



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

# Evaluation of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for Integration Fund

Final report



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## Executive Summary

### Background

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC, then called the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government) launched the £5.1M targeted English for Speaker of Other Languages (ESOL) for Integration Fund (EFIF) across 30 local authorities (LAs) during the 20/21 financial year. The programme started in August 2020 and finished in May 2021. Due to COVID-19, a funding extension was offered to all 30 areas in 2021-2022: 28 are continuing provision until 31 May 2022.

The EFIF programme aims to encourage the integration of communities by and improve language proficiency by providing English language sessions to individuals with little or no English (at pre-entry level and up to entry level 1). The fund trials a new approach to funding ESOL, adopting a localised place-based design, following DLUHC policy for devolving design and delivery of programmes to local areas.

The EFIF programme increased reading and writing requirements compared with previous community-based English language programmes, which had focused only on speaking and listening. Another new requirement of this fund was for all taught sessions to be led by qualified Level 5 + ESOL tutors. Additionally, all learners must receive one information, advice, and guidance (IAG) session. Unlike previous programmes, learners were eligible to participate if they had been in the UK for less than 12 months. Up to 25% of the funding in each area could be used for conversation clubs and social activities.

The overarching aims of the evaluation were to assess whether a place-based design improves the deliverability of the intervention and to assess the impacts of the intervention on learners, in terms of English language proficiency and improved social integration.

### Methodology

This report is based on the process evaluation and analysis of management information (MI), learner assessment and survey returns submitted by all 30 local authorities, on the volume and profile of learners, and on outcomes for English language proficiency and social integration. The process evaluation involved desk research on all 30 local authority bids and self-evaluation reports, and in-depth interviews with project leads in all 30 areas at the end of

each term. In addition, more intensive case studies were conducted in 12 local authorities in each term.

## Key findings

### Participation and outcomes

- **The EFIF programme supported fewer learners than planned, mainly due to issues relating to COVID-19.** A total of 6,508 enrolments occurred over the life of the programme, equating to 71% of the original target. This shortfall was largely owing to the multiple challenges created by COVID-19 and local / national lockdowns for recruitment and attendance. The majority of participants were women, aged 25 to 44 years old, and there was a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds reflecting the diversity of the local authorities which took part.
- **English language proficiency scores improved over the course of the programme.** Scores improved when comparing writing, reading and speaking/ listening assessments before and after the course. The average improvement in mean scores was 1.17 points for writing; 1.34 points for reading; and 1.64 points for speaking and listening. Comparison to the reported figures for mean scores for the CBEL programme indicates that EFIF learners had lower scores (both pre and post-programme) but showed a higher improvement for speaking/listening in terms of the increase in average assessment points.
- **Improvement was stronger for speaking and listening than for reading and writing.** Around one-quarter (24%) of participants moved up at least one level in speaking and listening, compared with 16% who did so for reading and 18% who did so for writing.
- **Taking part in EFIF provision also led to improved social integration among learners,** as evidenced from the social integration survey conducted before and after the course. Learners reported **more frequent interactions in English** at the end of the course, with the proportion speaking to 3 or more individuals in English over the previous week increasing from one-third (34%) to almost two-thirds (62%). Among participants with children, **more felt confident speaking to people at their child's school in English,** increasing from 8% to 29% by the end of their course. Learners were **more likely to 'definitely agree' that people from different backgrounds get on well in their local area** by the end of the course (23% at start

compared to 33% at programme end). This was supported with qualitative evidence, many learners described feeling more confident speaking English and being more able to communicate, compared to before they started the course, for example in the local supermarket or pharmacy, booking GP appointments and using public transport.

- **Digital literacy and use of technology increased over the programme.** Prior to the course 30% had used technology 3 or more times in the space of a week, this increased to more than half (53%) following the course) – although it is not possible to identify how much of this was influenced by the general increase in online activity necessitated by the pandemic.
- Wider outcomes reported by learners, and supported by providers, in the qualitative interviews included **improved knowledge of health and wellbeing** (including Coronavirus measures, which were reinforced in classes), **reduced social isolation, improved mental health, and increased motivation to progress in learning.**
- The cost per learner for EFIF taught programmes was £478 and for conversation clubs was £180. This compares to budgeted costs of £459 and £140: cost per learner increased mainly due to the lower than planned learner volumes (due to COVID-19). There was a sense that increased investment in the programme (through the use of Level 5 ESOL qualified tutors) supported good value for money because it enhanced learners' progress, and therefore programme outcomes. Providers felt that their skill and experience was needed when working with pre-entry level learners and when having to make rapid adaptations to delivery and curricula in the light of COVID-19.

### **Taking a place-based approach**

- Successive lockdowns (local during Term 1, national during Term 2) due to COVID-19 **hampered recruitment and the extent to which provision could incorporate planned activities and local visits.** However, providers continued to tailor course content to their local areas and strived to maintain their links with local venues so that planned activities could be re-instated when restrictions eased.
- The local, place-based nature of EFIF meant that providers could be more **agile and flexible** in making changes to their local plans. **Local knowledge and relationships proved** critical in enabling providers to maintain their delivery in the face of pressures arising from the Coronavirus pandemic, such as having to change venues and move to

more online provision. **DLUHC allowed the funding to be responsive** to local needs to change delivery, which supported areas to continue being able to deliver the programme.

- Programme leads and delivery staff identified the following elements as underpinning the positive outcomes observed:
  - The **use of Level 5-qualified ESOL tutors**; especially in the context of having to adapt materials and move delivery online due to COVID-19.
  - **Community-centred recruitment and the use of community spaces** for delivery; which providers felt had attracted learners who were traditionally more 'hard to reach'.
  - **Relevancy of course content to the local context**, and the ability to tailor it to the needs of the learners in the class; and
  - The **adoption of digital technologies and supporting learners' access to, and use of, digital learning**. Although face-to-face delivery was still preferred, EFIF demonstrated the potential of digital learning for people previously believed to be unable to access this method at all.

## Chapter 1: Background and Methodology

### Background

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) – formerly the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) - launched the £5.1M targeted ESOL for Integration Fund (EFIF) across 30 local authorities (LAs) during the 2020/21 financial year. The programme started in August 2020 and ran until 31 May 2021. Many areas encountered challenges in recruitment and delivery in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. An extension of funding was offered to all 30 areas in 2021-2022 and 28 have accepted the offer and are continuing provision until 31 May 2022.

The EFIF aims to encourage community integration and improve language proficiency by providing English language sessions to people with little or no English (i.e. at pre-entry and entry level 1). The fund trials a new approach to funding ESOL, adopting a localised place-based design, in line with DLUHC trends for devolving programmes to local areas.

Based on previous experience and stakeholder feedback from cross-government work on ESOL, the EFIF programme increased reading and writing requirements compared with previous community-based English language programmes, which had focused only on speaking and listening. Another new requirement was for all taught sessions to be led by qualified Level 5+ ESOL tutors. Additionally, all learners must receive one information, advice, and guidance (IAG) session while on the programme. Unlike past programmes, learners were eligible to participate if they had been in the UK for less than 12 months.

The fund aimed to provide places for up to 15,000 ESOL learners. The 30 local authorities (see **Table A.1**) which received funding through EFIF were selected based on relatively low levels of English language proficiency, relatively high residential segregation, and relatively high female economic inactivity (2011 Census). Local authorities were invited to submit bids, which focused at least 75% of funding on pre-entry teaching provision.

IFF Research and Bryson Purdon Social Research (BPSR) were commissioned by DLUHC in August 2020 to carry out the evaluation of the EFIF programme. The overarching aims of the evaluation are to:

- Assess whether a place-based design for intervention improves the deliverability of the intervention: i.e. does local partnership work?

- Assess the impacts on learners i.e. what outcomes are achieved in terms of English language proficiency and improved social integration for the learner?

## Methodology

### Scoping phase and Theory of Change development

The focus of the scoping phase was to understand the main aims of the EFIF programme, both nationally and locally, and what delivery would look like on the ground. It involved:

1. Rapid review of programme documents, including applications and delivery plans
2. Introductory calls with local leads
3. Development of a programme-level logic model.

