

## Research report

# Evaluation of the London City Strategy ESOL Pilot: final report

by Anne Bellis, Maria Sigala and Joy Oakley

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 744

# **Evaluation of the London City Strategy ESOL Pilot: final report**

Anne Bellis, Maria Sigala and Joy Oakley

A report of research carried out by Institute for Employment Studies on behalf of the  
Department for Work and Pensions

© Crown copyright 2011.

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This document/publication is also available on our website at:  
<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

Any enquiries regarding this document/publication should be sent to us at:  
Department for Work and Pensions, Commercial Support and Knowledge Management Team,  
Upper Ground Floor, Steel City House, West Street, Sheffield S1 2GQ

First published 2011.

ISBN        978 1 84712 978 9

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other Government Department.

# Contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
The Authors.....	vi
Glossary of terms.....	vii
Abbreviations.....	viii
Summary.....	1
1 Introduction.....	6
1.1 Research background and objectives.....	6
1.2 Methodological approach.....	6
1.3 Structure of the report.....	7
2 Background to the ESOL Pilot.....	9
2.1 National policy context for ESOL provision.....	9
2.2 The London City Strategy Pathfinders.....	10
2.3 Overview of the Pilot providers.....	13
2.4 Partnership working.....	13
2.4.1 <i>Community-based partnerships</i> .....	14
2.4.2 <i>Strategic-level partnerships</i> .....	14
3 Recruitment and profile of Pilot participants.....	17
3.1 Recruitment strategies.....	17
3.1.1 <i>Community outreach and networking</i> .....	17
3.1.2 <i>Referrals from other agencies</i> .....	19
3.2 Profile of Pilot participants.....	19
3.2.1 <i>Language, education and employment history</i> .....	20
3.2.2 <i>Provider views of participants' barriers to employment</i> .....	20
3.3 Eligibility issues.....	22
4 Provider approaches to project delivery.....	23
4.1 Course length and timing.....	23
4.2 Project location.....	24

4.3	Curriculum design and course activities.....	25
4.3.1	<i>Work-focused language training</i> .....	25
4.3.2	<i>Employability skills and job-brokering</i> .....	25
4.3.3	<i>Work experience</i> .....	26
4.3.4	<i>Accreditation</i> .....	27
4.4	Participant support issues.....	27
5	Participants’ experiences of the Pilot .....	30
5.1	Profile of participants interviewed .....	30
5.2	Finding out about the Pilot and reasons for enrolling .....	31
5.3	Barriers to employment .....	33
5.4	Participant experiences and views of the Pilot.....	35
5.5	Future plans/outcomes since completing the Pilot.....	37
6	Project outcomes .....	39
6.1	Meeting recruitment targets.....	39
6.2	Progression into employment.....	39
6.3	Other progression pathways.....	41
6.3.1	<i>Further training</i> .....	41
6.3.2	<i>Voluntary work</i> .....	41
6.4	Soft outcomes .....	42
7	Conclusions of the evaluation .....	44
7.1	Partnership working .....	44
7.2	Recruitment of participants .....	45
7.3	Structure and content of the Pilot programme .....	45
7.4	Childcare issues.....	46
7.5	Employment outcomes.....	46
7.6	Soft outcomes and other progression pathways .....	47

## List of tables

Table 2.1	Percentage of working age population by ethnic group .....	11
Table 2.2	Employment rate – working age (Employability rate) by ethnic group .....	12

# Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all participants in this research and all researchers who worked on the fieldwork. Thanks also to Alex Tziamalis at the Department for Work and Pensions for his continued support during the research process.

# The Authors

**Anne Bellis** is a Research Fellow in the Unemployment and Labour Market Disadvantage team and was previously a Research Fellow at the University of Sussex. She has had many years' experience in researching issues of unemployment and social exclusion and their impact on various groups, particularly those from minority ethnic and migrant communities.

**Maria Sigala** is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Employment Studies. Her main work has been in the areas of: early years services for families and children; women, employment and childcare; unemployment and worklessness; area level deprivation and health inequalities; and the integration of employment and skills. Her research interests also include labour market disadvantage with a focus on gender and those with caring responsibilities.

**Joy Oakley** is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Employment Studies. She has been involved in a range of qualitative and quantitative projects; recent and ongoing work includes the evaluation of the Integrated Employment and Skills trials and a process evaluation of the national Advancement Network Prototypes. Her research interests include advice and guidance for young people and adults.

# Glossary of terms

- Childcare Affordability Programme** The programme was funded jointly by the London Development Agency and the Department for Education and Skills to provide funding towards good quality affordable childcare for lower income families in the capital. The programme came to an end in March 2009.
- City Strategy Pathfinders** The main aim of the City Strategy Pathfinders was to empower government agencies, local government and the private and voluntary sectors in local consortiums to work together flexibly to tackle localised pockets of worklessness. Two Pathfinders operated within London – East and Southeast London and West London.
- Single Point of Access** A location where people can access advice, information and services from local government and other local providers.



# Abbreviations

BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CAP	Childcare Affordability Programme
CSP	City Strategy Pathfinder
CV	Curriculum vitae
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
ICT	Information and communications technology
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ILR	Individual Learner Record
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LSC	Learning Skills Council
NOMIS	National Online Manpower Information System
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SPA	Single Point of Access

# Summary

This report presents findings from research carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies as part of the evaluation of the London City Strategy Pathfinder English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Pilot. The research was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The two-year ESOL Pilot was designed to demonstrate how work-focused ESOL training provision can support access to sustainable employment for people who speak English as an additional language: the main target group was parents with ESOL needs who were in receipt of benefits or tax credits.

The ESOL Pilot was located within the London City Strategy Pathfinder (CSP) areas of East and Southeast London and West London, which face typical inner-city problems of social deprivation and worklessness. They are also areas with large, well-established Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities with disproportionately high rates of unemployment. One of the main aims of the ESOL Pilot was, therefore, to address some of the key barriers to employment faced by members of these communities.

This study took a primarily qualitative approach, consisting of an inception phase, followed by two waves of qualitative interviews with participants, provider staff and other stakeholders. In total, there were 175 interviews conducted during the course of the research: 104 with participants, 61 with providers and their partners and ten with stakeholders.

The key findings from the research are as follows:

## Partnership working on the Pilot

- There were originally 12 providers contracted to deliver the ESOL Pilot, eight in East and Southeast London and four in West London. Most of the providers were experienced in delivering ESOL and employability training programmes to disadvantaged and unemployed groups. Although the ESOL Pilot covered all 11 London boroughs in the CSP areas, there appeared to be a significant degree of overlap of Pilot activity in some boroughs, with reports that this had led to some duplication of effort and competition between providers in the earlier stages of the project.
- Partnership working was a distinctive feature of the Pilot, both at the operational and strategic levels. Most of the providers were working in partnership with community-based organisations to deliver the Pilot outcomes: these were either organised through formally sub-contracted arrangements or service level agreements (SLAs). In addition, all the providers reported that they were relying to some extent on a range of informal partners and networks for referrals to the Pilot, such as schools, children's centres, housing associations and community groups. Another advantage of this approach was the access it allowed to a wide range of community venues with on-site crèche facilities. On the whole, these partnership arrangements were reported to have worked well, despite the fact that management of contractual arrangements could at times be challenging and time-consuming.
- Partnership working at the more strategic level was more problematic. There were a number of strategic partners involved in some way with the Pilot (including the DWP, Jobcentre Plus, East and Southeast London and West London CSPs, and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) preceded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)) and this could well have contributed to the sense of confusion noted by some stakeholders and providers about its overall priorities and sense of direction. This confusion was reflected, for example in changes made to the eligibility criteria of participants (such as the extent to which non-parents could be recruited) and lack of clarity as to whether the main focus of the Pilot was on the 'learner journey' or employment outcomes.

- Another issue raised was what appeared to be a lack of synergy between the Pilot and the Single Points of Access (SPAs) based within the East and Southeast London CSP. Although it had been anticipated that these would be a major source of referrals to the Pilot, in practice, this only happened to a limited extent.
- By contrast, another partnership initiative (involving the SFA and CSPs) proved to be more successful, and this was the series of provider workshops organised by LLU+ based at London South Bank University, which took place during the second year of the project. The workshops facilitated networking and the sharing of good practice between the providers and were generally well received.

### Engaging and recruiting participants

- When interviewed in the later stages of the Pilot, most providers indicated that they had either met their recruitment targets or were very close to doing so. Providers used a range of strategies to recruit eligible participants to the Pilot.
- There was a general consensus that the most successful recruitment strategies by far were community outreach and face-to-face contact and engagement with parents at various community locations, particularly schools and children's centres. Providers also relied to some extent on making use of the existing links and networks established by their community partners. Only a few providers relied on their links with Jobcentre Plus, as they were not originally intended to be a referral source for this Pilot. Few providers were able to use the East and Southeast London SPAs to recruit participants.

### Profile of Pilot participants

- Interviews with providers indicated that the key characteristics of participants on the Pilot were as follows: approximately three quarters were women; most were in the 20–45 age range; the majority were of Black or Asian origin; and a very large proportion were out of work. The profile of participants recruited was, therefore, generally in line with the key target group for the Pilot.
- Interviews with both providers and participants indicated that participants faced a number of barriers to accessing employment, including:
  - low levels of spoken and written English;
  - lack of vocational skills and appropriate qualifications;
  - lack of UK work experience; lack of confidence; health issues; and
  - lack of access to appropriate and affordable childcare.

A significant minority of participants taking part in the research had come to the UK with high levels of professional skills and qualifications, including degrees. For these individuals, the key issues tended to be improving their English and gaining recognition for their overseas qualifications.

- Lack of work experience and poor English skills were viewed as particularly serious barriers within a competitive labour market. In addition, women with children of pre-school age were less likely to be seeking employment in the shorter term. Individuals who were more flexible regarding working hours, types of jobs and travel-to-work distances were considered by providers to have a better chance of securing a job on completion of the programme. Some providers admitted that they became more selective about who they recruited onto the programme and towards the end of the Pilot had targeted those who were more job-ready and more motivated to find work in the shorter term.

## Approaches to project delivery

- The overall Pilot framework allowed the providers considerable autonomy in the way they delivered their individual programmes. However, the research indicated a broadly similar approach to project delivery adopted by providers across the Pilot sites, for example, in terms of course structure and timing, curriculum content and location in community venues. In most cases, the programmes consisted of a series of short, flexible courses of 10–15 weeks' duration with varying hours of attendance per week, depending on individual needs. Providers emphasised the importance of flexibility for the client group, because of their childcare responsibilities and lack of familiarity with formal training. However, questions were raised by some project staff about whether longer courses would have been more appropriate for participants who were such a long way from the labour market.
- All the providers had designed ESOL programmes with a strong emphasis on employability, in accordance with the work-focused aims of the Pilot. For example, there was a broadly similar focus on the kind of language and vocabulary useful for developing 'generic' employability skills, such as writing curriculum vitae (CVs) and letters of application. In addition, some programmes offered IT training, which was popular with participants and could help improve their jobsearch skills.
- Providers used a range of strategies for supporting participants into employment. In most cases, there was a staff member with a particular remit for working with 'job-ready' individuals to help them look for suitable vacancies and prepare them for interviews. They often took on an employer engagement role as well. In very few cases, the job-brokering element of the programme was contracted out to another organisation. One provider reported that this partnership arrangement had made a significant contribution to their success in meeting their employment outcomes.
- Many providers also organised a series of employability workshops, which provided a useful opportunity for participants to put their work-focused language skills into practice, for example, through writing up their CVs or taking part in mock interviews. Some of the workshops were 'thematic', focusing on the skills required in various employment sectors such as childcare, health and social care or retail.
- Another key feature of the Pilot was the work placements offered to participants, which were seen, both by providers and participants, as a valuable means of gaining experience of the UK workplace. In a few instances, a work placement was reported to have led to a more sustainable job outcome. There was considerable variation among providers in their approach to offering work placements: while for some it was an embedded feature of the programme, others were not offering any at all, or only to 'job-ready' participants. A few providers explained that they had encountered difficulties in persuading employers to take participants on because of their poor language skills, or limited availability because of childcare commitments.

## Participant support and childcare issues

- Because of the multiple barriers faced by participants, learner support was another important element of the Pilot, particularly childcare support. Most providers reported that identifying resources for childcare had been a major issue for them, as there was no budget allocated for this at the start of the Pilot. There had been an initial expectation that providers would be able to access funding through the Childcare Affordability Programme (CAP) but this had ended in March 2009. Although another pot of money was later made available by the SFA, not all parents were eligible for this and, because of communication difficulties between the SFA and providers, not all providers were aware it was available. In the end, the childcare support provided varied

considerably across the Pilot sites, with some providers reporting they had managed to offer provision to only some of their participants, if it was available at the venue. Access to childcare was variable resulting in some parents, who would otherwise have been eligible, being unable to attend the Pilot. There was a general feeling among providers and their partners that the project should have had an allocated budget for childcare support, particularly as parents were the main target group.

- There were various other types of practical support offered to Pilot participants, which included:
  - payment of travel costs;
  - advice about benefits and,
  - in a few cases, in-work support for those who had found jobs.

