London**: WELCOME is City of London's latest Erasmus+ project. https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/education-learning/adult-learning/european-projects/Pages/welcome-project.aspx

– **LB (London Borough of) Barnet**: ESOL Conversation Café at Claude's Restaurant, RAF Museum with Barnet and Southgate College. https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/london/whats-going-on/events/esol-conversation-caf/

– **LB Enfield**: Enfield Libraries. https://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/libraries/esol-conversation-club-volunteer-libraries.pdf

– **LB Hackney**: Xenia. https://xenia.org.uk/

– **LB Hammersmith and Fulham**: Shepherds Bush Library. https://lbhflibraries.wordpress.com/2015/12/11/shepherds-bush-library-esol-conversation-group/

– **LB Islington**: Speak Street. http://speak-street.com/; also: Speak Street video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4fo1o5W3GI&t=16s; STAR (Student Action for Refugees). http://www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/volunteering/star_volunteering_projects; International House, IH London Training and support for Student Action for Refugees. https://www.ihlondon.com/news/2014/ih-london-training-and-support-for-student-action-for-refugees/

– **LB Lewisham**: New Cross Gate Trust, ESOL classes. https://www.nxgtrust.org.uk/services/esol-classes/

– **LB Merton**: Merton Home Tutoring Services, Time to talk. https://mhts.org.uk/learners/time-to-talk/

– **LB Redbridge**: Redbridge ESOL conversation clubs. https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/jobs/work-redbridge/esol-conversation-clubs/; Redbridge Institute, *English for every day*. https://www.redbridge-iae.ac.uk/english-for-every-day/; Redbridge Institute, *Could you lead an ESOL Conversation Club?* https://www.redbridge-iae.ac.uk/media/1393/esol_conversation_club_2018.pdf

– **LB Thurrock**: ESOL Conversation Club. http://www.askthurrock.org.uk/kb5/thurrock/fis/event.page?id=qTLNa-ihfbU

L&W LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

- **LB Tower Hamlets**: Free English language Classes (ESOL) and conversation clubs. https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/community_and_living/Welcome_to_Tower_Hamlets/ESOL_and_conversation_clubs.aspx

- **LB Waltham Forest**: Waltham Forest ESOL Group, *Conversation Clubs January 2019 Update*. wfesol.org/2019/01/11/conversation-clubs-january-2019-update/; Waltham Forest Adult Education Service, *English Conversation Clubs*. www.lbwfadultlearning.co.uk/main/english-conversation-clubs/

Manchester: Manchester ESOL Advice Service, *Learn English*. https://manchesteresol.org/practise-english/; University of Manchester, Multilingual Manchester. http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/english-language-provisions-in-manchester/; Talk English Manchester. https://www.talk-english.co.uk/manchester/; Chrysalis Family Centre. https://chrysalisfamilycentre.wordpress.com/free-sewing-classes/

Sheffield: Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English (SAVTE), Conversation groups. http://savte.org.uk/conversation-groups/about/; Sheffield Conversation Club. http://www.conversationclub.org.uk/about-us; Sheffield City Council, Sheffield Directory, *Learning , work and volunteering for adults*. http://www.sheffielddirectory.org.uk/kb5/sheffield/directory/adult.page?adultchannelnew=6

Various locations: Talk English. https://www.talk-english.co.uk/; City of Sanctuary. https://cityofsanctuary.org/by-theme/esol/; English for Action. http://www.efalondon.org/

Appendix 1. Practice descriptions

1.1 Conversation Circles[145]

Gerri Guyote from the public Peabody Library in Massachusetts launched a pilot project in 2013 that allows migrants to practise English daily in a comfortable location.

These weekly "Conversation Circles" fit alongside regular language courses and focus on building vocabulary, improving pronunciation and building participants' confidence in speaking English. The sessions are run by volunteers and deal with topics such as holidays, news, travel, cooking and gardening but also cover basic grammatical rules that are important for spoken English.

"All of the programs and resources are free to the public and we try to make the circles fun and engaging for the students," explains Mrs. Guyote.

The program started with three circles but at the time of writing there are seven weekly groups meeting for English practice. Over the past four years, they have had over 100 language learners participate in Conversation Circles. Participants' English speaking abilities ranged from beginner to advanced. Their needs and goals are as diverse as their backgrounds.

Some are enrolled in English classes at local community colleges or non-profits, but want more conversation practice. Others attend the circles while they look for jobs. Some are newly arrived in Massachusetts, some are here for extended visits and some have been here for over twenty years. The ages, backgrounds and countries of origin of the participants vary widely. What connects them all is a desire to better navigate their daily lives at work, at home, in social situations, at the doctor's, the grocery store and their children's schools.

An intangible benefit of the Conversation Circles is the social connection that participants can find with other learners and Circle volunteers. Having limited English skills, a lack of confidence in their ability to express themselves or simply being in a new place leads many Circle participants to feel socially isolated.

Some friendships remain contained within the circle time and others lead participants to connect outside of class. Either way, spending this time together over multiple weeks often provides English Language Learners with valuable connections. Many circle participants comment on how much more social interaction they are accustomed to in their neighbourhoods in their home countries. Friendly encounters and banter with volunteers and other learners can go a long way towards making their new home seem a bit more friendly.

Over time, different materials for the format have been developed and collected such as collections in bilingual picture dictionaries, activity books, online language learning subscriptions and teacher guides.

In addition, a 12-unit curriculum has been developed, which is readily available to the volunteers. Volunteers can pick and choose what materials they use, so each circle has its own tone and focus. Some volunteers are formal educators, others are local residents who consider their volunteering as a way of giving back to the community. Each volunteer has their own style and they are usually quite successful at sustaining a small group over 6-12 months.

There are 6-month or 9-month sessions. Most of the volunteers conduct their conversation circle about 46 weeks a year. For example, there is a family circle for parents with children up to the age of 6 years. This circle combines spoken English practice with playtime for children and family literacy (story time at the end of each circle).

The volunteers enjoy their circles immensely and they believe that they learn also from their students as the students improve their spoken English. There is a wonderful sense of community. Conversation Circles allow

---

[145] Reproduced from Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), *Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.*p23. https://volunteersinlanguagelearning.eu/

the Peabody Institute Library to offer these new arrivals some conversation, a little bit of extra language knowledge and a valuable chance to connect with others in their new home.

See also:

Mass Literacy Foundation (2016), Inspirational librarian helps adult learners through English Conversation Circles.

Boston: Mass Literacy Foundation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ6HNkuh78s

1.2 Xenia[146]

Xenia was started by a small group of women to support migrant women to improve their language skills. They are motivated by a desire to be welcoming to migrants and create a fairer, society. They see proficiency in English as a vital tool for navigating everyday life in the UK. Their workshops are women-only […].