The logic model comprises of six components:

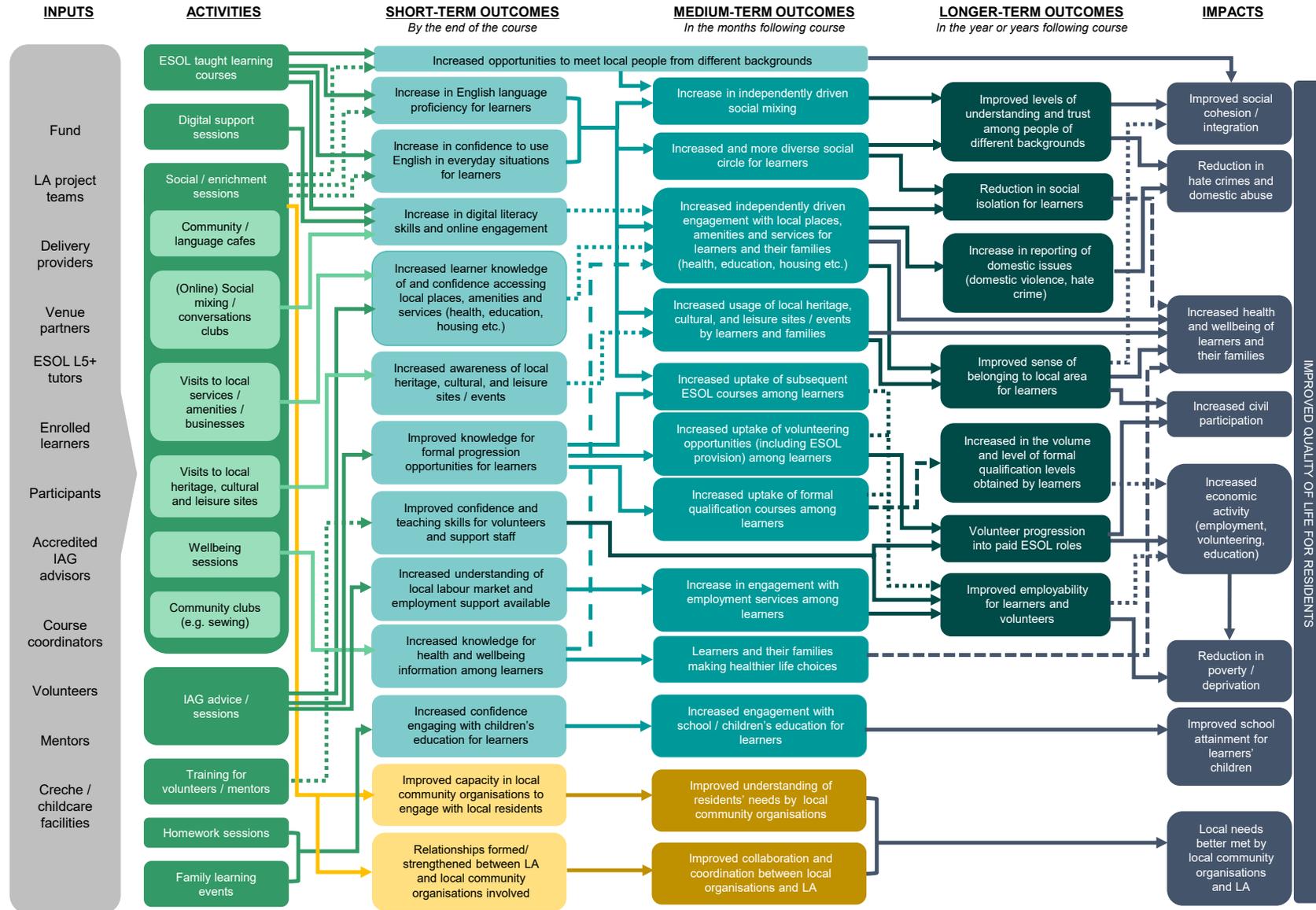
<b>Element</b>	<b>Overview</b>
<i>Rationale</i>	Justification for EFIF funding, the challenge it would address.
<i>Inputs</i>	Resources committed to allow the activities to take place.
<i>Activities</i>	The programme logic model focused on the required activities for delivery, and others identified as common across multiple areas.
<i>Outputs</i>	The direct products of the programme's activities, such as types, levels, and targets for delivery.
<i>Outcomes</i>	<p>Short-term outcomes are likely to occur during or by the end of engagement with EFIF delivery and can include, for example, changes in confidence, knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Medium-term outcomes are likely to occur in the weeks/ months after the programme, if positive changes from short-term outcomes are sustained and followed through.</p> <p>Long-term outcomes can be seen perhaps a year or several years after a programme and can result from cumulation of previous outcomes. These include changes in behaviour and status.</p>

<i>Impacts</i>	Long-term impacts are the ultimate, high-level effects that the EFIF programme is working towards. It is important to note that with impacts, the programme is ' <i>contributing to their achievement rather than 'causing' it</i> '; impacts cannot be directly associated with / referenced as a sole direct result of the programme, as it is likely that there are several other influencing factors contributing to any impact.
<i>Arrows</i>	Show the connections between specific elements of the programme (activities, outputs) and resulting outcomes and impacts, i.e. which activities are expected to lead to each outcome.

Underpinning the model (Figure 1) is the challenge the programme seeks to address:

*Britain is a diverse and inclusive country, but English language abilities often act as a barrier to social inclusion, employment opportunities and integration within local communities. There are many in England who cannot speak English well or at all. In Census 2011 this was 770,000 people and demand for English language classes has remained high since. MHCLG [now DLUHC] trust people and communities to make decisions that are right for them, as they are best placed to understand their needs. This fund provides an opportunity for local authorities to respond to the complexities of local unmet need by designing and delivering learning to residents with little or no English language, who may feel disconnected within their local communities.*

**Figure 1: EFIF programme-level logic model**



## Impact evaluation

Local authorities were required to carry out a baseline assessment with all learners at enrolment and a follow-up assessment with all learners at course completion. Learners did a series of English language proficiency tests (for speaking, listening, reading, and writing), developed by the English Speaking Board (ESB). They also completed a short local integration survey, asking them about their attitudes concerning social interactions and mixing; participation in everyday activities; confidence in engaging with public services; local and national belonging; and attitudes to community integration. Full measures are provided in Annex 1.

Local authorities were also required to upload aggregated data for their area to DLUHC's data platform, for transfer to IFF for analysis. The first batch was provided in January 2021 and included aggregated enrolment data for learners, including completion rates, as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021. The second batch included aggregated enrolment data, baseline and follow-up assessments, and survey data, from both terms. It was delivered in June 2021 and included all data as of 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

Using LAs' aggregated returns, the evaluation measures the level of change over this period among the cohort of learners, in terms of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills as well as confidence and attitudes measured in the survey. In practice it is reasonable to expect that over a short time period very little change in these outcomes would occur in the absence of the learning, in which case the counterfactual level of change would be small, but we do not have data to test this.<sup>1</sup>

## Feasibility of Randomised Control Trial and Quasi-Experimental Design

The original evaluation design included a Randomised Control Trial (RCT) among seven local authorities. During the scoping work for the evaluation, all the prospective RCT areas raised practical and ethical concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on course recruitment, which contributed to the reluctance to ask people to go onto a waiting list.

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<sup>1</sup> A 2018 wait-list RCT of Community-Based English Language Provision undertaken by the National Learning and Work Institute ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/690084/Measuring\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_community-based\\_English\\_language\\_provision.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/690084/Measuring_the_impact_of_community-based_English_language_provision.pdf)) did find improvements in the control group outcomes whilst this group was on the waiting list, but the authors concluded this was likely to be at least in part attributable to learners actively using that time preparing for the start of their course.

In light of these issues, IFF and BPSR were asked to explore an alternative to the RCT model and a Quasi Experimental Design (QED) was agreed. Areas would recruit learners for Term 1 and as soon as possible recruit a second cohort to start in Term 2. All recruits would undertake a baseline assessment, with the second cohort taking a repeat assessment on starting their course in Term 2, which would act as the follow-up for the comparison group. The QED was similar to the RCT in terms of data collection but without random allocation into an intervention or control group. Cohort 2 would still be on a waiting list but for a much shorter period and the approach meant areas could prioritise those who had been on a waitlist the longest for Term 1. The planned impact analysis would control for baseline differences between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 using propensity score matching or regression.

Several areas continued to struggle with the effects of local lockdowns on recruitment and delivery and after the new national lockdown was announced on 4<sup>th</sup> January, it was apparent there would be insufficient learner numbers to proceed with this approach and the QED element was cancelled.

### **Process evaluation**

The aim of the process evaluation was to understand whether the place-based model of the Fund improved deliverability of the intervention. The process evaluation also explored variations in delivery across the 30 local authorities, including how areas and providers responded and adapted to COVID-19 conditions. These factors were assessed through qualitative interviews with area leads in all 30 areas at the beginning and end of the programme, informed by a rapid desk review of all bids and progress reports. All initial depth interviews were carried out between October 2020 and January 2021, and end of programme interviews between May and July 2021.

In addition, the process evaluation includes case studies in 12 local authority areas. The case studies involve interviews with delivery partners such as sub-contractors and IAG providers, tutors, volunteers, learners and other key stakeholders (such as other members of staff involved in the delivery). The 12 case study areas were selected to ensure these included variety in terms of:

- Geography (mixture of regions)
- Partnership model (sub-contracting or not)
- Target groups of learners

- Mode of delivery (digital, face to face or blended)
- Social activity (integrated or standalone).

The case study areas selected were: Bedford, Derby, Barnet, Croydon, Redbridge, Newcastle, Bolton, Manchester, Oldham (replaced by Westminster in Phase 2), Salford, Wolverhampton and Kirklees.

Term 1 case studies were carried out between November 2020 and February 2021 and focused on set-up, design, establishment of partnerships, recruitment and initial delivery. For Term 2, fieldwork was carried out between May and July 2021 and explored experiences of delivering Term 2, and reflections and lessons learnt from delivery overall. All interviews were carried out over video conferencing software or telephone. Learners were offered an interpreter as well as a £30 voucher incentive for taking part. Each case study typically included between 10 to 15 interviews. A breakdown of the interviews is provided in the Annex.

#### About this report

This report draws together evidence from both terms from the qualitative research on delivery and the quantitative data on learner participation and outcomes. Where learner and volunteer vignettes are included, these are pseudonymised.

