



Department
for Education

English for speakers of other languages: Access and progression

Research report

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Social Science in Government

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Glossary of terms and acronyms

Term/Acronym	Definition
AEB: Adult Education Budget.	The budget that funds government supported adult education in England, as set out in the AEB funding rules for all providers of education and training who receive an AEB allocation for 2018 to 2019.
APPG: All-Party Parliamentary Group.	Informal cross-party groups that may include individuals / experts from outside of government.
Casey Review	An independent review into integration and opportunity in isolated and deprived communities (published December 2016).
CATI: Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing.	A telephone interviewing surveying technique.
CMF: Controlling Migration Fund	A government funding programme aimed to help local authorities respond to the impact of recent migration on their communities.
ESF: European Social Fund	A European Union funding programme aimed at improving employment and education opportunities for individuals in member states.
ESFA: Education and Skills Funding Agency	A government agency accountable for the funding of education and training for children, young people and adults.
ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages	English language provision for learners whose first language is not English.
FE (Further Education) Colleges	Providers of general further education for young people, adults and employers. They are typically large institutions offering a range of academic and vocational education to a diverse learner population.
Flexible Learning Fund	£11.4m pilot funding to test flexible and accessible learning delivery to maximise adult participation and attainment.
Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper	A government strategy and consultation on integrated communities (published March 2018).
VPRS: Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme	The VPRS is a resettlement scheme that was established in January 2014 to provide sanctuary to people displaced by the conflict in Syria

1. Executive summary

Background

Census data (2011) shows that approximately 770,000 adults (aged 16+) in the UK do not speak English well or at all. In 2016, the former Prime Minister commissioned Dame Casey to undertake a review into integration and opportunity in isolated and deprived communities. The Casey review concluded that good English skills are not only 'fundamental' to integrated communities, but a number of providers of English Language courses noted that their funding for such provision from government had reduced in recent years. Foster and Bolton (2018)¹ reported that ESOL funding via the Adult Education Budget (AEB) 'fell by 56% in real terms between 2009-10 and 2016-17' although there was an increase in the 2016/17 academic year. The 2018 Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper² highlighted that some people find it difficult to find suitable ESOL provision. In response to the Green Paper, the government has committed to developing a new strategy for ESOL in 2019. Among other recommendations to improve social integration across the UK, the Casey Review recommended the provision of additional funding for area-based plans and projects to address: promoting English language skills, empowering marginalised women, promoting more social mixing, particularly among young people, and tackling barriers to employment for the most socially isolated groups.

This report presents findings from research undertaken by CFE Research between June 2018 and March 2019.

Aims of the research and methodology

Exploratory research was commissioned to strengthen the evidence base on how provision meets the needs of different types of adult (19+) ESOL learners. The specific focus of the research was the accessibility of provision, pathways through provision, progression through the levels and whether appropriate information was available to potential learners. The research also sought to better understand the needs of non-learners and the barriers to accessing provision they face.

¹ Foster, D. and Bolton, P. (2018) Adult ESOL in England. UK Parliament. Commons Library Briefing #7,905, 25 April 2018. [online] Accessed via:

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7905#fullreport>

² Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2018) Integrated Communities Strategy green paper [online] Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper>

A two-stage research methodology was designed in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) which included a feasibility study³. The main phase of the study included:

- A survey of representatives from 162 English language learning providers;
- A day-long fieldwork visit to twenty eight participating English language learning providers. This included interview/s with 40 senior leaders, 136 interviews with teachers, and interviews or focus groups with 336 learners; and
- Ten focus groups with 38 non-learners.

The evidence presented in this report is not indicative of all speakers of other languages and providers offering English language provision, but of those who participated in this study. Care should therefore be taken when drawing wider conclusions.

Key findings

The English language learning provision offered by providers

The findings showed variation in provision depending on available funding and the type of provider. Survey findings mirror government data and showed that Further Education (FE) providers were most likely to offer accredited/classroom provision starting from pre-entry and going up to level 2. Learner numbers and the availability of courses decreased as the educational level increased. Case study visits with providers showed that some FE providers also offered non-accredited funded language courses (known as bridging courses) to learners who were performing below the standard requirement.

Findings from case study visits with English language providers showed that although local authority provision followed a similar structure to FE college provision there were differences: local authorities had a greater focus on 'adult community learning' and tended more towards a mix of formal and informal⁴, and accredited and non-accredited provision. Findings from case study visits also showed that local authority provision would usually take place in venues within local communities.

During case study visits, third sector providers said they would generally target learners at pre-entry/entry levels. A small minority of third sector providers offered accredited level 1 provision subject to demand and funding. Senior leaders from the third sector said their

³ A feasibility study was conducted to test methodological approaches to engaging learners, non-learners, and English language learning providers in the research.

⁴ Formal provision refers to provision offered as part of a structured course. Most formal provision is accredited. However in some instances, formal provision may be non-accredited. Similarly, informal provision is non-accredited.

provision was typically non-accredited and was delivered in informal settings. Learning was usually focussed on equipping learners with English for 'everyday life' such as shopping, speaking to the school teacher, visiting the doctors, etc.

A variety of funding sources for supporting English language learning were identified in the research evidence. The survey showed four-fifths of providers (80%) offered provision funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through the AEB. Two-thirds of providers said some or all of their English language learning provision was not funded through the AEB (63%).

Most local authority and third sector providers reported they were reliant on mixed funding streams and more likely to access multiple streams of funding compared to FE providers. Other sources of funding included the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) (19%), which is managed by local authorities, European Social Fund (11%) and Controlling Migration Fund (11%).

Delivery of English Language provision

Clear differences in the content and method of delivery of English language courses/classes was found when comparing the practice of FE, local authority and third sector providers.

Almost all survey respondents reported that their organisation delivered English language learning through classroom-based learning (98%) and just under two-thirds of providers embedded English language learning in other learning (65%). Just under half the providers delivered English language learning via outreach activity with hard-to-engage communities (47%) and/or delivered English language learning via community organisations or groups (45%). During qualitative interviews, teachers said that role-play, games and group work was particularly useful to encourage independent learning, provided opportunities for learners to listen to others speaking English and practice their own English.

The survey found the most common forms of technology used to deliver English language learning were online written materials or worksheets (74%), online presentations or visual material (70%) and the open-source Moodle software (53%). Hardware was also widely used to support the teaching and learning. Around three-quarters of survey respondents used mobile phones (75%), desktop computers (73%) or interactive whiteboards (72%) to support the teaching and learning.

Senior leaders and teachers in the third sector said in the interviews that they had either no or little access to hardware and technology to support the English language teaching due to the limited funding available to them. Pre-existing IT infrastructure was already in place and ready to use for FE and local authority providers.

Qualitative findings showed much third sector provision was non-accredited and did not follow a formal curriculum. Senior leaders and teachers from these providers said they responded to learners needs and were flexible in the design and delivery of learning. Third sector providers felt they were better placed to provide additional, targeted support services to meet the specific requirements of their learners. FE providers tended to use their existing infrastructure (e.g. learning support services) to cater for a wider variety of personal and social learner circumstances.

Demand for English language learning provision

Demand for English Language was high. Almost three-quarters (73%) of survey respondents reported a 'significant demand' for English language learning provision in the communities they serve, while a quarter (25%) stated that there was a 'fair amount of demand'. The majority of survey respondents said their organisation struggled to meet demand for English language learning. Over half (53%) said their organisations found it 'fairly difficult' to meet the demand and one in eight (13%) found it 'very difficult'.

Providers responded to demand in a number of ways. The actions listed by survey respondents included: creating a waiting list, register or other prioritisation tool (69%), increasing class sizes to accommodate more learners (68%), adapting teaching and learning methods (67%), and/or referring learners to another provider (61%). During case studies, some participants noted that they found it difficult to meet the demand without extra teaching support. Some providers said they worked with universities and colleges to access volunteer teaching support from students, and some said retired teachers were employed or volunteered to help deliver lessons and offer classroom-based learner support.

Despite limited examples of collaborative working evidenced in the qualitative fieldwork, just under half of survey respondents (48%) said they had developed new provision in partnership with another provider or organisation. Qualitative findings from all provider case study visits showed demand was highest for the pre-entry and entry level ESOL classes; most providers offered more of these classes in response.

Over a third of all survey respondents (37%) said they cross-subsidised English language learning from other income sources to increase provision. Looking only at these respondents⁵:

- Three in ten (30%) said they only offered provision funded by AEB;

⁵ Base = 60.

- One in eight (13%) said they only offered provision funded by non-AEB sources; and
- Over half (55%⁶) used AEB and non-AEB funding sources.

Cross-subsidisation is therefore a complex issue. The qualitative evidence helps explain the additional funding sources used by providers. Several providers sought other sources of funding to meet the growing demand for English Language learning. In some case studies, for example, local authority providers accessed the Community Migration Fund and outsourced funding to FE and third sector providers to deliver English language courses. Generally, local authority providers were more likely than other providers to cross-subsidise from other funding or income.

In all stages of the research, providers said the current level of funding for English language learning provision they received, regardless of the source, was insufficient to meet demand. Despite all the changes providers made to meet demand, providers still struggled.

Who accesses English language provision?

Many case study participants said the profiles/demographics of those accessing English language learning provision has changed during the past 10-15 years, resulting in the offer of more pre-entry and entry level courses, to meet the increasing demand from learners. The changes include more asylum seekers and refugees wanting to learn English. Moreover, some providers also said they noticed a decrease of economic migrants from Eastern Europe countries whilst learners from Italy and Spain had increased.

Survey respondents were asked about the number of learners currently accessing their provision. The largest learner cohorts identified were job seekers (a mean of 115 learners per provider) and people already in work (mean learners: 105). Fewer learners who were refugees (mean learners: 60), women not seeking work (mean learners: 67), recent migrants (mean learners: 78) and asylum seekers (mean learners: 50) were accessing provision. People of retirement age (mean learners: 27) comprised the smallest English language learning audience. Survey findings showed refugees were more likely to access pre-entry and entry level provision; and learners who were already in employment or receiving job seekers allowance were more likely to access learning at level 1.

Qualitative findings found that many older retired learners, women not seeking work, and asylum seekers/refugees were accessing English language provision with third sector providers. Third sector providers reported that their learners may have been out of

⁶ Proportions do not sum to 100% as two respondents stated "don't know" to both questions.

education for a long time, or never accessed formal education before. However, FE College providers reported that learners who had experienced formal schooling were more likely to access their provision.

Learners' motivations and perceptions of access and progression to ESOL learning

The motivations found for learning English were numerous. Examples cited by learners included:

- Improving employment prospects (either to gain a first job or progress a career);
- Enabling civic engagement and integration (to feel part of and connected to wider society);
- Developing life skills to enable engagement in everyday life activities (visiting the doctors, helping children with school work, etc.); and
- Accessing services and benefits (classes can be a Jobcentre Plus requirement).

Learners expressed positive views about progressing to higher levels and improving their English language skills during interviews. Those studying at pre-entry and entry levels wished to progress to feel more confident with English and in the longer term, move into more vocational studies and/or employment. A number of learners expressed a desire to improve their English language skills to a higher level, so they were able to undertake training to take up a professional occupation.

A number of barriers to learning were mentioned in both the survey and qualitative case study visits. Two of the main barriers were access to suitable childcare arrangements, and the existing literacy levels of potential learners. Other barriers included work commitments, particularly for those learners who work on a shift-pattern, cultural barriers, the cost of learning and funding restrictions, insufficient provision to meet demand and a lack of learners' desire to engage with English language learning. In many cases, learners and non-learners said they faced more than one barrier to learning.

A number of barriers to progression were also identified and they can be grouped into two main categories.

- Barriers relating to the provision or course included: the cost of a course, unsuitable pace of learning resulting from mixed ability classes, perceived quality of teaching and delivery, perceived limited teacher support/contact time, limited awareness of higher-level provision and the absence of ESOL accreditation from providers.

- Barriers based on individual characteristics included: diminishing of motivation to continue learning and poor attendance (caused by a wide range of personal circumstances).

2. Introduction

Context

Census data (2011)⁷ shows that approximately 770, 000 adults (aged 16+) in the UK do not speak English well or at all. English proficiency is lowest for men and women aged 25-44 across all ethnic groups, except for Indians. Pakistani (18.9%) and Bangladeshi (21.9%) ethnic groups have the highest proportions of people aged 16 or over with poor English language proficiency. By faith community, the Muslim population has the highest proportion of people aged 16 and over who cannot speak English well or at all (16%) and more women than men reported poorer English proficiency levels. Those with self-reported poor English skills were also three times more likely to report having no educational qualifications than those with high proficiency⁸. Of those who are employed, people with low levels of English are twice as likely to work in lower skilled jobs as those with high English proficiency⁹.

Demand for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision has been documented as being greater than supply. In a NATECLA survey (2014)¹⁰ 80% of providers reported to have waiting lists and 66% of them cited a lack of government funding as the main reason for this. The recent House of Commons Library briefing paper (Foster and Bolton, 2018¹¹) provides a useful outline of the current ESOL funding arrangements for adults (aged 19+). A summary of Foster and Bolton's key policy mechanisms is:

- Government-funded ESOL is funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through the Adult Education Budget (AEB). ESOL funding is not ring-fenced. Prior to the 2016/17 academic year, ESOL was funded via the Adult Skills Budget and community learning budget, which were brought together into the AEB in 2016/17.
- ESFA fully funds ESOL provision up to level 2 for the unemployed in receipt of specific work-related benefits. All other eligible classroom-based adult ESOL

⁷ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2018) English Language Skills. [online] Accessed via: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/english-language-skills/latest>

⁸ Detailed Analysis - English Language Proficiency in the Labour Market, ONS, Jan 2014

⁹ Making ESOL policy work better for migrants and wider society...on speaking terms, Demos, 2014

¹⁰ NATCELA (2014) Migrants on huge waiting lists for English courses as government funding is cut again. [online] Accessed via: <https://www.natecla.org.uk/news/779/ESOLwaiting-lists>

¹¹ Foster, D. and Bolton, P. (2018) Adult ESOL in England. UK Parliament. Commons Library Briefing #7,905, 25 April 2018. [online] Accessed via: <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7905#fullreport>

learning is co-funded, with government contributing 50% of the course cost, with the exception of a low wage trial in 2018/19 and 2019/20 for those with low incomes (with earnings below £15,726.50) which allow providers to fully fund courses. There is no funding provided for workplace ESOL.

- Funding is demand-led so budgets for future adult ESOL provision are not set. Government data shows AEB ESOL spending fell by more than half between 2009/10 and 2016/17.
- Some separate funding streams for target groups exist. One example is the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) which provided a £10m boost to language support already provided by local authorities.

In 2016, the former Prime Minister commissioned Dame Casey to undertake a review into integration and opportunity in isolated and deprived communities. The Casey review concluded that good English skills are 'fundamental' to integrated communities, but a number of providers of English Language courses noted that their funding for such provision from government had reduced in recent years. Foster and Bolton (2018)¹² reported that ESOL funding via the AEB 'fell by 56% in real terms between 2009-10 and 2016-17' although there was an increase in the 2016/17 academic year. The Casey Review recommended the provision of additional funding for area-based plans and projects to address: promoting English language skills, empowering marginalised women, promoting more social mixing, particularly among young people; and tackling barriers to employment for the most socially isolated groups. Since the publication of the Casey Review, there have been calls for a national ESOL strategy.

The 2017 All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration found that progression routes for ESOL learners were not always smooth¹³. The 2018 Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper¹⁴ highlighted that some people find it difficult to find suitable ESOL provision. It also reported that over half the providers in Greater London, (including two-thirds of colleges), struggled to meet demand at pre-entry and entry levels. As part of the government's response to the Integrated Communities Strategy Green paper, the government has committed to developing a new strategy for English language for speakers of other languages in 2019. This proposal was welcomed by many responding to the green paper consultation.

¹² Foster, D. and Bolton, P. (2018) Adult ESOL in England. UK Parliament. Commons Library Briefing #7,905, 25 April 2018. [online] Accessed via:

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7905#fullreport>

¹³ See <https://socialintegrationappg.org.uk/>

¹⁴ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper>

Aims and objectives of the research

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned CFE Research to undertake exploratory research to strengthen the evidence base on how provision meets the needs of different types of adult (19+) ESOL learners. Particular focus was placed on the accessibility of provision, pathways through provision, progression through levels and the availability of appropriate information. The research also sought to better understand the needs of non-learners and barriers to them in accessing provision. The key research questions were as follows:

- How do existing ESOL learners access the system and what are their needs in relation to access? How are needs currently met?
- What are learners' perceptions and experiences of progression through the stages of the ESOL system and what are the barriers and enablers to further learning?
- Why don't non-learners with ESOL needs engage in learning currently offered and how do the barriers non-learners face differ to those for learners?
- How do providers make decisions in planning the quantity and level of ESOL provision and how can they reach more learners within their existing budgets?
- How do providers support ESOL learners to progress between informal and formal provision and support them into other further education?
- How do providers currently use technology to deliver ESOL?

Methodology

A two-stage research methodology for this study was designed in partnership with the Department.

For stage one of the research study, a feasibility study was conducted to test methodological approaches in engaging with the participants specified below. This stage of the project involved testing the following approaches:

- Use of case study visits with providers, to engage senior leaders, teachers and learners;
- Conducting focus groups and paired interviews with learners (during the provider case study visits); and
- Consultation and engagement with local community groups to test the feasibility of accessing non-learners through these groups or through existing learners' contacts.

The second phase of the research included a survey of providers, a day-long fieldwork visit to twenty eight participating English language learning providers and a series of focus groups with non-learners.

Findings presented in this report are therefore derived from the following participants:

- Learners who were engaged in formal or non-formal English language learning;
- Non-learners who have not previously engaged in any type of formal or informal English language learning;
- Teachers delivering English language courses, delivering formal or informal courses; and
- Senior leaders from organisations (referred to as ‘providers’) delivering formal or informal English language provision.

The collective viewpoints of provider representatives, i.e. teachers and senior leaders, are all referred to as ‘providers’.

It should be noted that the evidence presented in this report is not representative of all speakers of other languages and providers offering English language provision, but of those who participated in this study. Care should therefore be taken when drawing conclusions. Further details of the methodological approach undertaken is provided below.

