

A large group of diverse young people are sitting on a green lawn outdoors. Some are looking towards the camera, while others are engaged in conversation or looking away. The scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a pleasant day on a university campus.

Post-16 education and training outcomes for young people who use English as an Additional Language (EAL): aspirations and trajectories

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This study focuses on access to education, training and employment for young people aged 16-25 who have English as an Additional Language (EAL). In particular, the research examines their post 16 pathways and outcomes and how they may differ depending on young people's linguistic self-identification, if at all.

The Longitudinal study Next Steps, previously known as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) was used to investigate the post 16 education and training trajectories and outcomes for young people born in 1989-90. The analysis compares the outcomes and pathways of three groups of young people based on their responses to the question if English is their first or main language when they were aged 13/14. In our analysis we compare young people who in Year 9 reported English as their only language, those who self-identified as bilingual or specified English as their first/main language and also speak other languages and those young people that said they have another language as their first or main language. The central group in this study is the latter or those who most likely would be identified as having English as an Additional Language (EAL) in school administrative data. Linguistic self-identification of these young people in combination with their place of birth data allowed probing further into any differences within a more generic group of young people identified as having EAL in the NPD or similar administrative datasets that are frequently used for the analysis of educational pathways and outcomes. Furthermore, this analysis focuses on exploring not only individual attitudes and social characteristics of these young people, but also broader family and/or parental factors that play a role in their post 16 journeys.

## Background

In 2020/21, 21% of primary and 17% of secondary pupils in England were classified as having EAL (DfE, 2021). However, the EAL classification does not indicate a pupil's proficiency in the English language and that varies widely (Tereshchenko & Archer, 2014; Demie, 2018; Strand and Hessel, 2018) and the group is very diverse not only regarding their first language, ethnicity, family circumstances and their prior educational and life experiences, but also regarding the age at which they arrived in the English school system. Therefore, the average attainment figures for pupils who use EAL are often misleading (Hutchinson, 2018). Some pupils who have EAL and are at later or final stages of English acquisition and where their families have sufficient knowledge of the education system and the English language score well above the national average for monolingual English speakers, but those who are new to English or at early acquisition stages tend to underachieve and this is the group that we are focussing on in this study.

Currently, most young people face increasing levels of insecurity in work, education and housing which affect their transition to adulthood. A report by the Health Foundation (Jordan et al, 2019) has identified four assets that affect how well young people make this transition: appropriate skills and qualifications, personal connections, financial and practical support, and emotional support. As evidence suggests, young people and adults who speak English as an additional language, particularly those who are English learners at earlier stages, tend to do worse on the labour market, and young people are more likely to be 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET) (Fernandez-Reino, 2019; Anderson & Nelson, 2021). Young people, especially those at the earlier stages of developing their skills in English, may lack some or all of these assets, facing significant barriers in gaining advice and guidance, and challenges in accessing Further

Education (FE) and appropriate ESOL provision and support for further English language development, potentially leading to a lack of engagement in education and training. Some young people are especially vulnerable to experiencing difficulties when making transitions from school and many young people embark on post 16 courses that do not suit their needs and aptitudes, resulting in drop-out and lower success rates (Hodgson and Spours, 2014).

The latest report from the DfE (Anderson & Nelson, 2021) concludes that post 16 outcomes and pathways differ based on one's first language and that those speaking English as an additional language have poorer outcomes than their peers who have English as their first/main language. At the same time, the research demonstrates that degree and/or Level 3 qualification achievement is associated with better labour market outcomes for young people who have EAL. However, to our knowledge, there are very few other studies that would link EAL status in compulsory education at the point of leaving school sector to go into the post 16 sector to progress, achievement and destinations information in the post-compulsory educational context. Furthermore, there is no equivalent to the EAL identifier, that would be ESOL status identifier, that is standardised and collected consistently in the post 16 sector.