Xenia runs weekly three-hour workshops at Hackney Museum in East London. […] The venue for workshops is provided for free by Hackney Museum – a good example of how clever partnerships can support work with low budgets.

There are about thirty people present at each workshop – a mix of English language learners and expert English-speaking women from the local area. The workshop might have a specific focus, like cooking or home or children etc. Bringing everyone together in a women-only space allows some women to attend who might not be comfortable learning in gender-mixed spaces. Language is developed through practice and informal feedback rather than through explicit language tuition or instruction.

Workshops are run by volunteer facilitators who are involved in Xenia in a more formal, committed way. The group of facilitators support one another to develop their skills. New facilitators are selected by the existing organising team and often come from the participant group (particularly the expert speakers).

Strength of the project

An interesting element of this project is that they don't distinguish between expert speaker participants and the participants with lower levels of English. This could be seen to challenge the idea that volunteers give to the learner 'beneficiaries', but not the other way round. It means learning and teaching can be more on a continuum. Arguably this makes it easier for participants to transition from learners to conversation leaders as their English improves.

Another strength of the project is [its] emphasis on relationship development. Workshops are advertised as a place where friendships can form. The informality of the setting and the loose structure lends itself well to relaxed conversation and relationship building between participants across linguistic and national differences. Accessibility is also prioritised: travel expenses can be paid and children are looked after by volunteers in the same venue where workshops take place.

[…] What is key is having small team of committed facilitators and a mechanism Xenia runs informal women-only conversation workshops attended by migrant language learners and expert speakers (migrants and non-migrants) every week. Its purpose is to help women migrants to learn English and feel welcome in their communities (integrate). The workshops and the whole organisation are run by volunteers. Xenia is an interesting case study because of its focus on community building, what it manages to do on a very low budget and its open door policy to participants. An interesting element of this project is that they don't distinguish between expert speaker participants in their workshops (who others might call the 'volunteers') and the participants with lower levels of English (who others might call the 'learners). The emphasis is on

---

[146] Reproduced verbatim from Volunteers in Language Learning for Refugees.eu (2019), op. cit., p76-77.

sharing and conversation to attract participants (i.e. links to migrant/refugee support groups or advertising effectively on social media).

Starting with a stand-alone workshop is a great testing ground. Xenia got the space for free thanks to Hackney Museum and contacted a local language education provider to advertise the session to migrant learners.

Support and coordination of the volunteers

Xenia has a management group which is predominantly volunteers. They have one paid member of staff who was elected from this group. Xenia distinguish between 'volunteers' who perform staff functions in the management group and volunteers with high levels of English who take part in their workshops (who they call 'participants' along with language learners).

In terms of recruiting participants to the workshops, anyone who wants to take part (language learners and advanced speakers) can register for workshops online or just drop in without registering.

Participation relies on making the workshops fun for expert speakers. Each workshop is run by a volunteer facilitator who guides the group discussion. Conversations focus on shared interests and participants benefit from building relationships with new people in their area.

Xenia workshops are not attempting to be formal language lessons or replace formal educational provision. They are more focused on relationship building and creating 'language rich' environments for learners to practice their speaking. However, the reliance on mutual support and training by volunteers does sometimes put strain on individuals involved. At workshops, the volunteer facilitators, who are often relatively untrained, 'rely on personality' and high-level language participants' ability to talk well. New participants can turn up every week and Xenia has run into problems with expert speakers using 'inaccessible language'.

Beyond taking part in the workshops, participants can become management group volunteers (see above). Xenia organises non-hierarchically as far as possible. In order to recruit volunteers, a call goes out to participants at the workshop and an initial meeting is held to discuss the role in the organisation. Individuals are told clearly what the current volunteers are looking for in terms of skills and time commitment and volunteers can forward accordingly. Again, these opportunities are open to all participants if they fit the role requirements, disrupting any concept of workshop 'beneficiaries' and 'volunteers'.

Because nearly everyone at Xenia is a volunteer, volunteer training, support and accountability happens in a very mutual way at Xenia.

"We realised that several of us needed more support and the new volunteers were often calling on those of us who had been in the project from the beginning and there was no way set up for those of us who had been with the project from the beginning to find support from the others and we tried to create a more genuinely circular way of each supporting each other."

Volunteers now organise themselves in two groups: volunteers that facilitate workshops and volunteers that do 'back end' functions such as monitoring, evaluating and communications. Skill sharing across the two 'circles' also happens – so facilitators share their skills with the other volunteers and vis versa.

At the time of writing Xenia are recruiting their first trustee board (trustees are all volunteers) and transitioning towards becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Top three tips

1. In informal, low resource settings volunteers can support and skill-share with other volunteers

2. A way round resource-intensive volunteer recruitment is to run sessions that anyone can turn up to without vetting. Obviously this comes with risks and should be framed accordingly. If you want to run open sessions that anyone can come to think about how the facilitator can set expectations and ground rules at the beginning of each session. Regular attendees who 'get it' will also help promote group norms.

3. Think about what practices (including what language you use) can disrupt the idea that volunteers only give and language learners only receive. How can you promote the idea that learning is a two-way street?

1.3 Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service[147]

Following the GLA KTIL project[148], the Council approved a "Conversation Club" project, with:

- Full-time, paid Conversation Club project co-ordinator (April 2016 to March 2018)
    - Co-ordinator delivers 4 to 5 accredited 30-hour free training courses a year for volunteers
    - Volunteers then host a free Conversation Club for second language speakers in the local community (minimum 25 hours which fits with adult education terms)
    - Co-ordinator also mentors and supports trained volunteers whilst leading clubs.
- Training for volunteer hosts includes:
    - Managing a group, conversation topics, basics of English language training, equality and diversity, and Prevent and safeguarding policies
- Training is rigorous, and distinct from teacher training; trainees judged unsuitable are 'counselled and advised regarding possible next steps'.
- Through the Speaking English with Confidence Project, ESOL teachers have been fully involved in the project and understand the separate, complementary role of the volunteers, and can support them in the clubs creating a sustainable, volunteer-led informal learning community.
- As of 2017, 45 volunteers trained, 20 conversation clubs running
    - Clubs average 10 people in each
    - No funding for venues: crèche facilities; or visits to local amenities
    - Coordinator uses adult education centres, community centres and schools (in particular those that host family learning classes) at times when they are less busy which generally suits members' availability.
- Volunteers come from a range of ages and ethnicities, some working, semi-retired, fully retired, parents with young children and teachers.
- Some WFALS ESOL students attend the clubs to complement their learning in class.
- Co-ordinator asks new volunteers to shadow existing volunteers and ESOL teachers until they feel confident taking their own group.
- Sometimes two volunteers will co-manage a group.