Provider survey

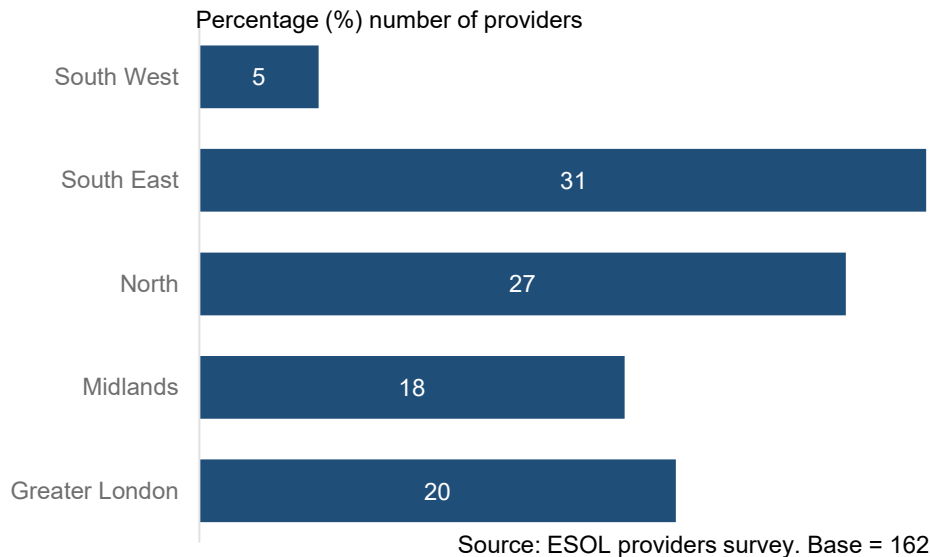
The overall aim of the survey was to learn from those who manage provision of English language learning for speakers of other languages on behalf of learning providers. The survey aimed to understand:

- The type of English language learning provision offered by providers;
- How English language learning provision is funded;
- Current levels of demand for English language learning and how providers meet this demand;
- Who currently accesses English language learning provision;
- How English language learning provision is delivered;
- The perceived impact of English language learning on learners; and
- The potential barriers learners face in accessing provision.

An online link to the survey was disseminated to English language learning providers through the seven regional ESOL coordinators¹⁵. A sample of 305 providers whose English language learning provision was funded by the AEB was provided by DfE and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) was undertaken. A total 61 surveys were completed via CATI and 111 surveys were completed online, with a total sample size of 172 providers. Ten respondents' responses were removed from the final sample, due to multiple people from organisations completing the survey¹⁶. Base sizes, displaying the number of people who gave a response to any question (excluding those who said that the question did not apply to them) are shown on each chart.

Of the final 162 providers, 80% were funded through the AEB. As shown in Figure 1, the sample represented a slightly higher proportion of providers from the South (72) than the North and Midlands (63). Meaningful differences were sought by funding type (AEB vs other) and by location of provider. However, no significant differences were identified.

Figure 1: Location of providers



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base: 162

¹⁵ ESOL coordinators are part of the Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships and implement activities providing strategic support to ESOL provision in the region. This can include mapping exercise of formal and informal ESOL provision in their area.

¹⁶ Preference was given to seniority of post.

Statistical significance

Assessing the statistical significance from the survey data is challenging as there is no definitive sample frame of all ESOL providers. As a result, several assumptions were made when running tests for statistical significance.

1. Through correspondence with DfE and partner agencies, a population estimate of 1,000 ESOL providers in England was used.
2. No subgroup data is available to describe individual provider types. It is therefore not possible to apply non-response weighting to the achieved sample.
3. As per all survey analyses, statistical testing assumes a normal distribution in response and random sampling.

Annex 1 shows confidence intervals for the full achieved sample of 162 providers based on the prior assumptions. Where the results for one group of respondents are compared and reported against the results for another group, any differences were statistically significant at the 95% probability level, unless otherwise stated. If the prior assumptions are met, this means that we can be 95% confident that the differences observed between the subgroups are genuine differences, and have not just occurred by chance.

Provider case study visits

CFE recruited English language learning providers to take part in case study visits. Providers were recruited through a number of means including contacting those who responded to the survey and agreed to be re-contacted for further involvement in the research and through communications sent by ESOL coordinators. Follow-up contact was made by CFE with those providers who expressed an interest in participating in a case study visit. Each provider visit included:

- A combination of face-to-face paired or one-to-one interview/s with 40 senior leaders lasting approximately 60 minutes;
- Interviews or focus groups with 136 teachers; and
- Interviews or focus groups with 336 learners (lasting 30-45 minutes).

Of the 28 providers participating, ten were Further Education (FE) colleges, ten were third sector providers¹⁷ and eight were local authority providers. Six were based in Greater London, ten were based in the South East, five in the North and seven in the Midlands.

¹⁷ Third sector providers included community organisations and organisations with charitable status offering formal and non-formal English language learning courses.

Focus groups with non-learners

Ten small focus groups (of up to four people) were conducted with a total of 38 non-learners to better understand the barriers non-learners face in accessing provision. In agreement with DfE, the focus groups were conducted with non-learners who were native Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Gujarati or Punjabi speakers. Due to the sensitive nature of the research and the difficulty in reaching non-learners, snowball sampling methods were used. CFE contacted a number of community groups known to them, who facilitated recruitment of non-learners. Focus groups lasted approximately 30 – 40 minutes.

Report structure

The remainder of this report will present findings from the provider survey, provider case study visits and focus groups with non-learners. The subsequent chapter goes on to discuss the purpose of ESOL provision, types of provision offered by providers, sources of funding and how this impacts on the availability of provision. Chapter 3 goes on to examine findings relating to the demand for English language provision. After which findings relating to the types of learners accessing English language provision are presented. Chapter 5 discusses findings related to learners' motivations to undertake English learning and their views about progression. The entry barriers to learning, along with the barriers to progression, are also discussed. The penultimate chapter presents evidence relating to providers' delivery of English language courses. Particular attention is paid to the similarities and differences in providers' approaches to delivery. Evidence related to the support offered to providers is also presented. The final chapter draws conclusions from the research.

3. English language learning provision offered by providers

This chapter presents providers' views on the purpose of English language learning provision. It covers how provision:

- Supports integration, employment opportunities and progression;
- Equips learners with essential life skills; and
- Encourages greater civic engagement.

An overview of the type and nature of provision offered by providers is also discussed and any differences in views by provider type is presented. This chapter also considers the sources of funding accessed by providers and the role of partnerships and collaboration in delivering English language learning provision. Finally, an overview of how providers market English language courses to prospective learners is shown.

Views on the purpose of English language learning provision

Generally speaking, senior leaders and teachers noted that the acquisition of English language learning skills related to three main areas. Table 1 presents the key purposes by the type of provider for which participants worked.

Table 1: Views on the purpose of English language learning provision by provider type

Purpose of provision	Evidence from interviews with leaders and teachers from all types of FE providers	Evidence from interviews with leaders and teachers from third sector only
Integration of communities into the UK	To help socially integrate those newly arrived in the UK and long-term residents with low-level English language skills.	Offered in combination with other cultural integration programmes.
Employment opportunities / progression	Developing English language skills to facilitate access to employment opportunities, or progress in careers.	
Essential life skills / civic engagement	Increase capability and confidence in dealing with civic institutions (doctors, banks, schools, local authorities, etc.)	Develop learners' everyday life skills.

Integration

The majority of participants from all types of provision said a main purpose of ESOL was to support integration into British society for two main groups:

- People newly arrived in the UK (such as economic migrants, women on spousal visas and refugees/asylum seekers); and
- Those who have resided in England for some time who have no or low-level English language skills.

In this context, 'integration' meant meaningful interaction with the wider English-speaking community outside their own cultural groups.

"For us, the language, English, is the main tool for integration in the UK society. If you deprive someone from accessing ESOL classes, how are they going to integrate?" (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

However, some teachers and senior leaders said acquiring English language skills was only part of what was required for learners to integrate into the community. They reported, for instance, that to become proficient and confident in English, learners needed to practice and develop their English outside the classroom. This requires a degree of continual social interaction outside their immediate community setting.

"We've always been challenging the Home Office's decision or definition of integration. [Our interpretation of the Home Office definition is] 'Integration can only start when one is allowed to live in the UK society, then they can fulfil their full potential.' [For us] it starts at day one [...] you have to start integrating from when you arrive." (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Some providers, particularly third sector ones, offered language provision alongside 'cultural reference' discussions to support learners' integration. This included discussions on British culture, navigating local transport or visiting the local library. Third sector participants said these discussions helped learners develop their confidence to undertake such tasks.

Employment opportunities and progression

Enabling access to employment opportunities was also viewed by most participants as a key purpose of English language learning provision, regardless of the type of provider they worked for. Senior leaders and teachers spoke about learners who wanted to learn or improve their English language skills to help them secure a job as well as those who wished to progress in a career.

“[English language learning] helps students get their next job. So, we’ve got students who are very highly qualified in their own countries, but can’t seem to get that next step on the ladder because they can’t either speak, read or write functional English.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Essential life skills and civic engagement

Learning English was viewed as vital to conducting everyday life in England. Senior leaders and teachers said developing English enabled learners to become more capable and confident when dealing with institutions such as banks, doctors, the local authority, the police, or supporting children with their homework and speaking to schools.

One senior leader from a third sector provider described the importance of ‘health literacy’, enabling conversations with medical practitioners to accurately describe symptoms, understand the advice, and read medicine bottles. Some teachers, particularly within the third sector, spoke about using their classes to focus lessons and vocabulary on key topics related to everyday life skills.

“We’ll design [lessons] around the integration needs of women, so we do quite a lot on things like sexual health, on domestic abuse, on child-rearing.” (Teacher, Third Sector provider)

Provision offered by providers

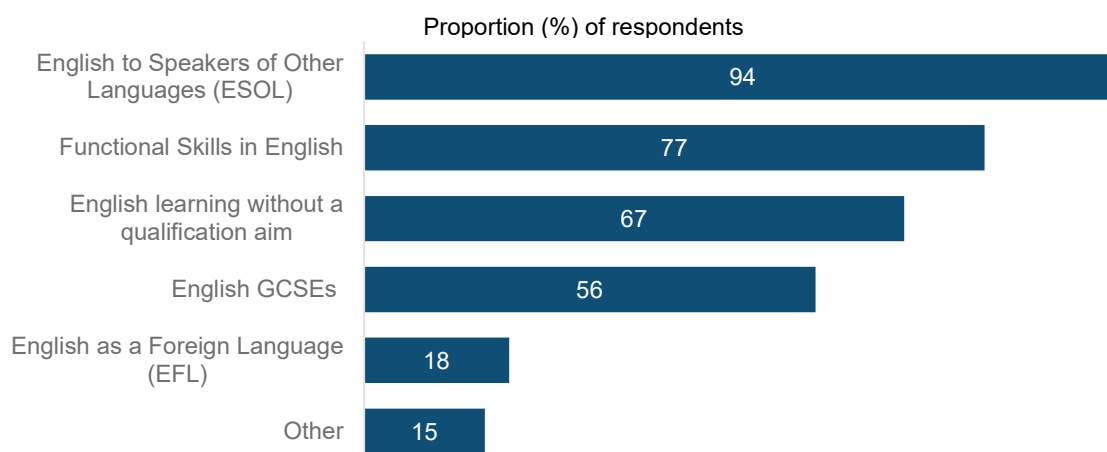
Overview of providers’ English language learning provision

Figure 2 shows ESOL was offered by nearly all providers responding to the survey (94%). More than three-quarters also offered Functional Skills in English (77%) and two-thirds of providers offered English without a qualification aim (67%).

Based on partial data¹⁸, nearly all providers said they offered entry level provision (97%) and the majority offered pre-entry and level 1 (both 86%). However, two-thirds (66%) said they offer level 2 and one in eleven (9%) offer level 3.

¹⁸ Base = 110 responses.

Figure 2: Types of English language learning provision offered by providers to speakers of other languages



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base: 162

FE provision

During case study visits, FE providers described a wider range of provision, at different levels, compared to local authority and third sector providers. Typically, FE providers offered a variety of ESOL courses, ranging from Entry 1 up to level 2 (and in some cases level 3 and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)), GCSE English and Functional Skills. Some colleges offered learners the opportunity to undertake a vocational course with an ESOL component, and this tended to be offered at various levels.

“We have the pathway programmes here, motor vehicle, hair, beauty, business, IT... [Learners] can do this vocational subject at quite a low level, more or less a level 1 but have an ESOL bolt-on with it. That’s something we’ve been experimenting with and [we’re considering] at the moment in terms of how best to present that provision.” (Senior Leader, FE Provider)

Some FE providers also offered non-accredited, funded language courses to learners who were either:

- Performing below the requirement of the course onto which they were enrolled; or
- To help learners progress onto a high-level course if some aspect of their English language skills still needed improving.

These courses were commonly user-led (i.e. co-designed with learners), at pre-entry level, and often referred to as ‘bridging courses’ by providers during interviews. Providers said they had been designed to assist learners who were not able to progress to the next educational level or achieve the required standard for progression within an academic year. In some instances, FE providers indicated that these programmes had been

designed to support learners and subsequently increase retention / improvement in progression. In relation to progression, providers said they were protecting funding by ensuring that learners were not enrolled onto ESOL programmes until staff had reasonable confidence that they would succeed. In their view, this reduced the likelihood learners would drop-out of courses.

FE providers who offered bridging courses noted that learners often had additional and complex needs and that progression could be difficult to achieve. The courses were not typically time dependent and were designed to improve confidence as well as ability. Participants said that bridging courses enabled learners to remain engaged with English language learning and countered the demotivation that learners sometimes felt at not passing an accredited course. FE providers noted that some learners on bridging programmes repeated the course several times, simply because they required extensive learning support which impacted on their pace of learning.

“It’s those bridging courses that have been the lifeblood of our ESOL department because without those we would lose students all the time. If you’ve got somebody in entry two who has failed their reading, has done entry one writing but isn’t ready for entry two writing, there would be nowhere to place them.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Local authority provision

Findings from case studies showed that local authorities tended to offer ‘adult community learning’, a mix of accredited and non-accredited provision, at venues and locations based in local communities. Local authority provision was also offered as outreach and sometimes contracted to third sector organisations to deliver. Local authority provision usually ranged from pre-entry to level 2. Evidence showed that some local authorities also offered vocational programmes which allowed learners to acquire ESOL qualifications too.

“We [...] are responsive to [...] the needs of the residents in the borough. We’re running some childcare programmes, so childcare for ESOL, health and social care for ESOL and we’re going to be moving on to ESOL for carers who are already in work. The good thing is, a lot of the learners on other programmes are now progressing into those, so they’ve done their ESOL here [PROVIDER] or at Outreach and now they’ve moved into our vocational programmes.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Third sector provision

The majority of third sector providers offered provision at pre-entry/entry levels; some offered accredited provision at level 1. This provision tended to be non-accredited and informal. It was often developed in response to local needs and based on developing

functional language skills to help learners to develop 'everyday life skills', such as visiting the doctor, shopping, reporting crime, etc.

Smaller third sector providers offered 'wrap-around' services to learners as part of their wider remit (housing advice, immigration support, benefits information, etc.) and offered childcare facilities for those wishing to undertake a class/course with the provider. Third sector provision tended to be at no cost, or low cost, to the learner.

Some third sector providers offered 'conversation classes' or 'role-play' classes at local community locations such as parks and libraries, to encourage learners to practice speaking English. The classes were usually run by volunteers and organised to supplement the English language pre-entry classes. Learners were encouraged to attend role-play or conversation classes to allow them to develop confidence in speaking in English. A number of participants working in the third sector said that conversation classes were popular among learners and had a number of benefits, such as allowing learners to develop friendships and integrating learners into the community.

"We do a creative English class as well and we do that [in a café] across the road in the park [...] it's a course which is like role-play. They're a shopkeeper or the police and they role-play in a fun way of learning English, rather than the standard pen and paper and reading. It's sitting around and having a chat [...] the role-play is not accredited but it can lead to accreditation when they then access the entry one ESOL." (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

A number of third sector providers focused on specific target audiences such as offering classes to single mothers, women or communities from countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. Third sector providers were also more likely to integrate and embed English language learning in 'interest-based learning', such as cooking, sewing or gardening. Providers noted such methods were an effective way to introduce English Language learning to learners.

"English learning was part of sewing - women came for the vocation but [learning English alone] didn't hold an interest since they have got skills which they can use and they get a sense of achievement, whereas English is a long-term programme." (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider).

Class sizes

Class sizes ranged considerably across all types of providers, although there was a greater consistency in class size across FE provision. Class sizes in formal provision were considered to be larger than in previous years, but typically were not larger than 18 learners. Senior leaders and teachers said class sizes were driven by demand for courses. FE learners indicated that current class sizes were 'about right', although there was evidence that some learners felt that it would have been beneficial if they were

smaller. Senior leaders and teachers from third sector providers offering non-accredited provision noted that class sizes varied from week to week, with the smallest being three and the largest 26.

However, both teaching staff and learners highlighted the challenge of classes comprising learners of mixed abilities. The changing demographic make-up of ESOL learners (see Chapter 5), involving larger numbers of those from non-European countries who may have little or no education, presented a range of challenges.

“I was in my new pre-entry class and we were reading a book, most students were turning the pages but one student had no idea what to do with the book. He didn’t know how to turn the page, he went straight to the back and then he opened it in the middle. As basic as not knowing how to use a book. You’ve got different alphabets, people who can read, people who can’t read.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

This highly diverse learner population created challenges for qualifications, particularly within the current funding framework. In offering an ESOL course, a provider typically started from the premise of an ‘average learner’, yet it was reported by some senior leaders and several teachers that finding an average between someone who may have no literacy alongside those that have substantial experience of prior education is extremely challenging.

Fluctuation of class sizes across voluntary providers was found to be more pronounced. The number of learners per class ranged from between 5 and 25 during any one class, causing a number of logistical challenges for the provider, particularly in managing a wide range of learners’ needs.

Timing of classes

FE providers structured their ESOL provision around school terms. Most provision was purposely offered around the school timetable to help meet the needs of learners and tended to be delivered in two, three-hour sessions on two different days over a fixed period (usually college academic term). The extent of out-of-hours provision (evening and weekend classes) was found to be limited among FE and local authority providers. However, this was something that some learners said they would value more of. Out-of-hours provision was found to be much more common among third sector organisations.

Classroom contact time

Almost all learners and the majority of senior leaders and teaching staff believed that four to six contact hours per week, for the duration of the course, delivered in formal provision was insufficient for learners to develop the required language skills outlined in provider

delivery plans¹⁹. Generally speaking the majority of AEB funded providers offered between four to six hours of guided learning per week. Typically AEB funded providers perceived that the offer of four to six hours was often dictated by the level of funding in which they were of receipt²⁰. Senior leaders noted that offering more contact time would mean that they were not able to cover the cost from the funding they received²¹. The majority of learners stated that they would welcome additional funded hours, irrespective of background and current living or working arrangements. Community providers tended to offer fewer hours per week than FE providers. The number of hours offered was constrained by available resources, such as the availability of rooms/venues and staff to deliver lessons. Interviews with third sector learners also showed that they would welcome additional hours.