This research report is a part of a two-stage project investigating how current ESOL provision and support meet the needs of and provides adequate opportunities for, young people aged 16-25 who use EAL. The research combines a literature review with quantitative data analysis of Next Steps data. This report presents findings from the second quantitative project stage. The main research question for the quantitative study was:

**What does the available Next Steps (ex LSYPE) data indicate concerning the aspirations, outcomes and pathways of learners who use EAL aged 16-25 compared to those with English as their first language?**

**Methodology**

Next Steps, previously known as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), follows the lives of around 16,000 people in England born in 1989-90. The study recruited a nationally representative sample of Y9 students aged 13/14 and interviewed them along with their parents/carers. Young people were re-interviewed each year until 2010, with the most recent additional sweep data available when they were aged 25, in 2015/16.

Next Steps has collected information about cohort members' education and employment, economic circumstances, family life, physical and emotional health and wellbeing, social participation and attitudes. The longitudinal nature of the Next Steps dataset, combined with all the detailed information on a range of attitudes and outcomes of young people and their families, as well as the dataset being nationally representative (Strand et al., 2015; CLS, 2021) presents a unique opportunity to explore the context, experiences, and attitudes of young people who use EAL and their families with regard not only to their compulsory education, but also post 16 pathways taken and their outcomes.

Young people included in the Next Steps cohort at age 13 were asked if English was their first or main language. We used young people's responses together with the data on their place of birth to identify six groups that we use in our analysis of the post-16 educational trajectories and outcomes. The six groups are:

- Young people who report English as their only language (monolingual English) born in the UK (1) or born elsewhere (2)

- Self-identified bilingual and those who report English as their main/first language, but also speak other language(es) (bilingual) born in the UK (3) or born elsewhere (4)
- Young people who report having another language as their first or main language (using English as an Additional Language (EAL)) born in the UK (5) or born elsewhere (6)

Although, the Next Steps dataset provides very rich longitudinal data and the cohort has been selected using robust design with oversampling of ethnic minorities and accounts for attrition over time, there are some important limitations to the use of these data. Firstly, we know all the young people had arrived in the UK by the age of 13 as the Next Steps sample included young people who were in schools in England at that time. Moreover, at the point of the analysis we did not have access to arrival age. We do recognise this as a shortcoming in the research. Secondly, the data represents a specific cohort of young people in 1989-90 and their education pathways and outcomes need to be contextualised in the policy and social events of that time. For example, until 2011, local authorities received an Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) and were required to use this to support the learning of EAL and bilingual pupils and the achievement of ethnic minority learners. This cohort has benefited from this ring-fenced funding for EAL when they were in compulsory education. Similarly, these young people had access to Connexions, a UK governmental information, advice, guidance and support service for young people aged 13 to 19 created in 2000 that has ceased being a coherent national service since 2012. Broader social and economic events also have to be considered. For example, these young people would have been 17/18 around the time of the 2008 financial crash which could have an impact on education choices and going into employment.

## Key numbers

- 70% of young people who use EAL and 80% of those who are bilingual were in education at the age of 19 compared to 41% of young people who speak English only born in the UK and 51% of monolingual English speakers born outside the UK.
- 23% of young people who use EAL and were born outside the UK are not in employment or education at the age of 25 compared to 15% of young people who are monolingual English language users and 11% of their peers who are bilingual.
- 64% of young people who were born in the UK and use EAL and 59% of those born outside the UK who are EAL speakers achieved first degree or a higher level qualification at the age of 25.
- At the same time young people who use EAL include the highest proportion of those with no qualifications (14% UK born; 12% born elsewhere) by the age of 25.
- 75% of parents using EAL felt very involved or fairly involved in their children's education in Year 9. This proportion increased in Year 11 when 84% of parents who use EAL agreed that they are involved in their children's education.
- However, 14% of parents who use EAL strongly disagreed that they know all they need to know about how they can help with their children's education in Year 9.