Current Impact of the Conversation Clubs

- The conversation clubs allow an informal space for members to meet in a non-threatening environment. Volunteers are seen more as friends or buddies than teachers. Oral participation is desirable but not mandatory and members can contribute at their own pace. Attendance is not mandatory and there is no fee.
- Conversation clubs have proved useful in supporting current ESOL learners with additional oral practice.
- It is a way of recruiting new ESOL learners into formal learning. Whilst recruitment is not an issue per se this may facilitate access for those 'harder to reach'. This would include people who may be intimidated by more formal learning context; cannot afford to pay class fees; unable to commit to regular weekly sessions; or don't want the pressure of qualification assessment.
- ESOL teachers see the value of using volunteers that is not about replacing them.

---

[147] Reproduced from Stevenson, A., Kings, P. and Sterland, L. (2017), *Mapping ESOL provision in Greater London, May 2017*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute. pp58-60. www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_esol_mapping.pdf

[148] Greater London Authority (2019), *English: the key to integration in London*. https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/education-and-youth/english-key-integration-london

- Volunteers are encouraged to think about training to teach adults.

Critical Success Factors

- Role of project coordinator, with the appropriate skill set, ability to build relationships, offer on-going support to, learners, teachers, volunteers and to lead the work.
- Strong relationships with the schools and local community organisations
- Volunteer training is rigorous and care is taken in their selection process to ensure that clubs will be responsibly and well managed.
- Enthusiastic and committed project co-ordinator and staff to support and mentor volunteers.

1.4 Merton Home Tutoring Service 'Time to Talk'[149]

'Time To Talk' is a conversation class for those unable to go to other classes, it is women only, based around cultural and health topics [such as sewing, cooking pancakes, making decorations, dyeing Easter Eggs, talks by a nutritionist, a doctor and volunteering manager]; some skills are taught by learners [such as vegetable carving, decoration of hands and the making of costume jewellery] These activities provoke much interest, discussion and consequently, the learning and practising of English.

[Website description] This is a weekly conversation group at St. Mark's Family Centre in Mitcham, to give learners another chance to practise speaking English in informal surroundings.
Every week a new topic is discussed and the conversation flows from there. People are free to ask any questions they like.
We use learning new crafts or skills as a way of learning new language and vocabulary.
Learners pass on some of their own skills – jewellery making, cake decorating, henna painting and sewing, to name just a few.
Outside experts also lead sessions – a local GP is visiting again this year, as are representatives from the voluntary sector, with sessions on floristry and, by popular demand, an introductory exercise session and the language of driving.

1.5 SAVTE (Sheffield Association for the Teaching of English)[150]

SAVTE has around 18 conversation groups regularly meeting across the City of Sheffield. These groups [aim to help] learners practise their speaking and listening skills in an informal and friendly setting. They are often a stepping stone into formal classes, helping [learners] to develop essential skills in listening, speaking and comprehension.

What learners can expect from relevant groups:

- Additionality to formal classes for ESOL learners
- A stepping stone into formal learning
- Limited access provision (When the learner has no other options available to them)
- Learners can make new friends from their community, helping to give them confidence and additional help.

[…] SAVTE's experience is that these groups are of high and lasting value to learners and also for the many volunteers delivering their ongoing and extensive provision.

Learner comments…

---

[149] Reproduced from Dawson, R. (2017a), *A Snapshot of English language teaching in seven voluntary sector organisations in 2017*. London: Merton Home Tutor Services. p23. http://www.natecla.org.uk/uploads/media/208/16729.pdf ; and from Merton Home Tutor Services. https://mhts.org.uk/learners/time-to-talk/

[150] Reproduced from SAVTE, *Conversation groups, About*. http://savte.org.uk/conversation-groups/about/

Neegat: *"I come here to improve my English, I can't go to other classes because I have children. I had one friend before, now I have lots of friends. My teachers here have given me the confidence to speak"*

Chi: *"We've learned very useful information about the NHS, we can talk about the topics we want to learn about, I really prefer the Conversation Groups – we can ask more questions here"*

Samira: *"I've connected with new friends – I'm more confident"*

Fatima *"I have improved, my English is better than before, I talk with my children more in English"*

Nadia: *"I have got better, I have more confidence to speak to people"*

Saiqa: "*We have a good conversation here, I don't go to any other classes"*

Jali: *"I like this Conversation Class, it's good because it's near my house – We can read and write, we really need practice to speak"*

Surab: *"We learn how to get on with life in England and our community, it's a great place to meet people and make friends"*

1.6 Redhill Conversation café[151]

With considerable support from the local council and the East Surrey Family Support team, local coordinators and interpreters have established a fortnightly language cafe. A committed and enthusiastic group of Syrian refugees arrive to sit in café-style for a short, one-hour, informal English session and to chat to one another for the remaining half hour.

This also provides a volunteer-run one hour crèche for the under-fives during term times and all age ranges during the school holidays. A very small budget provides the group with the opportunity to ask for the purchase of age appropriate toys.

Everything takes place in a reserved, but open-plan space of a local theatre. The families, including newly arrived and longer standing groups, are all demonstratively very happy to see each other.

Dads, uncles and grandparents who come are also willing to give the 'mini' lesson a try. The mums and children are in other education in many cases, but other members of the family may not want more formal learning opportunities. They are motivated to come to be able to greet and chat with other Syrians who have been widely dispersed in council owned houses/flats around the borough.

Volunteers are also glad of the opportunity to catch up with fellow volunteer teachers. Volunteers also help to transport anyone who is less mobile but many families have rapidly become familiar with using public transport.

Most volunteers are also visiting a family at home as well, so this is an opportunity for them to meet and exchange news and tips from their teaching experiences and to touch base with the volunteer coordinator.

1.7 Talk English[152]

We all know that adult learners of English vary enormously - in their motivation, previous learning and personal study skills. The people we work with on the Talk English project are all adults who have settled in the UK for a variety of reasons, from joining family members to escaping war or persecution. Some learners have had a high level of education in their home country, while others may not have attended school.

---

[151] Reproduced from NATECLA (2019), *A Framework for Good Practice in Voluntary ESOL.* http://natecla.org.uk/uploads/media/208/16911.pdf

[152] Reproduced from Salmon, M., and Trace, N. (no date), *How much do your learners use English outside of the classroom?* London: British Council, BBC. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/how-much-do-your-learners-use-english-outside-classroom

LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

Learners may have an established network of friends and family living close-by or they could be living alone, far away from friends and family. Alongside other things such as health, age, cultural expectations and so on, these differences can influence how quickly adults learn English.