## Chapter 2: Overview of the programme

This chapter provides an overview of participation on the programme across the 30 local authorities, in terms of the volume and profile of learners engaged.

### Local authorities

Although each of the local authorities had its distinct characteristics in terms of population profiles and challenges, common attributes included:

- High levels of poverty / deprivation
- Diverse populations, with a high proportion from ethnic minorities
- Relatively high proportions of residents from overseas, non-English speaking households and/or poor English Language proficiency
- High proportions of unemployed residents or low/unskilled workers, particularly among the migrant population.

Most of the LAs were in London (n=10) or the North West (n=6). A list of participating LAs is provided in the Annex.

### Delivery hubs

Areas used 167 different delivery hubs in Term 1; 107 were solely for delivery of taught classes, 30 were solely for social clubs and activities, and 40 for both. More hubs were used in Term 2, a total of 230. 112 of these were used for taught classes only, 63 for social activities, and 55 for both. The vast majority of Term 2 hubs were online, reflecting the impacts of lockdown between January and March 2021. As shown in **Table 1**, community centres were the most common hub type.

**Table 1: Types of hub location used in EFIF delivery**

<b>Hub information:</b>	<b>Term 1 total</b>	<b>Term 2 total</b>
Community centre	56	40
Online only	46 <sup>2</sup>	144
Adult education centre	31	23
Place of worship	11	7
Arts centre/ theatre	5	2

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<sup>2</sup> According to the MI data one local authority accounted for 30 of these online only hubs.

School - Primary	5	6
Library	4	2
School - Nursery / early years	4	6
Council building	1	0
Shop / retail unit	1	1
Other	3	4

### Taught English learners

Learners typically received two hours of tutor-led guided learning per week (or 'taught English'), across Term 1 (Sep – Dec 2020) and Term 2 (Jan-Apr 2021). Some LAs extended delivery in Term 2 until June 2021 if they experienced significant disruption in learner recruitment and course delivery due to COVID-19.

The original targets (i.e., those set out at the bidding stage) for taught learner enrolments totalled approximately 9,200 across all 30 local authorities, with 55% of these enrolments planned for Term 1. A total of 6,508 learners were enrolled over the life of the programme, equating to 71% of the original target. This shortfall was largely owing to the multiple challenges created by COVID-19 and local / national lockdowns. In some cases, areas had adjusted targets since their original bid so that, for example, they subsequently aimed to engage more learners in Term 2 than originally planned. Indeed, despite the national lockdown between January and March 2021, this did happen - originally Term 1 learners were meant to account for 55% of all enrolments; ultimately, they accounted for 42%.

Across the 30 local authorities, there were 2,738 learner starts recorded on a taught English course in Term 1, with 1,526 completing their course by the end of 2020; equivalent to 56% of Term 1 learners. There are a few reasons underlying this relatively low completion rate for Term 1: course length and, in some cases, disruptions due to COVID-19 meant that many courses were running into January (and, thus, had no completers as of the end of December when the data was uploaded). Some areas were also recruiting on a rolling basis, so learners' course completion was staggered.

For Term 2, there were 3,770 learner starts on a taught course, and the vast majority (90%, 3,409) completed. It is important to note that some of these learners will be individuals who also took part in a course in Term 1; duplicates between the terms cannot be determined from the data, but we know from the process evaluation that learners were able to re-enrol on the course if tutors felt they would continue to benefit from it and still met the eligibility criteria in terms of their English language proficiency.

As such, this section of the report will focus only on the demographic profile of the taught English course *starters* for each term separately.

The majority of learners were women (72% compared to 27% men in Term 1, 63% compared to 33% men in Term 2). They were relatively young, with around three-fifths (63% in Term 1 and 58% in Term 2) aged between 25 to 44 years old.

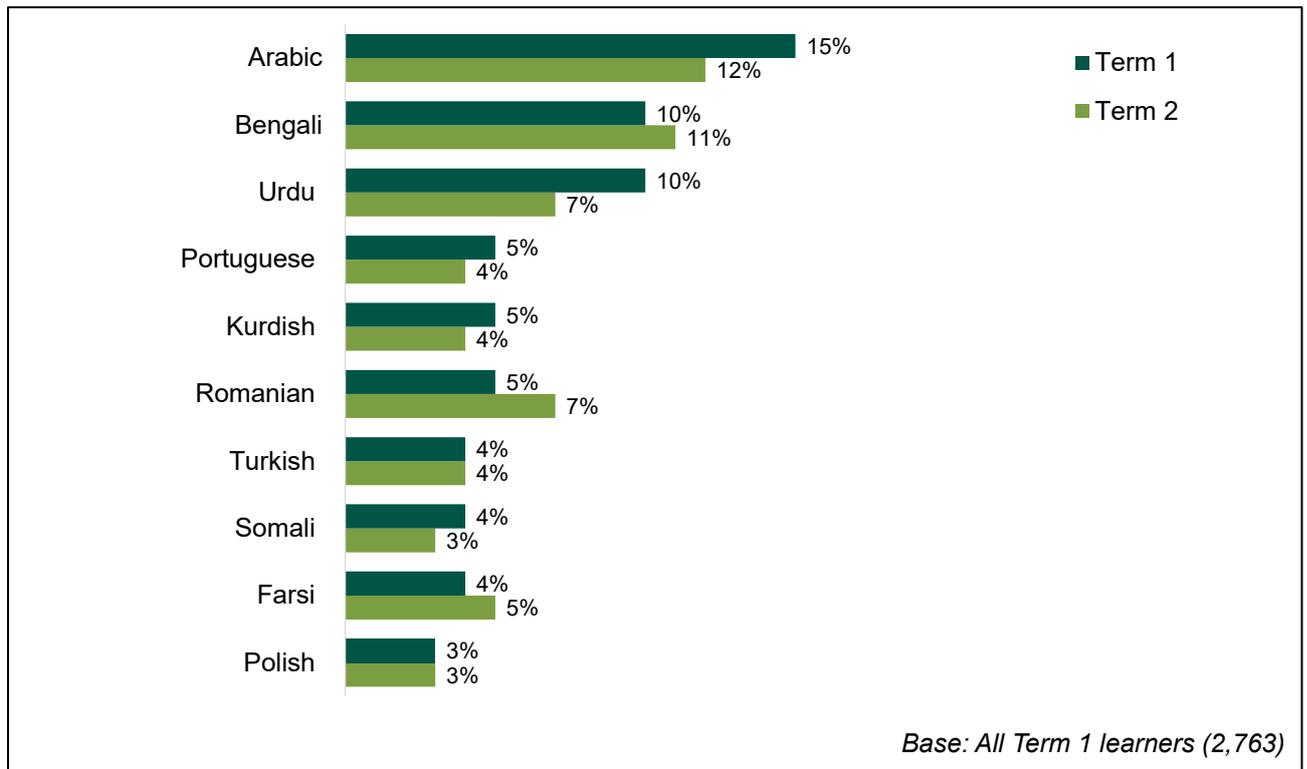
**Table 2: Learners by age**

<b>Age:</b>	<b>Term 1</b>		<b>Term 2</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of learners</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of learners</b>
19-24	212	8%	311	8%
25-44	1719	63%	2196	58%
45-64	716	26%	968	26%
65+	61	2%	89	2%
Prefer not to say	4	0%	36	1%
Unknown	26	1%	170	5%

White learners of ‘other’ backgrounds (i.e., non-British, Irish or Gypsy / Irish traveller) accounted for the greatest proportion of learners (21% in Term 1 and 25% in Term 2), followed by Black African learners (17% and 12%). However, looking at broader ethnic groups, Asian learners were most common (33% in both terms).

As shown in Figure 2 , EFIF catered for a diversity of learners from different backgrounds and cultures. Arabic was the most common first language spoken in both Term 1 (15%) and Term 2 (12%), followed by Bengali (Term 1: 10%, Term 2 (11%) and Urdu (Term 1: 10%, Term 2: 7%).

**Figure 2: EFIF learners by first languages spoken (Top 10 most common)**



Learners tended to have been living in the UK for a relatively short length of time. Nearly two-fifths had been in the UK for less than two years (39% and 36% in Terms 1 and 2, respectively), while 33% and 26% respectively had been living in the UK for between 3-5 years. One-fifth (21%) from Term 1 had been living in the UK for more than 6 years, while just over a quarter (26%) from Term 2 had.

A small minority of learners (7% in Term 1, 4% in Term 2) had a disability.

### Social Club participants

In addition to the taught element of the course, the ESOL for Integration Fund provided funding for LAs to deliver social clubs and activities to learners. The social clubs and activities aimed to provide opportunities for learners to practise English in an informal, social setting, as well as access leisure opportunities in their local area.

Of the 30 local authorities, 23 areas had social club participants in Term 1, while 26 had social club participants in Term 2. As of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, a total of 1,181 social club participants had been recorded, with a

further 3,337 attendees in Term 2. The profile of social club participants was largely in line with that of taught English learners (although there was a higher proportion of ‘unknown’ data across individuals, in particular for length of time in the UK).

Again, most participants were women (71% and 54% in Terms 1 and 2 respectively, compared to 23% and 25% of men) and aged between 25 to 44 years old (58% in Term 1 and 47% in Term 2).