## Key findings

- The evidence suggests that a group of young people who speak English as an additional language is heterogeneous in terms of their post 16 outcomes. The Next Steps data shows that, while bilingual young people were more likely to be high achievers across the range of outcomes at age 25, young people who use EAL and speak another language as their main language were likely to be more polarised in terms of their post 16 outcomes. The young people surveyed who use EAL include a relatively high proportion of those who are seen as ‘high achievers’ (more than half achieving first degree or higher by the age of 25) and ‘success stories’ (70% in education at age 19). Yet at the same time there is a significant number of those young people who are struggling, particularly in the labour market, and are being put at risk of social exclusion (around one fifth not being in employment or education at the age of 25).
  - Young people who use EAL as well as those who report being bilingual stay in education longer than monolingual English young people. 70% of young people who use EAL and 80% of those who are bilingual were in education at the age of 19 compared to 41% of young people who speak English only and born in the UK, and 51% of monolingual English speakers born outside the UK. A slightly higher proportion of young people using EAL (8% UK born; 10% born outside the UK) and their bilingual peers (7% UK born; 8% born outside the UK) aged 25 were in education compared with young people who are monolingual English users (4% UK born; 9% born outside the UK).
  - The group of young people who use a main language other than English also has the highest proportion of those with no qualifications (14% UK born; 12% born outside the UK). At the same time there is a high proportion of young people who use EAL (64% UK born; 59% born outside the UK) or are bilingual (67% UK born; 68% born outside the UK) who achieved a first degree or higher at the age of 25. However, young people who use EAL were less likely to have their degree awarded by a Russell Group university (14% UK born; 21% born outside the UK) compared to their bilingual (28% UK born; 32% born outside the UK) and monolingual English user peers (27% UK born; 25% born outside the UK).
  - The group of young people who use EAL have the highest proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) at the age of 25. Young people using EAL had higher rates of being in education (8% UK born; 10% born outside the UK) and at the same time being unemployed or reporting economic inactivity (21% UK born and 23% born elsewhere) compared to 5% of young people overall mentioning education as their main activity and 15% of young people being in NEET category at the age of 25. Also, young people who use EAL not only were more likely to be unemployed but also were slightly more likely to be looking after their home or family, compared to young people with English only, or those who reported being bilingual.
  - The occupations of young people using EAL at age 25 are comparable to those of the monolingual English group that were born in the UK. Bilingual young people, particularly those who are born outside the UK, have the highest occupational status on average; they are more likely to be in higher managerial or professional occupations at the age of 25.

1. up to 25 for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- The analysis demonstrates the importance of parents and their social and economic capitals, in the form of parental qualifications, occupations and involvement in education. Firstly, the data show that many young people, but particularly those using EAL, rely a lot on their parents for advice and role models for choosing their future educational and career pathways. Secondly, the study demonstrates how a large proportion of the differences between the post 16 outcomes of young people with different EAL status is explained by the qualifications, occupations and their parents' involvement in education.
- Contrary to some previous research (e.g. Manzoni & Rolfe, 2019; Evans et al, 2020) data from Next Steps suggest that parents from families using EAL feel that they are overall engaged in the education of their children and have good relationships with schools and teachers. This could be explained by the data coming from a different cohort of parents and also linked to the discrepancy between subjective views of parents and school concept of parental engagement (Schneider & Arnot, 2018) as well as the methodological approaches that different studies used.
- A higher proportion of those parents with another main/first language, both UK born and those born outside the UK, report that they feel their knowledge is not sufficient to help with their children's education. Around two-thirds (percentage) of all parents of Year 9 of pupils in the Next Steps survey felt they knew all they need to know about how they can help with their child's education at the same time. However, 14% of parents who use EAL strongly disagreed. This identifies a significant gap in the knowledge of a subgroup of parents who use EAL that could be related both to their level of English language, but also to their knowledge of the English education system.
- The pathways most young people in the Next Steps data take are very much reflective of the aspirations they and their families have. Young people and their parents from families using EAL and those reporting being bilingual included in the Next Steps cohort are much more likely to aspire for the traditional academic pathway than families and young people who are monolingual English users. Young people who use EAL or are bilingual plan to stay in education for longer and to continue to higher education. Based on the responses about their aspirations, English monolingual young people and their parents are more likely to consider learning a trade as early as age 13/14, getting a place on a vocational training course or starting an apprenticeship after Year 11.
- Around 60% of young people using EAL or their peers who are bilingual planned to start working full time if they thought of leaving full-time education at age 16 compared to one third of their peers who are monolingual English users. Whereas slightly more than half (percentage) of English monolingual young people planned to start learning a trade or join a work-based training programme compared to one fifth (20%) of those young people who use EAL or report being bilingual.
- A relatively high proportion of young people using EAL are likely to follow a vocational, rather than a more traditional academic, education path and continue their post 16 education in Further Education (FE) and Sixth Form Colleges rather than schools, compared to their English monolingual and bilingual peers. Thus, at age 16 around one third of young people who are bilingual and those who reported English as their only language were in maintained schools compared to one fifth of young people who use EAL. Almost half of young people (47%) who use EAL and who were born outside the UK study in FE colleges compared to around one third of their peers who are bilingual or monolingual English users.
- Very few young people using EAL are in apprenticeships between the age of 16 and 25.