Flexibility of provision

Several providers allowed learners to join courses at different points of the year. In the third sector, participants usually said this was a consequence of whether funding to run classes was available. Local authority and third sector providers offered classes when enough learners had expressed an interest to make it viable to run a course. In cases where too few learners enquired and/or applied, providers waited to commence classes until numbers were economically viable. In a few instances, FE providers also offered a rolling enrolment process to their learners, meaning that learners could join an accredited course at any time during the academic year²². Teaching staff from these providers noted the practical problems this presented within the classroom, particularly in following a set curriculum and teaching mixed ability classes. However, senior leaders from these providers stated that by offering flexible provision, it allowed them to meet the demand for English language learning.

¹⁹ The barriers this presents for learners are also discussed on p.82

²⁰ AEB funding is drawn down by providers based on the number of hours a course takes overall without mandating the period over which the course should be delivered. The number of hours for a course is typically set by the Awarding Organisation for regulated provision, and by the provider for non-regulated provision. Providers have the autonomy to take decisions at a local level on the intensity of the courses they offer.

²¹ The AEB funding formula recognises that providers may need to deliver additional learning to individual learners that incurs additional costs above the qualification rate. Providers can claim a top-up to the original funding rate to ensure they are funded for the additional hours.

²² These providers typically offered accredited ESOL provision by a module by module basis.

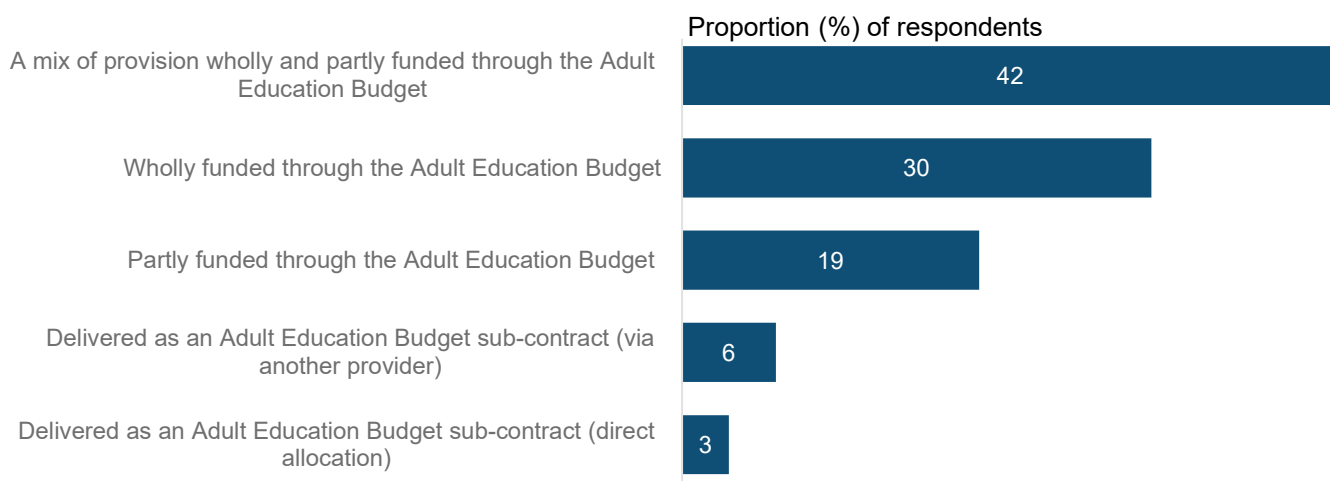
Sources of funding

AEB funding arrangements of surveyed providers

The survey found nine tenths of providers (91%) were at least part-funded by ESFA through the AEB (Figure 3). One in eleven (9%) providers reported that their provision was delivered as an AEB sub-contract. Based on the funding criteria listed on pp.14-15, at least three in five providers funded learning via more than one source (i.e. direct, part-ESFA funded provision).

All FE colleges and some local authority providers taking part in case study visits were in receipt of AEB funding; this situation was less likely for third sector providers. Some FE providers used other sources of funding, such as AEB-funded community learning to offer programmes to help learners engage in learning. Uses of other funding sources by FE providers was common in instances where English language learning in a community setting was offered or to fund the offer of bridging courses.

Figure 3: English language learning provision funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency through the Adult Education Budget



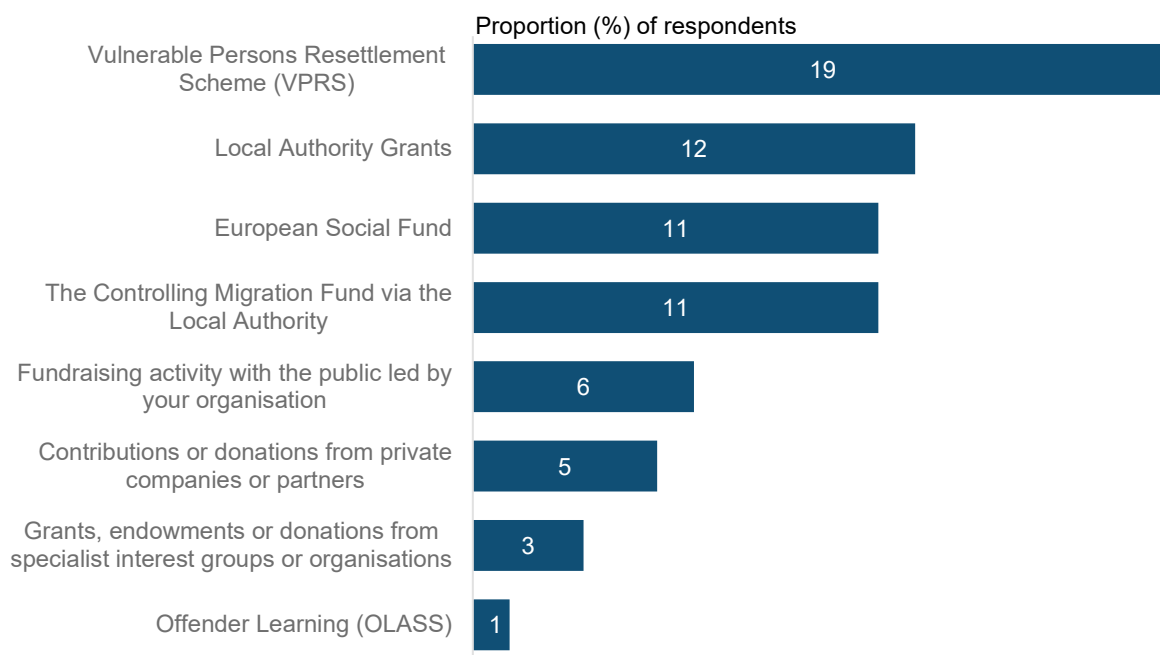
Source: ESOL provider survey. Base = 130

Other funding streams used by providers

Almost two-thirds of providers responding to the survey reported that some of their English language learning provision was not funded through the AEB (63%). As can be seen from Figure 4, (overleaf), a fifth of providers (19%) delivered English language learning as part of the VPRS – additional money for ESOL is allocated to local authorities participating in the scheme. A small number of FE providers and some third sector providers also said they delivered learning funded through this scheme.

Figure 4 also shows that just over a tenth of providers responding to the survey received funding from the European Social Fund (11%). It was common for third sector and local authority providers to receive funding through time-limited (government) initiatives such as the Flexible Learning Fund²³, Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) and the VPRS.

Figure 4: Sources of funding used in provision of English language learning to speakers of other languages



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base = 102

Non-formula funded AEB (community learning) and the CMF were used by local authorities to deliver English language learning. Access to these funding streams allowed local authorities to be flexible in their approach. FE colleges also used this as additional funding (sometimes in partnership with local authorities) as well as formula-funded AEB to offer bridging courses to learners enrolled onto accredited courses but not meeting the required standards. These two funds allowed providers to offer provision that supported fully funded AEB learning and/or allowed providers to reach learners ineligible for full funding.

“We’re lucky with our funding; we can use some of our adult community learning funding [AEB] to be more flexible with our programmes, so can offer bridging programmes in between. If they’ve gone between one entry level to another and

²³ A £11.4 million DfE fund that supports projects to encourage more people to take part in new training or courses that will help them progress in current employment or secure a new job.

they're not ready for the next entry level in terms of exam provision, then they can take a bridging programme.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Managing complex funding streams

Almost half of providers (47%) responding to the survey reported that they received a mixture of AEB funding and funding from other sources. The majority of case study local authority and third sector providers were reliant on mixed funding streams and more likely to cite multiple streams of funding compared to FE providers. The level of complexity has implications for the amount of financial management and administration required of providers and, in the case of time-limited funding, the resources required to apply for new funding as it becomes available. Third sector providers also accessed a range of commercial and/or local sources of micro-funding to fund English language learning.

“Well, at the moment I’m getting a salary from the Refugee Council, part-time, that’s EU funding. So, I’m subcontracted by the Refugee Council, then I’ve got funding from [A] City Council, there’s the [Church] have given some money. That’s tricky because you’ve got to spend the money and then send the receipts and then they reimburse you. So, some are restrictive. The Tesco tokens²⁴, I haven’t looked for this month, but that will be between £1,000 and £4,000.”
(Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Local authority and third sector providers operating a strategic plan that guided their offer held greater knowledge of different funding streams. Local authorities cited the benefits of a clear strategic plan as preventing duplication of effort (and therefore efficient use of limited funds) and ensuring that there was provision available, from pre-entry to level 2 (and in a couple of cases, level 3).

We belong to a group of West London local authority providers and we do joint planning to ensure that there are easy progression routes across borough boundaries, that we’re not duplicating, we’re not in direct competition with each other. (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

During case study visits, community providers described how they accessed funding across a range of other charitable and not-for-profit organisations. These ranged from national funding such as the National Lottery Community Fund and Children in Need, national networks such the Good Things Foundation, Faith Action and Communities of

²⁴ Every two months Tesco hand out grants of up to £4,000, £2,000 and £1,000 to local community projects. Each time a customer shops they are offered a blue token at the checkout and are able to vote for the local project they want the money to go to.

<https://sustainability.tescopl.com/sustainability/communities/topics/community-grants/bags-of-help/>

Identity, as well as local community sources. Typically, these funding streams were targeted towards a particular group or need²⁵. A number of providers focused their efforts on provision for refugees and those long term residents in isolated communities with low levels of English. One of several such examples was a community provider using a grant by the Good Things Foundation to provide English language classes to Muslim women who have been in the UK for less than one year.

Providers responding to the survey were unlikely to engage in fundraising activities with the public (6%) to raise money for English language learning provision. Small numbers of providers noted contributions or donations from private companies or partners (5%) and grants, endowments or donations from specialist interest groups or organisations (3%).

A small number of third sector providers responding to the survey stated that they were not in receipt of any funding for their provision of English language learning. Findings from case study visits with third sector organisations showed that many were reliant on volunteer support and few indicated that they received professional tutor support for free.

“It is incredibly important, if we didn’t, there are so many of our services which would come to a halt. With our teachers, volunteers are covering four of our nine sessions, so that would deeply impact what we could offer if we didn’t have any volunteers at all.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

One case study third sector provider who offered pre-entry informal provision said they received no funding and were solely reliant on the volunteers who ran the charity. However, this was the exception to the 28 case study visits as all other providers received at least some funding.

“Our little charity, [...] we have a whip around [...] we put our own money in. My husband provides the photocopies [...] I’m used to just using a whiteboard and markers. They use their mobiles, I’m fine with that. Last week we had been describing pictures so I said, ‘Get a picture of your home town and describe it to your partner.’” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Passing costs to learners

Some providers passed on some or all learning costs to the learner²⁶. Providers offered some full-cost provision to learners outside of full or part-funded eligibility, where demand existed. For example, for non-classroom-based courses delivered with employers. Some

²⁵ For example, Faith Action and the Good Things Foundation were funded through the Government’s Community Based English Language Programme (now superseded by the Integrated Communities English Language Programme (ICELP)).

²⁶ As per the policy summary at the start of the section, providers can pass costs onto learners.

providers passed costs for co-funded provision onto learners if they met the basic requirements and were in employment, or not in employment and not looking for work. Findings showed that the costs passed onto learners ranged from £3 per class to £600 for a year-long course.

Several learners who were accessing free courses stated that it would be difficult for them to attend if they had to pay (to be discussed further in chapter 7). All providers offered courses at no or low cost to learners who were experiencing financial hardships. These learners had typically met AEB funding or CMF eligibility criteria.

“For some people, if we see they’re in financial hardship, we do offer them free classes [...] we have a social worker who’s on our team and she will look at which families could really benefit from having someone in the household to speak English and learn English. As a charity we can’t offer free classes for everyone, but that would be amazing.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Learners who had not met the full or part-funded eligibility criteria for AEB funding were often required to pay the full cost of a course, the amount of which varied depending on the provider. For example, some providers were charging learners £200 - £300 per module, others the same amount for a year-long course. Providers took decisions on whether to charge learners ineligible for AEB funding for books, course materials, and specific elements of a qualification and/or assessment. Another provider noted that learners can pay upwards of £500 for a year-long accredited ESOL course. Some providers however charged much less.

“So [learners] pay £398 for the first semester, that’s £300 for the course, because that’s the funding we get for the speaking and listening, £45 for the qualification and we use course books, so we add the course book onto the cost of the course and then we give them the books, so that’s £53 and they get a course book and a workbook and that lasts them the whole year. If they just come back for reading then that’s just £162, so we do make it very clear. It’s more expensive at the beginning but the second half you pay a lot less. So, it’s a total of £560-ish.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Competitiveness between providers seemed to prompt some to lower the cost of accredited courses. Some senior leaders from local authorities and third sector organisations felt that FE colleges held the monopoly over attracting learners, largely due to their substantial AEB allocations. Some local authority providers had noted that use of CMF allowed them to exercise greater flexibility in the fees they passed on to learners. Consequently, these providers were able to lower the fees passed on to learners.

“We used to charge by the hour. On qualification courses, full fee was nearly £4 an hour and adult community learning was £2.50 an hour full fee [...]. The college said all ESOL will be free next year and we became the only provider in

the borough charging anything for ESOL. So I went back to our Head of Learning and said the college are charging a £30 registration fee a year and claiming it's free, so we'll match it." (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Partnerships and collaborative working

There is limited evidence from this study of formal collaboration between FE, local authority and community providers. The extent to which providers supported learners to progress from one provider to another was therefore also limited. From the case studies, some senior leaders recognised what they felt to be important potential benefits of collaborative provision within their communities. However, they reported no collaborations or partnerships with other organisations. Frequently providers interpreted collaboration or working in partnership to mean referring learners to other organisations.

"We work alongside the FE College. They deliver the short and fat programmes, more intensive, more full-time accredited programmes. Our learners here, they need a bit longer, we tend to teach over a year, we call them long and thin programmes. [...] We've found that if we get learners who need more intensive programmes, we'll send them over to the college and vice versa." (Senior leader, Local Authority provider)

The exception was participants employed by local authorities in senior strategic roles who desired better collaboration between all providers in an area. For example one such individual said an organisation in their area had employed a training hub coordinator who had created a central resource listing local English language learning and the responsible providers. The resource was used by providers to refer learners to the right level of provision as well as by learners themselves.

A few participants from learning providers discussed funding streams (i.e. Talk English²⁷, Flexible Learning Fund) that supported collaborative opportunities between organisations that they used to deliver services such as non-accredited courses in community settings to speakers of other languages.

"The partners market for Talk English. If we're partnering a mosque, they'll make a poster or they'll say it in the prayers on Friday. That's part of their relationship with us. We ask them to recruit the learners and we bring the course and the teacher. We bring the coffee and they bring the place. That's how we do it with them." (Senior leader, Third Sector provider)

²⁷ Funded by the MHCLG and offers a programme of regular talk English activities for people learning English, so they can meet others and practice speaking.

The impact of competition

During case studies, several senior leaders noted challenges to collaborative working due to perceived competition for funding. Some participants described an environment where providers are protective of their funding streams and learners and perceive other providers as a threat. Some reported that providers can compete for the same pot of money, that available funding is reducing and that they were careful about referring potential learners elsewhere as they may lose enrolments.

People were often competing for the same money, that's a bit difficult as well. There's another lady, I know she has a lot of women attend, she's got no money because she's just not good at fundraising. There's another lady who has a lot of funding and not many students. So, there's a lot of jealousy (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Most provider participants recognised the need to work collaboratively, so both learners and providers can benefit from partnership working. These participants often stated that ideally, learners should be directed to provision that is pitched at the right level to meet their needs. However, the competition for learners noted by some providers can lead to duplication of effort. To address this in one area, providers had set up a local working group that meets three times a year to discuss the provision in the area and has successfully funded an ESOL coordinator.

Marketing of English language courses

The majority of senior leaders from all types of providers reported that marketing was mainly by word-of-mouth. Learners typically heard of English language learning provision from a family member, friend or acquaintance. Several learners commented that they had become aware of the provision they were accessing through word-of-mouth and via personal recommendations from people who had attended a course/class with a particular provider. This did not come as a surprise to senior leaders as they felt individuals who required English language learning lacked the skills to react to more formal marketing and communication messages.

Word-of-mouth was perceived by some senior leaders, particularly those in the third sector, as an effective way of marketing English language learning provision. As such they did not feel the need to formally advertise their courses and so money could be saved by not having to allocate funding to marketing activities.

"It's traditionally word-of-mouth. A lot of it is learners seeing what another learner's achieved, they'll gossip with each other. Next minute one lady has brought a whole gang with her. This is one thing we're lucky with, we don't have

to spend really any money on marketing.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Whilst word-of-mouth was viewed to be the most effective method of advertising across the different types of providers, senior leaders also reported advertising English language provision via leaflets, posters and through Jobcentre Plus. Several learners commented they became aware of provision through leaflets in local libraries. Senior leaders felt that the success of these methods relied upon two key factors: the accessibility of these materials to prospective learners and, secondly, the circulation of such materials to organisations and areas where prospective learners visit.

“We have leaflets and posters. We put them all over the community [...]” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

In addition to using a variety of marketing methods, all FE colleges and some third sector providers used their websites to advertise their English language learning offers. However, the amount and coverage of marketing was dependent on available funding.