### Participants views of the Pilot

- Generally speaking, participants interviewed during the research expressed satisfaction with their experience of the ESOL Pilot and said they had benefited by improving their language, employability and IT skills. Some said that the programme had helped increase their confidence in their English and in looking for work, and some had recommended the Pilot to friends and family. Those who had been offered work placements welcomed these as an opportunity to gain experience of the workplace and practise their English in a different environment. Areas for improvement suggested by participants included:
  - longer courses;
  - more opportunities to practise their spoken English; and
  - a clearer division of the classes according to language ability and level.
- In most cases, the participants interviewed said they were keen to find work, either in the shorter or longer term. Future job plans were very varied and included work in different sectors such as retail, administration, health and social care and childcare. Many women participants were particularly interested in finding work in the childcare field, for example, as classroom assistants, playground supervisors or nursery school workers. The appeal of this type of employment was the benefit of work with flexible hours to fit in with their childcare commitments. Other respondents were hoping to undertake further training on completion of the programme, such as a higher-level ESOL course, childcare course or other form of vocational training.
- Ten participants were interviewed after they had completed the course: two of them were in full-time employment, one was in further training with the same provider, and the remainder were still looking for work. They reported that the main course outcomes for them had been an increase in their confidence in speaking English, an improvement in their jobsearch skills and a better understanding of the labour market.

### Employment outcomes

- Most of the providers viewed the 20 per cent target for employment outcomes as a challenge and, in the earlier part of the project, were struggling to achieve this. In the later stages, it seemed that more resources were being channelled into supporting participants into employment and providers reported making better progress towards meeting their targets. Various reasons were given for the difficulty in meeting employment outcome targets, including the distance of many participants from the labour market and the increased competition for jobs brought about by the

economic recession. There were also reports of participants who were reluctant to look for work (perhaps due to lack of confidence or cultural issues) and this also had a negative impact on outcomes. In order to improve employment outcomes, some providers became more selective in their approach to recruitment and were beginning to target individuals who they considered to be more 'job-ready', such as those with higher levels of English, previous UK work experience or children of school age. Providers adopting this strategy admitted that this reflected the tensions within the Pilot between the original aim of helping the hardest-to-reach individuals and pressure from funders to achieve the employment targets.

- Where participants were successful in securing job outcomes on completion of the programme, these were typically in entry-level occupations in areas such as retail, cleaning, security, care work, hospitality, catering or administration. East London providers had hoped that more jobs would be available in their Pilot areas through the 2012 London Olympics but there was little evidence through the research of this actually happening.

## Soft outcomes and other progression pathways

- Most providers anticipated that the 'learner journey' towards employment was likely, in many cases, to extend beyond the timeframe of the Pilot. Alternative progression routes were, therefore, viewed as a more realistic prospect for the majority of participants. These included: further training, particularly higher-level, accredited ESOL courses; more vocationally-focused programmes; or progression into voluntary work.
- The development of 'soft skills' was seen by providers as another important outcome from the Pilot, even if these were not formally recognised as such. The most frequently cited soft outcomes for participants were: increased self-confidence and motivation, and improved communication skills, employability and jobsearch skills.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research background and objectives

This report presents findings from research carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies, as part of the evaluation of the London City Strategy English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Pilot. The research was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The ESOL Pilot was designed to demonstrate how work-focused provision can support access to sustainable employment and progress in work for people who speak English as an additional language. The Pilot has run for two years from October 2008 to March 2011, in the East and Southeast London and West London City Strategy Pathfinder (CSP) areas, and was targeted at parents with ESOL needs, who were in receipt of benefits or tax credits. The Pilot aimed to recruit 5,000 participants to ESOL provision. Contract management of the Pilot was carried out by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), which was commissioned by the DWP to deliver the programme with a budget of £11.4 million.

The main aim of the research was to evaluate the implementation, progress and impact of the ESOL Pilot over time and to make recommendations for a more widespread adoption of this approach, if appropriate.

The key objectives for the evaluation were to:

- explore how the provision met the needs of Pilot participants;
- analyse outcomes for participants in terms of their participation in paid work, voluntary work and further training;
- assess how the Pilot interacted with existing provision of skills and employment services within the CSP areas;
- identify and disseminate examples of good, transferable practice in work-focused ESOL.

## 1.2 Methodological approach

The evaluation took a primarily qualitative approach, consisting of two phases: an inception phase, followed by two waves of qualitative interviews with participants, provider staff and other stakeholders.

The inception phase of the research (March to May 2009) consisted of introductory visits to the contracted providers, in order to gather information about the implementation and early progress of the Pilot projects and identify any key issues or challenges from the provider perspective. Two further waves of fieldwork were carried out in the spring and autumn of 2010. These consisted of more in-depth interviews with managers, staff and participants at the majority of Pilot sites. An interim report outlining key findings from the first wave of fieldwork was submitted to the DWP in June 2010. A breakdown of the interviews conducted during both rounds of fieldwork is presented in the following table:

**Table 1.1 Interviews carried out during fieldwork**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>March – May 2010</b>	<b>Oct – Nov 2010</b>	<b>Total interviews</b>
Project managers	12	11	23
Staff (including tutors, outreach workers, advisers, routeway brokers)	19	5	24
Staff from partner organisations	10	4	14
Pilot participants	54	50	104
Stakeholders			10
Total interviews			175

Although there were originally 12 providers contracted to the Pilot, only 11 provider visits were carried out during the second wave of fieldwork. One provider went into liquidation during the summer of 2010. Another provider visit was considerably delayed, due to logistical difficulties, and as a result, the total number of participant interviews has been slightly reduced from the original target of 110 to 104. In addition, a small number of telephone interviews were conducted with a total of ten stakeholders, both at the start and end of the evaluation, to obtain a strategic overview of the aims and impact of the Pilot.

All the interviews were recorded, subject to respondents' permission, to provide a detailed record. The majority of recordings were then transcribed so that a more in-depth analysis of the qualitative data could be undertaken.

### 1.3 Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter two considers the ESOL Pilot within a wider policy framework, both at the national level and within the context of the CSP areas in West and East and Southeast London. It also presents a profile of the providers participating in the Pilot and their partner organisations.
- Chapter three describes and compares the different strategies adopted by providers to engage with and recruit project participants. It also draws on findings from provider interviews to present a profile of the participants enrolled onto the Pilot.
- Chapter four focuses on the different approaches to project delivery offered by the Pilot providers, in terms of their curriculum offer, modes of delivery and main project activities (both language and work-focused). It also covers the different forms of support available to participants across the Pilot sites.
- Chapter five explores the ESOL Pilot from the participant perspective. It presents a profile of the participants interviewed during the study and explores their experiences, levels of satisfaction with the programme, their future aspirations and how they feel participation in the Pilot has helped them progress towards future employment.
- Chapter six looks at the overall performance of providers in meeting the project outcomes, based on the information available at the time of writing this report. Pilot progress is considered primarily in terms of: recruitment of clients from the target population and client progression into employment. Other progression pathways for participants are discussed, as well as the soft outcomes achieved by participants.



- Chapter seven draws out the key conclusions and messages to have emerged from the research. The chapter includes reflections on the key strengths and achievements of the Pilot, as well as the challenges and constraints experienced by both providers and participants. The chapter concludes with the main lessons learnt from the Pilot, which could usefully inform future similar provision for the target group.

## 2 Background to the ESOL Pilot

This chapter looks at the broad policy context of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Pilot: firstly at the national level and secondly, in terms of its location, geographically and strategically, within the City Strategy Pathfinder (CSP) areas of East and Southeast London and West London. The chapter also presents an overview of the 12 provider organisations originally contracted to the Pilot and considers the extent to which they were working collaboratively with other local organisations on project delivery.

### 2.1 National policy context for ESOL provision

ESOL provision plays a vital role in improving the life chances of people for whom English is not the first language: for example, by facilitating access to services, further training or work, and helping them to support their families, particularly their children's schooling. Recognition of the importance of ESOL is reflected at the policy level, by linking English language training to national strategies for integration and community cohesion.<sup>1</sup> However, it is widely recognised that the supply of ESOL provision is generally insufficient to meet demand and that many ESOL courses are over-subscribed, particularly in London.

Another issue is the limited availability of work-focused ESOL, a model of provision which is particularly relevant to the needs of Jobcentre Plus customers, and others, seeking to develop their English language skills alongside their employability within the UK labour market context. Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) had already responded to this challenge by providing the Employability Skills Programme (ESP), which was for individuals who had a basic literacy, numeracy, or ESOL need that was a barrier to work. In London, the vast majority of referrals to ESP were to address an ESOL need. The eligibility for this programme was for people claiming any working age benefit who had a basic skills need below level one that was preventing their entry into work. Successful as this programme was, its wide but still restricted eligibility combined with its design meant that there was scope for designing and testing alternative approaches.

A Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) consultation document in 2008 emphasised the need for shorter, more work-related English language programmes in order to meet the needs of both employers and employees and 'to increase flexibility and choice for employers, agencies and learners.'<sup>2</sup> The consultation paper also highlighted the importance of developing a 'whole community approach' to ESOL by embedding provision within Local Area Agreements and City Strategies. In 2009, BIS published their future plans for ESOL provision in the document, 'A New Approach to ESOL'.<sup>3</sup> The key elements of the new approach were to:

- shift the mix and balance of provision and services towards locally identified priority ESOL learners;
- allow local authorities more say over who has priority for ESOL funding;
- facilitate greater access to learning for those suffering social exclusion;

<sup>1</sup> Home Office (2004). *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration*; Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008). *Focusing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) on Community Cohesion*.

<sup>2</sup> Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008). *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2009), *A New Approach to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)*.

- support providers who are already working on this agenda to make changes; and
- bring providers not fully engaged on board.

Therefore, at the time of its inception, the London City Strategy ESOL Pilot was closely aligned to national policy objectives in three important ways:

- firstly, by exploring the impact of short, work-focused ESOL courses;
- secondly, by locating the Pilot within the London CSPs; and
- thirdly, by focusing on a key priority group – parents and carers within unwaged or low-waged families.

However, during the lifetime of the Pilot, there have been further policy changes in relation to ESOL provision, following the recent publication of the coalition government's plans for its further education strategy. The planned changes and their impact on ESOL provision were mentioned in brief in the new Skills Strategy launched in November 2010, with further details provided in the Skills Investment Strategy.<sup>4</sup> These documents have signalled a significant change to the way in which ESOL provision will be funded from September 2011. The main elements of the new strategy for ESOL will be to:

- limit public funding to people from 'settled communities';
- focus fully-funded ESOL provision primarily on 'active benefits' – people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or those in the work-related activity group of the new Employment and Support Allowance (ESA);
- remove full fee remission from people on a range of other benefits, including Working Tax Credits, Housing Benefit, Income Support, Council Tax and Pension Credits;
- discontinue public funding of ESOL delivered in the workplace;
- remove the funding 'uplift' that teaching ESOL attracts, making it potentially a less attractive option for colleges that want to maximise their revenue from courses.

Although the full implications of these proposed funding changes are as yet unclear, some commentators have already raised concerns about the potential impact on vulnerable groups of ESOL learners, such as low-waged workers and those on benefits other than JSA or ESA.<sup>5</sup> This would include many of the types of participants recruited to the ESOL Pilot, who would no longer be eligible for fully-funded provision from 2011, despite their recognised need for work-focused ESOL in order to progress in the labour market.

## 2.2 The London City Strategy Pathfinders

CSPs were part of the previous Government's drive for the reform of the welfare system, and were first proposed in the Welfare Reform Green Paper, *A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering people to work* (January 2006). The main aim of the CSPs is to empower local institutions and encourage them to work together flexibly to tackle localised pockets of worklessness.

---

<sup>4</sup> Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2010). *Skills for Sustainable growth: Strategy Document*; Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2010). *Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth*.

<sup>5</sup> NATECLA press release, [http://www.natecla.org.uk/content/509/press\\_releases/Coalition\\_announces\\_cuts\\_in\\_ESOL\\_funding](http://www.natecla.org.uk/content/509/press_releases/Coalition_announces_cuts_in_ESOL_funding), Institute of Race Relations. <http://www.irr.org.uk/2010/december/ha000017.html>

There were 15 CSPs selected, including East and Southeast London and West London, which were the areas furthest from the then national 80 per cent employment rate aspiration.<sup>6</sup> East and Southeast London CSP covers five London Boroughs: Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. The West London CSP (West London Working) comprises the boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon and Hounslow. The West London CSP area was coterminous with the Jobcentre Plus district and the West London boroughs have a history of working together as a part of the West London Partnership.

The London CSP areas face typical inner-city problems of social deprivation and worklessness. They are also areas with large, well-established Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, including: Afro-Caribbean, Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali groups. As some providers pointed out, more recent waves of migration (for example of people from various Arabic-speaking, African and Eastern European countries) have added to the ethnic and linguistic diversity of these localities. Key CSP targets relating to employment and benefit claimant levels were set nationally by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). These include targets aiming to increase the employment rates of BME groups in the CSP areas.

Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 show the percentage of working age population and employment rate by ethnic group in each of the boroughs.