However, another thing which can hinder the progress of many adult learners is a lack of opportunity, or even reluctance, to speak English in real-life situations. Many English teachers will agree that the progress of some of their learners is slower because they rarely speak English outside the classroom. Despite living in the UK, some learners can get by in everyday life without needing to leave their language community or they rely on friends or family members to help them.

How can we promote English use outside of the classroom?

Nasreen had previously relied on her children to help her to communicate with the doctor, the neighbours and at various appointments throughout her adult life, however since taking part in the Talk English project, she now feels a lot more confident to do things for herself. She often talks to her elderly neighbour in English.

The Talk English project has been designed to actively encourage learners to use English outside of the classroom, by offering a blend of learning opportunities. One-to-one mentoring and activities, including visits to museums and galleries, art and craft sessions, community walks and coffee mornings, complement informal English courses delivered by volunteers, and provide additional, authentic opportunities for learners to speak English outside of the classroom.

These enrichment activities provide learners with the chance to meet other people and learn or do something different. As English is the common language, learners, staff and volunteers communicate in English throughout the activity, with volunteers providing the necessary support and guidance needed. The focus is on doing the activity together and learners are motivated to have a go at using their English for real communicative purposes, with less fear of making mistakes or feeling that they have to speak accurately

Nasreen really enjoyed a 'Walk and Talk English' activity through which she explored the local area with other learners, supported by Talk English volunteers. She said that she could now name different places and types of buildings and she will not forget these words. She has also registered with her local library and borrowed some recipe books, recently baking some flapjack after reading the recipe in English with the help of her daughter. Nasreen has also thoroughly enjoyed a 'Talk English and Crochet' session during which the group chatted in English while crocheting.

Volunteer mentors or as we call them on Talk English, 'Friends', provide some learners with much needed one-to-one support and practice, which is focussed on increasing the learner's independence in their everyday life. This intervention is intended to be a short, sharp burst of support, in order to avoid learners becoming dependent on their volunteer Friend.

Involving the wider community

In addition, the project also offers training to help front-line staff in local businesses and services communicate more effectively in English and be 'sympathetic listeners'. Alongside the volunteers who teach and support learners on courses and in activities, staff trained as 'sympathetic listeners' contribute to making the local environment more welcoming and supportive to people learning English. This encourages learners to use English in their daily lives, developing their confidence and fluency. Additionally, this whole community approach to English language learning builds cohesion and understanding among residents, and reduces the need for interpretation.

'Through becoming a volunteer with this project, I am more aware of those struggling to speak English and integrate generally and I'm more aware of the differences in peoples' circumstances.' Talk English Volunteer

Learning English here, there and everywhere

This blend of learning opportunities challenges learners' preconceptions about how and where learning should and can take place, placing importance on functional English and other skills that learners need for their everyday lives, as well as promoting learners' confidence and independence, making them more active in their language learning.

1.8 BBC Learning Circles for English My Way[153]

Learning Circles are based around communal experiences and situations that can be really problematic – problematic in that they require some kind of transfer of information, but even more difficult when they have to be carried out in a language other than your mother tongue. Imagine something like using the self-checkout machines at your local supermarket.

How many times have you been caught up with your shopping and heard the line 'Unexpected item in the bagging area' or similar? Dealing with computerised checkouts is one of a series of 12 sessions, all based on this type of communal experience. So, we start by sharing our own experiences of these places and situations. Learning Circle participants may be asked how often they go to the supermarket, if they ever have any problems, and if they ever use English while out doing the shopping (and if not, why not). This allows a Learning Circle to start very much with the learner in mind.

How does a class work?

The learners watch a video showing people dealing with the situation. In the video, the characters, who are women from the target communities, come up against a problem. Maybe they can't work the checkout or they don't know how to ask for something. The first part of the video ends when the situation becomes stuck, that is, when the problem prevents a happy outcome. The discussion then moves on to the problem itself. The facilitator asks participants in the Learning Circle if they have ever been in this situation themselves and what they would do if they had the same problem.

They resume with the second part of the video. Here, the character is able to move the situation on and get what she wants or needs. In each of these situations, there is a key phrase and key items of vocabulary that help move everything towards this happy outcome. In the example of our confusing checkout computer, this might be something like 'Excuse me. I don't know how to use this. Can you help me?' There is now the chance for further discussion in the Learning Circle – how did the situation get resolved? What did the character say? More personalised discussion follows, with practice activities and other opportunities to use the language from the session.

Each Learning Circle session follows this two-part video format of situation, problem, solution. There's support material, in the form of flashcards, video transcripts and follow-up activities with instructions for people to lead the Learning Circle sessions. These are designed to be simple enough so they can be used without the need for any teaching experience.

This is perhaps the key to Learning Circles – they are designed to be used by people in their communities, setting up informal sessions with their friends and family to learn some English. The aim is that participants will pick up the key vocabulary and key phrases to help them get through these problematic situations in English.

The British Council project team have been creating resources for the English My Way website and evaluating the response from both tutors and learners. Recently, Frances Carbines, Project Officer at the British Council, had the chance to visit a few English My Way centres around the UK, to meet migrant ESOL learners, programme volunteers and centre staff in person, and to take part in sessions. Here's what she saw:

---

[153] Reproduced from Harrison, M., and Carbines, F. (2015), BBC Social Enterprise Project. London: BBC. https://eltjam.com/bbc-social-enterprise-project/

Our visit to the Crossover Centre in Birmingham involved participating in a lively Learning Circle facilitated by ESOL tutor, Julie Hughes. It was designed not only to teach learners key vocabulary and phrases to use in a realistic day-to-day situation, but also to encourage everyone to share their experiences equally and it was clear that the activities were very much enjoyed by the group of learners – a group of predominantly Pakistani women who lived in the local area. In this instance, the group were doing a session on using the Post Office, looking at the different options for sending parcels: economy or recorded delivery. It was a situation that everyone present was all too familiar with – waiting for an available post office assistant, then suddenly being presented with a myriad of postage options while an impatient queue forms behind you…

After watching the Learning Circle video and having a look over the flash cards containing key vocabulary, everyone in the room was invited to talk, in English, about their experiences of sending packages in post offices. One learner recounted how previously she hadn't realised that recorded delivery was an option: her package to her son had got lost in the post, causing disappointment, confusion and stress. Personal anecdotes are key to keeping the flow of conversation open; learners are encouraged to participate fully in every discussion, regardless of their level of English.