**Table 3: Social club participants by age**

Age:	Term 1		Term 2	
	Total	% of learners	Total	% of learners
19-24	86	7%	233	7%
25-44	680	58%	1604	47%
45-64	265	22%	601	18%
65+	25	2%	53	2%
Prefer not to say	4	0%	411	12%
Unknown	121	10%	475	14%

As with learners, White individuals of ‘other’ backgrounds (i.e., non-British, Irish or Gypsy / Irish traveller; 20% in Term 1 and 16% in Term 2) accounted for the greatest proportion by detailed ethnic group. Overall, Asian participants were most common (35% in Term 1 and 24% in Term 2).

The most common first languages spoken by social club participants were Bengali and Arabic, followed by Urdu and Portuguese. First languages were similar to those spoken by attendees at the taught classes.

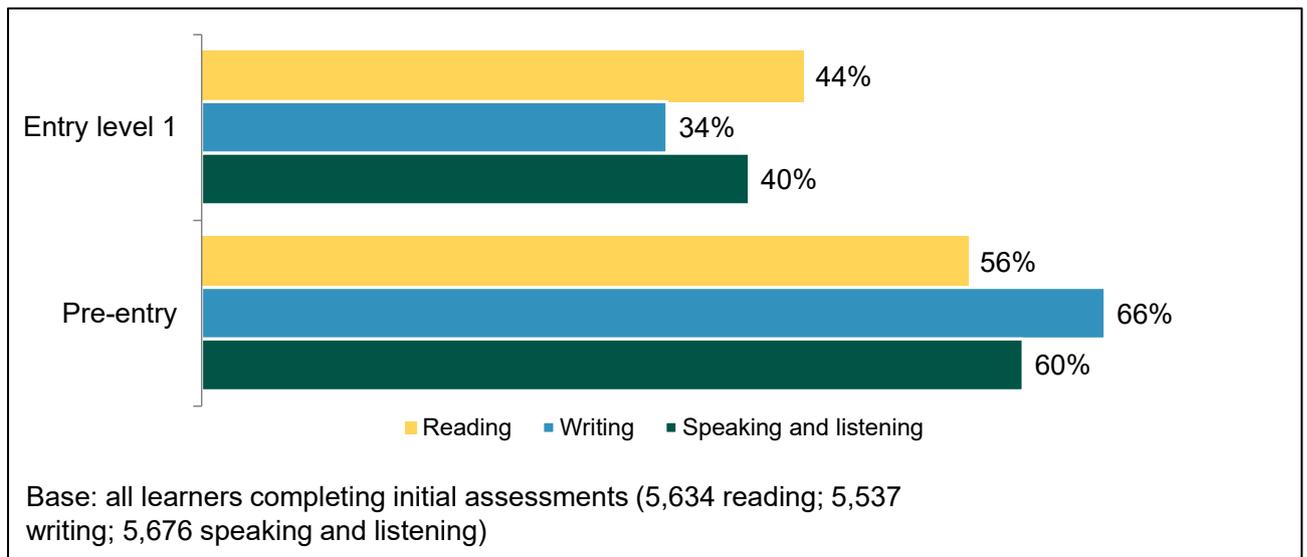
Learners’ English language proficiency before the start of the course

Learners came onto the course with a range of levels of proficiency across Pre-entry Level and Entry Level 1, as measured using the reading, writing and speaking and listening assessments.

Two-thirds (66%) of learners were assessed as Pre-entry in terms of their writing skills, 60% for speaking and listening, and 56% for reading skills before the start of the course. The remainder of learners were assessed as Entry level 1 in terms of reading (44%), writing (34%), and speaking and listening (40%).

Among learners assessed as Pre-entry level, around one in ten learners (9%) came into the course with the lowest Pre-entry Level score (score 0) for reading or speaking and listening (7%). Nearly 1 in 5 learners (17%) scored 0 for writing.

**Figure 3: Learners’ reading, writing, speaking and listening proficiency before the course**



As the data is reported separately for the three assessments, it is not possible to evaluate how many learners fulfilled the original eligibility criteria set out in DLUHC guidance. However, given the likely correlation in learners’ reading, writing, speaking and listening scores, it appears likely that, on average, the cohort of learners who went on the course were more skilled than originally anticipated. The guidance stipulated that, to be eligible, they should have no more than Pre-entry Level English (scoring 0 to 3) in two of the three assessments (reading, writing, and speaking and listening). However, at least a third (34%) of learners had reached Entry Level 1 in at least one assessment. Moreover, were they to score as ‘established’ (score of 7) at Entry Level 1 for any one of the three assessments, the guidance also suggested that the course would be unsuitable. However, 8% of learners had reached this level in at least one assessment (reading) before the course.

## Chapter 3: How EFIF delivery was set up

This chapter provides an overview of the delivery of the EFIF programme across the 30 participating local authorities. It discusses previous experience of ESOL delivery, delivery models including structure and mode of delivery for taught lessons and conversation clubs, and the adaptations that local programmes made over the year.

### Previous experience of ESOL delivery

There was a wealth of relevant prior experience across local authorities, both at an authority and individual level, with all areas having some experience in ESOL programmes or related delivery. While not all providers had experience of delivering ESOL to pre-entry learners, the wider ESOL experience was still seen as useful.

Most relevant in prior experience was delivery of previous MHCLG (now DLUHC) ESOL programmes, such as the Integration Community English Language Programme (ICELP)<sup>3</sup> courses which included Talk English<sup>4</sup> and English for Everyday, previously co-ordinated in around a quarter of areas. It was evident that those involved in Talk English had brought key learnings from the process into the EFIF programme. For example, many used the lesson content and materials in their design of EFIF provision. Some who had experienced both Talk English and EFIF mentioned the important distinction of using L5+ qualified tutors in the current programme. This was considered a positive development and crucial in successfully developing English language skills and confidence in pre-entry learners.

The Controlling Migration Fund<sup>5</sup>, another former (now DLUHC) programme, was also cited by multiple local authorities as a previous programme with parallels to the current EFIF funding, due to the focus

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<sup>3</sup> ICELP focused on helping to improve English skills and support participants to integrate into life in this country by making good use of local services, becoming part of community life. The programme was delivered via community hubs and targeted women living in segregated communities.

<sup>4</sup> Led by trained volunteers, Talk English classes supported people to improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in English. English language courses and other activities sought to connect learners to the places, spaces and people in their local area – helping them in everyday situations such as shopping in the high street, visiting the doctor or attending a parents' evening.

<sup>5</sup> Controlling Migration Fund launched in 2016 help local authorities mitigate the impacts of recent migration on communities in their area. It provided support to that promoted meaningful social mixing between people from different backgrounds, facilitating the integration of recent migrants and asylum seekers. These projects included, but were not limited to, English Language courses.

on integrating individuals into communities. Other programmes mentioned included ESOL for All and Real English in Action.

For those who had engaged with these programmes, the most crucial outcomes which fed into the EFIF programme were the relationships established and entrenched with local delivery and community partners, and an understanding of how to incorporate connections to the local area and everyday living into course design.

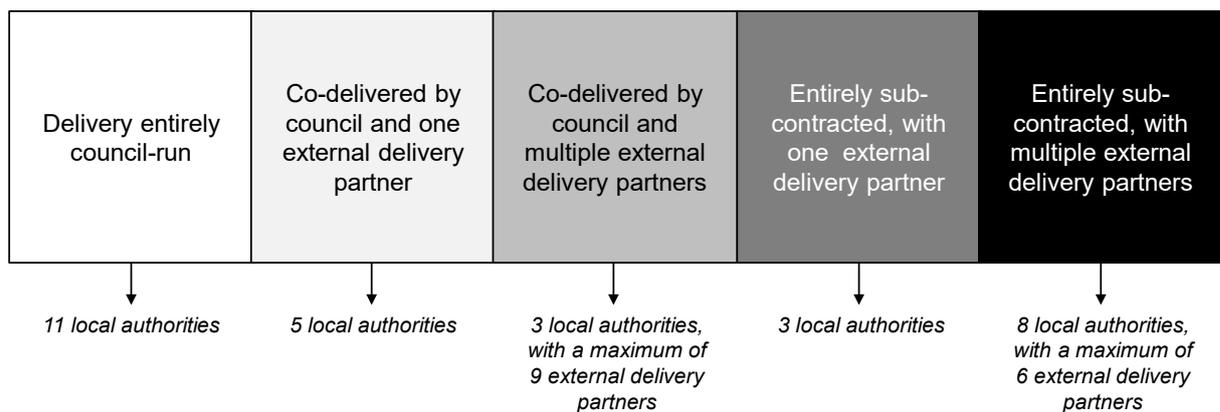
Many areas talked about the benefits of being able to leverage longstanding relationships with previous delivery partners; this meant that there were positive working relationships going into EFIF delivery, and an understanding of the strengths of each organisation (for example, some may be best suited to delivering social club activities while others excelled at delivering taught classes).

Likewise, where collaboration and network building among community organisations to engage similar audiences had taken place in the past, local authorities had a clear understanding of the best recruitment avenues.

### Delivery models

As shown in **Figure 4**, various delivery structures were in place across the 30 local authorities. At one end of the spectrum, delivery was entirely council-run; at the other, all delivery was subcontracted to multiple external partners.