**Table 2.1 Percentage of working age population by ethnic group**

	<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Mixed ethnic group</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Pakistani/Bangladeshi</b>	<b>Black or Black British</b>	<b>Other ethnic group</b>
East London	Greenwich	69.9	1.2	3.4	1.7	13.1	10.7
	Hackney	61.1	3.2	2.2	2.1	21.0	10.4
	Newham	31.8	0.7	17.3	18.7	16.5	15.0
	Tower Hamlets	46.9	1.8	4.7	33.3	4.6	8.7
	Waltham Forest	55.6	2.5	5.2	10.6	16.8	9.3
	<b>E London total</b>	<b>52.4</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>10.9</b>
West London	Brent	44.9	2.2	16.6	2.3	18.5	15.5
	Ealing	48.1	2.8	18.8	3.3	6.0	21.0
	Hammersmith and Fulham	72.1	2.7	2.2	0.8	9.8	12.4
	Harrow	45.4	0.9	26.8	3.8	9.2	13.9
	Hillingdon	65.8	1.2	12.5	3.6	4.2	12.7
	Hounslow	55.6	1.9	19.7	3.4	2.8	16.6
	<b>W London total</b>	<b>54.3</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>15.8</b>
UK		88.8	0.9	2.4	2.2	2.6	3.1

Source: Annual Population Survey, Jul 2009-Jun 2010, obtained via NOMIS.

<sup>6</sup> Although there has been no commitment to an extension of the CSPs beyond March 2011, their aims are broadly in keeping with the coalition government's localism and 'big society' agendas. The CSPs can be seen as one way in which responsibility for policy can be devolved from central to local government.

From this table, it can clearly be seen that all 11 East and West London boroughs have sizeable BME populations, compared to the national average, with the largest being: Newham (68 per cent), Brent and Harrow (55 per cent each), Tower Hamlets (53 per cent), Ealing (52 per cent), Waltham Forest and Hounslow (44 per cent each). In East London, the largest ethnic groups are: Pakistani/Bangladeshi (mainly in Newham and Tower Hamlets); Black (Hackney and Waltham Forest) and Indian (Newham). In West London, the largest communities are of Indian origin, particularly in Harrow, Hounslow, Ealing and Brent.

**Table 2.2 Employment rate – working age (Employability rate) by ethnic group**

	<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>BME</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Pakistani/ Bangladeshi</b>	<b>Black or Black British</b>
East London	Greenwich	66.3	71.5	54.1	63.5	69.7	49.7
	Hackney	70.1	77.3	58.7	53.5	51.6	60.6
	Newham	59.5	66.5	56.1	61.7	48.2	52.4
	Tower Hamlets	61.9	72.4	52.5	67.7	42.8	74.3
	Waltham Forest	64.2	71.7	55.1	71.6	45.5	58.4
	<b>E London total</b>	<b>72.2</b>	<b>72.4</b>	<b>55.3</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>57.1</b>
West London	Brent	72.3	69.2	62.9	64.8	75.4	62.8
	Ealing	74.0	74.6	58.6	72.3	31.7	63.1
	Hammersmith and Fulham	71.9	74.2	41.5	42.8	-*	41.6
	Harrow	79.2	73.2	71.1	78.8	62.1	53.4
	Hillingdon	79.6	78.7	60.6	76.9	56.6	50.1
	Hounslow	79.3	76.9	66.6	70.6	51.7	56.3
	<b>W London total</b>	<b>75.9</b>	<b>74.7</b>	<b>61.8</b>	<b>72.1</b>	<b>52.7</b>	<b>56.9</b>
UK		70.2	71.9	58.7	69.7	47.8	59.4

Note: \* Figure not available as small sample group size.

Source: Annual Population Survey, Jul 2009-Jun 2010, obtained via NOMIS.

This table provides evidence of the significant gap in employment rates between the white and BME populations across all East and West London boroughs. The BME unemployment rates are highest in Hammersmith and Fulham (59 per cent), Tower Hamlets (48 per cent) and Greenwich (46 per cent). The ethnic groups with the highest levels of unemployment across both East and West London are those of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin, followed by Black or Black British.

Both CSPs are working closely with a range of partners including Jobcentre Plus, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and local authorities, as well as London-wide bodies such as the London Development Agency, the Greater London Authority and the Olympic London Employment Training Framework. As with other CSPs, they have a remit to pull in additional funding such as from DWP or European Social Fund. Given their large BME populations, the London CSPs have drawn in substantial funding from DWP for ESOL provision. The ESOL Pilot can, therefore, be seen as playing a role in meeting the CSP targets for East and Southeast London and West London.

## 2.3 Overview of the Pilot providers

There were a total of 12 providers contracted to deliver the ESOL Pilot: eight in the East and Southeast London CSP area and four within the West London CSP area. They represented a wide range of participating organisations including: five private sector training providers; three Further Education (FE) colleges; a Sector Skills Council; an economic development agency; a local authority; and a voluntary sector organisation.<sup>7</sup>

Despite their different backgrounds, most of the providers had an established track record in delivering employability training programmes to disadvantaged and unemployed groups, such as New Deal and Skills for Life. A few of the providers had more experience in providing vocational training programmes for people in the workplace, such as National Vocational Qualification (NVQs) and qualifications under 'Train to Gain' funding. Typically, the majority of providers had some kind of previous experience in supporting the training and employment needs of people who speak English as an Additional Language. Some providers had specialised in delivering ESOL programmes over a number of years, including work-focused ESOL, while for others, it was a relatively new curriculum area. Only some of the providers had previous experience of working with Jobcentre Plus customers.

Geographically, the ESOL Pilot covered all 11 London boroughs in the CSP areas. However, there appeared to be a significant degree of overlap in certain boroughs, with six Pilot providers working in Hackney, five in each of Newham and Tower Hamlets and two in Ealing. Some respondents reported that they felt this had led to a certain degree of duplication of effort and competition between providers.

In the initial round of interviews, providers indicated that they were taking into account the nature of the local labour markets when designing the work-focused elements of the Pilot programmes. The main employment sectors being targeted for job outcomes were:

- health and social care;
- childcare;
- security;
- hospitality and catering;
- retail;
- customer service and cleaning.

## 2.4 Partnership working

Partnership working was a distinctive feature of the ESOL Pilot, both at the operational and strategic levels, and was generally viewed as crucial to successful achievement of its outcomes:

*'I think very important. I think without partnerships there was no way you make a Pilot like this successful. There's only so much one organisation can do really.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

---

<sup>7</sup> During the second year of the Pilot, one contracted organisation went out of business. In order that their learners could continue to receive support from the Pilot, contract variations were given to another provider to enable them to take these learners into account. The learners were also given the contact details of other Pilot providers.

### 2.4.1 Community-based partnerships

Most of the providers were working in partnership with other organisations to deliver the Pilot outcomes: these were either organised through formally sub-contracted arrangements or service level agreements (SLAs). In a few cases, providers had no subcontractors or formal partners but directly delivered all the Pilot provision themselves. The majority of subcontractors/formal partners were community-based organisations with a history of working with local BME communities and of delivering ESOL or employability training. They were, therefore, invited to participate in delivery, because of their existing strong links and track record of service delivery in the Pilot areas. In addition, all the providers reported that they were relying, to some extent, on a range of informal partners and networks for referrals to the Pilot, such as schools, children's centres, housing associations, and community groups.

On the whole, these arrangements were reported to have worked well on both sides. One Pilot provider considered the role of both contracted and non-contracted delivery partners as integral to both recruitment and delivery:

*'...I think partners are an integral part of this Pilot. Without partners it would be impossible... some partners help us out with referrals, others with venues.'*

(Project Manager, West London)

Partner organisations could gain benefits from their involvement in the Pilot too. For example, in exchange for supplying a venue for the Pilot, partner organisations such as children's centres would benefit in turn by having more people use their services. However, some Pilot providers reported that the management of partnership arrangements and contracts could be time-consuming and challenging. In some cases, there had been problems with partners/subcontractors over issues such as quality assurance, health and safety and the reliable collection of management information (MI) data. One Pilot provider noted that there had been difficulties in sharing information between organisations because of data protection issues and because of IT/information systems not being compatible. It was recognised that some of these problems could have been due to poor communication with partners and providers' own lack of experience in managing contracts of this kind. As one project manager reflected, they had learnt a great deal from working with their community-based partners:

*'Our relationship, working with this sort of provider, we've learned a lot...in terms of the needs of the smaller community organisations and, possibly, what we would do different...would be more support at grass-root level rather than just having a strategic overview.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

### 2.4.2 Strategic-level partnerships

Partnership working was also an important element of the Pilot at the more strategic level during the planning, design stages and overseeing the operational phases of the Pilot. As already discussed, various key stakeholders were involved, including the DWP as funders, Jobcentre Plus, the SFA as commissioners and contract managers, as well as the East and Southeast London and West London CSPs.

Although Jobcentre Plus customers were eligible to take part in the programme, there was some difference of opinion among stakeholders as to whether they should have been a key target group for the Pilot. Some felt that the provision should have been focused more on harder-to-reach groups, such as the partners of benefit claimants or of low-paid workers. In practice, providers who already had established relationships with Jobcentre Plus were able to make use of Jobcentre Plus for

referrals. Other providers did not have these links or felt that they received inappropriate referrals from Jobcentre Plus:

*'...there's a very patchy take-up of the information required for successful referral by Jobcentre Plus to us and it's been a significant problem for us...dealing with inappropriate referrals... someone who shouldn't have ever been offered the programme in the first place, people who are not parents...'*

(Project Manager, East London)

It was acknowledged by some stakeholders and providers that the range of strategic partners involved in the Pilot had perhaps contributed to a degree of confusion about its priorities and sense of direction. For example, the relationship between the SFA and some providers in both East and West London was reported to have become strained by the many changes that were made to evidence requirements and other variations to contract arrangements. The account management of the ESOL Pilot was affected by the re-organisation of staff following the closure of the LSC and the establishment of the SFA, which became effective on 1 April 2010. At this time, the providers were allocated different account managers. Some providers felt that there was a lack of consistency in the way the Pilot was managed and this, in turn, affected their relationships with their subcontracted partners:

*'I think, a lot of times, even our relationship with our partners has been hindered a lot because of this miscommunication with the SFA and, working with smaller partners, it seems like, because we're the main contract holders, that we're changing the goal posts, as and when it suits us, which is not the case at all. In those terms, the consistency of some of the messages that are coming through hasn't really been appropriate.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

According to some stakeholders, the complex management structure of the Pilot and confusion about its priorities had led to many of the CSP boroughs becoming distanced from it over time. As one key stakeholder reflected:

*'... [the] boroughs don't own it, they don't look at it, they don't understand it, it cannot integrate with anything else they're doing.'*

(Stakeholder)

One illustration of this lack of integration with other CSP activities relates to the role of Single Points of Access (SPAs), which have been a significant feature of the East and Southeast London CSP. SPAs were developed to provide intensive support to low-income and workless families in the area to facilitate a shift into work. In the East and Southeast London CSP boroughs, the SPAs are responsible for co-ordinating support for unemployed people in their area: they assess client needs and refer on to local training providers, as appropriate. In East and Southeast London, an agreement was put in place at the start of the Pilot that the SPAs were supposed to contribute 50 per cent of the referrals. However, as the Pilot developed and moved away from the CSPs, this seemed to have a knock-on effect on the work with other CSP services. Providers working in East and Southeast London reported that the SPAs had not proved very useful in terms of recruitment, with only a small number of referrals coming through this route. When asked why this aspect of the Pilot partnership had not worked well, one provider commented:

*'I think it was politics, lack of funding...people not speaking to each other, lack of communication caused the problem...'*

(Project Manager, East London)



By contrast, a partnership initiative designed to offer support to the ESOL providers, through the LLU+ based at London South Bank University, was considered to be more successful.<sup>8</sup> The support workshops organised by LLU+ for providers helped to dispel some of the underlying tensions that arose from the providers and their partners operating in competition with each other, both within the ESOL Pilot and externally, as they competed for diminishing sector resources. This tension was seen, for example, in a reluctance to share materials such as pro formas. The providers and contracted partners felt that the work with LLU+ had brought them closer together, enabled networking and sharing of information, good practice and ideas:

*'...we've got a team of three tutors and they have all consistently felt that their visits to the LLU+ to network with other tutors and to meet people from other organisations doing a similar thing have been very attractive and interesting.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

The only criticism made of these workshops was that they had not been brought in earlier in the Pilot<sup>9</sup> and some partners felt there was little flexibility in terms of dates and venues.

---

<sup>8</sup> LLU+ is a national consultancy and professional development centre for staff working in the areas of literacy, numeracy, dyslexia, family learning and ESOL.

<sup>9</sup> Delays in the award of the support contract were caused as it was not possible for the (then) LSC to manage the tendering process. Extended contract negotiations took place between the LSC and the London Development Agency to allow a transfer of funding to enable a suitable procurement process.

# 3 Recruitment and profile of Pilot participants

This chapter details the various strategies that providers used to recruit potential participants. It describes the profile of the participants drawing on providers' descriptions of their participants. Finally, it discusses some of the eligibility issues that arose over the course of the project.