Peer teaching is an integral part of the English My Way programme; the most confident learners in the class will support others in the class, even acting as ambassadors in their community, and, when needed, more experienced learners can assist less experienced learners by suggesting useful words and phrases – the flash cards and visual imagery are of vital importance. The emphasis is on getting used to speaking in English without a need to get it completely right every time – building confidence through a shared desire to communicate and swap ideas. This is particularly important for learners who have no prior experience of education and for whom the idea of sitting in a formal language class may seem at best, unfamiliar, and at worst, intimidating.

Learning Circles can be held anywhere – someone's living room, a café, a community centre or even in the local park (weather permitting!). They complement the more formal English My Way sessions found on the website: for example, Learning Circle 8: Medicine gives learners the confidence to discuss medical symptoms in an informal environment, while the Healthcare sessions on the English My Way website encourage learners to consider their wider lifestyles and healthcare implications. English My Way centres across the UK can then complement the sessions with additional talks and workshops. For example, Cooke e-learning Centre in Leicester ran a session on the risks of diabetes, with a view to encouraging learners to live healthily as well as recycling new vocabulary they'd come across earlier in the day.

1.9 Sheffield Conversation Club[154]

Sheffield Refugee Friendship Group came together with STAR (Student Action for Refugees) and the newly established Drop in Centre (Sheffield Asylum Team) at Victoria Hall in late spring 2002. About 5 or 6 volunteers sat down with about 5 or 6 refugees to talk and play games, drink a cup of tea and get to know each other.

There was no particular brief and no training. We explored a variety of approaches to help language practice and confidence building and give new arrivals a chance to find out about the city and what it could offer them. Someone suggested the table we used could be labelled Conversation Corner to encourage those who came to the drop in centre for housing or medical advice perhaps to stay on and involve with the talk and the fun side of the afternoon. Later the name was changed to Conversation Club.

The club has proved so popular, that we first extended to a 2nd session run on a Friday afternoon, and later to a women-only session on Thursday midday. New groups have since grown up in some Sheffield districts and in other towns. We now also extend our activities to weekend walks, museum visits, football, cinema visits, and soon… to anything that our members want to organise.

---

[154] Reproduced from Sheffield Conversation Club http://www.conversationclub.org.uk/about-us and http://www.conversationclub.org.uk/meetings

"Welcome to Conversation Club. We are a tree with many branches. We are strong because we agree to respect each other's confidentiality and personal privacy with courtesy for the wellbeing of the whole tree."

1.10 Shepherds Bush Library – ESOL conversation group[155]

Our ESOL conversation group has been running for just over a year and became so popular with customers, that we recently started another group. I recently had a chat with members of our group, to find out what the service means to them. […]

Alex from Brazil and Sylvia from Italy both said that it has given them the opportunity to improve their English and make friends which are important to them as they have no family in the UK.

Sophie from France who has been coming for a year said that she loved that it was not a formal class and that Patrick was a good group leader and that everybody participated.

The group loved the fact that Patrick [volunteer facilitator] allocates time to everybody and never interrupts them and that he gives them additional support by e-mailing exercises to them.

Mathilde from Quebec City said that some external classes are so expensive and are not as good or as fun as the one at the library. She loved the fact that Patrick the group leader was so welcoming and commented that she felt it was an essential service.

I asked Patrick why he volunteered to run the group and how he has enjoyed his experience. He explained that he felt it was important to have such a service in this multi-cultural community. He said the group is a great mix of people from Iran, Romania, Italy, Holland, Japan and that as much as he has educated them, they have also educated him.

1.11 International House-STAR (Student Action for Refugees)[156]

The partnership between STAR and IH London aims to help refugees and asylum seekers develop the language skills they need to enable them to access essential services and adapt to life in the UK.

In 2013, our teacher trainers provided STAR staff and volunteers with ice breaking methods for participants, teaching materials, exercises and games to expand and develop their vocabulary as well as providing lessons plans and teaching tips to pass on to new volunteers.

Clare Webster, Assistant Director of Teacher Training at IH London said: "English Conversation Clubs provide a relaxed and supportive learning space for new arrivals to the UK, and those granted refugee status, to practise English and socialise."

Flexible, responsive but structured

She went on to say that the skills needed to facilitate Conversation Clubs are very different from a classroom environment: "Volunteers at the clubs need to be flexible and responsive to work in an informal environment, but they also need to ensure that the sessions are structured in a way that helps those participating develop and improve their language skills".

Feedback on the IH London training sessions from STAR volunteers has been overwhelming positive, with volunteers from a STAR group in Leeds telling us: "We implemented some of the structures we talked about (in the training sessions) and I'd say it was our most successful class yet!"

---

[155] London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham Libraries
https://lbhflibraries.wordpress.com/2015/12/11/shepherds-bush-library-esol-conversation-group/

[156] Reproduced from https://www.ihlondon.com/news/2014/ih-london-training-and-support-for-student-action-for-refugees/

STAR volunteers have access to teaching materials and lesson plans learning environment website which is coordinated by International House London and training sessions will continue throughout 2014.

1.12 Reflective discussion leaders in the workplace[157]

Not unlike parts of the UK, in Stockholm a high proportion of care workers come from overseas and some have limited Swedish. ArbetSam, a large workforce development project in Stockholm, developed two innovative roles to support peer learning in social care workplaces: reflective discussion leaders and language advocates. Both roles are filled by care staff on a voluntary basis.

Language advocates are care staff who support language development in their workplace. This includes helping colleagues with workplace documentation and communication with people who need care and support. The advocates were also trained to raise awareness among colleagues and managers about how people learn second languages.

Reflective discussion leaders lead structured discussions with colleagues in their workplace that focus on a specific issue or a topic of concern, such as supporting relatives or person-centred care. Participants share experiences and ideas to arrive at a common approach or solution.

Results suggest that these approaches have changed attitudes towards language learning among those involved as learners, their managers, colleagues, teachers and many others. From 'lack of Swedish' being a problematic, conflict-generating issue that was difficult to discuss and handle, language learning is now beginning to be seen as an important part of care work.

---

[157] Based on Miller, L., Braddell, A., and Marangozov R. (2013), *Migrants in low-paid low-skilled work in London. Research into barriers and solutions to learning English.* Falmer: Institute for Employment Studies. https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/migrants-low-paid-low-skilled-work-london

Appendix 2. Sample presentations and role descriptions

2.1 Leicester City Council

Learning with libraries[158]

English conversation

We have regular groups in some of our libraries and are seeking volunteers to set up new ones where we know there is a demand. So if you would like an opportunity to practice speaking English in a relaxed and informal environment, contact your local library to see if they have a group. If you would like to volunteer to help run a group, please follow the volunteer quick link above.