**Figure 4: Types of delivery models**



Sub-contracted delivery partners were typically local colleges or charities. Where multiple partners were involved, these were often strategically selected because of their geographical location or relationship/familiarity with specific pockets of the target population.

For many, the intended delivery model was not possible due to COVID-19; it was common for areas to have delivery partners drop-out due to the challenges presented by the pandemic. In some cases, this was because partners had to stop all delivery (i.e. not just EFIF) during lockdown, as venues were closed and there was no infrastructure or contingency for online delivery. For other partners, the challenges that COVID-19 brought meant that they wanted to focus on delivering against their core targets, which did not include EFIF learners; they therefore decided not to run courses for EFIF learners either just in Term 1, or at all. Therefore, having partners only deliver provision in one of the terms was another symptom of the pandemic, sometimes halving the original target of students allocated, sometimes trying to achieve targets in just one term.

In some cases, involvement of external partners was delayed to Term 2. This allowed those partner providers time to prepare, to be better adapted to online delivery, or to expand their scope of delivery. In other cases, where some face-to-face socially distant learning was allowed to take place in Term 1, the stricter lockdown rules at the beginning of Term 2 saw some of those partners halt provision, while others preferred to delay the start in order to adequately set up for online provision too, experiencing some drop-outs along the way. A consortium model between provision partners, as adopted in Luton, helped redistribute learners to ensure continued provision, also aiding in the partners' transitioning from a competitive model to a more collaborative one.

Despite this, some places saw their uptake of students increase in Term 2 compared to Term 1 after the relaxation of restrictions in March and the reopening of some referral partners such as Jobcentre Plus. Therefore, a less common yet occurring response to the impact of lockdown on learner numbers was to bring additional partners in Term 2 to increase delivery capacity. Another response was to add another cohort to the original two after programme was extended, usually in shorter, more intensive courses.

As suggested in the previous section, community (i.e. non-delivery) partners were also involved in delivery models. In original plans, community partners had three primary roles: to support with outreach and recruitment (these partners typically included schools, local faith organisations, and libraries), for venue use, and to support the localised elements of the course delivery (for example, hosting visits to community-based sites).

Local programmes that were reliant on community partnerships were the most likely to be impacted by COVID-19. In this context, many planned venues were not able to open, and visits to the local area were not viable within the restrictions. Furthermore, many community partners were facing their own challenges in the pandemic - particularly schools - and, as such, were not able to support the programme to the same capacity as planned. In many cases, these remained as simply referral partners until the end of the project, especially in cases where the entire provision was delivered online throughout the programme.

Use of partners and the impacts of COVID-19 are explored in more detail the next chapter (Process Evaluation: Experience of delivery).

### Course structure and content

The EFIF programme allows a great deal of flexibility and agility in delivery, due to it being locally developed and managed by the LAs. This was evident in the variety of delivery patterns implemented, and the changes implemented along the way as necessary. The length of taught courses across both terms ranged from a condensed 2.5 week course up to 24 weeks, with 10-12 weeks being the norm. Likewise, the number of guided learning hours (GLH) spanned from 20 to 92 hours, with 30 GLH most common. Even within some areas, the delivery structure varied between partners and between terms.

Based on previous experience with pre-entry learners, local authorities generally felt that longer courses were more effective in developing entry-level language skills and minimising the impact of absence.

*“A lot of our courses have stuck to being 24 weeks. Our view from doing Talk English in the past is that students prefer to do a longer cohort, and this works from our perspective as well. If learners miss a few sessions - for whatever reason - the extended course gives them the opportunity to meet the hours. And I think especially with COVID, some people may have to isolate for two weeks or more and with the longer programme they are still getting quite a lot of hours. We’ve always done this with our English classes though; it takes so long to learn a language, after 4-5 weeks they have settled in and got to know each other and opened up, and they don’t feel shy to get involved.”*

Programme lead

A small number of areas felt it would be beneficial to offer different course lengths for the learner to select from. For example, one provider offered a 5 week “taster” course to allow learners to trial the learning environment before committing to the full, formal 10 week taught course. Other areas offered additional GLH “boosts”, including hours dedicated to helping parents navigate their children’s home learning, and help them communicate with schools. One area even described flexing course length as it progressed, depending on the skills development among learners; lengthening or shortening as relevant to meet the intended learning outcomes.

Length of course could also vary at an individual level within a specific programme, as some areas allowed rolling recruitment onto courses, while others offered a modular approach (for example, 4 x 4 week modules) in which learners could stop at the end of any module.

It was evident in interviews that the scope for flexibility made possible by the localised approach to EFIF was necessary for withstanding the impact of the pandemic and local and national lockdowns. Compared to original plans, many courses were lengthened to allow additional time for learners to have an adjustment period to an abrupt movement to online delivery, either upfront or mid-course if lockdowns disrupted them. Others felt that, in the context of having to move to purely online delivery, a course running over more weeks with shorter sessions would be best, to avoid screen-fatigue and overwhelming learners in this challenging context.

In contrast, some areas decided to offer shorter, more condensed courses where the start of course delivery had been delayed due to COVID-19. The purpose of this approach was, in Term 1, to give learners who may be eager to start an opportunity to engage with learning English sooner, while not disrupting the hopeful reinstatement of the original format for Term 2. For Term 2, shorter, condensed terms were offered in an attempt to increase delivery volumes within the

extended timeframe of the EFIF funding and increase number of students to closer to the original targets.

#### **CASE STUDY: A condensed course**

One example of a local authority adopting to run an additional course, under condensed timing was Redbridge. Redbridge Institute had all students set to participate in Term 2 of the programme already assessed and allocated in December. However, they continued to get applications for the programme in 2021, especially from March onwards, after a new wave of leaflets about the course was released, and once more referral partners, such as Jobcentre Plus started opening up.

In addition to bringing in a new delivery partner for Term 2, Redbridge Institute decided to run an additional, compressed “Term 3” to accommodate the wave of new interested students in March and April. The new cohort would get the same number of guided learning hours as previous cohorts, 60 in total, but condensed into 5 weeks instead of 10, of 5 hours per week. Depending on the group and their availability, the 5 weekly hours were split either between two or three online sessions with the same tutor.

In order to allow for as much flexibility around people’s personal lives and levels of comfort meeting face to face, they continued to deliver Term 3 completely online as well (the same as the first two terms). Classes were organised by the level of English students had at the beginning of the course, as revealed by the initial assessment.

*I think it’s worked really well, this term [Term 3] because we’ve also learned a lot of lessons along the way. The 3 hours on Wednesday [split 2 in the morning, 1 in the afternoon] allow you to flow into the next lesson without them forgetting what you taught them, so the learners are more active in the afternoon class. With spending more time of a topic, it’s amazing how much more they retain of it the following week.*

Delivery staff

In a couple of instances, local providers started additional cohorts towards the end of Term 2, encouraged by the extended funding period of the programme. So as not to rush the delivery period for this last cohort however, these areas opted to include a part of the additional provision in the EFIF funding and cover the costs of delivery for the rest of the programme from other, additional funds. The providers and the LAs that adopted this method aimed to meet the learning needs of the students beyond the delivery timeframe of the EFIF evaluation, although this would mean that the additional cohorts could not be counted towards the EFIF completes as their final assessment could not be conducted in time.

Though the specifics of course content and the structures for how this was delivered varied greatly between areas, there were some common topics / skill areas:

- **Conversational language skills**, such as describing themselves, their families, and day-to-day life. As well as supporting learners' social integration outside of the classroom, this was thought to support social integration within sessions, with learners hearing first-hand the lives of others from potentially different backgrounds.
- **Use of food and recipes** was common. This was thought to be an engaging topic for learners and another way for them to understand about different cultures and traditions.
- **Developing language skills to support engagement with the local area services**, for example asking for directions, completing a trip to the grocery store, or describing illness at a doctor's surgery. Many cases this was planned to progress to visits to the local area, to put skills learnt into practice.
- **Providing information on the local area**; what and where services/amenities were available and how to access them (for example, how to get there by public transport).

That said, many areas wanted to avoid being too prescriptive with the course content upfront. It was common for delivery staff to take a more adaptive approach to course content, first ensuring they understood a group's and each individual's learning requirements, goals and interests, then building course content around this.

For some areas, practising the course content was supported by tools for learners to engage with between classes, such as workbooks and apps/online portals with activities and learning resources. Some delivery staff assigned engagement with these tools as part of homework, while others left their use up to the learner.

### **Information and Guidance (IAG) and employability skills**

All taught learners were required to receive at least one session of IAG by a trained advisor to receive information about local opportunities available to them in education, employment or volunteering. It was evident that, in practice, interpretation and implementation of this requirement varied significantly between areas.

In some areas, provision and plans for IAG was as intended; it was a formal element of the programme, often making use of an external partner or internal delivery staff with IAG accreditation, with sessions dedicated to providing IAG support to taught learners. Usually, where it

was formalised, the IAG sessions were designed to take place towards the end of a course, to equip learners with the knowledge and confidence to pursue a desired next step; whether that be further training or education, volunteering or job searching. For some courses, IAG sessions were designed to act as a bookend, with individualised action plans for each learner developed up front for them to work through as the course progressed, and a reflection and review of next steps session at the end of the course.