## 3.1 Recruitment strategies

Providers used a range of strategies to reach out to, engage and recruit eligible participants. Most providers had employed at least one person with sole responsibility for outreach and recruitment, but this is not to say that other members of staff were not also involved in recruitment and outreach services. As the following examples illustrate, marketing and recruitment were ongoing processes throughout the life of each project:

*'We are constantly out there recruiting. We are constantly on the phones; we're constantly in the community. We've never, in all honesty, been at a point on the programme where we can say, okay, we can just concentrate on something else now for a week, because the numbers are already filled. It's constant. Up until the day the course starts we are constantly recruiting.'*

(Project Worker, West London)

However, a few providers did not need to market their provision as widely, because they already had a well-established track record of offering English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision.

The main recruitment strategies used by providers fell broadly into two categories: outreach and networking; and referrals from other agencies. These are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

### 3.1.1 Community outreach and networking

Most providers used marketing materials such as leaflets, flyers or posters to advertise the course in venues where parents were most likely to visit. These venues included local schools, libraries, GP surgeries, children's centres, youth and other community centres, Citizen Advice Bureaux, religious establishments, and hospitals. The majority of providers used such material as a first step towards reaching out to eligible parents, particularly through schools. Most found that face-to-face contact with parents was a more effective way of engaging them than simply passing on leaflets for them to read. A few providers pointed out that face-to-face contact worked better because of the language and literacy barriers faced by parents with ESOL needs:

*'I've got about...maybe 30-something people now on that particular list, just from going out to three schools. We sent leaflets out but the thing is, again, it's the reading. Even though on the leaflet you can see the languages are on the back, they'll still put it down, that's what I've found, so I have to go physically, stand out there...and say, "this is what's happening", and speak to them a bit more. They prefer the person-to-person contact, I've found.'*

(Project Worker, West London)

## 18 Recruitment and profile of Pilot participants

---

Successful recruitment through schools could often mean the whole school being involved, according to some providers. Once the links had been established, providers would give leaflets to children to pass on to their parents, organise events for teachers and parents or attend parents' evenings.

Networking more widely in the local area was another popular means of recruiting people to the Pilot. It meant that providers were able to take advantage of their social capital, including past and current learners and partners in the community. Community organisations that proved to be useful for referrals included housing associations, refugee forum groups, youth and community centres, religious and educational organisations, and also police community support officers. For example, one provider was able to recruit many of their participants through a mail-out carried out by a housing association to all its clients. Another provider was able to target participants through a youth centre where outreach workers could point them to their eligible clients. A few providers made use of links with local colleges in order to recruit learners who had completed Entry 1 or Entry 2 ESOL.

Such community-focused approaches to recruitment, however, usually required a dedicated marketing and outreach team. Some providers had these teams in place earlier on in the Pilot, whilst others found 'invaluable' the contribution of outreach and employability workers that they had employed towards the second half of the project to help them hit their recruitment targets.

Some providers considered that their flexibility in organising venues and mobilising staff according to the participants' needs was to their advantage.

*'I think also we've been successful in recruitment because we're quite flexible in terms of our classes and staff as well, so we have morning and afternoon classes, that could fit around childcare.'*

(Project Worker, East London)

Another reason given by providers for proactively raising the profile of the Pilot among partners was the fact that it was in competition with other similar provision in the Pilot areas:

*'It's just raising the profile; there are a lot of different programmes that are available, or there have been up until now, a lot of programmes that have been available for people who have ESOL. And to people who give advice and guidance, unless they're closely linked to it, they don't know what the differences are.'*

(Project Worker, East London)

As the ESOL programme became more established in the Pilot areas, word of mouth became another effective form of recruitment, and it was not uncommon for participants to recommend the course to friends and family.

Finally, it is interesting to note that, for some of the providers, the 'harder-to-reach' individuals who were the key target group for the Pilot were different from their usual type of participant. Therefore, these community outreach methods of recruitment were a new departure for them:

*'The training providers have recruited through people coming through their training programmes, and people coming through the door who are...already engaged with that process, they're likely to have higher skills and so they're a different type of candidate. The people that we are recruiting are very much in the community, women's groups, low skilled, never worked, possible poorer English level, etc.'*

(Project Manager, West London)

### 3.1.2 Referrals from other agencies

Referrals to the Pilot also came from other organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus and the Single Points of Access (SPAs) based in East and Southeast London. However, over the course of the project, these proved to be a less fruitful means of recruiting participants, compared with community outreach and networking. Jobcentre Plus was not originally intended to be a source of referrals when this Pilot was set up, and few providers relied on their links with Jobcentre Plus to recruit their participants. Despite the difference in target groups, some providers had the perception that the Pilot was ‘not competing well’ with other, more established, ESOL provision:

*‘ESOL for parents is not something that flags up on the advisers’ systems particularly. If they are going to refer for an ESOL provision, it will be the mainstream ESOL programme... A lot of learners who might access this programme might prefer to go to a programme that is simply learning the language, without an employability outcome.’*

(Project Manager, West London)

Most of those who had received referrals from Jobcentre Plus had done so because they already had a good ongoing relationship with the organisation, for example because they also held contracts to deliver ESOL to Jobcentre Plus claimants. One provider had recruited around 70 per cent of their participants through this route:

*‘What will happen is they’ll ring up for an ESOL provision, ask about the timings and stuff and in the course of that discussion [names project worker] will say, well, actually we’ve got a more flexible programme; if your client’s a parent, they can come on that one.’*

(Project Manager, East London)

In contrast, the SPAs, operational in East and Southeast London, were initially intended to provide 50 per cent of the Pilot’s referrals in the East and Southeast London City Strategy Pathfinder (CSP) area. However, many providers reported that they had not made much use of the SPAs and some who did reported that the experience had not been very satisfactory:

*‘[One SPA] did have meetings every month which were too much to attend and then the meetings seem to have completely disappeared so I don’t know what’s happened there. [Another SPA] is very much driven by us getting in contact with them.’*

(Project Manager, East London)

## 3.2 Profile of Pilot participants

Information about the profile of the Pilot participants presented here is based on data gathered during the interviews with the providers.

The vast majority of participants were not employed at enrolment to the programme and this corresponded with the main target group for the Pilot, which was people not in paid work (although providers were permitted to recruit a small percentage of employed workers). According to the providers, those participants in employment were mainly working in part-time, low-skilled jobs:

*‘It would be a handful of women that have some sort of casual work...that wanted to come to our course, with the aspiration that, given the opportunity, [they] could possibly get a better job.’*

(Project Manager, East London)

Many providers were not aware whether or not their participants were in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Income Support (IS) or other work-related benefits, since they were not required to record this information. It was mainly those providers who recruited via Jobcentre Plus referrals who were aware of a large number of recruits that fell into this category.

### 3.2.1 Language, education and employment history

The Pilot was designed to target people with low levels of English language skills, mainly at pre-entry or entry level. However, within this cohort many providers, and particularly their tutors, described a very diverse group of participants in terms of ESOL levels and education and employment history. Particularly at pre-entry level, there were some who had no previous educational experience and could not read or write in any language, whilst there were others who could not speak English but were highly literate in their own language. Also there were participants who could speak English fairly well but had no written skills. The pre-entry and entry-level group also contained some individuals with university degrees and who had worked in professional occupations in their countries of origin.

However, according to provider accounts, it was more common for participants to have no previous work experience, as in the case of many women with caring responsibilities. One provider profiled a typical participant as follows:

*'They may have come to the UK at a young age, maybe to come and join a spouse...They take on the role of maybe a responsible person at home for the family – the wife-role. So therefore it doesn't give them a lot of time to come to the UK and really study...The majority of them haven't got qualifications;...the ages range probably from about 30, maybe until about 45. And the majority of our learners, I would say that they're either Bengali or Pakistani or African. We've had a few Eastern Europeans as well.'*

(Project Worker, East London)

### 3.2.2 Provider views of participants' barriers to employment

According to providers, the main employment barriers faced by Pilot participants were as follows:

- Low levels of spoken and/or written English (as might be expected for a programme of this type).
- Lack of vocational skills.
- Illiteracy in mother tongue.
- Lack of recent work experience, particularly in the UK labour market.
- Lack of appropriate qualifications and lack of recognition of overseas qualifications.

It is not surprising, therefore, how many participants were reported by providers to lack confidence in their English language and employment skills:

*'Their [English] levels are low. As far as they're concerned, they don't feel confident of going out there and talking to an employer, or going into employment.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

Lack of access to suitable childcare was also an issue for many participants, childcare that was not only available at the right times and in the right location but also that met the parents' quality, religious and cultural expectations. Since the vast majority of participants were parents and particularly mothers of young children, childcare affordability and availability were important factors to be taken into account in facilitating their access to employment:

*'Parents come because they want to improve their English and the challenge has been that a lot of those parents aren't particularly interested in going into work and that might be for a variety of reasons. It might be because they've got young children and childcare is difficult, as I have found to be the case. It's expensive and it's not very flexible so that's an issue.'*

(Project Manager, West London)

Providers found that securing jobs for those with no or little work experience presented a particular challenge:

*'For some of these ladies it will be their first job so obviously they've got no retail experience or they've got no experience working within a school environment, or the kitchen environment. They've got kitchen environment experience but that's from home, but not at a professional level.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

They further pointed out that even for low-level jobs, the literacy levels required by employers were often too high, considering the rate of progress that could be made by people with low levels of English, and that the perceptions of some employers, particularly around adhering to legislation may not be accurate:

*'It's the low level of English, the lack, sometimes, of written English. A lot of employers want reading and writing to Entry Level 3, because that's the requirement for Health and Safety, that they can read all the notices and understand everything that's said, and that's a barrier, a big barrier.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

Lack of work experience and low levels of English were particularly serious barriers within a competitive labour market:

*'I think, generally, there's a lot of competition for work, a huge amount of competition for work, and they come near the bottom of the pile, because they don't speak good English, because they don't have advanced work skills and they're the last people to get the jobs, really.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

The experience of providers was also that the number and age of their participants' children played an important role in their employment decisions. Providers themselves clearly considered women with pre-school age children to be less likely to seek employment. The provision for this group was, therefore, considered to 'pay dividends' in the longer rather than the shorter term. On the other hand, participants, who were flexible regarding working hours, types of jobs and travel to work distances, had better chances to secure employment, according to providers:

*'The labour market we're in flexibility is key, and one thing these people don't have is flexibility.'*

(Project Manager, West London)

Although 'flexible' participants were easier to be placed in sustainable jobs from the providers' point of view, this view of the 'good worker' disregarded the complex barriers and caring responsibilities of these individuals. These will be further explored in Chapter 5, from the participant perspective.

Finally, another issue was the limited availability of ESOL provision in general at pre-entry level, which was considered likely to affect the most disadvantaged participants, once they completed the programme. As one provider admitted, low-level ESOL learners were not an 'attractive' group to providers:

*'Pre-entry learners are no longer attractive to anyone because now obviously it's a lot more outcome based in jobs so pre-entry learners are the hardest to help and the furthest away from the labour market in most instances. So because of that we've had a lot of people coming to this programme because they can't find any other provision.'*

(Project Worker, East London)

### 3.3 Eligibility issues

Eligible participants were those who were parents (though some providers would also accept a small number of non-parents); claiming benefits or tax credits; were residents; had the right to work in the UK; and resided within the designated catchment areas. In order to establish and confirm eligibility, most providers would require prospective participants to produce relevant paperwork such as an award letter for the child benefit or tax credits, passport, and/or national insurance numbers. Most providers would request some proof of eligibility, rather than relying on self-declaration of status.

Some providers had to turn away parents with an ESOL need but who could not provide sufficient evidence of their entitlement to public funding, such as those who came within the category of 'no recourse to public funds':

*'A lot of them came and within the process of registration we had to tell them that they...don't have specific evidence for recourse to public funds because all their documents are either their husbands' or with the Home Office. A lot of their husbands don't give passports to them in that situation.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

In addition to the formal selection criteria, there were providers who were using their own screening process to recruit participants who were closer to the labour market as well as those who needed more support. This was particularly the case in later stages of the Pilot, when providers were more focused on achieving their target employment outcomes. One provider described how, as a result of their experience with earlier participants, they had started screening for those committed to paid work from the outset:

*'...we'd always talk to them about work and what they'd like to do. Inevitably, everyone says, yes, they'd love to work, so we'd take them on the course, and then realise eight weeks down the line that actually they don't want to work at all. So we are now asking much more about their background in work, and how they would find work, and so we are getting a little bit more commitment out of the people that we take on now.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

Some providers explained how they attempted to achieve the difficult balancing act of addressing the needs of the hardest-to-help groups, while at the same time improving the project's employability outcomes:

*'The IAG advisor would be the first point of contact, they will carry out a one to one...so we had then to do a balance where, yes out of the ten at least five we need to select who are wanting a job. And the other five, okay, fair enough put them on a programme, they'll get some support, bring them a bit of confidence but we know that they won't get a job.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

## 4 Provider approaches to project delivery

This chapter considers the overall approach to project delivery which was adopted by the providers, considering in more detail aspects such as: course structure and timing; the curriculum and main project activities. It also explores the main types of support offered to participants, including childcare support.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the providers contracted to deliver the Pilot formed a heterogeneous group, (including training providers, Further Education (FE) colleges and a range of other organisations), with different organisational structures, cultures and ways of working. In addition, the overall Pilot framework allowed the providers considerable autonomy in the way they designed and delivered their individual English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes.