## Main conclusions

This study demonstrates that many young people who use EAL are successful in their education and employment pathways between the age of 16 and 25. Although, young people who use EAL stay in education for longer, many being in continuous education up to age 19, there is a subgroup who struggle to achieve high and/or appropriate qualifications (18% with qualifications below NVQ Level 3) or any qualifications (around 10%) by age 25, and cannot continue into higher education, but also do not have appropriate skills and/or work experience to successfully follow a vocational pathway and find employment. Compared to a traditional academic trajectory, a vocational pathway that requires navigating work-based training, FE sector, apprenticeships and/or labour market opportunities is potentially a much more complex process, requiring more knowledge about the system and qualifications. As this study shows, young people using EAL and their families are more likely to opt for a familiar and more established academic pathway. However, while the academic route is appropriate for some, for others, they may have not been able to access the information on other education and training routes, which may have been of benefit to them.

As the study findings suggest, growing up in families speaking EAL and who do not have sufficient or any knowledge of the English educational system and labour market, combined with lower achievement as a result of a lack of language support, can present challenges for young people's choices, pathways and post 16 outcomes, even though educational commitment is very much there. Given that ever-more complex forms of education and routes into the labour market are likely to define employability in the future, not only the social context in which a family's social capital is acquired becomes increasingly important, but also the coherent system of support, advice and guidance engaging with the young people who use EAL and their families and ensuring that the information that they need is clear and accessible is essential. While the proposed legislation in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill (Department for Education, 2021) would ensure that all school children, from years 8 to 13, have at least two opportunities to meet with further education colleges and training providers, these opportunities and information provided must also be inclusive to young people who use EAL.

To conclude, there are several key points arising from this study that add to already existing knowledge. The study demonstrates that the educational success of a group of young people identified as using EAL on average is detracting attention from a subgroup of young people using EAL who struggle and need support. These young people are more likely to have another language as their main language, rather than defining themselves as bilingual, and they are likely to have arrived late into the English speaking education system, possibly as refugees, and have lower proficiency in English. There are challenges for them to follow a traditional academic pathway, but equally there are barriers for them in choosing an appropriate vocational pathway and gaining work experience. Their families may not be sufficiently fluent in English to be able to support their children English learning and, more importantly, do not often understand the British education system and labour market, especially the post-16 vocational training options and their links to employment.

Finally, the findings suggest that the value of education is related to the level and type of education achieved, and its relevance for young people's lives, development and employment, as well as current labour market opportunities. This study shows how young people using EAL are more likely to stay in full-time education for longer, but at age 25, when it is time to move on and into the labour market, there is a relatively large group that struggles as their education (and their parents' social capital and knowledge of the UK system) does not provide a

sufficient basis for successful employment. In this context, advice and guidance given to young people and their families is central. Finally, not only effective advice and guidance services, but also investing in work with parents who use EAL becomes ever more vital as the means of bridging the gap.