For others, IAG sessions for each individual learner were not formally built into a course's structure, but rather an IAG professional would be given a dedicated slot to come in and talk to the learners - with the aid of a translator – about what their service offered. It was then up to the learner whether they wanted to follow-up with a one-to-one session.

Where inclusion of IAG was less formal, it tended to be “woven in” to the course, with frequent signposting to relevant providers. Some areas specified that their ESOL tutors were trained in IAG and able to address as and signpost accordingly.

Delivery of IAG was another element of EFIF provision heavily impacted in the fallout of the pandemic as many felt face-to-face settings were most effective / necessary for delivery of this support; this is discussed further in in the next chapter.

Many areas decided against formalised integration of employability skills into their course, as they felt pre-entry learners were too far away from the job market to warrant this. Furthermore, many thought the inclusion of, for example, job searching and application skills, could potentially be overwhelming to learners who were still grappling with basic English language or literacy skills. A few areas had intentions to progress learners into searching for and apply to jobs, but only towards the end of the course.

As a result of this, these LAs focussed on more preparatory work such as supporting learners on filling in forms, carrying out job searches, improving vocabulary around relevant areas of work and related topics such as health and safety, and exploring their goals and interests. One of the tutors also mentioned volunteering a possible next step.

*“Their English-speaking skills are too low for them to access jobs, so the ESOL course is the first step. Within this they focus on building skills such as filling in a form*

*with their name, address, phone number, gender, national insurance number. They also can become a volunteer as a starting point and one of our teachers started as a volunteer.”*

Delivery staff

Some areas focused more on developing soft skills often valued by employers (such as timekeeping, team working and IT skills), within their course content.

### Mode of teaching

In their original delivery plans, local authorities mainly planned face-to-face delivery, with online delivery sometimes stated as a backup option. However, due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, many areas delivered at least some online classes during the first term. Some areas moved the entirety of their delivery online, whilst others kept some face-to-face classes, dependent on provider and venue availability.

Many areas found that planned venues were either closed or unable to comply with COVID-19 guidelines, and a lack of suitable venues was often a deciding factor leading providers to move delivery online. Other areas chose to move delivery online following a drop in attendance in face-to-face classes. This was partially driven by anxiety among learners to travel on public transport and/or attend indoor classes with others. Staff were aware that some learners were considered vulnerable themselves or lived with family members who were. While the areas invested heavily in making face-to-face classes as safe as possible, and communicating this to learners, some learners still did not feel comfortable attending in person. Attendance was also impacted by learners having to isolate, particularly those with children in school.

Some areas recognised early in Term 1 that there was a high likelihood of classes eventually having to move online, and therefore delivered training on digital skills to learners during initial face-to-face classes. These areas felt this laid the ‘groundwork’ for moving classes online and attributed much of their successful transition to online teaching to these initial digital skills sessions.

Further detail on experiences of changing the mode of delivery is provided in the next chapter.

### Social cafes and conversation clubs

As part of the ESOL for Integration Fund, 25% of the bid amount could be used to deliver conversation clubs and social activities<sup>6</sup>. As with taught classes, the planned structures of the social elements were somewhat varied, both among Local Authorities, and between Term 1 and Term 2. In Term 1, some planned to have weekly conversation clubs available to learners, specifically designed to complement the content of the taught course and develop skills and confidence between classes. Others had courses running alongside the taught classes, for example a six-session course on cooking or craft skills, which learners could opt in to, or informal social cafes which they could drop into and engage with learners from other courses and language levels. In Term 2, with the higher levels of restrictions, only virtual conversation classes were able to continue, with almost all skills-based courses being put on hold.

Another format that a few areas took was having opportunities for social mixing built in towards the end of a course, so that learners could develop their confidence and skills before putting them to use in a more informal context, which was a model adopted in both terms, both for the level of language learning accumulated before the social club, and in the hopes of restrictions loosening up allowing for more options for the social clubs, including some face to face outdoors activities.

The clubs often included plans for one-off trips and activities. Some clubs were however solely focused on one activity (e.g. a weekly sewing club). Examples of activities planned for learners as part of the clubs include:

- Trips to local attractions or places of historical interest
- Trips to local amenities (libraries, supermarkets, town hall)
- Craft activities (sewing, knitting, pottery, jewellery making, painting, floristry, henna tattooing, making face masks)
- Guided local walks
- Activities with local theatre groups (including team building activities)

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<sup>6</sup> For clarity, in this report all social activities and language cafes provided will be referred to as 'clubs' throughout this section.

- Physical activities (Zumba, dance, yoga etc.)
- Other wellbeing activities (e.g. cooking, gardening, book clubs)
- Practice taking local transport

Although these activities were curtailed throughout both terms due to regulations, most local authorities managed to conduct conversation clubs and social cafes online. Some local authorities even managed to take online social clubs further, by delivering remote yoga classes, theatre and circus skills sessions for the whole family, sewing and arts and crafts, cooking and other fun activities. Other online social cafes were also used as a means to deliver more useful local information to learners in a less formal environment, on topics such as local recycling schemes, wellbeing, COVID-19 vaccines, the census, women's health and contraception, domestic violence services, reporting hate crime, etc.

While some clubs were intended only for learners enrolled in the course, with the content of clubs closely linked to that of taught classes, others were both for learners and additional people not enrolled on the course.

Despite the diversity of the planned activities, the aim for most clubs was to encourage social interactions and conversation between learners in a safe environment, with volunteers on hand to support conversation and help with the tasks. They were often seen as an opportunity to put taught learning 'into action' and encourage unstructured conversations. A secondary aim for many areas was to use clubs to acquaint learners with the local area and introduce them to more amenities e.g. through guided walks or using the local area as a starting point for conversation.

### Addressing barriers to learning

Qualitative interviews revealed several common barriers to learning faced by participants on the EFIF programme, some of which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learners across all terms were broadly described as highly isolated, which often made it challenging to engage them in formal learning. The side-effect of isolation for some of these learners was low confidence and poor mental wellbeing, both of which were also seen as barriers to accessing language learning provision and other forms of support. It was also relatively common for learners to have limited or no experience of formal education, which meant that the informal, community-based approach to engagement and delivery was critical.

**Table 4: Barriers to participation and how EFIF programmes addressed them**

Barrier	Addressed by:
Transport/ location	Some areas offered private transport to class or hosted classes in community venues that were known to learners, such as community centres, religious buildings or schools. One area ensured that the class was on a bus route from the area which learners typically lived.
Childcare	<p>Most areas were planning to provide childcare or a creche at the learning venue, but as many were unable to offer face-to-face learning, these plans were largely not implemented. For women with school aged children, areas planned to arrange classes around school hours, or to host them in local schools. However, due to the pandemic, schools were unable to accommodate external providers on their premises.</p> <p>Lockdown also meant many parents attending the classes had to do so while taking care of their children at home. This resulted in some reduced attendance. Some areas provided activities for children while parents were learning, or included a family learning element, which worked well.</p>
Lack of literacy skills and readiness to learn	<p>Many learners, in addition to little or no English, had little or no literacy skills in their mother tongue, or much experience of formal education.</p> <p>Some areas prepared for this by having multilingual volunteers available during lessons to help explain instructions or provide translations for new vocabulary. These volunteers were also seen as highly valuable during the enrolment and assessment phase, to provide additional support to ensure prospective learners attended their enrolment session and first lesson.</p>
Digital skills and access	This was identified as a key barrier when classes moved online. Solutions included: organising

training on how to access the relevant software and how to use its functions and building in digital skills to an initial early face-to-face session (so learners could get direct support).

Some areas offered spaces in local council buildings like ICT suites for learners to access the classes if they lacked internet access at home, when government guidelines allowed. This was supported by a change to the funding rules for the EFIF programme, which meant local authorities were able to use some of the existing funding for equipping learners with devices and connectivity.

The pandemic presented additional challenges for those with school aged children. Learners were often sharing a digital device with their children and during periods of home schooling. Some areas adapted to this by offering classes at different times, including in the evening or on the weekends, to increase the likelihood of learners being able to take part.

### **CASE STUDY: Reducing barriers to participation**

An interesting example of ways to reduce barriers to entry was provided by Newcastle. Newcastle had different providers for the taught provision and the social element. The latter was provided by NEST, a student volunteer project that supports refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, part of the University of Newcastle, with a history of collaboration with Action Foundation, the provider of the Taught ESOL classes.

During Covid times, and especially during maximum restrictions, they had to stop all face-to-face provision, moving all possible activities online, turning all sport based activities into sport centred translation exercises, and supplementing this with various other support mechanisms in order to meet people's underlying needs, exacerbated by the pandemic, which would allow them to attend the online ESOL provision.

This included help with very basic needs (though not funded through EFIF) like getting their accommodation heated during the winter, foodbank referrals, health referrals, and support with any information they may require, as well as tech support, and breaking some language barriers through drawing on volunteers from their network of international students.

They also provide childcare help, by extending youth provision during the Action Foundation's ESOL classes, to allow parents to attend the course. This includes:

- one to one or small groups help with homework,
- reading groups for the whole family delivered in partnership with another student society with a license to dress as Disney characters, increasing children's engagement
- circus skills lessons organised by NEST and facilitated by professional circus performers. They teach skills like juggling and magic tricks, which allows children to step outside of their comfort zone and outside of their first language without making that the centre of attention.