The reason for this ‘black box’ approach was to give providers the flexibility to adapt their provision to the specific needs of the participants (for example in terms of course location and timing) and it was hoped that this freedom would generate innovative approaches. However, despite organisational differences and the flexibility of the Pilot design, the research has indicated that providers adopted a broadly similar approach to working with the client group across the different providers and Pilot sites. The following sections consider different aspects of the Pilot provision, highlighting key areas of similarity and difference.

### 4.1 Course length and timing

Most providers were offering a series of short, flexible courses of varying weeks’ duration, although the most common pattern was to deliver courses of 10–15 weeks’ duration. Hours of attendance also varied, depending on individual learning need, with most participants having the option of attending for up to 16 hours per week, so that those on benefits such as Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) would not be adversely affected.

Providers emphasised the importance of flexibility for the client group, as this approach was more suitable to the needs of adult learners who had typically not been engaged in formal learning for many years. They were also careful to ensure that participants could attend at times which fitted in around school hours and other family responsibilities:

*‘...we wanted to give as broad a range as possible of time commitments...there are different versions, so that people could give either a longer period of time or a shorter period of time, to make it attractive to fit in with their other commitments.’*

(Project Manager, West London)

However, questions were raised by some project staff about the relatively short length of the courses and how appropriate this was for the client group, given the employment targets, particularly those who were furthest away from the labour market and had very basic levels of English. Such short, work-focused interventions could be more appropriate to learners at the higher end of the ‘job-ready’ spectrum. Many respondents commented that they did not consider the courses long enough to achieve the Pilot employment outcomes and successfully move these participants into employment.



*'The course should be much longer and there should be more time because it feels like the course has just started and now it finishes in a few weeks and I feel some of them just need more and more practice...'*

(ESOL tutor, East London)

Some providers anticipated that with a shorter course there would be a greater need for aftercare and ongoing employability support. Some providers thought that the ESOL Pilot would be the first step on the 'journey' towards employment for these participants: it would provide a stepping stone to further learning.

### 4.2 Project location

Most of the project delivery was taking place in a wide range of community venues, such as schools, children's centres, community centres, libraries etc. For many participants, this was a first step back into the education system after many years. The use of these settings was designed to encourage participation as it was thought more likely that participants would attend a venue which was 'adult-friendly' and reasonably close to their homes. Another advantage to using community-based venues was easier access to on-site crèche facilities for participants with pre-school age children. For this reason, schools and children's centres were a particularly popular choice for the location of the Pilot programmes:

*'The best learning we had was a children's centre. It was ideal for running this type of thing. So they dropped the children off to the school, which was next door to the children's centre, and then they'd come in to the children's centre at 9:15 and they were ready to start. And then the crèche is there for the younger children.'*

(Project manager, East London)

From a different perspective, however, the location of provision within community settings familiar to the participants could also be seen as a disadvantage, in that it could reinforce the reluctance of many of the participants to move outside the 'comfort zone' of their local communities in order to find employment. According to providers, many participants (especially women with young children) wanted to find work which was also close to their homes, such as in a local school or playgroup. This was a reasonable aspiration at the personal level: however, it could be unrealistic within the context of the local labour market, since there was a limit to the numbers of such jobs available:

*'One of the things that we have found across the board almost that the parents had unachievable expectations of the type of job they would like to do. They all want to be teaching assistants...every single one of them. And they only want to work school hours and they want to work...at their child's school and it has to be financially worthwhile. Now, I know for every teaching assistant post in the area, there's hundreds of applicants... So that was a bit of a hurdle to get over.'*

(Project manager, West London)

One of the tasks for providers, therefore, was to make participants more aware of local labour market conditions and to encourage them to consider moving beyond their immediate localities in order to access a wider range of jobs. However, providers found this was difficult to achieve within the relatively short timescale of the Pilot programmes.

## 4.3 Curriculum design and course activities

### 4.3.1 Work-focused language training

The programmes across all the Pilot sites based the course curriculum on the key areas of English language development and employability skills. All providers reported that they had, therefore, designed the ESOL elements of the programme to include a strong focus on employability and the workplace, in line with the overarching aims of the Pilot. For example, there was a broadly similar focus on the kind of language and vocabulary useful for developing ‘generic’ employability skills, such as writing curriculum vitae (CVs) and letters of application.

Some programmes offered IT skills such as word-processing, email and use of the internet alongside ESOL. This proved to be very popular with participants and could also be a valuable means of improving their ability to conduct their job search. One provider noted a higher rate of job starts among people who had undertaken combined ESOL and IT courses:

*‘One of the late additions which has been very successful has been combining an IT curriculum with the English. And if you look at the success rate of people from those courses – much, much higher than any of the other courses.’*

(Programme Manager, West London)

Some providers also included vocational language and terminology which related more specifically to the types of jobs that participants were more likely to access: for example, entry-level jobs in sectors such as health and social care, childcare, hospitality, catering and retail.

### 4.3.2 Employability skills and job-brokering

Providers used a range of strategies for supporting participants into employment. In most cases, the project teams had a staff member with a particular remit for offering one-to-one support to participants throughout their time on the programme: these workers were variously known as job coaches, employment brokers, or routeway brokers, depending on the organisation. There was some consistency across these roles; they were usually responsible for working with ‘job-ready’ individuals, to help them look for suitable job vacancies and prepare for interviews. They often took on an employer engagement role as well and organised work placements:

*‘We will do the employer liaison. We will call employers. We will set up the interviews. We will set up the work trials. We will set up placements for those who just want a taster of work...’*

(Project Worker, East London)

At some of the Pilot sites, local employers were invited to come and give talks to the participants about the types of jobs available in their organisations and some also gave information about volunteering opportunities.

Some providers (such as FE colleges or large private training providers) were able to draw on existing in-house staff teams to deliver this aspect of the programme. In very few cases, the job-brokering element of the programme was contracted out to another specialised agency/partner. One of these other organisations was a provider with experience of delivering employment programmes for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) clients, including pre-employment training linked to vacancies. One provider who had adopted this approach reported that the partnership had worked very well and had made a significant contribution to their successful job outcomes:

*'[The job brokers] worked alongside the employability teachers...who are part of our team. So you had a co-ordinated approach to the challenges of looking for work...and the best way around it.'*

(Project Manager, West London)

Many providers reported that they had organised a series of employability workshops, which provided a useful opportunity for participants to put their work-focused language skills into practice, for example, through writing up their CVs or taking part in mock interviews:

*'We do things like CVs, covering letters, application forms...so by the end, they'll have a full CV for applying for jobs and they practise their application forms.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

Some of the workshops would be 'thematic', focusing on the specific skills required in the particular vocational sectors popular with participants, such as childcare, health and social care or retail.

### 4.3.3 Work experience

Work placements and work experience were viewed by some providers as another important work-focused element of the programme, particularly for participants with little or no previous work experience:

*'We've got a company that we're working with...and our learners go on a two-week work placement with them, where they basically do the job and shadow someone else...it's good for their CV as well because some of these guys have got no work experience...It makes them a bit more attractive to employers.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

It was reported that, in a few instances, a work placement had led to a more sustainable job outcome. There was considerable variation among providers in terms of their approach to work placements: for some it was an embedded feature of the programme; others were more selective and only offered placements to participants considered to be 'job ready'. A few providers reported that they were not offering any work placements on their programme, explaining that there had been difficulties in persuading employers to take the participants on because their language skills were not good enough:

*'But I think it's very difficult when people don't speak the language to even find them a work placement. It's really difficult. I took some women, Kosovan and Bengali, up to the [care organisation] and we couldn't find any placements for them because their English wasn't good enough. They wouldn't accept them. They were going to do care work; they wouldn't accept them.'*

(Project Worker, East London)

Another provider said that it had been difficult to find work placements for parents with young children which were flexible enough to fit around their childcare responsibilities.

Voluntary work was viewed by some providers as a good alternative way for participants to gain experience and a better understanding of the workplace. One provider had found the local council to be a useful source of voluntary placements, for example as classroom assistants or events stewards.

### 4.3.4 Accreditation

Learners had the opportunity to take formal ESOL qualifications, if required, at some of the Pilot sites: these were more likely to be available at colleges or some of the provider organisations who offered accredited ESOL programmes on a regular basis. The most commonly cited form of accreditation was the City and Guilds Skills for Life Certificate at Entry Level or Level 1. However, formal accreditation was not generally seen as a key project outcome and it was more common for participants to receive an in-house certificate on completion of the course. As one provider pointed out, working to a qualification syllabus would be too restrictive and at odds with the flexible aims of the programme. Some providers were offering short vocationally-related qualifications, for example, in basic food hygiene, health and safety or customer service.

## 4.4 Participant support issues

Because of the multiple barriers faced by many of the Pilot participants (discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 5), they required various kinds of support, both to attend the programme and to help them into employment on completion.

Childcare was cited as a major issue throughout the Pilot, with most providers reporting that they had struggled to access sufficient funding to cover the childcare requirements of participants. It was reported that Pilot funding could not be spent on childcare and that providers would have to draw on existing funding streams for this. The rationale for this was that the Pilot participants should be encouraged to arrange childcare which would be appropriate for them as they moved into employment. There had been an initial expectation that the providers would be able to access Childcare Affordability Programme (CAP) funding for childcare expenses, but this was withdrawn in March 2009. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) subsequently made a new pot of childcare funding available when it became clear that, due to the re-focusing of funding, there was little childcare funding available, but providers pointed out that not all Pilot participants were eligible for this and, because of communication difficulties between the SFA and providers, not all providers had been aware of it:

*‘We had a small sum of money made available for childcare which we have not been able to access, because the criteria are very restricted and the application process so difficult. We haven’t been able to access a single penny of it, which is a shame. But also we were told about it very, very late in the day.’*

(Programme Manager, West London)

It is not surprising, therefore, that the childcare support provided varied considerably across the Pilot sites, usually depending on the venue used for the programme. The most popular solution adopted by providers was to locate the course in a children’s centre or community centre, where on-site crèche facilities were already available. Other alternatives included helping parents to find suitable childminders or nurseries, or hiring mobile crèche facilities – although these proved to be very expensive. It was also reported that some participants were making their own informal childcare arrangements with friends or family members.

Some providers, operating on multiple sites, reported that they had been able to offer free childcare to some of their participants, but not to others:

*‘That was a really big contentious issue, actually, with childcare. For example...in one of the centres, they’ve got an in-house crèche so that they were able to offer some crèche facility...In other areas, where childcare wasn’t really offered because of the location and the demographics, we’ve had to, unfortunately, take on parents that didn’t really have a childcare need, so mainly they were at school, which was a shame...’*

(Project manager, East London)

This comment highlights the fact that, in some Pilot areas, access to childcare became something of a ‘lottery’ depending on which centre the participants attended. This means that some parents, who were otherwise eligible, were denied access to the programme because suitable childcare was not available. For example, at one Pilot site it was reported that at least 60 prospective participants had not been able to enrol on the Pilot due to lack of childcare funding.

There was a general feeling among providers, and some community partners, that the project should have had an allocated budget for childcare support, particularly as parents were the main target group. In addition, some of the community-based partners, with very limited resources, had felt obliged to draw on their own reserves, rather than denying access to participants with childcare needs:

*‘So one of the issues was childcare – again, we would say that would be another big issue in terms of running something like this again. Childcare would have to be properly costed because it was costed at around £2,500 per partner agency, when it costs a lot more...So in the end...all of the agencies have had to dip into their own reserves to provide the childcare in order to meet the need.’*

(Provider partner, East London)

There were various other types of practical support offered to Pilot participants which included the following:

- **Travel costs**

Many participants required support for travel costs in order to be able to attend the programme. Most providers offered to pay these, although again, practice varied between different providers. For example, one provider routinely paid all their participants’ travel fares; another paid 90 per cent of the costs; a third provider issued participants with ‘Oyster’ cards for travelling on London Transport, which covered about 50 per cent of their travel. Some providers said they also paid for participants to travel to job interviews.

- **Benefits advice**

As previously discussed, many of the participants, although in receipt of benefits or tax credits, were not Jobcentre Plus customers. One respondent pointed out how important it was for these participants to understand what would happen to their benefits once they became employed. In a few cases, Pilot staff were given training in giving initial advice about benefits so they could offer information and guidance to people who had reached the stage of applying for jobs. It was emphasised, however, that that participants would be signposted to more specialised services, such as the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, if they required more in-depth support.

- In-work support

Although resources for this were limited, some providers stated that they tried to offer in-work support to participants who had progressed into work, as this would help to achieve a more sustainable job outcome. This usually consisted of tracking participants and staying in touch with them for a period of time after they had completed the programme:

*'...if they've found a job whilst they're here...we can keep in contact with them. So if...they've got problems with someone at work, we can address those issues and help them through them, which means they're likely to sustain - whereas when they're by themselves they just leave and think they've got nobody.'*

(Employer Engagement Manager, East London)

# 5 Participants' experiences of the Pilot

This chapter explores the Pilot from the participant perspective and presents a profile of the individuals interviewed during the evaluation. It explores their experiences and views of the programme, including how they found out about the Pilot, their reasons for enrolling and their levels of satisfaction. The chapter concludes with participant views on the ways in which the programme has helped them progress towards achievement of their future goals.