“We advertise that we do ESOL through our prospectus and on our website. We don’t market the individual courses. We do market our initial assessments [...] The brochures go out through all the libraries and schools and children’s centres [...]” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Advertising via Jobcentre Plus was also a common marketing tool, especially among those providers offering accredited provision. Some providers advertised their courses via promotional materials, others worked with Jobcentre Plus staff to brief them about courses on offer. A few providers placed a college representative at Jobcentre Plus to offer initial assessments to prospective learners who are applying for benefits. By doing so they were able to attract those who may be seeking work and, as a requirement of receiving benefits, have to engage with English language learning.

“We go to the Jobcentre Plus. We go there every other week and do initial assessments for people who sign up for Universal Credit or Jobseeker’s Allowance. We make them an almost instant offer.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Marketing courses via social networking tools was perceived as an effective means of advertising, particularly among third sector providers. This method was free to use and perceived to generate interest from prospective learners. Social networking tools such as WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook were cited by third sector providers alongside the use of leaflets and word-of mouth.

“We use various different methods... We use WhatsApp, we use social media, MailChimp, agencies through partners, through faith settings, through word-of-

mouth, leaflets, posters. We use lots of different avenues. Our leaflets are multi-lingual as well, Urdu, Gujarati, etc., so people can easily understand the message.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Summary

Findings showed that the type of English language learning provision offered varies by type of provider. FE providers were more likely to offer a wide range of accredited/classroom provision, at different levels, when compared with local authority and third sector providers. Some FE providers also offered non-accredited funded language courses to learners who were performing below the requirement for the course they were enrolled on to – known as bridging courses.

Local authorities tended to offer what they described as ‘adult community learning’, a mix of formal and informal provision, accredited and non-accredited provision, at venues and locations based in local communities. They used a variety of AEB and non-AEB funding sources as a foundation for their offer.

The majority of third sector providers tended to offer provision often at pre-entry/entry levels and some offered accredited provision at level 1. The provision offered by these providers tended to be non-accredited and informal, often developed in response to local needs and based on developing functional language skills to help learners to develop ‘everyday life skills’, such as visiting the doctor, shopping, etc.

Qualitative findings derived from case studies showed that the majority of local authority and third sector providers’ provision was largely reliant on mixed funding streams. Non-formula funded AEB funding²⁸ and the CMF were commonly stated by local authorities as sources of funding used to deliver English language learning and formula funded AEB funding was commonly stated as a source by FE providers. Findings also suggest limited collaboration and partnerships between FE, local authority and community providers.

²⁸ The 'non-formula-funded' activity within the ESFA funded AEB which is reconciled through the funding claims process.

4. Delivery of English language provision

This chapter discusses providers' delivery of English language courses. Particular attention is paid to the similarities and differences in their approaches to delivery, which includes the distinction between accredited and non-accredited courses. Teaching methods used to deliver English language learning by providers are also discussed along with the use of technology. Evidence related to the support offered to providers is also presented in this chapter.

Approach to delivery

Findings showed that there are clear differences in the content provided and the method of delivery between formal and community providers.

Accredited and non-accredited courses

Further education and local authority provision

FE and local authority providers followed a curriculum which was designed to equip the learner with the skills required to gain a qualification. ESOL Skills for Life courses comprised three modes: reading, writing and speaking and listening. The extent to which learners were able to take awards in a single mode as well as a 'full-mode' certificate that combines all three disciplines was variable across providers.

Courses offered by FE providers and some local authorities followed an integrated approach where teachers focused on skills development, vocabulary and grammar. Most FE providers said that they offered periods of learning across three terms, with terms dedicated to specific skills – 'speaking and listening', 'reading' and 'writing'. Content remained broadly similar across formal provision but differed by the time required by learners of different abilities to successfully cover the content.

Course delivery tended to follow a consistent approach across FE providers, however, local differences were identified depending on the curriculum used. Teachers and senior leaders from FE providers indicated that the requirements of curriculum limited the flexibility of teachers to plan content. In the view of some teachers and senior leaders, curriculum constraints meant the content being delivered by FE providers did not always meet the needs of learners.

"A lot of [learners want to learn] much more about everyday life and coping in everyday situations, whereas the exam requirements are somewhat different. So, you try and do a little bit of both but they're not totally compatible. The City & Guilds exam is very prescriptive really in what you have to teach." (Teacher, FE provider)

In two instances, senior staff indicated that the use of an external examiner had caused a degree of concern to learners who were not comfortable with being observed and assessed in a formal manner - and was cited as a factor in student non-attendance during the assessment task.

“We’ve found in a couple of instances students are put off by exams. In one place they changed their exam board because the one they were working with had an external examiner who came in and it freaked out a lot of students. They changed to self-assessment.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

In response some providers had changed to self-assessment rather than external moderation, to avoid external assessment. It was felt that self-assessment boards allowed providers to tailor the content of the courses and assessments to the needs of the learners to deliver increased learner success rates.

Third sector provision

Findings from case studies showed that third sector providers were more likely to offer non-accredited English language courses which allowed them greater flexibility in programme delivery. The decision not to follow an accredited course was deliberate and illustrated that, for many, the primary focus was on helping individuals to integrate into society by offering more practical content. It also meant that content was learner-driven and responsive to learners’ needs. Case study visits with third sector providers highlighted a range of topics covered in the provision they delivered, particularly at pre-entry and entry levels. These topics included navigating local transport networks, pregnancy, dealing with an emergency, reporting a crime, writing school applications, employability rights, hygiene and visiting a pharmacist.

“The hardest question I’ve ever been asked, they wanted words for female sexual parts so that when they could go to the doctor, they can explain where it’s hurting or bleeding or whatever. I found that very challenging... I’ve done washing hands, the difference between flu and colds, all sorts of things.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

By offering informal non-accredited provision third sector providers were able to offer a more relaxed environment where learners could learn at their own pace. Consequently, this had an impact on staff perception of the extent to which learners gained a true understanding of key learning blocks, for example, grammar. Learners enrolled in FE provision more commonly indicated that significant time was devoted in lessons to focus on grammar. Some third sector providers noted that informal provision based on learners’ needs was what made the courses/classes they offered distinct to the courses offered by FE providers.

“We have informal ESOL, we have no tests and no exams, our whole rationale behind that is if people want certificates they can go to the city college.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Findings showed that third sector providers had the flexibility to deliver English language learning classes in innovative ways which helped to meet learners' immediate needs. The most common example cited was where programmes facilitated the inclusion of childcare provision either within or alongside the lessons. (See Chapter 4 - one of the often cited entry barriers).

“On Mondays, we have volunteers who look after pre-school children while we teach the mothers. We also have a family learning group on Tuesdays where parents are learning in one end of the room and their children at the other end of the room.” (Teacher, Third Sector provider)

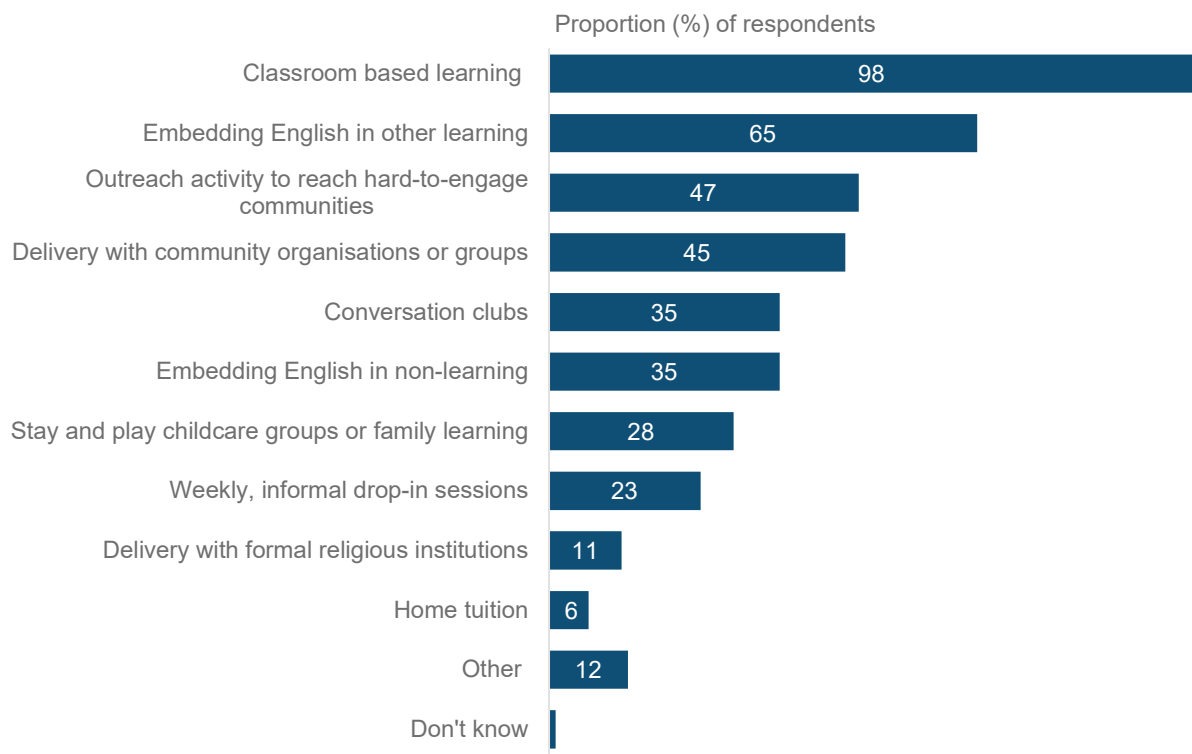
Methods used by providers

As can be seen from Figure 5 (overleaf), almost all providers responding to the survey reported that their organisation delivered English language learning through classroom-based learning (98%) and around two-thirds of providers embedded English language learning in other learning (65%). Just under half the providers delivered English language learning via outreach activity with hard-to-engage communities (47%) and/or delivered English language learning via community organisations or groups (45%). Small numbers of providers stated that they delivered English language learning through 'other' means, which included classes in the workplace and online learning (12%).

Qualitative findings from interviews with senior leaders, teachers and learners showed that classroom based learning was commonly used across FE, local authority and third sector providers. Within this delivery method, teachers and learners alike spoke about the value of incorporating independent, small group work, or paired work. Teachers noted that independent tasks during the class helped learners to develop skills necessary for independent learning. Group work was valued by teachers as it helped to break up the sessions and gave learners the chance to work and learn with their peers. Role-play activities were particularly valued by learners as these gave them the opportunity to listen to others speaking English and practice their own English.

“Getting them working independently in small groups, or in pairs, as quickly as possible is what you're trying to do, to get them using their language and not just being passive.” (Teacher, FE provider)

Figure 5: Methods used to deliver English language learning



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base: 162

Games were also found to be common method used among providers of all types. Several teachers commented that the use of games in teaching and learning was useful in encouraging learners to speak and repeat sentences and, as such, familiarise themselves with how to compose sentences.

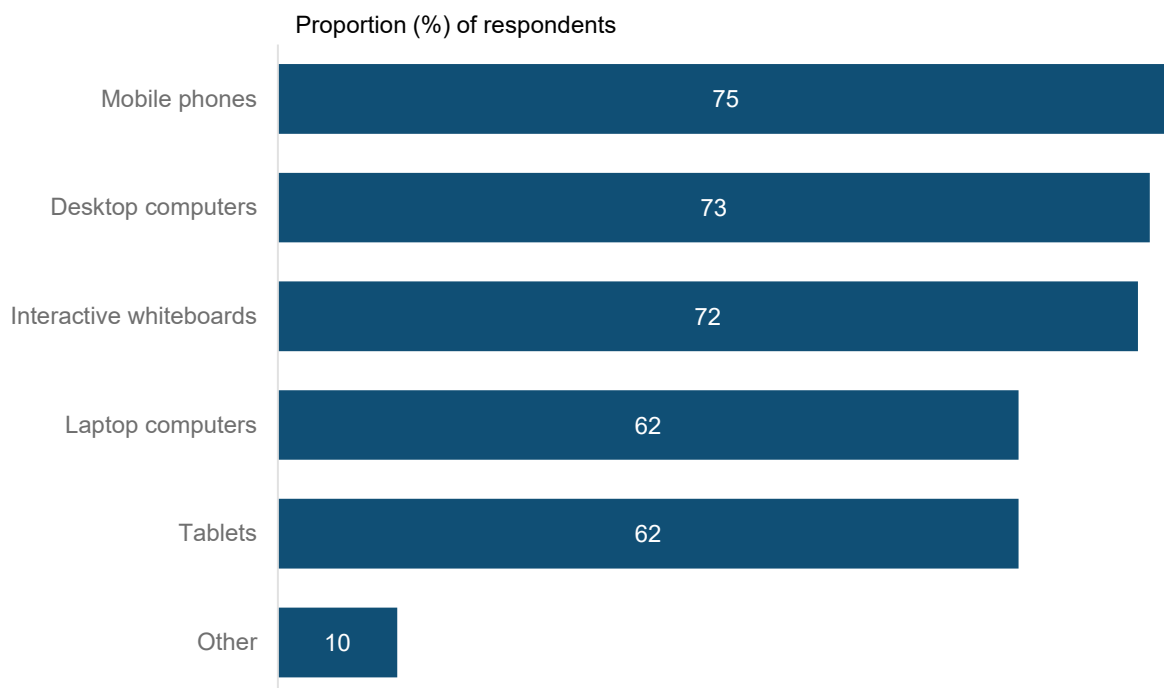
“Yes, role-plays, games. Games can make you repeat the sentence and structure over and over again, then you’re more likely to remember it, it’s great to give people the motivation to keep repeating the language.” (Teacher, Third Sector provider)

Use of technology in lesson delivery

The majority of providers responding to the survey used technology in their delivery of English language learning provision; the most common being online written materials or worksheets (74%), online presentations or visual material (70%) and Moodle (53%). Just under a quarter of providers also reported using Blackboard (23%). Small numbers of providers reported using language training software such as Rosetta Stone, Transparent Language or Language Labs (12%) to deliver English language learning. Just over a quarter of respondents (27%) had used other software to deliver English language learning such as Cahoot, Google Classroom and Triptico.

Hardware was also widely used by survey respondents to support the teaching and learning of English to speakers of other languages. For instance, as can be seen from Figure 6, around three-quarters of providers used mobile phones (75%), desktop computers (73%) or interactive whiteboards (72%) to support the teaching and learning.

Figure 6: Hardware used by providers to support the teaching and learning of English to speakers of other languages



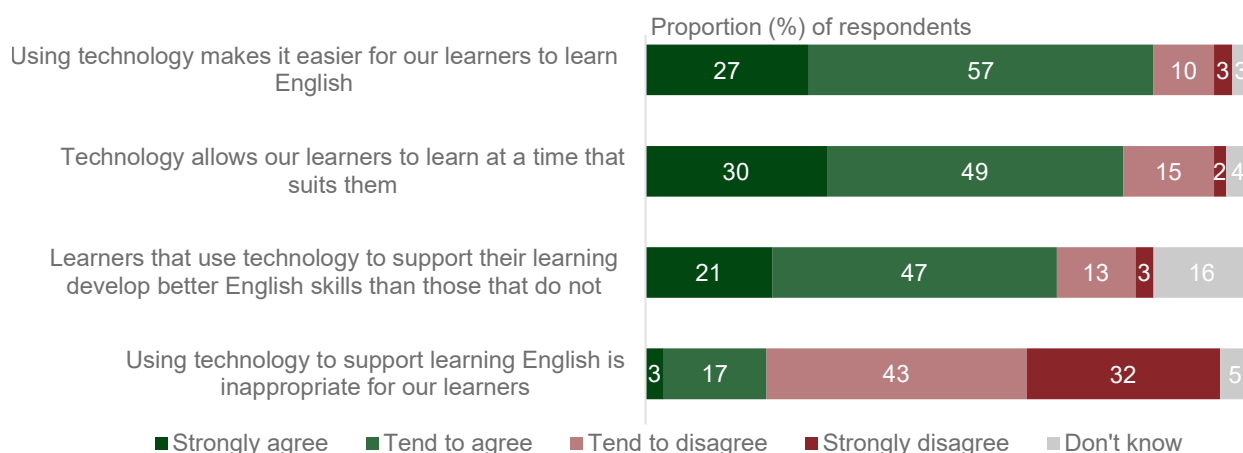
Source: ESOL provider survey. Base: 162

Qualitative findings from case study visits found third sector providers were less likely to use technology than FE Providers. Third sector providers, who often had to be flexible in the location of their delivery, rarely cited having access to online technology and usually relied on more traditional approaches to delivery. Interviews with senior leaders and teachers showed that interactive whiteboards were commonly used by FE providers, but rarely by third sector providers.

The use of computers was also less frequently cited by teachers and senior leaders from third sector and FE providers. However, as some teachers from FE providers noted, this was not due to an absence of technology but rather insufficient time to build their use into a class. Teachers from FE providers also noted that they were more likely to use hardware and technology when assigning homework. Fewer third sector and local authority providers mentioned doing so. However, as indicated by the majority of learners, use of mobile phones was common, typically as a means to access Google Translate services. Learners tended to be comfortable with this approach and cited its usefulness.

Survey findings showed that providers in general recognised the positives of using technology to deliver English language learning. As can be seen from Figure 7, the majority of respondents agreed that using technology made it easier for learners to learn English (84%) and that technology allowed learners to learn at a time that suited them (79%). Just over two-thirds of the respondents agreed that learners who used technology to support their learning developed better English skills than those who did not (68%). These findings were reinforced by the number of respondents (75%) who disagreed that using technology to support learning English was inappropriate for learners.

Figure 7: Impact of the use of technology on learning and teaching



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base = 152

However, despite providers' recognition of the benefits of using technology in learning and teaching, almost half the respondents (48%) agreed with the statement that their learners struggled to engage with technology for learning (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Use of technology with speakers of other languages



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base = 152

This perception is reinforced in part by the qualitative research which found that levels of confidence in using technology among teachers was mixed. Learners enrolled in lower level programmes were highlighted by teachers and senior leaders as less likely to be IT literate. Findings also highlighted that where learners had little or no prior education, they were more likely to lack basic IT skills. Older learners were also perceived to be less confident in using technology.

“Lower [level] learners are not very literate in terms of IT. [...] I feel that, at least for some lower learners, they would benefit from classroom-based activities.”
(Teacher, FE provider)

Supporting learners

The extent to which the learning and support needs of learners had been addressed in the design and delivery of English language learning provision was found to be mixed. FE providers reported a more robust system of academic learning support in place than those in the third sector.