## **Chapter 4: Experiences of delivery**

This chapter discusses the experiences of programme leads, delivery staff, volunteers and learners in the first and second term of the EFIF programme.

### **Overall impact of COVID-19**

Across both terms, COVID-19 affected each point in the learner journey, starting with recruitment, enrolment and learner assessment, through to engagement, as well as the delivery mode and (some of) the course content.

Due to the announcement of a nationwide lockdown in January, Term 2 was more severely affected by COVID-19 restrictions than Term 1 with nearly all delivery moving online from the start or being postponed. Challenges to delivery were largely similar across the two terms. The most significant impacts were seen in the limited incorporation of the localised knowledge (e.g. visits to local places), the delivery of conversation clubs, and the reduced peer relationships as a result of online learning or social distancing measures within face-to-face delivery.

Although the pandemic presented programme leads, delivery staff and learners with many challenges, some were also able to identify positive aspects to delivery resulting from it. This included learning digital skills, development of peer support groups using WhatsApp, and the wider accessibility of online courses among learners who would struggle to access a class in person. However, for other areas the online element was more difficult, especially the completely remote recruitment and onboarding which proved difficult for everyone.

The impact of COVID-19 at each stage of the learner journey is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

### **Experience of recruiting tutors and volunteers**

#### **Recruitment of tutors**

Many areas reported having no difficulties recruiting Level 5 accredited ESOL tutors for their programme due to already having experienced tutors working for the provider or having access to agency staff. In addition, some providers also ran ESOL teacher training or upskilled

volunteers, which allowed them to select the most appropriate tutors for the course.

Among areas that did need to recruit, most felt recruitment went smoothly. A few however said they struggled to find enough qualified teachers who would also fit well within the more informal community teaching setting, within the timescales of the project. One area that struggled to recruit ended up having to use their project coordinators to also teach classes, which was not part of the original plan.

### **Recruitment of volunteers**

Similar to the experience of recruiting tutors, most areas had a pool of volunteers from previous provisions to draw on, many of whom had teaching qualifications or experience teaching ESOL. Some of the volunteers had previously been on an ESOL course themselves or were more advanced ESOL students. Volunteer recruitment was however somewhat impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some areas noticed that much lower volumes of volunteers applied to take part than in previous years, because they did not have the digital capacity or experience to teach from home or did not feel comfortable coming out for face-to-face teaching.

*"Covid has been a challenge as volunteers are not so receptive about coming in to spend time in a community setting."*

Delivery staff

In many areas, the context of COVID related changes in delivery meant there was less scope for volunteers to get involved than originally planned. The conversation clubs designed to be led or supported by volunteers were largely postponed or restructured, the move to online restricted the use of volunteers for one-to-one support during classes, and for the socially distanced in-person classes in Term 1, volunteers were often not able to attend in order to keep numbers low and maximise the number of learners in the class.

Experience of recruiting learners

### **Recruitment strategies**

When seeking to recruit learners from different types of communities, it was a common strategy for areas to rely on referrals from provider networks such as multi agency, employability, mental health, and local

faith networks, including Jobcentre Plus (JCP) offices, community centres, religious centres, schools and charities. Some areas did outreach work through these organisations to build awareness of the programme, whilst others utilised pre-existing relationships. One area saw a large uplift in referrals from Jobcentre Plus from Term 2 onwards, as other ESOL providers were not available during lockdown, though at the assessment stage they found a relatively high proportion of the learners were above the English language threshold for the programme.

Other recruitment strategies employed were drawing on waiting lists of learners from previous courses, using word of mouth from previous learners, using online forms or QR codes on their webpage or social media for self-referrals. For some areas, Term 1 learners were re-recruited for Term 2 either because the courses ran across two terms, or because it felt beneficial to the learner to either repeat the course or move up to a level still covered by EFIF, as they had started from such a low level.

One area's development of a centralised recruitment service for all ESOL delivery was highly valuable (see case study below).

#### **CASE STUDY: A centralised recruitment service for all ESOL delivery**

Manchester made use of a centralised ESOL recruitment service across both terms and all providers. Previously, providers would do their own recruitment, with some being oversubscribed while others had capacity. It was also common for learners looking for an ESOL class to sign up to more than one provider. The centralised service meant learners could access the right course for them, in an easier and quicker way than previously. The service also fielded queries about the programme from the learners prior to courses starting, freeing up time for teaching staff in earlier classes. Furthermore, due to its waitlist abilities, Manchester had access to a list of learners who had been recruited prior to the pandemic and lockdown, thus minimising the impact of COVID-19 on learner volumes.

#### **Impact of the pandemic on recruitment**

Across both terms, most areas recruited lower numbers of learners than expected or had to delay the start of the programme due to the pandemic. Chapter 2 showed that learner volumes were just over half the planned numbers, pre-COVID-19. A few areas were targeting groups less integrated in society, which tended to be harder to reach even without a pandemic. For these groups, not being able to be out in their local area minimised the opportunity for learners to find out about the courses from community or religious centres they may normally attend.

*"Despite all the community links, a lot of people rarely leave home and we are struggling to engage them."*

Programme lead

The closure due to pandemic restrictions of organisations that providers used for referrals (such as community centres) significantly reduced the opportunity to recruit potential learners. Some key referral routes such as schools, were understandably pre-occupied with their own delivery and did not have capacity to support with recruitment.

*"Working with our charity partners to obtain referrals has been difficult. For example, the schools are feeling the strain from the day-to-day challenges of providing Covid-safe education. They have not been very responsive to our offers of free ESOL lessons."*

Programme lead

For Term 2, some areas commented that having to move completely online from the beginning meant more difficulty recruiting and more drop-outs because learners were having difficulty with the technology required or preferred to wait for face-to-face. Some areas tried offering learners the option to be put on a waiting list for when face-to-face classes were possible.

On the other hand, recruitment for in-person classes (when they could be held) was also impacted by learners feeling nervous to physically attend ESOL courses, particularly those elderly or vulnerable, despite the providers' efforts to make locations safe and easily accessible. Because of this, one area planning in-person classes was not able to deliver anything in Term 1 due to challenges with recruitment and low attendance from learners.

Where recruitment had not been badly impacted by the pandemic, providers often had long waiting lists to draw on, or saw engagement increase after extensive leafletting or an increase in word of mouth from the initial learners.

## **Enrolment and assessments**

Throughout the programme, enrolment and assessments were either done in person, on a one-to-one basis, on the phone or online, with the assessment moved to the start of the first taught lesson in a few cases. Most enrolments and assessments for Term 2 were done completely remotely due to the national lockdown from January 2021.

Completing the assessments online or over the phone was seen to be more challenging than in person due to language barriers and learners struggling to access and use technology. Carrying out enrolment and assessments in person was also described as challenging and time consuming, as it had to be done on an appointment based, one-to-one basis, with time for cleaning between appointments. However, as a result of these challenges there were some instances of areas finding ways to streamline their digital assessment processes for future delivery, such as conducting the assessment digitally, available in both written and video form.

### Delivery of taught ESOL classes

Overall, delivery staff were positive about their experience of delivering taught ESOL classes and pleasantly surprised about the students' engagement with the course. The main challenges identified were related to the pandemic restrictions: difficulties of running classes online, or the challenge of continuing face-to-face classes safely.

Online courses posed challenges for both students and tutors in terms of access to and use of technology and adapting to the online experience of delivery. However, even when courses had a few learners drop out at the start of the course (often attributed to personal reasons such as pregnancy, caring responsibilities or moving away from the area) it was not due to lack of interest in the course, and learner engagement increased as the term progressed, especially in Term 1.

In Term 2, some areas found that attendance and engagement was generally high from the start with some areas attributing this to it giving learners something to do and to focus on during the lockdown at the start of 2021.

*“Attendance for those sign ups has been really good and people are turning up and engaging well in the classes. Two men have made friends and supporting one another.”*

Programme lead

This was also thanks to proactive mitigation against low attendance. Areas sent learners reminders via text or called up learners if they missed a session to encourage them to come back to the next one.

Where courses were delivered face-to-face, attendance was low because of COVID-19 restrictions, with some learners sporadically having to self-isolate or due to anxiety about being around other people.

The COVID-19 restrictions also created logistical challenges, for group work or more personal tutor help due to social distancing, but tutors reported getting used to the new way of teaching, especially by the end of Term 2.

*"It's been a really enjoyable programme to teach, a lot of hard work, effort and dedication at the beginning, but once up and running [in Term 1] really enjoyable. The content has been flexible, we've got lots of material to use but we can be creative in the right setting and with the right teachers."*

Programme lead

### **Experience of digital delivery**

Despite initial concerns that online delivery was not compatible with teaching such low levels of English, or that learners would have access to technology or enough digital skills, many areas found ways to adapt to the challenges as the programme progressed.

With no previous experience of online learning or in some cases of using tools such as Zoom, Teams or Google Classroom, providing learners with the necessary skills to meaningfully engage in lessons was resource-intensive and particularly difficult if there was no opportunity to meet learners in person at all. Areas typically provided guidance for learners via translated how-to guides, one-to-one guidance sessions and whole class 'online training' sessions, sometimes having volunteers speaking the learner's language offer ad hoc support via WhatsApp. Providing this information was particularly challenging among learners with no English and low levels of literacy.