## 5.1 Profile of participants interviewed

A total of 102 participants were interviewed either in small groups or individually. Interviews took place at two points in time during the research, in the spring and autumn of 2010.

The key characteristics of the interview sample were as follows:

- The majority of the sample (around 75 per cent) were female.
- All respondents were of working age, with the majority in their 30s or 40s.
- The ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of respondents were very diverse and consisted mainly of people of Asian, African and Arabic origin from countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Morocco, Sri Lanka, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Sudan. There were also some respondents from Eastern European countries including Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Albania, Latvia and Kosovo as well as a smaller number of participants from countries within the European Economic Area including Portugal, Spain, and France.
- The length of time respondents had lived in the UK also varied widely, ranging from less than six months to ten or more years.
- Most of the respondents were parents (around 90 per cent).<sup>10</sup>
- Pilot respondents whose youngest child was of school age outnumbered those with pre-school age children, though both groups made up almost 80 per cent of the total sample.
- There was also a diverse range of backgrounds in terms of previous education and qualifications. One in four of those interviewed had no or very low formal qualifications whilst around 40 per cent had completed secondary school. A significant minority of the sample had studied at university and had degrees in subjects such as medicine, education, computing, business administration and accountancy.

---

<sup>10</sup> The original intention of the Pilot was that all participants should be parents, but there was a contract variation from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) which enabled some providers to recruit non-parents.

- Only one in five of the participants had never worked. Most respondents in the sample had had some form of previous work experience before coming to the UK and this included office administration, retail work, dressmaking, hairdressing, health and social care, teaching and translating. Some had also gained work experience since coming to the UK but this was mainly in low-skilled jobs, such as cleaning, factory work, van driving and work as care assistants or kitchen porters. Around 90 per cent of the total sample were unemployed; 43 per cent of participants in the second wave of interviews were Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Income Support (IS) claimants.
- Eight participants were interviewed twice, once during their course and then about six months after their course had ended. Ten participants in total, including the longitudinal ones, were interviewed after they had completed their course, while all the others were still attending their course at the time of interview.

## 5.2 Finding out about the Pilot and reasons for enrolling

The respondents had found out about the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Pilot through a number of different means. These included:

- Leaflets and posters in local libraries and other local services:

*'I was just looking for something to update on my skills...a course that I can afford, so then I went to the Citizen Bureau. I just found out that there is a leaflet and they had a phone number, so I called, just to check what was going on, and they said, yes, you can come...'*

(Male, Polish, 30s, West London)

- Advertisements in the local press:

*'I found it in the newspaper. There was an advert for the skills training, what they proposed, like a pre-ESOL class. So I just made a call and they asked me to come to the office, and afterwards I started the ESOL class.'*

(Female, Sri Lankan, 20s, West London)

- Word of mouth through friends or informal community networks:

*'I heard from a member of my group, so they let me know they were going to start a programme. Our Nepalese group.'*

(Female, Nepalese, 30s, East London)

- Through existing contacts with providers:

*'I told [the provider] I wanted more learning for English...that's why they called me because I was interested in more English.'*

(Female, Bangladeshi, 20s, West London)

- Referrals from Jobcentre Plus:

*'I just applied through the Jobcentre, Jobseeker's and they told me that I had to find work and because my English it not very good they sent me to do a test here and they agreed that I can start to study here in the college.'*

(Male, Sri Lankan, 40s, West London)



Other respondents reported that they had heard about the Pilot through their children's school, a children's centre or other community organisation.

The two most important reasons given by respondents for enrolling on the programme were to improve their English, and to find work. In many cases, participants attached equal weight to both aspirations:

*'The main reason was to improve my English, and find a job, because I was thinking about it, because my kid was getting older, growing up and I was alone, by myself, so if I have learnt English, I could get a job, and a very good one.'*

(Female, Bangladeshi, 40s, East London)

For some participants, improving their IT skills was also a priority:

*'...why I go for IT course, because there is a beginner course. I don't know even how to switch off the computer...I don't know how to do this search of work, I'm sorry...at least I know now how to use mouse...what else they teach me? Messages – how to send them out...emails.'*

Many participants also wanted to improve their English in order to help their children with school work and to communicate better with their children's teachers:

*'My English, more to speak English because I didn't speak very well. A lot of problems when you go to the schools to speak with the teachers about your child, you don't understand what she's saying to you.'*

(Female, Lithuanian, 20s, East London)

A typical comment made by many parents was that they welcomed the opportunity to do some training now that their children had reached school age:

*'Now that my son is going to school full-time I have a chance to learn.'*

The financial benefits of having a job could also play an important role in people's decisions to engage with the Pilot:

*'I want to work in the future...and now only my husband works, less money, so I want more money for my family...'*

(Female, Chinese, 30s, East London)

The 'no fees' policy of the Pilot meant that for most participants these courses were very attractive, particularly as other provision available locally could be expensive:

*'I wanted to improve my English before I start to look for a job. So, it was a good opportunity for me to find these ESOL classes, and by the way, it was free, so it's another reason because I have searched for ESOL classes, something like that, and they are very expensive.'*

(Female, French, 20s, West London)

Others wanted to improve their English so that they could progress to vocational training:

*'I started the course because my spelling's quite poor. I wanted to improve my spelling because I want to take a course, plumbing or something.'*

(Male, Portuguese, 30s, West London)

Finally, for a minority of participants, who were employed at the time of attending the course, the desire to improve their performance at work was a motivating factor:

*'I know I can communicate, but, still, I feel like I lack some confidence of fluency when communicating. Even at work I have to deal with some of the visitors, I'm working with the elderly. And I don't feel that confident, you know what I mean? So just to learn more.'*

(Female, Nepalese, 20s, East London)

### 5.3 Barriers to employment

Respondents were asked what they considered to be the barriers they were facing in finding employment. The main barriers referred to by participants in the sample covered a similar range to those identified by providers (and discussed in Chapter 3). They included: low levels of spoken and written English; lack of confidence; childcare responsibilities; lack of qualifications or relevant UK work experience; and health problems and disabilities. The following examples and individual case studies illustrate in more detail some of the difficulties that participants could encounter in their journey towards the labour market.

Lack of previous work experience and low self-confidence could be the main issues facing many participants. The following case study presents a typical example.

H. was a 54-year-old Pakistani lady with a fairly good level of spoken English. However, she was timid and spoke very quietly. She had school leaver qualifications from Pakistan. She had been in the UK for 33 years and had two grown-up children. She had never worked, either in England or in Pakistan.

In the seventies, shortly after she arrived in the UK she had attended evening English classes. Last year she did a computer course at her local college.

She said she was attending the ESOL Pilot because she 'had to find a job'. She said she would really like to do a work placement because she knew she needed to gain experience and improve her confidence, as she has never worked before.

However, even those from more professional backgrounds had to have their qualifications recognised in the UK if they wanted to resume their careers.

S. was a woman in her 30s from Turkmenistan (part of the former Soviet Union). She had come to the UK nine years ago with her English husband, but was now divorced and a single parent with a five-year-old child.

She had trained as a doctor in her country of origin and was keen to continue practising medicine in the UK. However, the process for gaining recognition of her qualifications and for being accepted onto the General Medical Council's register was lengthy and expensive and she did not know where she could go for financial support for this. One of the steps involved was to pass the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam, which would demonstrate that she had high levels of competence in both spoken and written English.

She was finding the ESOL course useful in improving her English and offering flexible hours to fit in with childcare needs.

As already discussed, finding appropriate childcare presented a significant barrier for many participants and could make the difference between whether they were able to attend the course or not.

N. was a 39-year-old woman from Nigeria, with four young children aged one, two, eight and nine years old. Her husband did not live in the UK, so she was effectively a single parent. She had a fashion degree from Nigeria and had previously been self-employed as a dressmaker. She was a care assistant in the UK for three years before she had her youngest two children.

She saw a leaflet for the course in her local library and called to enquire, as she specifically wanted help to find a job. She said that she very much wanted to work so she could improve her English, meet new people and support her children.

She wanted to find a job working with children, either as a teaching assistant or childcare worker in a nursery. However, she did not know where to begin to look for childcare support. She was not being offered payment for childcare expenses through the Pilot, although a job coach was helping her to look for appropriate childcare. N. was very concerned she would not be able to continue with the course if she could not find any childcare.

For participants with small children, the cost of childcare could act as a disincentive to finding work. One individual, when asked if she would look for work on completion of the course, responded:

*'Yes, but my baby is little and it's very expensive in childcare.'*

(Female, Brazilian, 30s, East London)

Some participants were apprehensive about the prospect of losing their benefits if they moved into the labour market. One respondent felt she needed advice about this:

*'It is a big problem because how much money do I need? I went to the Jobcentre to discuss my situation. If I get a job, how much money should I pay for my rent, tax, blah, blah, lots of things.'*

(Female, Lithuanian, 40s, East London)

There could also be cultural norms that discouraged women's participation in the labour market:

*'Our religion is not ladies going to work, yes, strictly. That's why I stay at home at times, and not work.'*

(Female, Indian, 30s, East London)

Some respondents referred to health-related issues which had impeded previous attempts to find work, such as diabetes, high blood pressure or back problems. The following story provides a typical example:

A. was a 38-year-old man from Afghanistan, who had been in the UK for nine years. He was father to a four-month-old baby who was looked after by his wife. He had been a medical student in his home country, but had been unable to finish the course.

Since coming to the UK, he had worked in various shops and for a large supermarket chain until he had an accident, which left him with amnesia, epilepsy and back pain. Unable to perform his duties any more, he was forced to leave his job. He stressed that his English had been much better before he had his accident. He had struggled to recover for a while, but now felt much better and keen to work again, preferably by continuing to work in retail.

He was very positive about the course and was finding it beneficial in developing his jobsearch skills, particularly filling in application forms, making phone calls and preparing his CV for the first time.

## 5.4 Participant experiences and views of the Pilot

The participants in the sample confirmed that the main activities they had been engaged in on the programme were improving their English language and employability skills. Many talked about the jobsearch activities they had undertaken, such as: developing IT skills, curriculum vitae (CV) writing, application forms, interview techniques, jobsearch practice and self-presentation. Generally speaking, respondents expressed satisfaction with their experience of the Pilot programme and valued the opportunity to develop their language, employability and IT skills.

The majority of participants interviewed had very positive comments about their tutors. They would often describe them as 'nice', 'friendly', 'kind', and 'helpful'.

*'I was very happy and my teacher was very good. We enjoyed the class.'*

(Female, Mauritian, 30s, West London)

Many participants felt that the course had helped them improve their English. It had also given them the opportunity to speak and practise English as for many, English was not a language spoken at home or among their social networks.

*'We are practising together and we are speaking together, which is helpful. Because we not speaking at home; we are speaking here together, and that's why we can speak now a little bit English.'*

(Female, Hungarian, 50s, East London)

*'Talking is very important because my friends is all Bulgarian and we're talking all in Bulgarian, but when you meet the other people you have to talk in English, and it's very important talking.'*

(Female, Bulgarian, 30s, East London)

Some respondents expressed their approval of the work-focused aspects of the programme, such as CV preparation and mock interviews, which they felt had improved their chances of competing in the labour market:

*'I'm always scared at interviews. And I think now I'm feeling a bit, okay, it's an interview, okay it will go...I'm not that scared nowadays. I think that is a plus point.'*

(Female, Nepalese, 20s, East London)

*'Someone came to the class to talk about how to write a CV and to talk about employment, how we have to attend an interview and everything like that... It was nice because sometimes it's useful to know how to write a CV. In each country a CV is different.'*

(Female, French, 20s, West London)

Some respondents indicated that they had been offered work placements while on the programme. These included work experience in retail, kitchen work, office work, care work and charity shops. These respondents said they welcomed the opportunity of work placements as a chance to gain experience of the workplace and practise their English. One respondent expressed her appreciation of what she had learnt from her work experience in the care sector:

*'For me, really, I enjoyed when we worked with the people who need help and how to help them which I didn't know before. So when I learned how it worked, I was interested in it.'*

Another had benefited from a four-week placement in a charity shop:

*'Last month I worked at the British Heart Foundation. I was working in the shop. Four weeks working and coming to college...it was good.'*

Some individuals said they were expecting to undertake ESOL qualifications as part of the programme. Where participants were being offered the opportunity to take a formal qualification, they generally said they valued this as providing evidence of what they had achieved on the programme.