Most learners indicated that they had no prior experience of English language learning programmes. The exception to this was those learners on jobseeker’s allowance/ Universal Credit who may have stopped due to personal reasons and now were required to learn English as part of benefit claimant commitments. Senior leaders and teachers from all types of provider also noted that, increasingly, learners arrived at lessons with a range of additional learning needs. This required specialised additional support during lessons, which for third sector providers who offered provision during evenings and weekends was expensive.

“I happen to have some learners who are deaf, and it was challenging, in the sense that we don’t have any training to deal with learners like that. We don’t have time for some of the soft skills with students, let alone orientating other organisations, like the BSL [British Sign Language] interpreters. They need an orientation course about how they should behave in the lesson but we just don’t have the time and resources to do it.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

One local authority senior leader described the freedom the AEB’s Learning Support fund gave them in allowing learners more time to study when working towards a qualification, if needed. In contrast to the approach taken by other providers, the participant described how they used such an approach to advocate inclusivity and be mindful of learners’ different paces of learning.

“We arrange our exams so that learners who need more time can spend more time doing the same qualification aim without doing an exam so they can be ready for the exam the next term. We don’t push our learners to achieve because it’s unrealistic in terms of what their basic study skills are. Other learners who are more proficient can move through more quickly.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Pre-course assessments

Qualitative findings showed that as a requirement of AEB funding, FE and local authority providers conducted pre-course assessments with learners to gauge their current standard of English and subsequently place them on the right course. Some learners felt this assessment was not always accurate and some cited experiences where they had felt to have been wrongly assigned to a particular ESOL class. Some learners stated that they had achieved accreditation from a provider but, in moving to another provider, they felt their accreditation was not recognised. These learners perceived a pre-course assessment to mean that previous accreditation was not recognised when, in fact, the providers were assessing the skill levels of potential learners to ensure they were assigned a class at the right level for them. As noted by senior leaders, conducting a pre-course assessment allowed providers to create a group profile of the learners before the course commenced and helped them to identify potential barriers which could be addressed during the delivery of the programme.

“[The pre-course assessment] allows you to find out who you’ve got [prospective learners], where they’re from, and their educational background. We try to get them to open up, information about their first language is very useful, because it helps you to understand the interference that often is a stumbling block to learning English. Identifying targets that help to address the needs identified.” (Teacher, FE provider)

Senior leaders and teachers from FE providers commonly highlighted the importance of engaging with learners from the outset to set targets and work to an individual learning plan. This helped FE providers to identify and account for differing learning and support needs. Although less common, target setting and learning plans were also evident in third sector provision.

“I do an Individual Learning Plan for each student. Everybody is different and has got different strengths and weaknesses. I set targets twice per course and then I review the progress. Then you incorporate their different needs into your materials and delivery.” (Teacher, FE provider)

Across FE, local authority and third sector provision, learners were able to draw on a range of different additional support services offered by providers. Most FE providers offered student support, counselling and mental health services. Teachers noted that these services were particularly useful for those learners who had additional learning and support needs or mental health needs. Provider case studies highlighted instances where third sector providers were also able to offer additional services, particularly in instances where English language provision was provided as part of a wider strategy to improve integration.

In some instances, FE and local authority providers offered staff, including teachers, the opportunity to undertake training to better understand and manage the needs of asylum seekers and refugees who may have experienced some form of trauma. Teachers who received such training reported feeling better equipped in understanding the types of things that may impact learners who are experiencing trauma and are able to provide some sort of pastoral care to these learners.

“We are very lucky that we work in a big college we’ve got access to an educational psych who comes in and gives us education on trauma. We’ve gone from being your bog-standard ESOL teacher ten years ago and now our skillset has to be so much bigger than that. We can’t say, ‘That’s not my job, I’m just a teacher.’ You can’t get away with that anymore.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Learners themselves were less likely to cite additional support that was available to them or having accessed the support. However, the majority of learners were overwhelmingly positive about the teachers delivering English language courses or classes. Learners often expressed gratitude and appreciation for being able to learn and praised the informal support provided by the teachers, such as additional feedback on their progress at the end of a session. In a small number of cases, learners undertaking FE provision received employment support ranging from assistance in producing a CV or assistance from a Jobcentre Plus representative who helped them find suitable employment. There was limited evidence of support offered to learners after the courses they had accessed had ended.

Summary

Clear differences were identified in the content provided and the method of delivery between FE, local authority and third sector providers. Third sector providers were more likely to offer non-accredited English language courses than formal providers who were more likely to offer accredited ESOL courses. As such, third sector providers were more able to exercise flexibility to tailor content to the additional needs of the learners.

The use of hardware and technology varies across providers, with the use of hardware more common among funded providers. This is largely because funded providers are likely to be FE colleges and local authority providers who are likely to have a pre-existing IT infrastructure in place. The main constraints for the use of technology among third sector providers was the lack of funding and IT infrastructure within those organisations.

The extent to which learning and support needs of learners has been addressed in the design and delivery of provision is mixed. FE providers reported to have a more robust system of academic learning support in place, which means that learners were able to draw on a range of additional college-wide services when required. However, findings

showed that community providers were often well placed to provide learners with additional support services, particularly when their offer was part of a wider programme of services designed to aid integration.

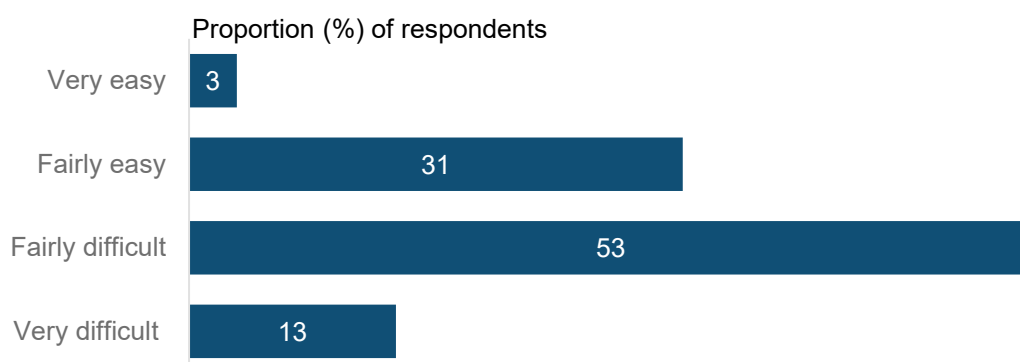
5. Demand for English language learning provision

This chapter presents findings relating to the demand for English language provision. The chapter covers the viewpoints of provider representatives derived from survey and qualitative findings, on their ability to meet the demand and the factors that influence their views. Also discussed are the actions providers have taken to meet the demand from the communities they serve.

Demand for English language learning

Almost three-quarters (73%) of providers responding to the survey reported a 'significant demand' for English language learning provision in the communities they serve while a quarter (25%) stated that there was a 'fair amount of demand'. As can be seen from Figure 9 over half of those who responded to the survey (53%) reported that their organisations found it 'fairly difficult' to meet the demand for English language learning in the communities they served and one-in-eight (13%) reported that their organisations found it 'very difficult' to meet the demand.

Figure 9: How difficult or easy is it to meet the demand for English learning among speakers of other languages in the communities providers serve?



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base = 154

The strength of demand for English language learning was reinforced by the finding that over four-fifths of respondents agreed with the statement that 'there are people in the community who we would like to serve who would like to learn English but are unable to do so' (strongly agree – 44%; tend to agree – 42%). These findings suggest that most providers were unable to meet the demand for English language learning.

Qualitative findings from provider case studies support the survey findings. Almost all FE, third sector and local authority providers noted that demand for English language provision was high among the communities they served.

Access to English language learning

Providers were asked whether the number of speakers of other languages learning English with their organisation had increased, decreased or stayed the same compared with five years ago. Survey findings showed that the number of learners accessing English language learning provision had increased for most. Two-fifths (41%) of providers stated that the number of learners accessing English language learning provision had ‘increased a lot’ and a further fifth (20%) said the number of learners had ‘increased a little’. A number of reasons were offered by senior leaders and teachers in the interviews for the increase in learners accessing provision (see Table 2), including an increase in refugees and asylum seekers accessing provision and a greater political concern for speakers of other languages to improve their English language skills to enable civic, economic and social participation. Similar reasons were given regardless of the type of provider.

Table 2: Factors increasing participation in English language learning

Integration / access	Personal / other
Jobcentre Plus requirement	To be able to help children with homework and communicate with teacher
To be able to use healthcare services independently and communicate with staff	Bereavement of dependent spouse/partner
Support for, and comprehension of, British citizenship requirements	To be independent
Increasing employment prospects; addressing reasons for unemployment	Perceived importance of English
Increase of refugees and asylum seekers accessing provision	
Access to free English Language learning classes	
Changes in AEB eligibility criteria	

Seventeen per cent of providers stated that the number of learners who had accessed their English language provision had stayed the same and a fifth of providers stated that the number of learners who had accessed their English language learning provision had decreased (decreased a little - 14%; decreased a lot - 7%), with most of these providers attributing the dwindling number of learners to funding cuts.

Changes in the AEB eligibility criteria

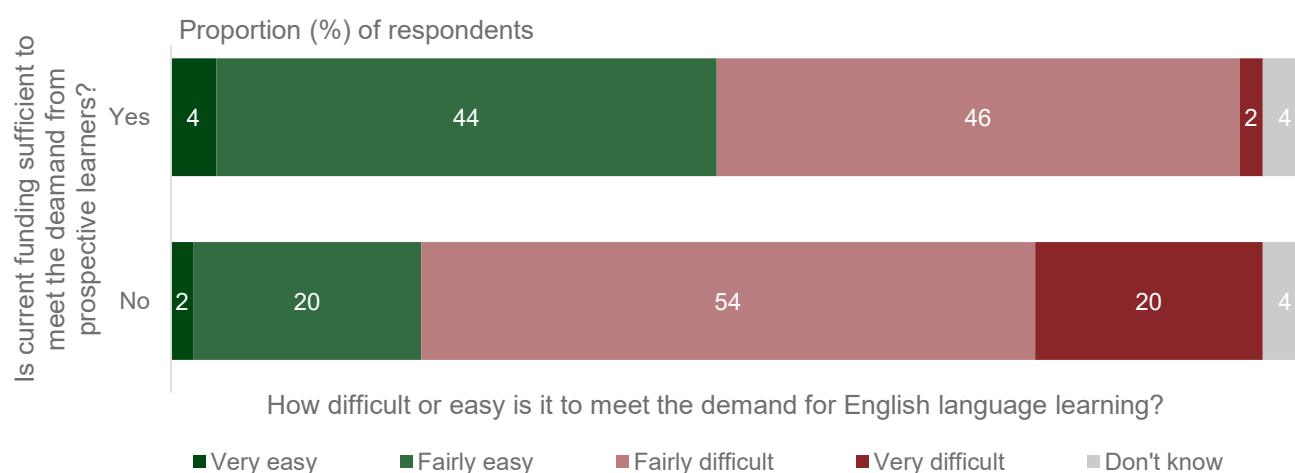
The majority of FE colleges and local authority providers related an increase in the demand for English language learning provision and the number of learners accessing their provision to changes in the AEB policy in August 2018. Formerly, only those who were in receipt of work-related benefits were eligible for fully funded English language courses. Policy changes through a low wage trial gave providers the discretion to expand eligibility to those earning less than £15,736.50 a year and providers reported a subsequent increase in demand for ESOL courses. A number of senior leaders from providers who accessed AEB funding said they were concerned that if eligibility rules were to change back, then the numbers of people wanting to access provision may fall.

“This September [2018] it really picked up because of the very last minute decision by the government to offer free courses to those who earn less than £15,000 something [...] I always maintained that if we could sort out the ESOL fees, we'd get our numbers back up to what they used to be, so this year they're full. [...] now we've got plenty of demand and there are waiting lists.” (Teacher, FE provider)

Funding

In the survey, almost two-thirds of providers (64%) stated that their current level of funding was insufficient to meet the demand for English language learning provision. Figure 10 shows providers' responses to the question about how easy or difficult their organisations found it to meet the demand for English language learning in their communities and their answers to a question related to whether current funding was sufficient to meet the demand from prospective learners. Survey findings showed that just under half (48%) of providers who stated that current funding was sufficient to meet demand for English language learning, reported that they still found it 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' to meet the demand. Conversely, around a fifth (22%) of survey respondents who stated that current funding was insufficient to meet demand from prospective learners said it was 'very easy' or 'fairly easy' to meet the demand from potential learners in their own communities, suggesting that they had taken other actions or used other resources to meet the demand.

Figure 10: Is current funding sufficient to meet demand for prospective learners?



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base: 149

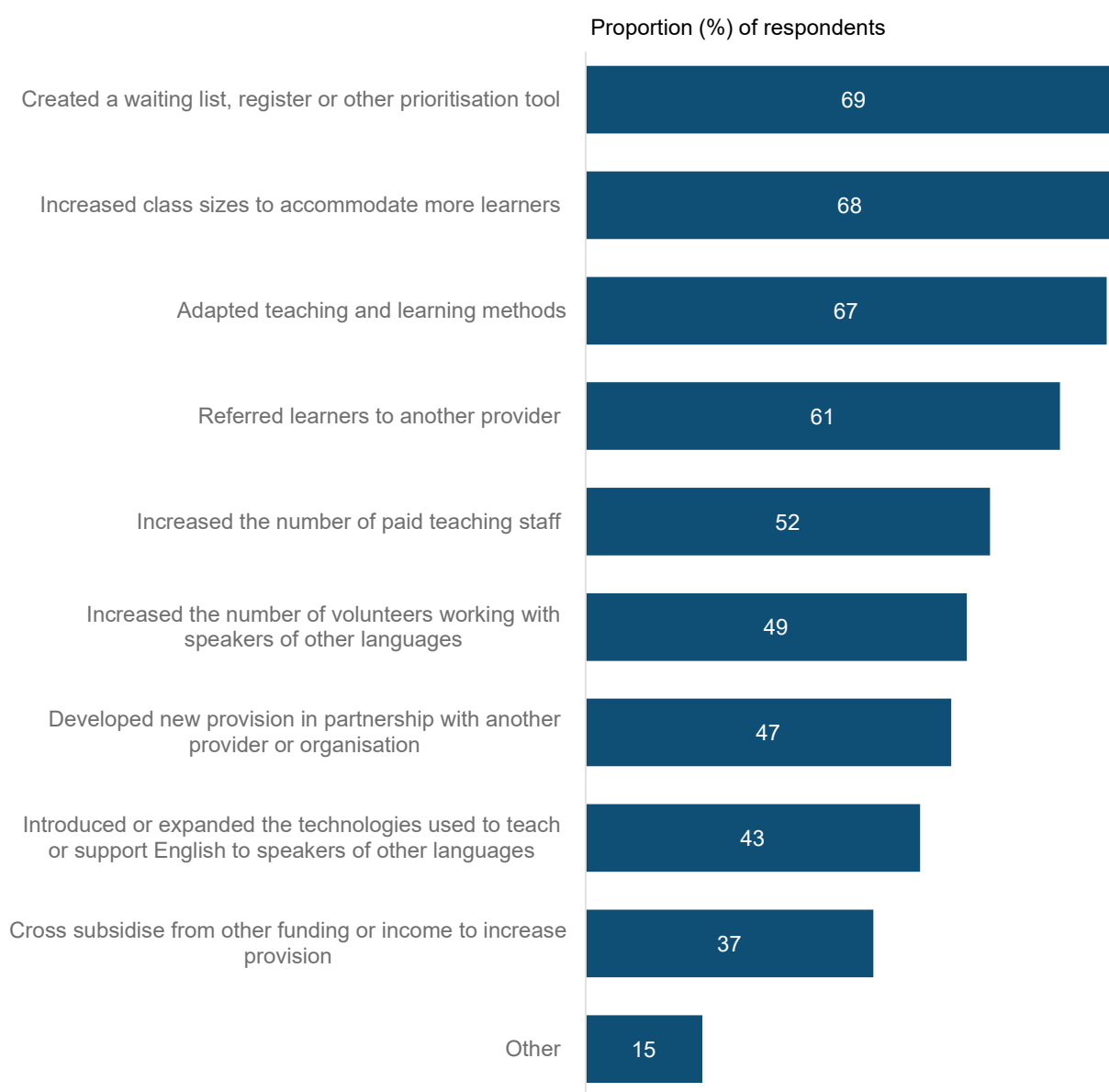
Several providers said in the interviews that current funding rules restricted demand for English language learning. Many third sector providers reported they were operating with very little funding. Several third sector providers received small pots of funding from organisations such as Big Lottery, Housing Associations, Refugee Council, Active Citizens and others to offer English language learning provision. However, many reported that this funding was insufficient to ensure sustainability of provision. This had implications for meeting the demand from their local communities, especially those who sought out the provider because of their location and status as a community organisation.

“The barriers are lack of funding. If we had more funding, we could provide more [classes] but the monopoly of the big colleges, they are the decision makers of providing funding to the communities. They get funding because they’re large and they keep ESOL money themselves. [...] We could expand very easily but the funding prevents us.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Providers’ efforts in meeting the demand

Survey findings showed that most providers took a number of steps to meet their local community’s demand for English language learning. Those survey respondents who said that their organisations found it either ‘very difficult’ or ‘fairly difficult’ (64%) to meet the demand were asked what actions their organisation had taken in the past year to meet demand. Figure 11 shows the actions taken by providers to meet the demand from prospective learners.

Figure 11: Actions taken by providers to meet the demand from prospective learners



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base: 162

Adapting current provision

As can be seen from Figure 11, the majority of providers adapted their current provision in response to demand. This included actions such as:

- Created a waiting list, register or other prioritisation tool (69%);
- Increased class sizes to accommodate more learners (68%);
- Adapted teaching and learning methods (67%); and/or

- Referred learners to another provider (61%).

Waiting lists and increased class sizes

During interviews, many providers said they created a waiting list. However, this was less common among third sector organisations compared to FE colleges and local authority providers. Some third sector providers referred learners to other providers, while others took them on despite reaching capacity. A number of senior leaders from FE and local authority providers said they referred learners to other organisations once their courses had reached capacity. However, interviews with a number of teachers from these same providers contradicted this view, saying learners had joined their classes part way through the term, despite classes being at capacity.