Volunteer in libraries[159]

Volunteer roles

English conversation group facilitator

Suitable for people willing to facilitate a regular group of people who wish to improve their spoke English – this is not a teaching role.

English conversation group facilitator[160]

English Conversation Group

Would you like to be involved in setting up a new group in your local library?

We would like to set up 'English Conversation' groups in our libraries. We seek motivated volunteers who are interested in helping us to set up and facilitate these. We have a successful model which we run at Leicester Central Library and prospective volunteers will have the opportunity to attend this group to get a feel for how it works.

We need volunteers who are able to facilitate an informal conversation in English that group members can join in with. Volunteers will not need to correct mistakes or explain grammatical rules but should be able and willing to speak in clear and correct English on a variety of subjects.

This 20 minute video explains some of the principles of language learning that we hope our groups will make available to people http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0yGdNEWdn0

When we received expressions of interest from prospective volunteers, we will approach the local library about setting up a group. Please be aware that we cannot guarantee that this opportunity will be available to everyone who expresses an interest.

What we can do:

- Provide a space for the group to meet
- Provide books/materials to provide a stimulus for conversation

---

[158] https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/libraries-and-community-centres/libraries/learning-with-libraries/

[159] https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/libraries-and-community-centres/libraries/volunteer-in-libraries/

[160] https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/177740/english-conversation-group-facilitator.pdf

- Provide materials for group members to take away, including written material and audio books
- Provide information about more formal English learning opportunities such as ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) courses
- Advertise the group with posters and flyers in the library, on our website and using social media (Facebook and Twitter)

What we need from you:

- Enthusiasm
- A regular commitment of 1 to 1 ½ hours a week
- The ability to facilitate a group
- A willingness to talk, in English, about a variety of subjects

The Role:

- To facilitate a new English Conversation group in your local library
- To support people in the development of English language skills through holding informal conversation
- To help people to access library resources to improve their English language skills
- Signpost people to ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses where applicable
- The role is suitable for people interested in Library & Information Services and facilitating learning

Skills and experience:

- Good listening and speaking skills in the English language
- A welcoming, approachable, positive, patient person
- Enjoys meeting and talking to people of different nationalities, cultures and languages
- Enjoys talking about different subjects
- The ability to communicate with people of mixed language abilities

You will gain:

- A reference from Leicester Libraries
- Chance to use existing skills
- Chance to share your skills with others
- Gain new skills and knowledge
- Improve confidence
- Meet new people

Method of application:

- Expression of Interest Form
- Informal Discussion

2.2 Bristol City Council, Learning Communities Team[161]

ESOL Conversation Clubs - Background

Over the last year the Bristol Learning Communities Team has been trialling ESOL Conversation Clubs in 6 different local community venues, with the aim of providing free, informal opportunities for ESOL learners to practise speaking English. A volunteer training programme has been developed and 18 volunteers have been trained. This initial trial has been very successful, despite minimal resourcing, and additional funding has now been secured from Bristol City Council to extend and develop the project.

---

[161] https://www.voscur.org/sites/voscur.org/files/ESOL%20Conversation%20Clubs%20Outline.docx

What are ESOL Conversation Clubs?

The clubs are held in local community venues, run for 1 – 1 ½ hours a week and each club is facilitated by 2 – 3 trained volunteers. They are free to join and learners can attend on a drop-in basis. During the clubs, volunteers lead discussions, run activities and speaking games, and engage in general conversation with the learners.

The clubs provide a relaxed, informal way for adult ESOL learners to practise their spoken English. The pilot clubs have found that the clubs help learners to develop their vocabulary and confidence, which in turn helps them to access services more confidently, meet new people, play a greater role in the life of the city, and improve their skills for citizenship and employment.

Who are the clubs for?

The clubs are for adults (18+) who speak English as an additional language and who want to improve their speaking skills. Clubs can be mixed ability.

The clubs are ideal for those people who are already attending classes and are looking for the opportunity for further practice or for those who are, for whatever reason, unable to commit to more formal courses. Information, advice and guidance about more formal ESOL lessons are provided during the club sessions, should learners be interested.

Where are the clubs held?

During the pilot stage, the Conversation Clubs were held in 4 Children's Centres (St Pauls, Brentry, Little Hayes and Long Cross), Hannah More Primary School and Easton Community Centre. It is hoped that in the next stage of the project we will work with a wider range of local organisations, in order to meet the needs of more diverse groups of learners.

Who are the volunteers?

So far, volunteers have been recruited from our existing database, through our host organisations and through the Adult Learning Service. 18 volunteers have thus far been trained, including both older and retired people, employed people and people not working who want to develop new skills.

The volunteers receive full training from an experienced ESOL tutor as well as ongoing support from the Learning Communities Team. The training covers safeguarding, health & safety, the impact of poor language skills on people's lives, barriers to learning, equality and diversity, leading conversations, how to help ESOL learners develop conversation skills and choosing materials to support conversation. Prior to joining the training, applicants are interviewed to establish that they are suitable for the volunteering role, and references are requested.

What is the role of the 'host' organisation?

The Conversation Club host organisation will be asked to:

- Publicise the club and recruit club members (ESOL learners)
- Provide the volunteer with a list of names/register
- Be responsible for the health and safety of the volunteer while on their premises and make sure they have insurance to cover them.
- Have a named person for the volunteer to liaise with regarding the running of the club
- Ensure the volunteer is aware of the organisation's safeguarding procedures and the name of the safeguarding officer
- Provide a suitable space for the club – preferably a room for its own use or a private space in the corner of a multi-use room
- Provide the volunteer with photocopying facilities, a flip chart and pens if required, and tea/coffee making facilities if requested

- Take part in termly reviews with the Learning Communities Team to evaluate the success of the club

Some host organisations will also be asked to help with the recruitment or identification of suitable volunteers from their existing client base/volunteer database.