The flexible timing of the programmes designed to fit in with school hours was obviously a bonus for some parents:

*'It is really good; for me it's really good. The teachers are nice, the place is nice, it's easy to come here because it's between school hours so I don't have to worry about my son. When he's finished school I can pick him up easily, it's not a problem...'*

(Female, Indian, 30s, East London)

Equally, not having to pay for the course was an attractive element of the programme for those aware of the cost of such provision elsewhere:

*'It is very good because it's free, because so many people, if they don't work, they can't pay; if it's free it's really useful for them.'*

(Female, Indian, 30s, East London)

The cost of the provision was a worry for those considering taking up further ESOL provision:

*'I like this course because you learn about English. It's very nice. Now, it's finishing and I don't know if I can afford to pay for the next round.'*

(Female, Somali, 30s, East London)

There was also, however, some dissatisfaction regarding certain aspects of the Pilot. Quite a few of the participants said that the course was too short for them to improve their English sufficiently to seek employment:

*'We need to more learn this one. We need more class; otherwise we can't get anything, any job, anywhere. I feel because I need more learn, then we can do something.'*

(Female, Bangladeshi, 20s, East London)

Some participants were unhappy about learning in mixed ability classes: for some of them, the course content was pitched at too high a level, while for others the pace of the sessions was too slow. In particular, individuals, at the more advanced end of the spectrum, found that the mixed levels classes stalled their progress:

*'My disappointment is on the one side it was nice to help each other, but sometimes you feel maybe because we were all mixed in the same class, some people know English very well, some people didn't know anything in English. I think I was in the middle, but I think for the people who know English very well, it was quite boring for them. They spent all their time helping the others but they didn't improve their English more than that.'*

(Female, French, 20s, West London)

Many respondents were of the opinion that it would have been better to divide the classes by language level and ability, where possible:

*'The problem is that [the tutor] has got too many different levels at the same time, so that the class contains people from Level 1, 2 and 3.'*

## 5.5 Future plans/outcomes since completing the Pilot

In most cases respondents said they were keen to find work and, in this respect, had found the work-focused elements of the programme very useful. Future job plans were very varied and included work in different sectors, such as retail, administration, health and social care and childcare. As providers had indicated, many women participants expressed an interest in finding employment in the field of childcare, for example, as classroom assistants, playground supervisors or workers in a nursery school. In many cases, the appeal of this type of employment was the benefit of work with flexible hours to fit in with their childcare commitments. Working within close proximity to their children's schools was another important criterion for a suitable job:

*'...we are living in Hackney and my son is studying in this school, and in Camden I'm working just one day a week, Saturdays, because I cannot travel during the week. That is the biggest problem for me, but now I try to find something in Hackney.'*

(Female, Turkish, 40s, East London)

Another popular work destination among respondents was in the health and social care sector:

*'Basically my favourite job, I would be in the future in care work. I want to work with people who need help.'*

(Female, Somali, East London)

Some respondents said they were hoping to undertake further training on completion of the programme, such as a higher level ESOL course, childcare course, or other form of vocational training. One respondent explained how the course had raised her aspirations and confidence to undertake an National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in childcare, which previously she had seen as beyond her reach:

*'From next September, definitely, I can do this [childcare course]...It will be great for me because what I do with my job search, everywhere they ask, NVQ2 and NVQ3 and that's it, when I see this work, it's not for me. I cannot do this job.'*

(Female, Russian, 30s, West London)

Continuing with training and acquiring vocational qualifications was perceived to fit in well with caring for small children among some female participants. A common view was that, once their children were older, they could then seek work:

*'I have two kids now and I'm a full-time mother. Once they have grown up, in five years when they go to school, I try [to find work]. I want qualifications, learning and everything. And when they go, I can go and look for work.'*

(Female, Somali, 30s, West London)

There were a few participants who were not optimistic about finding work on completion of the programme. One respondent, who was looking for any kind of work, talked about his discouraging experience of signing on at the Jobcentre for the previous nine months, but with no suitable vacancies becoming available:

*'But me, I apply any company...but no, no working...Every day we're thinking, this is nine month and have in Jobcentre this problem...You want a job? No, I'm sorry, that's it...no jobs.'*

(Female, Bangladesh, 30s, East London)

Ten participants were interviewed after they had completed the course. Two of them were in full-time employment, one was in further training with the same provider, and the remaining were still looking for work.

One of the main outcomes of the Pilot for many was an increase in their confidence to use the language:

*'Yes, I was looking for a job, my main activity of course, so because I just had this background from the course, so my English is maybe not improved significantly, but I had more confidence in using English. Because I had a chance to hear others, and I had a chance to hear my English, and so all this advice was quite useful.'*

(Male, Polish, 30s, West London)

The two participants, who had progressed into paid work, both emphasised the importance of learning about the UK labour market and the support that they had received during their job search:

*'From these guys, I learned...how people looking for job, what you should do and where do you look for. It's also a great experience that I did it.'*

(Male, Polish, 30s, West London)

This increased confidence could, in turn, encourage individuals to become more independent and to travel further afield:

*'Now I can go everywhere, I can ask people if I go somewhere and I don't know the place. I can ask people where I can find the place. Now it's no problem for me.'*

(Female, Mauritian, 30s, West London)

As these participants' experiences indicate, many of them had taken significant steps forward in their progress towards the labour market, for example, in terms of improved confidence, employability skills and understanding of the labour market. However, it could be argued that the value of such short, work-focused interventions is limited for such a disadvantaged group of participants if delivered in isolation, rather than as part of a longer-term planned progression pathway into employment.

## 6 Project outcomes

This chapter assesses the overall performance of providers in meeting the project outcomes, based on information available at the time of writing this report. This includes analysis of Individual Learner Record (ILR) data from the earlier part of the project carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), as well as verbal self-evaluations from providers themselves. The chapter also considers other outcomes achieved by participants, such as alternative forms of progression and soft outcomes.

### 6.1 Meeting recruitment targets

The majority of providers, when interviewed at an earlier stage in the Pilot, had expressed optimism that they would be able to meet their recruitment targets: the combined provider recruitment target was for 5,000 participants over the course of the Pilot and each provider had a different share of this overall target. Interviews with providers carried out in the autumn of 2010 indicated that their earlier optimism had not been misplaced, as most of them reported they had either already met their recruitment targets or were very close to doing so. A fuller picture of recruitment outcomes will not become available until after completion of the Pilot in March 2011.

As discussed in Chapter 3, what has become clear from the qualitative research is that some recruitment strategies proved to be more effective than others. In particular, there was a general consensus among providers that the partnership working developed with schools, children's centres and other community organisations provided the most successful recruitment outcomes:

*'Working with children centres and working with schools was the most successful strategy. We tried lots of different methods, including working with libraries and Citizen's Advice Bureau, sending out leaflets and working with Jobcentre Plus, which is probably the most ineffective method for this group.'*

(Project Manager, West London)

### 6.2 Progression into employment

The Pilot providers had a target to meet of 20 per cent outcomes for sustainable (13 weeks or over) employment. The majority of providers perceived the 20 per cent employment target to be 'challenging', 'tough', or even 'unrealistic'. During earlier evaluation visits, only a few believed that they could progress so many participants into jobs for 13 weeks at least. By the time of the fieldwork visits carried out in autumn 2010, respondents were more cautiously optimistic about their employment outcomes but admitted that progress was still slow. Provider estimates of their progress at this stage ranged approximately between five to ten per cent (rather than 20 per cent), although two providers gave estimates closer to 15 per cent. Some of them pointed out that information about job starts would continue to trickle in for at least three months after the Pilot had finished, so they were hopeful that their final totals would be higher.

Some providers said they were keeping track of participants who had completed the Pilot and had offered them a financial incentive if they found a job and forwarded documentary evidence of their employment. This strategy was paying dividends to some extent:



*'And then, of course, intermittently we send out a text saying, have you got yourself a job, because if you do, we've got an incentive voucher...and they are really keen to get that. So we have a few who found themselves jobs and we didn't know about it and so they've come in and given us the evidence in return for a voucher.'*

(Project Manager, West London)

Some providers referred to difficulties they had encountered because of the tight parameters around the types of job which could be claimed as outcomes. For example, casual work, agency work or part-time work of less than 16 hours per week would not be counted on the ILR system, despite the fact that this type of flexible employment might be very suitable for a typical Pilot participant with limited work experience and childcare responsibilities:

*'We know for a fact, working with these learners, trying to get them into sustained work, 13 weeks, is going to be more difficult than getting them into casual work or maybe working for an agency. Obviously, we can record that information but we're not being recognised, payment-wise, for that.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

Other providers mentioned that many parents wanted to work in schools because of the flexible hours, but it was not always possible because of their low levels of English:

*'They want to work around the schoolchildren's timetable. They want the holidays and they want the hours, so they'll say, okay, we'll be a meals supervisor, or we'd like to do the playground assistant work. It's not that easy because, again, some of them link to schools that require qualifications, because they could probably get people that have got very good English.'*

(Project Worker, West London)

On various occasions, providers referred to a reluctance on the part of many participants to look for work and this, inevitably, also had an impact on the Pilot outcomes. Various reasons were given for this. In some cases, it was due to a lack of confidence, or apprehensiveness about travelling outside their immediate locality. For other participants, there could be cultural issues involved. For example, some people, who were favourably disposed themselves to finding work, faced opposition from spouses and other family members, particularly while their children were still young:

*'I think there's some pressure from family because I talked to some of the learners...and it's oh, we need to discuss this with our families and husbands. And then they came back and said, well no, when the children are older and all that, then we can [find a job] but now they need to focus on the household and the children.'*

(Course Tutor, West London)

According to some providers, the current conditions in the labour market, particularly the impact of the recession, was another important factor to take into account. At a time when there was such fierce competition for jobs, applicants with limited English language skills were even more likely to be disadvantaged:

*'I'm concerned about it. Yes, I'm concerned that we're in a recession and...because I think there's an awful lot of competition out there and everybody wants a job.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

Among those participants who had been successful in accessing jobs, this tended to be in entry-level employment in a range of different sectors. These included jobs as cleaners, sales assistants, teaching assistants, childcare workers, care assistants, kitchen porters and security guards. Less commonly, some had found work in food manufacturing, community transport, administration, warehousing and restaurant work. A few participants had moved into self-employment, as childminders or, in one case, a market-stall holder.

## 6.3 Other progression pathways

As already discussed, progressing participants into paid work was seen as a challenge by most providers, who anticipated that the 'learner journey' towards employment was likely to take much longer for most participants, in many cases extending beyond the timeframe of the Pilot. Alternative progression pathways were, therefore, viewed as a more realistic prospect for the majority of their participants and an effective means of shortening their distance from the labour market. The main alternative progression routes from the Pilot were, firstly, continuing with education and gaining further qualifications and, secondly, undertaking voluntary work.

### 6.3.1 Further training

The main type of progression being accessed by Pilot participants was further training: in many cases this would take the form of a higher-level English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course, or one with more specific work-related skills:

*'So those learners who were considering looking for work, we managed to put through our 'ESOL with Office Skills' or 'ESOL with ICT' courses...they're accredited courses and have been beneficial for these learners.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

This finding suggests that one of the benefits of a programme of this kind for participants is the development of their confidence in moving on to other training programmes, as well as their increased awareness of the opportunities available.

Other participants progressed into more vocationally-focused programmes, such as childcare, health and social care or customer service. In many cases, this was being offered by the same provider, while some individuals were signposted to courses with other providers. One provider described a popular course with participants which offered accreditation to become self-employed childminders.

Exceptionally, a couple of participants (with higher levels of qualifications from their own country) were reported to have progressed into higher education.

### 6.3.2 Voluntary work

The majority of providers believed that the most realistic and useful route into the labour market, particularly for the hardest-to-help participants, was through doing some voluntary work. A few providers were even offering such opportunities within their organisation. The main benefits of volunteering were seen as giving people transferable skills and boosting their confidence:

*'A lot of them, once they've started it, they're very appreciative to do it, because it gets...them into the habit of getting up and going to work. They're in a work environment and they're really enjoying it, and obviously, it's a slow process, but their confidence is building and they're happy to do it now.'*

(Project Manager, West London)

Where possible, providers would look for voluntary work which could potentially evolve into a paid job:

*'What we try to do, the jobs that we try to find is where the person will say right, okay, they can volunteer, almost like a work placement, they can volunteer for two weeks, and then with an opportunity to gain employment at the end of the voluntary, so that's what we try to do. Then there's opportunity for the learners to gain paid employment, that's the aim at the end of the day.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

### 6.4 Soft outcomes

Given the characteristics of the key target group for the Pilot and the limited prospect of job outcomes for many of them in the shorter term, there was a strong focus by providers on achieving soft outcomes, as a means of moving participants closer to the labour market. The main soft outcomes described by providers related to improvements in levels of confidence and motivation, communication skills, employability skills and understanding of the labour market.

Almost all providers talked about the positive impact that their ESOL provision had on their participants' confidence levels. Some tutors, in particular, who were able to observe their behaviour in the classroom described how reserved some of the participants had been at the start of the course and how they had gradually started participating, integrating and working together.

*'Once you engage learners and they come out of those shells again they see there's a world out there and they start integrating. They start talking to other people from different backgrounds and they just love coming here.'*

(Project Manager, East London)

Some project workers, especially tutors, observed attitudinal changes in their participants as the course progressed and their confidence increased:

*'When they come to the course, it's very negative, because obviously all they think about is childcare and things like that, and some of them have lost a lot of confidence by staying home... but once they finish a course, they're very much motivated...and they all start, by mid or towards the end, maybe three, four weeks before the end; they really want to pick up, they really want to go out and do some sort of work; if not work straight away, do some voluntary work, maybe, to start.'*

(Project Worker, West London)

Some tutors described this progression as a process that started from the period that they committed themselves to attending their course or as a 'mental jump' which happens after they start the course, as they can see themselves as learners or employees, rather than staying at home and looking after their children.