“We don’t have waiting lists because we work very closely with other providers in the city and if we have got an extra six on a list for a class, that’s not a viable class [size] for us so we will pass those on to the [...] Centre down the road [...]. We’ve got a very strong network within the city to do that.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Referring learners to other providers

During interviews, several third sector senior leaders and teachers noted that their regions had struggled to cope with the growing demand for English language learning. Some of these participants also noted that they had been unable to make referrals because other providers were at full capacity and were unable to take on prospective learners. It was perceived that this could potentially impact on learners’ motivations to undertake English language learning, particularly those from hard-to-reach communities.

“So, [prospective learners] say, ‘we want entry one ESOL’. So, I’d say, okay, we’ll look at the colleges. ‘Sorry, we’re fully booked.’ Every time. What I found was we were losing those learners. Their confidence would go and then they’d go back to being the hard-to-reach community again, even though they try to access and try to get out.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Increasing teaching staff

As shown in Figure 11, over half the providers in the survey (52%) said that they had increased paid teaching staff to meet the demand. However, qualitative findings from interviews with senior leaders found that finding suitably qualified ESOL teachers was difficult. Some participants reported a shortage of ESOL teachers and others commented on the offer of low pay and fixed term contracts as impacting on their ability to recruit teachers.

Survey findings also showed that some providers (49%) used additional volunteer support to meet the increasing demand for English language learning. Increasing volunteer support was particularly common among third sector providers. Indicative findings also showed that non-AEB funded providers²⁹ (71%) were more likely to use additional volunteer support than AEB funded providers (44%). Interviews with senior leaders from these organisations showed that it was common for volunteer ESOL teachers to approach them to offer their skills.

“Many of them are retired ESOL teachers. It’s really word-of-mouth, I always get emails from people, asking to come in. Teachers hear about it and get in touch, I’ve never advertised for any teachers.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

A number of AEB funded and non-AEB funded providers worked with student volunteers from universities, schools and colleges who helped providers deliver English language learning courses. Additionally, some of the English language learning courses were delivered by volunteers. Volunteers were more likely to be delivering courses for providers who were not in receipt of AEB funding. Providers who used volunteers to deliver classes reported variable levels of support being offered to volunteers which resulted in classes and courses being delivered to variable standards. The level of support provided to volunteers depended on the availability of resources, particularly staff time to manage, direct and monitor volunteers. Some providers were reluctant to use volunteers, largely because it was perceived that volunteers would find it challenging to teach or support learners.

“It’s sometimes a bit of an eye-opener for them. If they haven’t been working in the sector, they’ve been doing something else and now they’re volunteering as an ESOL tutor, they have no understanding of the lack of education there might be in some of their students’ backgrounds. They find it unbelievable that they might not be able to have penmanship skills or something like that. That is a surprise to some of them.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Developing new provision

Survey findings showed that just under half of providers (47%) developed new provision in partnership with another provider or organisation. Qualitative findings from all provider case study visits showed demand was much higher for the pre-entry and entry level ESOL classes; most providers offered more of these classes in response. Findings from interviews with senior leaders showed that prospective learners who had recently arrived in England with low or no English language skills were more likely to approach third sector providers than others because they thought learning took place in an informal

²⁹ This is drawn from a low base size of 28 non-AEB providers.

environment. Several participants from third sector organisations noted some learners had never been to school in their home countries and their provision allowed such learners to become accustomed to an educational setting, while allowing tutors to cater for a range of needs flexibly.

“We have quite a big demand at the lower level classes. So, for pre-entry literacy and pre-entry classes, the demand is high. So, we have a lot of learners who have yet to attain. So, at pre-Entry literacy, they’re pre-literate, so there’s quite a high demand, and then it seems to taper off, I think as you get higher.”
(Teacher, Local Authority provider)

Cross-subsidised from other funding or income

Over a third of all survey respondents (37%) said they cross-subsidised English language learning from other income sources to increase provision. Looking only at these respondents³⁰:

- Three in ten (30%) said they only offered provision funded by AEB;
- One in eight (13%) said they only offered provision funded by non-AEB sources; and
- Over half (55%³¹) used AEB and non-AEB funding sources.

Cross-subsidisation is therefore a complex issue. A number of providers sought other sources of funding to meet the growing demand for English language learning. Several FE and local authority providers used community learning funding to offer informal English language learning. For example, in some case studies, local authority providers accessed CMF and outsourced the funding to FE and third sector providers to deliver English language courses. In interviews with local authority providers, they identified English language learning as a priority and developed provision through targeted projects such as Talk English Plus, English outreach community programmes, free classes and family learning with parents. CMF funding was seen to give local authority providers flexibility to be able to use the funding how they wanted. For instance, funding could be used to offer free English language classes to asylum seekers who have been awaiting a decision on their claim for less than six months. Moreover, findings from case studies showed that this source of funding allowed FE providers and local authorities to employ additional staff and increase class sizes to meet demand.

“We’ve got Integrated Communities funding coming so we do the council as a whole and a portion of that is going to go to the new project called Friends and

³⁰ Base = 60.

³¹ Proportions do not sum to 100% as two respondents stated "don't know" to both questions.

Neighbours project, which is more of an engagement rather than a learning activity project. That will be another thing that I'll be involved in but my main role is coordinating the family learning provision in schools and also liaising with colleagues in terms of neighbourhood learning type community provision and community organisations.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

“We’re part of a product called Mothers Matter recently where we worked with 100 pre-entry parents, mothers, who had never communicated with the school and were unable to do so. Out of those 97 did not know the name of their child’s teacher, it’s through that relationship with the school where they’re delivering some of the things we could not pay for, like a crèche.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

It is important to note that despite taking actions to meet the demand for English language learning, several providers still said it was difficult to meet this demand. For example, two-thirds (66%) of those who had said that they found it ‘fairly difficult’ or ‘very difficult’ to meet the demand despite increasing class sizes to accommodate learners.

Summary

Generally, findings suggest that the majority of providers struggled to meet the high demand for English language learning. Providers also felt the amount of funding they received was insufficient to meet demand generated from speakers of other languages. Other providers who had indicated that funding was sufficient, also found it difficult to meet the demand from potential learners in their local community.

Survey findings showed that providers had taken a number of actions to meet the demand. Providers worked with university and college students and retired teachers to help deliver English language classes or provide classroom support to learners, albeit with limited success. Although the survey findings showed most providers would refer learners to other providers, or create waiting lists, there were few specific examples of this from providers participating in case studies. Increasing the number of classes was often explored by providers, but capacity and resource constraints prevented them from doing so. Evidence of providers cross-subsidising from other funding or income to accommodate additional English language learning provision was common among local authority providers. Despite adapting provision or making infrastructure changes, several providers still faced difficulties meeting demand.

6. Who accesses English language provision?

This chapter presents findings related to the types of learners accessing English language provision and how these profiles have changed over time. Also discussed in this chapter are findings related to the types of learners accessing English language learning provision from pre-entry to level 3.

Demographic composition of English language learners

English language providers who responded to the survey were asked approximately how many speakers of other languages in total were currently accessing some form of English learning with their organisation. Responses ranged from 8 to 4,000, with 19 providers unable to provide an estimate.

The socio-demographic profiles of learners from case study providers were similarly varied across all three types of providers. Some variance was noted, in particular where economic migrants may have come for work or where refugees had been housed through resettlement programmes. Teachers and senior leaders who had worked in the ESOL sector for some time reported that the needs of learners had changed over the last decade. They noted an increase in the number of learners with refugee or asylum seeker status and a decrease in economic migrants from the EU.

“We’ve found in other organisations that it’s been quite a significant decrease demand from, say, Central and Eastern Europe [...] We’re [now at] about 40% asylum seekers and refugees.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Some providers from the FE, local authority and third sectors suggested that the recent changing demographic of learners may be due to the impact of the EU referendum in 2016 on learners’ desire to come to live or remain living in the UK. Providers speculated that a more ‘hostile environment’, together with many Eastern European learners who have lived in the UK for some time and developed their English language skills, may also have accounted for a drop in the number of learners from this demographic.

“A couple of years ago [...] we had more migrant workers, so Eastern European migrant workers who had degrees and professions. That’s really, really dropped off. Now, whether that’s because their English has become so good they don’t need to come, but I suspect it’s definitely Brexit in some form or another. I know some people have actually returned home.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

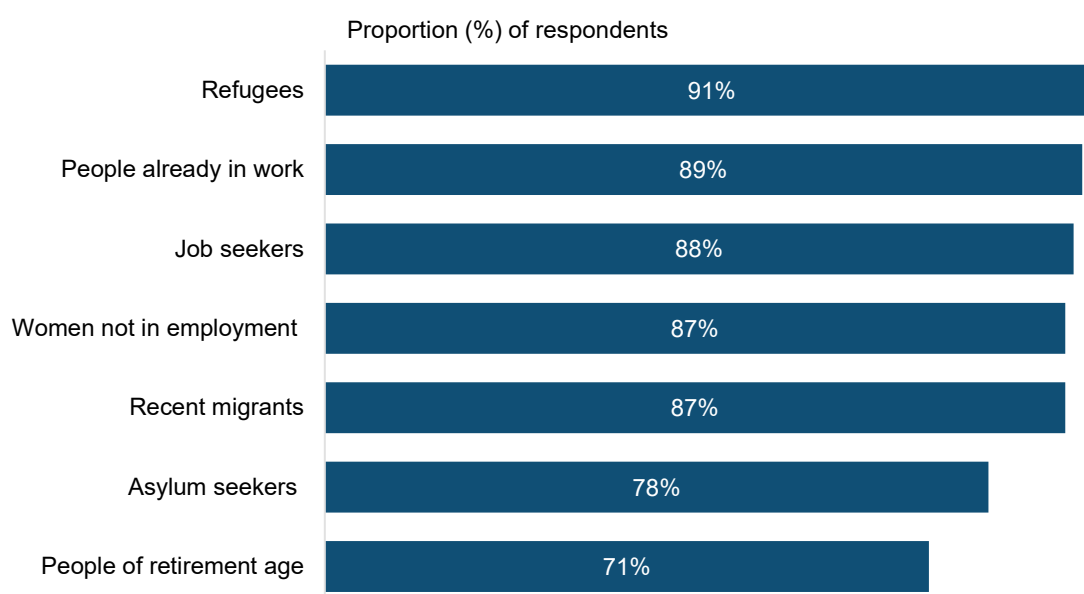
Another noticeable change providers observed regarding economic migration was an increase in learners from Italy and Spain, following the economic crisis in these countries.

“The profile of our students, really, is quite well qualified migrant workers living in poor areas who are cleaners, waiters, waitresses, baristas maybe. The biggest changes have come, in ESOL, in the last twenty years with the European Union and workers coming from Eastern Europe, and then that changed to be Spain and Italy during the [economic] crisis [in these countries].”
(Senior Leader, FE provider)

Profile of English language learners

Figure 12 ranks the proportion of providers reporting in the survey that they taught ESOL learners with specific characteristics. The majority of providers stated that people from most of the groups detailed were accessing provision within their organisation. Around nine tenths of providers who responded to the survey stated that refugees (91%), people already in work (89%), job seekers (88%), women not in employment (87%) and recent migrants (87%) were accessing English language learning provision with their organisation. Providers were significantly less likely to say people of retirement age were accessing English language learning provision (71%) compared to all other groups except asylum seekers.

Figure 12: Types of learners accessing English language learning provision



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base: 155

Qualitative findings showed that older retired learners, women not seeking work and asylum seekers/refugees were commonly accessing English language provision via third sector providers. To illustrate this theme further, the below quotation from a senior leader of a third sector provider notes that members of these groups, particularly older retired workers, had been established in the UK for a lengthy period of time but due to the

nature of their employment had not been exposed to the English language. As a result, they had not learnt the language informally through their workplace.

“Mostly asylum seekers, some refugees and recently quite a lot of Chinese people and some of those ladies have been here a long time, 40 years or so, but they’ve been working in kitchens all the time and haven’t really been exposed to English.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Findings from case studies also suggested that learners who may have been out of education for a long time, or never accessed formal education, were more likely to engage with community providers compared to larger, formal FE provision. Senior leaders and teachers attributed this to prospective learners’ low confidence and fear of accessing more formal provision. Provision offered by third sector providers tended to be more informal and consequently less overwhelming for prospective learners.

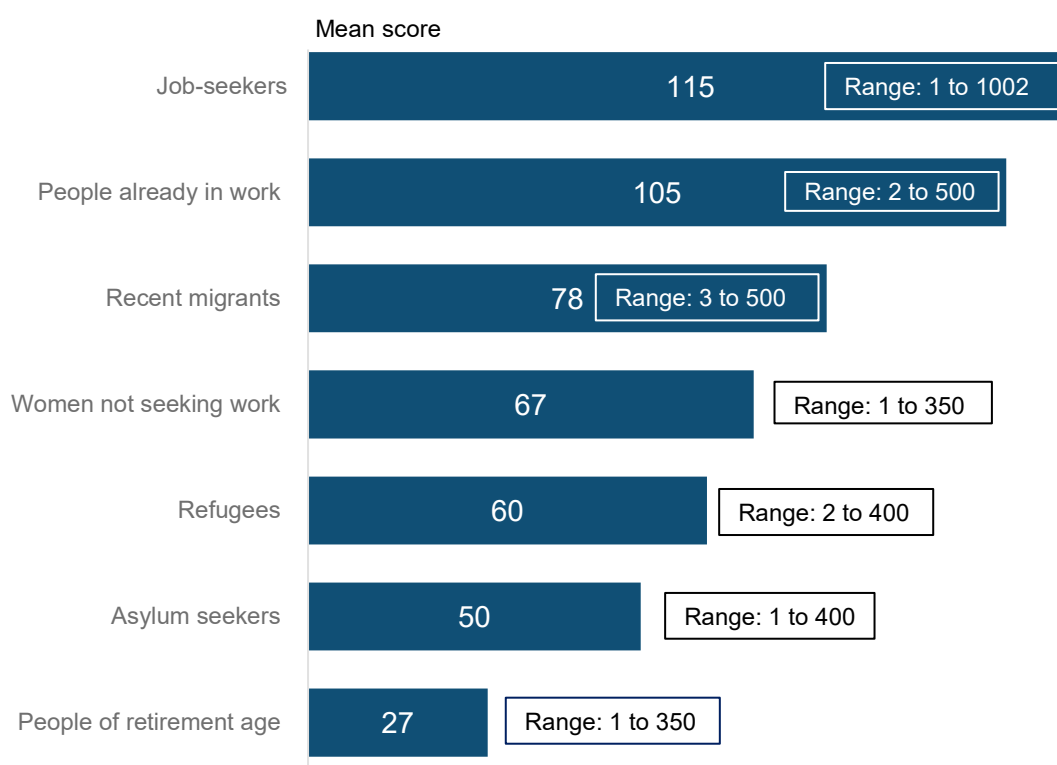
“When your confidence is very low, you feel very isolated. It’s sometimes hard to leave your front door. [...] To do things yourself without relying on a friend or your husband, is something really hard. To walk into a door and say, ‘I’m interested in doing a class’, if it’s a big college with people walking in and everybody knows where they’re going, it can be overwhelming for a person. If it’s a course at a centre like this, it’s small, quiet and welcoming. It’s much easier for them but it’s not too daunting.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Volumes of English language learners by type

Providers were asked to specify how many learners from each of the groups listed in Figure 13 were currently accessing English language learning provision with their organisation. The average number of learners reported by providers for each audience is depicted in

Figure 13. Survey findings showed that job seekers and people already in work comprised the largest learner group for those providers answering the question, followed by recent migrants, women not seeking work, refugees and asylum seekers.

Figure 13: Range and mean scores of learners currently accessing providers' English language learning



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base: variable

Providers responding to the survey were also asked what level of national literacy standards (pre-entry through to level 3) they offered to each audience they identified. It is worth noting that there is currently no funding available for level 3 provision, which means the low numbers recorded cover either unfunded provision and/or error in recall from respondents. Table 3 shows that there is no statistical difference in the level of English taught by audience except in two circumstances:

1. Job seekers or those in work were more likely to be taking level 1 courses than refugees or asylum seekers; and
2. Refugees were more likely to be taking pre-entry level courses than job seekers or those in work.

These findings are logical as refugees are more likely to enter the UK from countries where English is spoken less often and will start their learning from a much lower foundation of knowledge. Refugees are therefore less likely to have good existing skills to move onto level 1 when they enter the country, or after being here for some time.

Table 3: National literacy standard taught to speakers of other languages

	Pre-entry level	Entry level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Don't know
Refugees	83%	88%	62%	52%	8%	7%
Asylum seekers	75%	88%	64%	53%	10%	8%
Women not seeking work	74%	87%	66%	47%	5%	8%
Recent migrants	74%	88%	68%	53%	7%	7%
People of retirement	73%	87%	70%	54%	6%	10%
People already in work	72%	88%	76%	55%	7%	7%
Job seekers	65%	89%	76%	59%	7%	7%

Summary

This chapter has demonstrated the shift in the demographic profiles of learners accessing English language learning provision among the providers participating in the research. Survey and qualitative findings from provider case study visits showed the profiles of those accessing English language learning provision is perceived to have changed during the past 10-15 years. Notably, providers have suggested that economic migrants from Eastern Europe have decreased while the numbers of learners from countries such as Italy and Spain has increased. The number of asylum seekers and refugees seeking English language learning was perceived to have also grown over this time. The changing demographic of learners has implications for the wide variety of learners' needs that providers are presented with, particularly at pre-entry and entry levels.

Proportionately, providers reported more job seekers and people already in work were receiving English language learning provision compared to other groups (women not seeking work, refugees and recent migrants, degree asylum seekers). Although people of retirement age were often listed as target audiences by providers, numbers of such learners were relatively low.

Findings also showed that refugees were more likely than job seekers and those in work to be accessing pre-entry and entry level provision. People already in work and job

seekers were more likely than asylum seekers and refugees to be accessing level 1 provision.

7. Learners' motivations and perceptions of access and progression to English language learning

This chapter discusses findings related to learners' motivations to undertake English learning and their views about progression. The entry barriers to learning along with the barriers to progression through levels are also discussed.

Motivations to undertake English language learning

The backgrounds of English language learners taking part in this study were very varied. All learners reported that their families were supportive of their decision to take an English language class. At one end of the spectrum, some learners had received little or no education in their country of birth; a few women said they married at the age of 9 or 10 and became responsible for managing a home rather than receiving an education. Conversely, others said they were highly qualified and had occupied professional roles in their home countries (e.g. accounting). Typically, all learners emphasised that an English course provided them with the opportunity to become confident in speaking, reading and writing English, improving their ability to communicate with others independently.