Conversation Club Leader, Bristol City Council[162]

Role Title	Conversation Club Leader
Purpose	We're looking for volunteers who speak fluent English to run an English Conversation Club for adults who don't speak English as a first language, giving them a chance to practice speaking English in a relaxed, fun setting.
What you will be doing	• The clubs have up to 15 members and are led by 2 or 3 volunteers working together. The role involves: • welcoming members • introducing conversation topics and new vocabulary, and steering discussions appropriately • ensuring discussions promote community cohesion and encouraging all members to participate • running speaking and listening games, role plays and activities • some modelling of conversations • providing language support (eg. helping club members with pronunciation etc) • signposting members to appropriate ESOL provision and/or to community facilities
Skills, experience and qualities needed	• Fluent English • Confidence in taking the lead to speak in a group situation • Some understanding of the needs of people of diverse backgrounds beginning to learn English as a second language • A commitment to promoting social cohesion and to working with respect for diverse cultures
When and where	• Conversation Clubs typically last one to two hours and run during school hours or in the evening starting around 17.30pm- 18:30pm. • Clubs are run in community venues across Bristol/South Gloucestershire/North Somerset such as in schools, community centres and libraries. • We will aim to place each volunteer in a club at the most convenient time, day and venue for him/her.
Support offered	Conversation Club Leaders will receive full training and induction to the role (approximately 7 hours over 2 half days or one full day) They may also have opportunities for further training as required. The local Community Learning Development Worker and Volunteer Coordinator will support volunteers in this role. There will also be support provided by the 'host' organisation.
Benefits to the volunteer	• The opportunity to meet people from diverse cultures • Good experience to enhance your CV • The chance to discover whether a teaching or community work career would suit you. Some Conversation Club Leaders may progress to our initial tutor training course after which there may be opportunities for paid work, initially as a Learning Support Assistant. • If you are already in teacher training this is an opportunity to develop some of your skills away from the pressure of assessed teaching practice.

---

[162] https://www.voscur.org/jobs/86943

Other information	• Volunteers need to commit to completing the training and at least 6 club sessions.
	• Volunteers placed in courses run in Children's Centres/Schools may be required to undergo a criminal record check (DBS)

Conversation Club Volunteer, Bristol City Council[163]

Conversation Club Volunteer

Main aim: To run an informal conversation club for adults who don't speak English as their first language to practice their English speaking

What can I get from this role?

- The opportunity to meet people from diverse cultures
- Experience in a teaching and learning environment
- Good experience to enhance your CV

Tasks and responsibilities:

- Working in a team to facilitate the weekly conversation club sessions
- Welcoming members and introducing conversation topics
- Steering discussions appropriately and encouraging all members to participate
- Running speaking and listening activities
- Signposting members to appropriate ESOL provision and community facilities

Experience and skills:

- Fluent English
- Reliable and organised
- Good communication skills
- Able to use your initiative and work as part of a team
- Understanding of the needs of people of diverse backgrounds beginning to learn English as a second language
- A commitment to promoting social cohesion and to working with respect for diverse cultures.

---

[163] https://www.voscur.org/sites/voscur.org/files/Conversation%20Club%20Vol%20RD.pdf

Annex B – research materials

B1 – conversation club observation tool

Name(s) and number of facilitator(s) being observed	
Day, date, time, duration	
Observer	
Venue	
Purpose and type of CC observed (including level) and frequency	
Number of participants	
Brief description of CC participants (e.g. refugees, parents at a children's centre, ESOL learners on a waiting list , etc.)	
Topic or focus of session	
Additional background information	

Conversation club

Activities	
Patterns of interaction	
Resources used (including ICT)	
Other	

Discussions/feedback/reflections with facilitator(s) and participants
Good ideas to share/include

B2 – conversation club volunteer interviews topic guide

Background (5-10 mins)
1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself?
   Probe: career background, previous experience of volunteering and/or working with and supporting adult migrants, qualifications

2. Can you tell me about the conversation club you volunteer at?
   Probe: who is it aimed at? What level of ESOL? Who runs it? When, how often and how long for does it run? Why was it established (e.g. lack of mainstream ESOL provision, to meet specific needs)?

3. Can you tell me about your volunteer role within the conversation club?
   a. Why did you get involved?
   b. How did you get involved/how were you recruited?
   c. Have you been given any accredited and/or informal training?

4. [if not covered] Have you volunteered at conversation clubs or anything similar before your current one?

Barriers and highlights (10 mins)
5. What are the main practical challenges you face(d) in the setting up of and/or running of the conversation club?
   Probe: finding facilities; recruiting participants; recruiting and maintaining volunteers; costs; travel

   a. [If not covered] Do you always hold the club in the same place?

6. What are the main challenges you face in running sessions/activities at the conversation club?
   Probe: meeting the needs of the participants; session structure; (lack of) resources available; (lack of) facilities available; (lack of) support available; working with other volunteers

7. What are the main impacts of these challenges on:
   a. Your ability to fulfil your role in the club?
   b. Your participants' experience?
   c. You personally?

8. What have been your main highlights in volunteering at the club?
   a. What has surprised you?
   b. What have you gained from the experience?

Resources and activities (15 mins)
9. Are there any specific resources or strategies you use to help in planning and running the conversation club?

a. What are the benefits of using these resources/strategies?
   Probe: on you, on the participants

b. Are there any challenges when using these?

10. What kinds of topics do you cover in the club?
    a. Are there any you would like to cover but don't? Why?
    b. To what extent are the conversation club participants involved in suggesting or agreeing topics covered? How is this done?

11. [If not covered] What kinds of activities do you do as part of the club?
    a. What are the benefits of these activities? What do they bring to the group?
    b. Do you use a generic structure for each session? [If yes] What do you always include?

12. Do you get feedback from participants on the club (the activities and topics or any other aspect)?
    a. [If yes] How do you do this and how often does it happen?
    b. How do you use this feedback to shape/influence future sessions?

13. Do you have access to support with delivery of the club?
    a. What types of support?
       Probe: formal, peer support, local networks

    b. Where and how do you access this support?
    c. Which sources are most useful?

14. Is there any existing support you are aware of but don't use?
    a. Are there issues accessing the support? What are they?
    b. [If know about and can access but don't use support] Why not?

15. [If not covered] What gaps in resources/support do you think there are?

Overall views (5 mins)

16. What would you say is the main thing missing from the resources and support available?
    a. If you could have support in one area, what would it be?

17. What would be your 3 top tips for other volunteers working at conversation clubs?

18. Anything else to add?

B3 – volunteer focus groups topic guide

Warm up and current roles (15 mins)

1. Before we begin, can you all introduce yourself and say a bit about:
    a. Your role as a volunteer (teaching assistants, language buddies, language champions, mentors, etc.), the key aspects/activities involved in your role, where you are based, how long you have been in your role, the levels and cohorts you support/work with, why you got involved in this volunteering.
    b. If you have any English language learning qualifications, what training you have had, and your experience of/confidence in teaching English language.