## Recommendations

### Advice and Guidance

- Department for Education needs to take a lead in ensuring the provision of comprehensive and personal information, advice and guidance for young people (16-25 years) who use EAL. This should include targeted careers support for Post-16 institutions to help them signposting young people to appropriate programmes of study, including apprenticeships. Department for Education must ensure that future legislation around information, advice and guidance, as proposed in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, are inclusive for pupils with EAL.
- The Department for Education should, as part of the level 3 and below qualification review, consider differences in content and focus of ESOL and Functional Skills (FS) qualifications, and how all these qualifications can serve as steppingstones for a range of young people to enter the labour market. The ESOL part of these qualifications needs to recognise and support transitions for young people who use EAL. The reviewed qualifications have to be integrated with information, advice and guidance on further and higher education, technical and academic education and training, and employment options to ensure young people who use EAL are empowered to make decisions on their future education and employment beyond compulsory education.
- The information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young people speaking EAL aged 16-25 years needs to identify a more diverse range of future education and training pathways that will provide a route to employment. Here a particular focus needs to be on explaining various vocational qualifications, their levels, and routes to employment, including apprenticeships.
- There is a need for an online comprehensive guide translated into several languages that explains post 16 sector qualifications, type of providers, funding and various pathways in and out of further education and training for young people who use EAL and their families who are not familiar with the UK system. A similar guide is necessary for Higher Education sector.
- The Government needs to evaluate various existing support mechanisms to harness existing good practice and ensure effective coordinated support for young people who use EAL and their families. Where the Government is setting up various hubs (e.g. integration hubs for refugee resettlement and Youth Hubs for young people), it needs to consider embedding support and advice and guidance for young people who use EAL in these.
- Schools need to be included in the information networks and be provided with training and resources to work with parents who use EAL during the early years of secondary education to ensure parents receive appropriate advice and guidance regarding various post 16 education and training options to enable them to support their children most knowledgeably and effectively.

2. .Over 110 new Youth Hubs offer job help - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

## Data

- There is a need for a cross-government national English Language Strategy to coordinate all the different Government policies and funding streams, which provides an overarching vision for the future of the ESOL landscape on a national scale to local and combined authorities. The strategy needs to take account of the education and training needs of young people aged 16-25 years and be underpinned by an understanding of young people's lives, including how they develop English language skills, their post 16 pathways, and the support they and their families need.
- The Government needs to introduce a mechanism for ensuring that an EAL identifier is collected for students on the NPD beyond compulsory education and that marker is transferred across to ILR and HESA datasets, where appropriate, for the purposes of recording the education and employment outcomes of young people who speak languages other than English. Some form of an EAL identifier is necessary for post-compulsory education and training essential to provide opportunities for monitoring outcomes and further research.
- Department for Education, in line with the devolved nations, and other countries, should introduce a statutory requirement for post 16-education and training providers in England to assess and record level of proficiency in English for young people who use EAL. Collecting standardised data on EAL identifier combined with English language assessment would be better positioned to enable Government, FE, training and ESOL providers to plan vocational and ESOL provision and support for young people aged 16-25 years who may need support with their English language or some specific advice and guidance.
- As there are a range of practices that already exist in post 16 sectors regarding English language assessment as a part of initial assessment and individualised learner plans (ILP), there is a need for research and development that would allow for exploration of existing best practices and creation of a standardised way of recording the results of the English language assessment in the ILR dataset.

## Research

- There is a need for recognition of bilingualism and its advantages, but also for commissioning some further research into intersectional factors, particularly parental support and practices that may explain the link between multiple languages in families and their impact on educational and labour market outcomes of young people.
- The Department for Education should test and conduct a robust evaluation of ESOL embedded with vocational options, particularly apprenticeships, that are available for young people using EAL and how they may work for effective and successful transitions to the labour market. This information is a prerequisite for the development of effective advice and guidance services.
- More research is necessary on the support mechanisms for post 16 transitions and pathways for young people speaking EAL who do not have their families and/or other established broader social links in the UK considering the essential role parental involvement and support plays in the successful post 16 outcomes.