Findings from the 28 case studies showed that the main motivating factors for learners to undertake an English language course/class fell into four broad categories:

- Improving employment prospects (to gain a first job or to progress careers),
- Civic engagement and integration (to feel part of and connected to wider society),
- Developing life skills to enable engagement in everyday life activities (visiting a doctor, helping children with schoolwork, etc.) and
- To access services and benefits (classes are a Jobcentre Plus requirement).

Improving employment prospects

Learners

Learners, providers and teachers all cited employment opportunities as a key motivating factor for undertaking English learning. Some learners wished to improve their English language skills to undertake further study and academic qualifications in order to enter a professional career. For learners who were already in employment, English classes helped them in their current roles. For instance, some noted English language learning helped them improve their work performance and/or increased their confidence in dealing with customers in the workplace.

“I work in McDonald’s and my manager said, ‘Don’t be afraid to speak in English, your English may not be perfect but people will understand you.’ I knew I was making mistakes when I was talking so then I decided to do a course.”
(Learner, FE provider)

Several learners were highly educated and had worked in professional occupations in their home countries. However, on arriving in England, they had had to take low-paid, unskilled employment because their English language skills were insufficient for equivalent careers here. These learners wished to improve their English language skills to progress their old careers in England or enter better-paid occupations.

“My ambition is I want to get a good job. I’d like a nursing job, hospital, and I’d like anything about school, like teaching assistant, or a nurse. That’s why I need to improve my English.” (Learner, FE provider)

Providers

Some FE and third sector providers offered additional support such as help with CV writing and job search skills. One local authority provider teamed up with local employers to offer Functional Skills courses to employees who have resided in England for some time.

“We are part of a project called the Flexible Learning Fund. We’re offering Functional Skills in the workplace. [...] they [ESOL learners] are working towards Functional Skills qualifications. We’re partnering with [organisation] on that.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Providers noted that younger mothers were often motivated to learn English so that they could progress their studies and move into paid employment once their children were older. In contrast, many providers and teachers observed that older women (aged 60+) were less motivated to learn English, particularly if they had been settled in England for some time and had managed to conduct everyday life without English language skills. Providers suggested older women living in close-knit communities were able to draw upon the language skills of others as the need arose.

Civic engagement and integration

Some learners, and the majority of senior leaders and teachers, noted increased civic engagement and integration as a motivating factor for learners. Some learners, in particular, entry and post-entry learners identified the importance of speaking English as a way to develop ‘confidence’.

“We live here, we work here, and for me it’s very important to speak that language. If my English is better, I feel a bit more confident, more comfortable.”
(Learner, Local Authority)

Integrating into society was cited as being a strong motivational factor for learning English among several learners and the majority of senior leaders and teachers. Learners said integration meant improving their life chances, progressing in their jobs and fulfilling tasks relevant to their everyday lives. Teachers and senior leaders from all types of providers, made strong reference to integration as a key motivation for their students, either explicitly using the term or referencing it by stating that students want to learn English to ‘feel at home’.

Senior leaders often referred to the government’s 2018 Integrated Communities Strategy and several stressed the importance placed by the government on encouraging integration between newly arrived and pre-existing communities. Some local authority and third sector participants had successfully applied for Integrated Communities funding and used this to deliver community based English language courses. However, third sector providers were more likely to cite integration as a motivating factor for learners compared to other participants. In one of several similar examples, a third sector senior leader discussed how learning English helped to break down refugees’ barriers to communication and encourage their integration into society. In such cases, integration meant widening the number of people with which an individual could interact locally.

“To break down isolation, [refugees] need to communicate, so they will realise that they’ve got neighbours, they’ve got people that they communicate with them. The same way for [us] as an organisation, we think ESOL, studying or learning the language will help them to network with other people.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

However, a small number of FE and third sector senior leaders felt that learning English for the purpose of integration was *not* a strong motivation for some learners. These senior leaders stated that integration may be unachievable or even undesirable; largely because these particular learners did not possess the desire or motivation to integrate. For example, several senior leaders and teachers spoke about speakers of other languages who have resided in England for a long time, yet have not learnt English, simply because they have been able to draw upon the language skills of others in their community. These findings were reinforced by several non-learners themselves, who noted that they did not need to learn English to integrate into society because they do not need it to conduct everyday life.

Life Skills

Most learners said they were strongly motivated to learn English to enable them to engage in everyday life activities. Learners recognised the importance of being able to speak, read, write and comprehend spoken English to participate in everyday life. This view was supported by all other research audiences. The types of everyday activities mentioned included reading and replying to emails from their children's school, visiting the GP, helping children with their homework, filling forms and listening to customers and understanding them and having the knowledge and confidence to respond correctly. Several learners noted, learning English was "important for life, [for] everything".

Participants said undertaking these everyday tasks was an especially important motivation for women. In particular, mothers wanted to support their children's education and ensure they could progress as well as possible. Women, especially older women, were also responsible for a lot of the 'life administration' tasks mentioned in the previous paragraph.

"For certain refugee groups, especially the women who traditionally don't work, they might not have ambitions for themselves, but they have massive ambitions for their children. That's where the changes will be seen, not for the women themselves but in their ambitions for their daughters and sons." (Teacher, FE provider)

Some learners said they were motivated to attend English language learning classes to socialise with other learners, meet new people and develop a life outside of the home.

"For some of them it's a trip out [...] I think it's an approved thing by their mother-in-law in the Sylhetis community. They meet their friends, they meet them at the school gate and then they come along here, so it's social and it's getting out of the house and [...] they have a chat on the way here in their own language and on the way back." (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Access to services and benefits

Several senior leaders and teachers noted that some learners were required to learn English by the Jobcentre Plus in order to access benefits. Senior leaders and teachers alike reported that some referred individuals did not possess the appropriate level of skills required for an entry level English language course. This led them to signpost such referrals to pre-entry level courses offered by third sector providers in some cases.

"We sent a big number [of learners to community organisations] because the jump for them from where they were to an entry level course was just too high for them. They wouldn't have made that or retained on that course. Their

retention wasn't great, but their attendance wasn't too bad in the community courses." (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Some providers noted the motivating factor of access to benefits for some English language learners, especially since the introduction of Universal Credit and the advent of Welfare reforms. Several providers noted the impact on demand for English language learning due to the requirement to learn English in order to access Universal Credit (SFA and DWP, 2014³²).

"The Welfare Reform has motivated people because before where they didn't learn English, now they have to learn English [...]. They were self-motivated to come [before] because they wanted self-development. They were seeking jobs, careers and so on, whereas now, they have to come because they can't access any of the [benefits] due to the Welfare Reform." (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

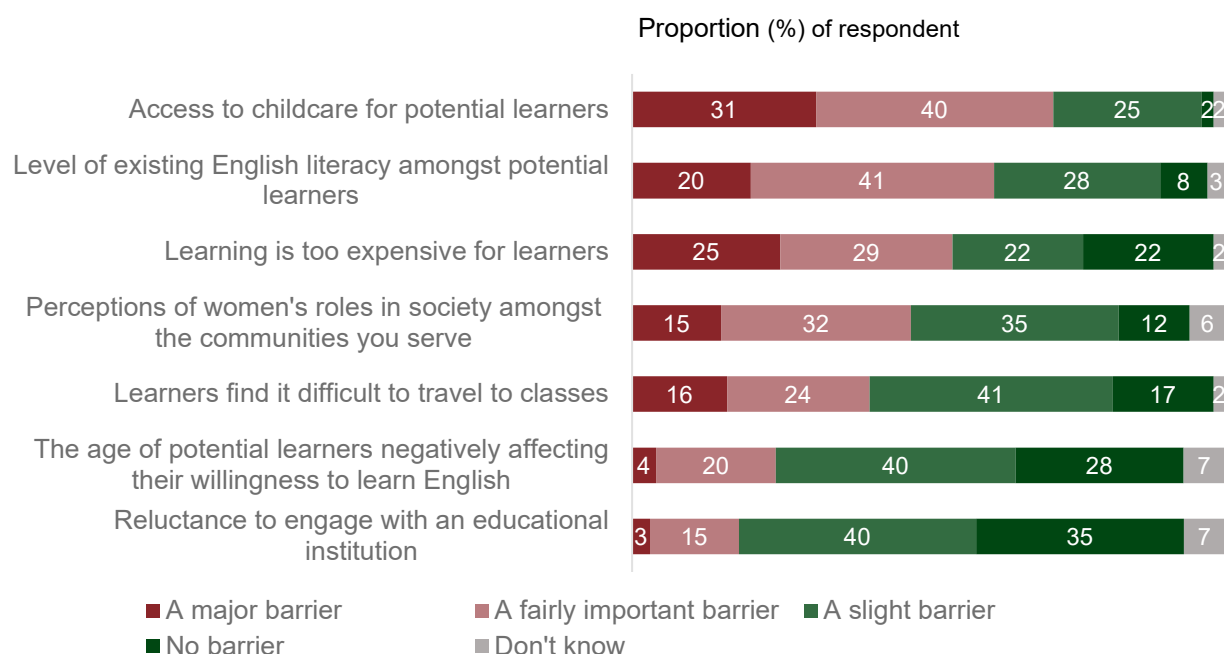
Entry barriers to accessing English language learning

A number of entry³³ barriers to accessing English language were evidenced in the study. The survey collected views from providers on the importance of seven specific barriers (Figure 14). Access to childcare was the most important barrier identified in the survey (71% stating it was a fairly important or major barrier) followed by the level of existing literacy possessed by learners (61%).

³² Skills Funding Agency and Department for Work and Pensions (2014) New English language requirements. Introductory note. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/19774/1/ESOL_joint_DWP_SFA_note_and_QA.pdf [Accessed 28/4/2019]

³³ Entry barriers relate to the barriers that initially present to people seeking access to English language learning provision as well as those who are not motivated to do so.

**Figure 14: How significant a barrier, if any, are the following to potential learners in your area?
Ranked by aggregated importance**



Source: ESOL provider survey. Base: 162

In addition, three other barriers were noted by participants in the qualitative strands of the study: lack of motivation among learners, insufficient provision to meet the demand and workplace barriers. This section mostly contains evidence derived from qualitative research with non-learners, much of which triangulates with testimony from other research participants.

Several providers commented that potential learners face several barriers in accessing English language provision which may hinder efforts to access suitable courses/classes. The range of potential barriers that ethnic minority females may face in accessing English language learning provision was noted in particular. Barriers to English language learning for any one person may be numerous.

“The fees, the number of hours, courses being available when they are free and near them, near where they live or where they work. If you want to attract women from certain groups, courses near schools near where they are and I think, for other groups, community settings feel safer for them. We need to go out to where they are.” (Teacher, FE provider)

The main barriers to English language learning identified above are discussed below in turn.

Childcare commitments

This is the barrier to engagement cited most frequently in the survey. Seven in ten providers (71%) said access to childcare was a fairly important or major barrier. During qualitative research, the majority of senior leader and teacher participants said family commitments were a key barrier to engaging with English language provision, with different care barriers by learner community. For example, women in Bangladeshi communities often looked after parents-in-law with poor health in addition to children and/or required permission from husbands to attend classes.

“[In] the Bangladeshi community, they have parents-in-law who often have poor health so they can’t spare the time, they’ve got children to look after. We know some of them, when the children are old enough, they’ll save up and go to the regional college, possibly for evening classes, but they need a cooperative husband for that.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Correspondingly, most female non-learners cited childcare commitments as a key barrier to accessing English language courses. While some had previously started an English language course, they were unable to finish due to family commitments and other household responsibilities. One explanation given by a non-learner was that family and childcare duties was similar to working full-time. This participant did not feel that they would have time to dedicate to English language learning classes.

“It is hard because [childcare and home responsibilities are] like being in full-time employment [...] we have to give three hours of our time [to attend a one hour lesson]. We have to do the housework, look after the children, so it is hard.” (Non-learner)

Some providers offered crèches to help learners to overcome childcare commitment barriers. For learners and for logistical purposes, it was important for them to access childcare close to the venue when courses were being held. Case study visits showed that third sector organisations supporting refugees and asylum seekers were more likely to offer crèches than FE and local authority providers. Participants from these providers generally offered crèche / childcare facilities as part of a wider programme of support offers.

Level of existing literacy among learners

Several teachers from third sector providers indicated that learners who have never formally engaged with education in their home countries struggled more than other learners and required much more support. Examples included learners struggling to hold a pen properly, understanding the alphabet or having the ability to read. Teachers commented that these learners struggled because they were not familiar with the

learning processes. Several teachers interviewed from a third sector provider noted that those learners who had previously engaged with education in their home countries were more likely to progress quicker than those with who did not.

“People who are multi-lingual tend to be quicker at picking up other languages but for some people they might have had no education and they might not be able to write in their own language [...] for them they might just stay in a lower class for a lot longer [until they become] confident.” (Teacher, Third Sector provider)

Cost/funding restrictions

Over half the providers responding to the survey stated that the cost of learning was a barrier to accessing English language learning provision (54%). During case studies, providers cited challenges regarding the co-funding arrangements of AEB funding (see chapter 2). Senior leaders and teachers said that learner contributions to the cost of courses may deter some from enrolling and this particularly affects those who are working but have families to support and other financial commitments.

“I think people who are on low-paid work and have families to support, and of course some are trying to send money home, it’s not something that they can all manage.” (Senior Leader, FE provider)

Full AEB funding eligible learners said they would have been unable to access an English language course without funding. Similarly, many non-learners reported cost as an entry barrier. Participants who were first generation migrants said that when they arrived in England, their aim was to develop a secure financial base for their families, focussing their effort on earning and saving money to allow them to purchase their own home. Some non-learners noted that at the time of their arrival in England, the policy environment meant paying for an English course was unrealistic. While some older non-learners would now be eligible for funded courses, they said no equivalent policy was in place when they arrived and cited cost as a restriction. Typically, most younger female non-learners interviewed were unemployed and relied on their husband’s income. They stressed that raising a family on one salary was difficult and they could not afford the expense of paying for an English course. Many noted that if English language learning provision was free, then they would consider it.

“Honestly if we have to pay it will be hard so it won’t be possible. The income we live on will not cover us to pay for an English class. We can only learn English if the class is free.” (Non-learner)

Learners expressed a range of views on payment for the English language learning courses they accessed. Those learners attending a course at a FE college and who paid or contributed to the fees typically found the cost of the course to be reasonable.

Conversely, learners accessing a course via a local authority or third sector provider said paying for classes would have inhibited their ability to take the course. Local authority and third sector providers who offered fee-paying courses were able to do so at a lower cost than FE providers; some third sector providers said this was because their overheads to deliver were lower. Additionally, some were in receipt of in-kind support which meant that they could cover the costs of classes for all students.

“All of our courses are free and we can only do that by working the way we do, we don’t pay rent and we don’t have a building to maintain. Our cost of delivery per hour is only £150, whereas if you had a big building to maintain and facilities management, and big IT systems, then that’s significantly pushing up the cost of delivery. For the ESOL provision we’re able to deliver non-fee paying by the council supporting it by giving us buildings and space in schools.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Cultural barriers

Just under half of the provider survey respondents felt perceptions of women's roles in society were a barrier to English language learning (47%). During the qualitative interviews, some providers noted cultural influences restricting women's access to provision. For instance, cultural gender stereotypes which made women housewives and primary homemakers were sometimes cited. It was perceived by providers that women who primarily fulfilled these roles prioritised educational needs lower than their housewife/caring responsibilities.

Other providers noted that where families supported females learning English, families and potential female learners may be uncomfortable with mixed sex classes and male teachers. Offering single sex classes was not always seen as feasible due to resource limitations including the increase in cost, a shortage of female teachers, or in some cases where the small numbers of women requesting a female-only class did not warrant an extra class. However, in other cases demand for female-only classes was sometimes high.

“Some of the [learners'] husbands don’t like them going to learn English in a setting with males. They’d like them to learn English but they want it to be women only classes. That is a big barrier because in society, wherever you go, there’s a mix of people. If you say, ‘I just want a class for females’, it’s not feasible.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Evidence from case studies revealed some effective practice in helping to overcome this barrier. There was a perception that teachers from similar backgrounds to learners bred confidence in the learner group and provided a more comfortable learning environment. This was in part perceived to be because these teachers recognised and used familiar

cultural settings and behaviours in their teaching and support. Teachers from the same background were seen to build quicker and stronger rapport with learners.

“It is a very important female-only environment, which is culturally appropriate and staffed also makes a difference by a similar background teacher who they can relate to. That is the basis of building the confidence of individuals. If they can identify with someone who is delivering that course, they found that very useful because that breaks down the barrier instantly in terms of relating to someone.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Location of classes/transport

Travelling to classes was cited as a barrier by two-fifths of providers in the survey (40%). During qualitative interviews, senior leaders and teachers working in the third sector provided more detail on the types of geographical barriers faced by learners. In some areas, there was a lack of public transport, especially where provision was not within or adjacent to the neighbourhood of target learners. This point was particularly problematic where learning venues were distant from childcare provision or a workplace. Other providers said some potential learners had limited awareness of how to navigate the transport system. Finally, the cost of travel was a barrier for some, including those eligible for full AEB funding.

“Other barriers could be finance. They might not have a bus fare. It’s too far from them to walk, so finance is a big one, really [...] they don’t get a bus pass and it’s hard for them to travel.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

When asked about the reason for choosing the provider for their course, the convenience and closeness of the venue was commonly cited as a key reason by learners. Close venues were preferred for a number of reasons including travel time, cost and the familiarity of surroundings.

“[The town’s main FE] College [also offer ESOL], I can’t go. It’s too far, it’s two bus changes. [The college] didn’t give me a bus pass ticket. Three months I’m going, I stopped. It’s very expensive for me. You know, I’m a job seeker, I can’t afford it. Then I stopped [going there] and [this provider] helped me.” (Learner, Third Sector provider)

Several providers described how geographical barriers were overcome including access to a free bus pass for some learners based on certain conditions such as for those living more than three miles from the college. In other cases, participants cited examples of refugees or asylum seekers accessing funding from charities for travel; some third sector providers subsidised travel costs for their learners. However, several third sector providers said were often unable to subsidise learners travel costs because of funding constraints.

“Asylum seekers only have £37 a week, so we fundraise all the time to make sure that we can pay for their transport costs. We spend about £1,200 a month on asylum transport reimbursements. Also, young people, we make sure that we give them their bus money so they can get home safely.” (Teacher, Third Sector provider)

Basing provision in local communities was a suggested means of overcoming barriers to travel, which is what some third sector providers did. In one of several examples, a senior leader described how several local community and faith groups collaborated to offer English language provision, thus avoiding the need for local people to travel. However, such provision was often non-accredited and did not address the requirement to travel to providers that did offer accredited provision. As noted earlier (Table 4), fewer providers offer level 2 English language provision than entry or pre-entry level. For some prospective learners, travel could be a barrier to access and progression.