2. To what extent, if at all, is your role dictated by the people you support, their needs and interests?

Challenges and opportunities (25 mins)

3. What are the main challenges you face in delivering English language provision? How do you overcome these challenges? Think about:
    o Meeting participant need (*Probe: inconsistent attendance; mixed ability classes; learners with little or no previous educational experience; 1st language literacy needs; impact of trauma, health needs, financial problems; managing learner expectations/perceptions of informal provision, managing different levels of ability*)
    o Session structure (*Probe: suitability of structure for participants, e.g. length*)
    o Format of provision (*Probe: formality of provision, number of contact hours*)
    o (Lack of) resources available (*Probe: ESOL resources/materials, specialist CPD and training resources/opportunities*)
    o (Lack of) facilities available (*Probe: childcare, refreshments*)
    o (Lack of) training to support delivery (*Probe: support from English language tutor/volunteer coordinator, wider support available e.g. existing local networks*)
    o Any other challenges (*Probe: funding, travel, personal barriers*)

4. [If not covered by question 3] Are there any challenges mentioned that you face that are specific to working with people from migrant or refugee backgrounds? How do you deal with these? What are your experiences of working with people from migrant or refugee backgrounds?
Probe: challenges, opportunities.

5. What have been the main positives you have found in volunteering in English language learning?
Probe: Meeting participant need (e.g. reducing social isolation, building confidence), personal gains
    a. Have there been any surprises or unexpected outcomes?

Existing resources, materials and support (25 mins)

6. Are there any specific resources, strategies or approaches you use to help in planning and running English language provision?
   a. What is the benefit of using this resource/strategy/approach?
   b. Are there any challenges when using this resource/strategy/approach?

7. What resources, strategies or approaches have you found work best when working with people from migrant or refugee backgrounds? Why?

8. Do you have access to support with delivery?
   Probe: formal support, peer support, local networks
   a. What types of support?
   b. Where and how do you access this support?
   c. How frequently do you access support?
   d. Which sources are most useful?

9. Is there any existing support that you know about that you would like to access but haven't been able to/been offered?
   a. What are the challenges to accessing this support?
   b. If you did access support, what do you think you would gain from this support?

BREAK (10 mins)

Suggestions for future resources, CPD support, etc. (30 mins)

10. What gaps in resources/support do you think there are?
    a. Are there activities, topics or themes that the people you support want to cover/enjoy/say they need? What are they?

11. What do you think a set of resources to aid in your volunteering would look like/ include?
    Probe:
    - *Format*
    - *Content (e.g. on language required for practical immediate needs, e.g. using public transport, and having language for different situations, mental health, local customs and regional culture, traditions and values)*
    - *Single skill resource or integrated?*
    - *Formality*
    - *Resources that can be used in a 1:1 setting*
    - *Digital resources? Apps?*
    - *Bridging resources to facilitate progression from community-based provision to college-based provision?*

12. In an ideal world, what CPD opportunities, training or awareness-raising sessions do you think would be particularly beneficial for volunteers like yourselves to support the delivery of English language provision?
    a. What would/should these sessions cover?

Probe: carrying out an initial assessment, how best to support learners with their learning needs, awareness of issues refugees face accessing provision, awareness of wider barriers e.g. mental health needs, signposting to other organisations, how to access additional funding to support learners)

    b. Who do you think is best placed to organise and deliver this training? Why?

    c. Who do you think should attend this training? Why?

    d. What do you think the format of this training should be?
Probe: Online, face to face?

    e. What do you think the main benefits of this training would be for volunteers working in the sector?

13. What support, if any, do you think is needed to help volunteers with their health and wellbeing?

    a. What would this support look like?
Probe: format, content

    b. How would this support be best delivered?
Probe: online/face to face/telephone? 1:1 or groups?

Summary (10 mins)

14. Overall, what are your 3 top tips / critical success factors for:

    a. Working with those from migrant and refugee backgrounds?

    b. Supporting volunteers working in the sector?

    c. Resources to facilitate informal English language learning?

B4 – Project lead interviews topic guide

Background (5 mins)

1. Could you tell me a bit about your organisation?
   Probe: what it does, extent of working with volunteers and/or working with and supporting adult migrants or refugees

2. Can you tell me about the programme/project/provision that you lead that provides volunteer opportunities?
   Probe: who is it aimed at? What level of English language ability? Who runs it? When, how often and how long for does it run? Why was it established (e.g. lack of mainstream English language provision, to meet specific needs)?

Volunteer roles (5 mins)

3. How does the programme use volunteers?
   a. What are the different roles you have for volunteers?
   b. What activities do they undertake as part of their role?

4. Do volunteers feed into the running of the programme? To what extent and how?
   a. Do you ask for feedback from them? How does this happen and how is it used?

Challenges, practicalities and opportunities (10 mins)

5. What are the main challenges you face when working with volunteers?
   Probe: recruitment and retention; (lack of) resources available; (lack of) funding; (lack of) support available; lack of capacity to provide adequate support/travel expenses/childcare etc.

6. What are the main practical obligations you have to deal with in order to work with volunteers?
   Probe: insurance, employment law, safeguarding

7. What are the main benefits/opportunities you find come from working with volunteers?

Recruitment, retention, training and support (15 mins)

8. How do you recruit volunteers?
   Probe: adverts, messaging, medium (e.g. online)
   a. Have you found that this works well? What are the benefits?
   b. What are the challenges with this method?
   c. [If mention more than one method] Which do you find is the most effective method of recruitment? Why?

9. [If not covered] Do you face any problems with recruitment of volunteers?
   a. [If yes] What are the main reasons why?

10. How do you match volunteers to the right roles?

11. What training do you provide to volunteers when they first start?
    Probe: formal or informal, accredited

12. Do you face any problems with retention of volunteers?
    a. [If yes] What are the main reasons why?
    b. [If yes] What do you do to try and keep them?

13. Do you have anything in place to monitor and look after the health and wellbeing of volunteers?
    Probe: regular catch ups, debriefs after difficult sessions, buddy system/peer to peer support, managing workloads

14. Do you provide any financial support to volunteers?
    Probe: pay for their travel, cover other expenses linked to the programme

15. Do you currently provide CPD for volunteers?
    Probe: basic training to advanced accreditation
    a. [If yes] What do you do?
    b. [If yes] How is this delivered?

Resources (5 mins)
16. Are there any specific resources you use to help with any aspect of working with volunteers?
    Probe: information on legal requirements, tips on recruitment and retention, CPD information, tips on supporting health and wellbeing, local networks
    a. What are the benefits of using these resources?
    b. Are there any challenges when using these?
    c. [If mentioned more than one] Which resources do you use most? Why?

17. [If not covered] What gaps in resources/support do you think there are?

Summary (5 mins)
18. What is the main area you would like support in?

19. What would be your 3 top tips for other people working with volunteers in the support of English language learning?

20. Anything else to add?