*'I think all of them, at least have made that mental jump, even if it's not next week they want to work, but as soon as their kids are in school, then they will go back to work.'*

(Tutor, West London)

Apart from the more obvious improvement in English language skills (both spoken and written), some providers commented on participants' enhanced communication skills, in the broader sense. This might be demonstrated, for example, in their interaction with tutors and other participants and their development of wider social networks:

*‘Some of the parents – it would have been one of the rare occasions that they socialised, networked, worked alongside people from different cultures and people from outside their own communities.’*

(Project Manager, West London)

A few providers purposely supported participants with applications for bank accounts or trips and studied language associated with driving theory tests to develop soft skills such as computer skills and travel planning, using activities that were attractive to the participants and applicable in their daily lives even if they did not secure employment. Developing these soft skills could also help with integration into their wider community and have an impact on the lives of their families.

*‘This is people’s life you’re talking about, and their progress in the country, their effects on their kids, and the kids being the future of the country, how they behave towards things, it all adds up at the end of the day.’*

(Project Manager, East London)

As one tutor pointed out, most of the learners in the class may already have had some spoken English but they had limited opportunities to practise it at home or in social situations. The class environment and the structure of the lessons enabled them to practise their English and to boost their confidence as a result. Such improved communication skills were of course not only beneficial in social situations but also helped to develop the participants’ employability, for example in their ability to market their skills to an employer.

In addition to improvements in communication and self-presentation, an important development for this group of participants was their increased understanding of the UK labour market and the recruitment process itself:

*‘...They start to learn about the workplace and how to go about getting a job...when you break it down and say this is the process...people say, okay, I understand that, so I’ll be able to do it.’*

(Project Manager, West London)

Most of the providers based their information about soft outcomes on anecdotal evidence and observation. Interestingly, one tutor described how they had attempted to record this information in a more systematic way, by developing a tool specifically to measure the soft outcomes and distance travelled by participants while on the programme:

*‘We wanted to see the journey that learners travel by doing the programme...we got an external evaluator who helped us design a tool called ‘Distance Travel Tutor’...three areas that we looked at were their confidence, their motivation and their job skills by the end of the programme. We found that almost everybody made some changes, they’d all travelled some distance in their journey with us...For example, when someone started on the programme without any confidence, by the end of the programme they would have moved up a scale of three or four, which shows that their confidence and aspiration has increased...’*

(Course Tutor, East London)

It would be interesting to see how a ‘distance travelled’ tool of this kind could be developed further to measure and record the progress of similar groups of learners disadvantaged in the labour market.

# 7 Conclusions of the evaluation

This chapter draws out the main conclusions from the evaluation. It highlights the key issues for the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Pilot which were raised by the research and reflects on the main strengths and achievements of the programme, as well as its limitations and the challenges faced by both participants and providers. The chapter aims to focus on the main lessons learnt from the Pilot and how these could usefully inform other similar work-focused programmes designed to support progression into employment for the target group of participants.

## 7.1 Partnership working

- Partnership working was a distinctive feature of the Pilot, in accordance with one of its key aims of working collaboratively with other skills and employment services in the City Strategy Pathfinder (CSP) areas. Certainly, one of the most successful aspects of the Pilot was the extent to which it fostered – or strengthened – links between Pilot providers and community-based organisations in the delivery of the programme. These partnerships were developed both through formal, sub-contractual arrangements and through more informal networking. In particular, the links with schools, children’s centres and grass-roots community organisations in the Pilot areas contributed significantly to providers’ recruitment strategies and enabled them to engage with the key target groups. Some community partners also played an important role in the delivery of the ESOL programmes, or in providing appropriate venues with on-site crèche facilities. Despite some difficulties reported in terms of data-sharing and other contractual arrangements, these community-based partnerships, on the whole, appear to have worked well.
- On the other hand, partnership working at the more strategic level was more challenging and problematic. There were a number of strategic partners involved in some way with the Pilot (including the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), Jobcentre Plus, and East and Southeast London and West London CSPs) and this could well have contributed to the sense of confusion noted by some stakeholders and providers about its overall priorities and sense of direction. This confusion was reflected, for example in changes made to the eligibility criteria of participants (such as the extent to which non-parents could be recruited) and lack of clarity as to whether the main focus of the Pilot was on the ‘learner journey’ or employment outcomes.
- Another issue raised was what appeared to be a lack of synergy between the Pilot and the Single Points of Access (SPAs) based within the East and Southeast London CSP. Although it had been anticipated that these would be a major source of referrals to the Pilot, in practice, this only happened to a limited extent.
- By contrast, another partnership initiative (involving the SFA and CSPs) proved to be more successful, and this was the series of provider workshops organised by LLU+, which took place during the second year of the project. The workshops facilitated networking and the sharing of good practice between the providers and were generally well received.

## 7.2 Recruitment of participants

- Interviews with providers in the later stages of the Pilot indicated that they had either met their recruitment targets or were very close to doing so, in most cases. (This awaits confirmation by the Individual Learner Record (ILR) data after completion of the Pilot in March 2011). By common consent, the most successful recruitment strategies were community outreach and face-to-face contact with parents at various community locations, particularly schools and children's centres. As already discussed, the East and Southeast London Single Point of Access (SPAs) and Jobcentre Plus were less fruitful sources of referrals, with only a few providers relying on their links with Jobcentre Plus to recruit participants.
- Evidence from the provider interviews indicated that the profile of participants recruited was generally in line with the key target group for the Pilot, namely, unemployed parents of working age with low levels of English language skills. Most providers required prospective participants to produce relevant documentation as proof of eligibility to attend the programme. This meant that some parents with ESOL needs were excluded because they fell into the category of 'no recourse to public funds'. There was some confusion among providers about the percentage of 'non-parents' who could be recruited as the threshold for this was changed by the SFA halfway through the programme.

## 7.3 Structure and content of the Pilot programme

- The overall design of the ESOL Pilot was based on the 'black box' concept, which allowed providers considerable autonomy in the delivery of their individual programmes. Despite this, there was a broadly similar approach adopted across the different Pilot sites, which may have been facilitated by the work of the LLU+. Most programmes consisted of a series of short, flexible courses of 10-15 weeks' duration and varying hours of attendance per week, located in accessible community-based venues, often with on-site crèche facilities. This programme design could be seen to have a number of benefits for disadvantaged participants from the target group. For example, the flexible timing of the course appealed to parents, as attendance usually fitted in around school hours. Also, the location of the courses within local communities provided 'hard-to-reach' participants with an accessible 'first step' into a formal system of employability training. The course content was also learner-centred, with a work-focused ESOL curriculum and a range of practical activities designed to improve the participants' employability skills and support them into employment.
- However, there were also some serious limitations to the programme, which were highlighted both by provider staff and participants. Firstly, it is questionable whether the relatively short length of the courses was suitable to the needs of the majority of participants, particularly considering their average distance from the labour market. Many participants themselves raised this issue, commenting that they felt they needed a longer course to improve their chances of progressing into work. It could be argued that such short, work-focused interventions were more appropriate to people at the higher end of the 'job-ready' spectrum, while for more disadvantaged participants, such an approach would only be of benefit if part of a longer-term planned progression pathway into employment.
- Another issue was that the location of the courses in community venues tended to reinforce participants' reluctance to move outside the 'comfort zone' of their immediate environment in order to find employment. It was reported that many people wanted to find a job close to home, for example in their children's school, despite the fact that this aspiration was unrealistic within the context of local labour market conditions. Some providers felt that raising participant aspirations and encouraging them to consider a wider range of jobs had been a valuable aspect of the Pilot; however, this was again a difficult goal to achieve within such a relatively short

timescale. On some of the Pilot programmes, work placements proved to be an effective means of helping participants develop a better understanding of the workplace, especially if this was their first experience of working in the UK. Not all providers organised work placements for their participants but, given their value, they could be considered as an integral aspect of any future work-focused ESOL programmes.

- There were questions raised by the research about the extent to which the ESOL and work-focused elements had been successfully integrated on some of the programmes. This could be a problem, for example, where different aspects of the programme were delivered by different partners. As some project managers indicated, the work-focused approach was a new departure for many of the teaching staff both within their own and their partner organisations. For example, many of these were ESOL tutors with expertise in working with adult learners to develop their language and literacy skills but with less experience of the employability side of the curriculum or of the requirements of the local labour market. This was recognised as a challenge by project managers and was being addressed through various means: for example by shifting resources more towards staff with a particular remit for supporting job-brokering activities or engaging with employers. However, there was an impression at some of the Pilot sites that the work-focused and employability elements were more of a 'bolt-on' to a conventional ESOL course, than a more integral part of the programme.

## 7.4 Childcare issues

- Provision of childcare was a major issue throughout the Pilot, with most providers reporting that they had struggled to access sufficient funding to cover the childcare requirements of participants. Separate childcare support was not offered as part of the contract as there was an expectation that providers would encourage participants to access childcare provision which would be appropriate and affordable for them when they entered employment. There had been an initial expectation that providers would be able to tap into the Childcare Affordability Programme (CAP) funding available in the CSP areas, but this was withdrawn in March 2009. The SFA subsequently made a new pot of childcare funding available, but not all participants were eligible for it and not all providers had been aware of it, because of communication difficulties between the SFA and providers. As a result, the childcare support provided varied considerably across the Pilot sites, with some providers reporting that they had managed to offer free childcare to only some of their participants, depending on the venue. This meant that access to childcare became something of a 'lottery' across the Pilot and some parents, who would otherwise have been eligible, were unable to attend. Lack of childcare support thus became a barrier to learning, before it became a barrier to employment. There was a general consensus among providers and their partners that the project should have had an allocated budget for childcare support, particularly as parents were the main target group. This reflects the tension between the original aims of the Pilot as work-focused ESOL with employment targets and an expectation that people would move into work and the reality of the distance from the labour market of most participants.

## 7.5 Employment outcomes

- Most of the providers viewed the 20 per cent target for employment outcomes as challenging and, in the earlier part of the project, were obviously struggling to achieve this. In the later stages of the Pilot, it seemed that more resources were being channelled into supporting participants into employment, although it still seemed unlikely that any of them would actually reach their targets. Various reasons were given for this including the distance of many participants from the labour market and the increased competition for jobs brought about by the economic recession.

There were also reports of participants who were reluctant to look for work (perhaps due to lack of confidence or cultural issues) and this also had a negative impact on outcomes. In order to improve employment outcomes, some providers became more selective in their approach to recruitment and were beginning to target individuals who they considered to be more 'job-ready', such as those with higher levels of English, previous UK work experience or children of school age. Providers adopting this strategy admitted that this reflected the tensions within the Pilot between the original aim of helping the hardest-to-reach individuals and pressure from funders to achieve the employment targets.

- Where participants were successful in securing job outcomes on completion of the programme, these were typically in entry-level occupations in areas such as retail, cleaning, security, care work, hospitality, catering or administration. East London providers had hoped that more jobs would be available in their Pilot areas through the 2012 London Olympics but there was little evidence of this happening through the research.

## 7.6 Soft outcomes and other progression pathways

- Most providers anticipated that the 'learner journey' towards employment was likely, in many cases, to extend beyond the timeframe of the Pilot. Alternative progression routes were, therefore, viewed as a more realistic prospect for the majority of participants. These included: further training, particularly higher-level, accredited ESOL courses; more vocationally-focused programmes; or progression into voluntary work.
- The development of 'soft skills' was seen by providers as another important outcome from the Pilot, even if these were not formally recognised as such. The most frequently cited soft outcomes for participants were: increased self-confidence and motivation, and improved communication skills, employability and jobsearch skills. Learners interviewed after they had completed the programme confirmed that they now felt more confident in using their English language skills and jobsearch skills and had a better understanding of the UK labour market.
- One provider attempted to measure the soft outcomes achieved by participants in a more systematic way by developing a 'distance travelled' tool and this could be viewed as another example of good practice to emerge from the Pilot. It would be interesting to see how such a tool could be developed further in similar projects for disadvantaged participants, so that the milestones achieved on the 'learner journey' could be more formally recognised.



The ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Pilot was designed to demonstrate how work-focused ESOL provision could support access to sustainable employment and progress in work. The Pilot targeted parents for whom English is not their first language and are in receipt of benefits or tax credits. The Pilot programme was located within the London City Strategy Pathfinder (CSP) areas of East and Southeast London and West London, which face typical inner-city problems of social deprivation and worklessness. The Institute for Employment Studies carried out an evaluation, which was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The evaluation took a qualitative approach; consisting of an inception phase, followed by two waves of qualitative interviews with participants, provider staff and other stakeholders. In total, there were 175 interviews conducted during the course of the research: 104 with participants, 61 with providers and their partners and 10 with stakeholders.

Research themes include:

- partnership working on the Pilot;
- engaging and recruiting participants;
- profile of Pilot participants;
- approaches to project delivery;
- learner support and childcare issues;
- learner views of the Pilot;
- employment outcomes;
- 'soft' outcomes and other progression pathways.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:  
Kate Callow, Commercial Support and Knowledge Management Team,  
Upper Ground Floor, Steel City House, West Street, Sheffield, S1 2GQ.  
<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

**DWP** Department for  
Work and Pensions

---

Published by the  
Department for Work and Pensions  
May 2011  
[www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)  
Research report no. 744  
ISBN 978-1-84712-978-9