“There are quite a lot of local communities and faith groups who run provision in the borough because they know that it will cost their learners money to catch the bus or train to a venue that provides it. Again, that’s non-accredited but they’re trying to put something on for people.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Some providers offered outreach (i.e. community housed) English language learning classes themselves, or through partnerships. Other providers wanted to develop such partnerships to reach the ‘hard-to-reach’ groups (i.e. current non-learner groups).

“It would be good if we could develop our ESOL provision here. Also if we could develop our ESOL provision in other areas, even within the town, there are lots of learners who’d find it difficult to come here. If there was something just within their local community, it would be ideal for them. If we could work in partnership with more organisations, that would be brilliant.” (Senior Leader, Third Sector provider)

Lack of motivation

One of the barriers to emerge from the qualitative research was the limited desire of some to learn English. All non-learners interviewed were first generation migrants, of which almost all migrated to the UK in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s. The majority of non-learners reported some of the cost, childcare and employment commitments already discussed as initial barriers to English language learning. However, many acknowledged that while some of these barriers no longer existed, there was an absence of motivation because English language skills were not necessary to live their lives. The majority of the non-learners resided in areas where there was a large number of people who spoke their native language. Consequently, they did not feel that they needed English language skills as they had a wide support network to call upon. This sometimes included native

language speakers offering the very services that acted as a motivation to some learners discussed earlier (e.g. medical services, local shop, etc.).

Several non-learners noted that through employment they had ‘picked up enough English to get by’. These factors, coupled with the non-learners’ ages, meant that these participants did not see the value in learning English at this stage of their life. However, some noted that it might be different for non-English speakers arriving to England in current times, as knowing how to speak, read and write English was felt to be integral to conducting everyday life in England successfully.

Insufficient provision to meet demand

Another barrier, discussed in more detail previously (see Chapter 4), is the inability of some providers to meet demand. Qualitative interviews with senior leaders and teachers alike highlighted a perceived national shortage of qualified ESOL teachers. Participants reported that ESOL and related teaching positions were often recruited on a casual, part-time basis which was perceived to be due to funding restrictions. A direct consequence of this was reported to be that few teachers were attracted to these roles. Findings also showed that some larger FE providers re-trained permanent teaching staff, for example, training Functional Skills tutors to become qualified ESOL teachers to counter this shortfall.

“Nationally, there seems to be a dearth of ESOL tutors. We find it hard to recruit on a casual, part-time basis because if you have certain people who have got that TEFL background and come back to this country from teaching abroad, on high incomes, it’s quite a shock, I think, for realising that the work you might get is just part-time, casual. Even if the hourly rate is quite good, it’s nothing like recognising the kind of work you’ve done abroad. There is a struggle, I think, for providers to find sufficient tutors, at times, for delivery.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Work commitments

Work commitments were also cited as a barrier to engagement, largely by senior leaders and teachers. The nature of shift work could restrict access for some. Providers sometimes offered classes at different times of the day to accommodate learners’ availability. However, most recognised this as challenging, as the resulting class sizes were smaller and hard to deliver with the available funding. In one example, a provider offered evening classes to help men employed on shift work but found that there was limited uptake. Conversely another participant said their evening classes had been at full capacity albeit with class sizes that varied week to week, due to learners’ changing shift patterns. This provider recognised the benefit of offering classes flexibly at different times

of the day and week, although also recognised challenges in attracting men to evening classes.

“With the men, it tends to be the nature of the work that they do. They work shifts and it’s quite difficult for them to fit in the classes. Even when we have done evening classes, they’ve not really been that full. So, it’s more difficult I think for the men to access classes probably.” (Teacher, Local Authority)

Learners’ views and motivations for progression

Over four-fifths of providers surveyed agreed that their organisation had ‘the network in place to help learners reach at least entry level 3 or B1 standard English’ (strongly agree: 59%; tend to agree: 26%). This is reinforced by the finding that the majority agreed that ‘most of our learners progress to a higher level of English’ (strongly agree: 44%; tend to agree: 45%). However, over a tenth of providers (11%) disagreed with this statement, suggesting that opportunities to progress to higher level courses with some providers may be limited.

It is also important to note that Chapter 4 shows an inverse relationship between the proportion of providers offering English language learning provision and the level of the course. Together, the findings suggest that provision for higher level English language learning is more physically distant for some learners. This may be a result of the complex relationship between demand and barriers to learning.

Learners expressed several positive views about progressing to higher levels and improving their English language skills during interviews. Those studying at pre-entry and entry levels wished to progress to feel more confident with English and in the longer term, move into more vocational studies and/or employment. A number of learners expressed a desire to improve their English language skills to a higher level so they were able to undertake training to take up a professional occupation. The differences here are between social English and the higher cognitive and communication requirements for professional occupations.

“I have a plan. I like for teacher maths, yes, but first, for English speaking good. After that, a course for maths.” (Learner, FE provider)

“When I was in Greece I [wanted] to do nursing. It’s a little bit difficult for me here. I need to know very good English first and go to school.” (Learner, FE provider)

Some learners aspired to study or were already studying at university and wished to improve their English language skills to aid their academic studies. Others had worked in

professional occupations in their home countries and wished to progress their English language skills to enable them to take up similar positions in England.

“We all have degrees and qualifications. [...] You just need English. I will do ESOL courses and a bit of speaking and level one.” (Learner, FE provider)

Several learners also noted after they had finished their current course, that they did not wish to progress or develop their English language skills further. Those learners recognised that the English language skills they had learnt had met the needs they had identified prior to taking the course. The resulting fall in motivation is one reason why demand for higher level provision is lower. This is covered in more detail in the next section.

Barriers to progression

A couple of barriers to English language learning also limited learner progression: motivation and cost. As discussed earlier in this chapter, learners may reach a level of English that meets their needs and so feel they do not need to continue. Costs also act as a barrier for some, especially if changes in circumstances mean a learner no longer attracts full funding and is asked to meet part or all of the cost of subsequent English learning themselves.

In addition, a number of other barriers to progression were identified through the qualitative fieldwork. These barriers can be collated into two broad categories: experiences of learning and limits to provision.

Experiences of learning

Poor/interrupted course/class attendance

Poor attendance due to work and childcare commitments and other life events has been noted elsewhere in this report. Several teachers noted that asylum seeker and refugee learners' complex lives had a major impact on attendance. Teachers spoke about the significant mental health needs of this group, resulting from the traumas they faced and subsequently fled from.

“We have people who are mentally ill, but mainly because of the asylum process, or who are suffering from post-traumatic stress. We have had a number of people who have been in and out of mental hospitals since they've been here.” (Teacher, Third Sector provider)

Teachers and senior leaders gave examples where students had needed to return to their home country for an extended break during the course, which created difficulties for

both learners and providers. Such an approach was considered to be detrimental to learners' progression, especially if learners had been part way through or had almost completed the course, resulting in them having to re-sit the course to earn any associated accreditation. Providers felt that such episodes could demotivate learners to continue with the course or progress, leading them to drop out completely. Several provider representatives suggested technological solutions may be useful in overcoming such barriers, particularly access to shared learning materials, virtual classrooms, etc. However, some providers felt the nature of the interruption would dictate whether virtual or online solutions would be effective. In the case of significant or severe life circumstances, the likelihood of a learner remotely accessing learning was perceived as remote.

"It's difficult, I had a lovely student last year from Mexico, then her father was ill in Mexico, she had to go home, she missed so many lessons, three weeks later she came back and I had to say we'd taken her off the register. It's difficult, sometimes you know they have really good reasons. I told her to re-enrol next time, but I felt bad." (Teacher, FE provider)

The impact of interrupted attendance on funding

As well as impacting on a learner's progression on a course and beyond, many participants said poor attendance impacted on providers' earnings and success rates³⁴. The link between attendance and earnings and success rates was reported to be less of an issue for providers delivering non-AEB provision such as those in a local authority and the third sector. Senior leaders from AEB-funded providers noted that regular attendance was important as a drop in the numbers of learners recruited impacted on the funding received at the end of the year. In one of several examples, a teacher explained that if a student missed two lessons, the provider would have them taken off the register 'because they want to keep the figures looking good'. This was echoed by other teachers and senior leaders, especially those from FE providers and local authorities³⁵. This attitude may be considered demotivating for learners, especially those who have sought to overcome some of the entry barriers detailed earlier in the chapter.

"I think there's a belief that funding is affected by attendance, so sometimes students have these particular problems, other teachers might have worried it looks bad on the records. That can be a problem, you have a motivated student,

³⁴ Particularly AEB funding where funding is directly linked to the learner completing their course and then achieving either learning aims, further learning or gaining employment.

³⁵ The decision to remove a learner due to non-attendance is the providers choice. There are specific funding rules around attendance and drop out.

if they haven't got the childcare, teachers might say wait until your child goes to school." (Teacher, FE provider)

Mixed ability classes

Some providers connected poor rates of progression to mixed ability classes. They described scenarios where learners of mixed abilities were grouped together to make class sizes viable. Senior leaders and teachers explained that some learners had been able to progress quite quickly while others had struggled to keep up. The tensions of being in mixed ability classes were evident from interviews with learners who complained that either the pace was too fast or too slow for them. Those who felt the pace was too slow felt that others in the class had prevented them from progressing quickly. ESOL teachers from all types of provider noted that mixed ability classes created a difficult teaching and learning environment. For example, it was difficult for teachers to differentiate learning based on ability in a class, especially where the gap between the least and most able was large. The practical issues faced by teachers included a requirement to plan for a number of different eventualities for a lesson based on the current progress of each learner. This was required for both the different level of English ability of learners in the group and the variation in the individual topic (comprehension, grammar, written skills, etc.).

"I think [in the case of a mixed ability class] ... students go 'What's the point in going, because I might get five minutes of something that's relevant to me?' You're planning five lessons in one. [...] When I've been lucky enough to have a group that's all doing the same, or at least almost the same, the attendance has always been much higher." (Teacher, Local Authority provider)

Limited tutor contact time

Teachers and learners also stated that limited tutor contact time (as discussed under the 'Overview of providers' English language learning provision', p.29) on accredited and non-accredited English language classes was a barrier to progression. Typically AEB funded providers perceived that the typical offer of four to six hours was often dictated by the level of funding they were in receipt of. Senior leaders reported that offering more contact time would mean that they were not able to cover the cost. Additionally some AEB funded providers said more contact time may put an unnecessary burden on learners as many had work and/or childcare commitments. Both teachers and learners felt the four to six hours of contact time was insufficient.

Teachers (some of whom are volunteers) had to plan and deliver content relevant to a range of needs and abilities, especially in mixed ability classes. For learners, limited contact hours did not give them enough time to practice what they had learnt in the lessons. This was a particularly strong barrier for those on pre-entry and entry level courses, who stated that they would benefit from more time to practice and develop

confidence in speaking English. Some learners noted that outside of class time, the chance to practice English was limited. This was largely because they would return to their own families and communities and default to speaking in their native language.

Factors with provision

Insufficient provision

A number of providers described scenarios where learners who were keen to progress and cover the cost of courses themselves were unable to do so due to a lack of local provision. Providers noted that there was some demand for provision at levels 1 and 2 which they were unable to meet due to perceived operational and funding constraints. The survey data showed a fall in the proportion of providers offering ESOL at level 2 (Table 3) which is supported by the qualitative evidence. Lack of provision may impact learners' confidence and motivation to progress their learning, should courses become available at a later date.

Awareness of available provision

Several providers and learners said some people were unaware of local English language provision, or of any funding for which they might be eligible. Some providers had noted attempts in their area to map local provision but developing awareness of all providers offering English language courses locally and regionally was seen to be a challenge. This was especially the case for provision that was reliant on the availability of fixed term funding streams, as information can become quickly outdated.

"The other problem is you might think you have a student in a class who can't do anything, needs to be moved. We don't have a list of where the other classes are and the other levels. We need something where we can look on a database. 'Right, actually, there is a pre-entry class over here that would suit you.' If I'm in [a different area] I've no idea what's going on here." (Teacher, Local Authority provider)

Recognition of ESOL accreditation

Some senior leaders noted the lack of recognition among providers of qualifications gained from English language courses. In practice, this meant that if a learner wishes to progress, one provider may not recognise or even acknowledge certification or accreditation received for completing previous English language courses, largely because of two providers using different exam boards. As such, in order to progress,

learners may be required to undertake a course at a level already completed with the new provider³⁶.

“Every time they go to a different provider, they have a separate initial assessment, they’re given different and often not impartial information, advice and guidance and that is really confusing. If you don’t speak the language trying to access ESOL is actually really hard.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

A further issue was related to learners’ limited awareness of the different types of English language learning provision which they could access in their local area. Some teachers noted learners could be unaware that their course was non-accredited and ‘wasted a term before realising’. This difference was common between types of provision, especially for colleges offering accredited provision at level 1 or higher. A key issue for learners is that the advice they received prior to enrolment did not signpost the course that best suited their needs. For example, learners who wished to enter or change employment needed a qualification that their employer recognised and valued. The findings suggest that learners do not always get the right guidance to place them onto the English language course that suits their needs, or that such a course is not always available at a given provider.

“I don’t think learners necessarily understand the difference between the type of ESOL we’re delivering here and the type of ESOL delivered in the colleges. They don’t understand the difference between regulated and unregulated [i.e. concepts of accreditation] even when you describe it as a qualification and non-qualification they still don’t understand.” (Senior Leader, Local Authority provider)

Summary

Findings showed a range of motivations for learning English, including improving employment prospects (to gain a first job or to progress careers); to enable civic engagement and integration (to feel part of and connected to wider society); to develop life skills to enable engagement in everyday life activities (visiting a doctor, helping children with schoolwork, etc.) and to access services and benefits (classes are a Jobcentre Plus requirement).

The most significant barriers to entry recorded in the survey were access to suitable childcare arrangements and the existing literacy levels of potential learners. These

³⁶ Under the AEB funding rules providers must carry out a thorough initial assessment to determine an individual’s current level and enrol the learner on a level above that at which they were assessed.

barriers did not present in isolation. For example, childcare could often be an issue alongside other barriers such as distance to provision (increasing the amount of child care required) and timing of the course (misaligning with the availability of childcare). Existing literacy skills could also interact with issues such as mixed ability classes and inadequate signposting to suitable provision to form greater barriers.

Other barriers to entry included lack of motivation, funding restrictions, work commitments, location of classes/difficulties in accessing transport, cultural barriers and insufficient provision to meet the demand.

Barriers to progression included the lack of motivation to do so, the cost of courses, poor attendance resulting in incompleteness of course, issues resulting from mixed ability classes, limited teacher contact time, awareness of available provision and the recognition of ESOL accreditation among providers.

8. Conclusions

Barriers to entry and progression are found to be numerous and context dependent. However, some common elements exist. For instance, motivations to engage and progress English language learning were found to be similar. These motivations are found to be instrumental in encouraging non-learners and learners to engage with learning. Family and work commitments alike were found to be important barriers for certain groups of the population, particularly females and those working on shift patterns. It is also important to note that the barriers to entry and progression discussed do not present in isolation but are often intertwined, often cumulatively presenting complex circumstances for some.

Findings suggest that the majority of providers struggled to meet the high demand for English language learning and that the amount of funding they received was perceived to be insufficient. The minority of providers who indicated funding was sufficient still found it difficult to meet the demand from potential learners in their local community. For these providers access to suitable venues, qualified teachers and volunteers resulted in them unable to meet the demand. However, although several providers had taken a number of actions to meet the demand, many struggled to do so.

The type of provision offered varied by type of provider. FE providers were more likely to offer a wide range of provision and at different levels when compared with local authority and third sector providers. A marked difference between accredited and non-accredited provision with respect to delivery, pedagogy and learning approaches, additional support and use of technology is evident in delivering formal/informal provision was reported.

Although there is evidence that some providers refer students to other providers based on the learner's suitability for a course, several providers did not refer students to other providers. There were some examples of providers instead placing learners into mixed ability groups to ensure they had financially viable numbers. In other cases, potential learners are instead placed on waiting lists. This has implications for encouraging progression among learners, particularly for those who are accessing informal provision with third sector providers.

Participants reported finding funding for English language learning provision to be complex. The eligibility criteria associated with AEB funding was found to be restrictive for learners who had to part fund their learning, such as the employed or those not actively seeking work. However, a number of other pots of funding (such as the CMF) target specific audiences to deliver provision at low or no cost to the learner. Provision offered by the third sector was often reliant on short term funding streams (e.g. the CMF) which, once depleted, meant that provision ceased. This has implications for encouraging progression among learners and is one reason why it is difficult to map local provision as it becomes so varied.

Generally, learners participating in the research felt that provision had met their needs and were positive about their experiences. However, the design and delivery of English language learning provision does not always match learners' needs. Providers offering accredited provision reported being driven by the need to cover all the relevant content to ensure learners are equipped to pass and gain accreditation and hence achieve funding. Third sector providers were found to be more responsive to learners' motivations to learn English, often delivering courses and content relevant to learners' everyday lives. However, the lack of accreditation meant many of these courses were not recognised as progression steps onto higher level, accredited learning. Findings from interviews with learners showed that all providers in the study were meeting their learners' needs and course requirements with the exception of the number of guided learning hours or classroom time. More contact time was seen to benefit learners as they have more opportunity to practice their newly acquired language skills.

The research highlights that the use of hardware and technology varies across providers, with the use of hardware more common among AEB-funded providers. This is largely due to the fact that FE colleges and local authority providers are likely to have a pre-existing IT infrastructure. Survey findings showed that non-AEB funded providers either make less use of technology, or find 'common tech' ways – mobiles, free software, etc. Case study visits with third sector providers showed that the main technological constraints were the lack of funding and weaker IT infrastructure. The costs associated with technology are found to be significant for third sector providers who already struggle to fund core learning activity.

Overall, the providers taking part in this study described a series of approaches they took to maximise the funding they received for the benefit of learners. Providers were clearly adaptable and usually ensured decisions were based on how they could best realise tangible gains for their learners based on the resources they had available.

Appendices

Annex 1: Selected confidence intervals for survey statistics at the 95% confidence level

	Reliability at the 95% confidence level for given percentage response (assuming population of 1,000 providers)		
Base sizes	50% / 50%	70% / 30%	90% / 10%
162 (total response)	±7.1%	±6.5%	±4.2%
100 responses	±9.3%	±8.6%	±5.6%



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