Many tutors and volunteers needed guidance and support initially to deliver sessions online as for many it was a new experience and some also had limited digital skills.

Learners interviewed as part of the case studies however largely felt learning to use online tools such as Zoom, Teams or Google Classroom was relatively easy and useful for getting more used to technology in general. For example, one learner explained how they were attending online Qur'an classes already.

Some tutors found engaging learners online to be challenging, particularly in classes with mixed abilities. They noted that pre-entry learners for example can range considerably in ability despite all being

assessed as pre-entry. In classes with a mix of abilities, tutors would normally be able to give learners more one-on-one tailored support, but this was difficult to achieve in an online format. A few areas dealt with this by splitting pre-entry learners into different ability groups, but other providers were unable to do this due to lower than usual numbers of learners.

*"Pre-entry needs different approaches, you have to be creative and use different scenarios, you can't just use a worksheet. You need individual differentiation between the learners, some of them may even be illiterate in their own languages."*

Delivery staff

Delivery staff felt the online format lent itself better to practicing speaking and listening, rather than reading and writing, and this was particularly the case for pre-entry learners. Some providers however got around this by having learners submit their work to an online tool, through which the tutor could review and comment on it. In other areas, learners took photos of their work and shared it with tutors via WhatsApp.

*"It been difficult teaching pre entry online, it's good for listening and speaking, but you can't check their work and they need more help than I can give online"*

Delivery staff

Some tutors also commented that the online format meant there were limited opportunities for spontaneous interaction between learners. Teaching strategies like teamwork, peer review and collaboration were seen as challenging online, which limited impact on improving confidence in speaking. However, there were examples of learners who communicated digitally outside of class and of providers organising video conferencing links for the learners to meet socially after the end of class.

Despite the challenges to online delivery, some tutors were surprised with the level of learner engagement and progress made even when the course was entirely online. One tutor commented that the format of online classes also allowed them to identify less confident speakers and provide them with more opportunity to contribute.

*"It challenged my perceptions about learners' ability to learn digitally. I didn't think it would be as successful as it was."*

Delivery staff

Furthermore, most providers found online classes made it easier to reach people who are isolated, mothers with childcare responsibilities, older people, or people with health issues and mental health issues.

Another unexpected benefit of online delivery experienced was that it forced some areas to improve their shared digital resources. While some areas used pre-existing platforms such as Google classroom, one area, for example, developed an app where learners and teachers can interact safely online and learners can access curriculum specific online learning activities. It also allowed the area to evidence and record learning experiences. In Term 2, two other areas began to use the app which was particularly beneficial in lockdown.

#### Experience of using Level 5 ESOL practitioners

The experience of using Level 5 ESOL practitioners was very positive across both terms. Having qualified tutors was seen to ensure the teaching materials were of high quality and the delivery professional. This was reflected in feedback from tutors, programme leads and organisers with smooth course delivery generally perceived to be a strength of the programme even with the disruption of having to move to blended learning. Some tutors had been involved in previous ESOL programmes as coordinators and appreciated now being able to focus on the teaching rather than managing volunteer teachers.

Some areas felt that more Level 5 tutors were needed to effectively engage with pre-entry learners, who tend to need more tailored support and therefore require the tutor to adjust their delivery to different learning speeds and styles. The need for a tailored approach was exacerbated by online delivery where the format lends itself to presenting and teaching to the group as a whole, making it more challenging to attend to learners one-on-one. The online format in turn made Level 5 ESOL tutors even more valuable as they had the necessary skill set to quickly recognise and respond to different learning needs.

*"Pre-entry needs different approaches, you have to be creative and use different scenarios, you can't just use a worksheet you need individual differentiation between the*

*learners, some of them may even be illiterate in their own languages."*

Delivery staff

## Volunteer experience

The trade-off for using Level 5 ESOL tutors was perhaps the impact on the role of the volunteer which had diminished compared to previous programmes, where they were directly involved in delivery of taught lessons. Some providers had however integrated volunteers into their delivery, for example by having them offer translation and digital support for learners, or leading break out groups, allowing the tutors to focus on teaching. Several areas were also able to launch their conversation clubs, led by volunteers. In one area, volunteers were heavily utilised in one-to-one sessions with learners in between taught lessons (see case study below).

Most volunteers who were interviewed had some experience of volunteering for previous ESOL delivery or had teaching qualifications. Some were previous students and therefore were motivated to help others learn English whilst improving their own English.

Volunteers were generally very positive about their experience and the support they received in the role, having access to teaching materials and support with the technology, though some still found the digital aspect daunting and more difficult to engage with learners. Some appreciated that they were given enough autonomy and freedom to tailor their role to the needs of the learners, for example when running conversation clubs, though a few mentioned more information about content covered in the taught class would help conversation clubs complement them better.

### **Westminster online conversation club volunteers: Marina and James**

Marina has supported ESOL learners on various projects in the past while James is new to volunteering with ESOL learners. Both heard about the opportunity through their employer's volunteering service. Their main motivation was to offer support to learners and to pass on their English language skills.

*"I enjoy volunteering and when I feel that I give back to the community, especially with the learners who have difficult backgrounds, I was really happy to help and contribute to their progress. "*

Volunteer

Each session had between 5 and 8 learners and there was a specific theme often relating to current affairs. From this starting point the volunteers and learners developed the conversation as a group, often moving on to more personal topics such as sharing details about their country of origin or culture.

While Marina and James did not do any formal training before their volunteering, both felt confident to carry out the role and found the briefing by the programme lead and tutors helpful. They would have appreciated some more specific training on lesson planning and topic development.

### **Delivery of IAG**

As outlined in Chapter 3, intended approaches to IAG delivery differed substantially between areas in terms of structure, formality, content and who it was delivered by.

In practice, some areas had to adapt or completely change their original plans due to COVID-19. For example, some cases the use of tutors to deliver IAG sessions where they had originally intended to use IAG qualified tutors as the pandemic created barriers to the latter. As many had planned for IAG advisors to physically visit taught sessions and offer drop-in sessions, the delivery was impacted by the move to online classes. In Term 2, some areas had talks from IAG advisors as part of the online classes rather than delivered in person as initially planned.

In keeping with original plans, IAG support for many areas was focused on progression. Many tutors aspired for their learners to progress to further ESOL courses (often at the same provider) or recommended to complete the course a second time to embed learning. In Term 2, progression onto further courses was more of a challenge in some places, as many community-based courses were not running as a result of the pandemic.

*“The priority [for these learners] is more about progression routes. Ten weeks’ [learning] is not sufficient for them to get a job but it helps them progress to the next course.”*

Delivery staff

*“My tutor explained to me about follow-on courses that I can join, she recommended other English courses.”*

Learner

#### **CASE STUDY: IAG during end point assessments**

In Manchester they planned to have IAG advisors to address each class but felt it would not work in an online environment. As a result, they decided to append the IAG to the end point assessments which were done in person, by appointment. They used these sessions to discuss progressions and were able to progress around half of learners. In Term 1 they 'progressed' around 20 per cent of learners onto Term 2 courses, because they were not ready for a higher level course. Similarly, in Term 2 they offered some learners to repeat the course as a progression route. Those who did not progress onto other English courses often took up family learning courses, digital skills courses or conversation clubs run by a partner charity delivering sessions for the EFIF conversation clubs.

#### **Delivery of conversation clubs**

Among areas that were able to deliver conversation clubs (around two-thirds of all areas), the experience was mixed. A very small number, predominantly in Term 1, were able to deliver some of the conversation clubs in person and in general this experience was positive. One area incorporated the conversation club into the breaks of the face-to-face classes, provided refreshments and had external speakers attend to discuss health and wellbeing topics such as yoga and mindfulness, which worked well but it was a rare occurrence due to circumstances. In one area that was unable to do any taught delivery in Term 2, they saw improvements in learners' confidence and language solely from the conversation clubs suggesting they may have played a key role in learner outcomes.

For those that moved the conversation clubs online, experiences were mixed. Some areas felt that the main loss was the natural social interaction that occurs in-person such as small talk, body language and spontaneous interactions. Some also questioned the extent to which online conversation clubs would benefit low level learners.

*“The whole point was to be out and about and having fun to enhance learning, so we have not gone down the online route. A lot of areas are doing online tours but I’m not sure how that will help with somebody at such a low level practice their language skills.”*

Programme lead

Despite this view, there were also some areas that felt they were able to achieve this social interaction by solely running the conversations clubs and social activities online, by engaging learners in activities such as virtual tours of local museums and places of interest, book clubs, film clubs, art clubs and exercise classes, utilising the skills of their

**CASE STUDY: Online social club collaborations with food charities and art galleries**

The social clubs in Manchester included special sessions in collaboration with Manchester Art Gallery and a local food charity which does cookery sessions. These sessions were done in a webinar format, so there was limited interaction between learners, but they enjoyed the sessions. The art sessions were more interactive, where staff from the gallery gave an introduction to the collection, showed some of the pieces on display and then split learners into groups to use their vocabulary to describe what they had seen. Staff felt they could improve these sessions to encourage more interaction but felt they were a positive starting point.

volunteers, and used break out rooms to allow discussions in smaller groups or pairs.

Even though the in-person dimension was lost, providers who ran online conversation clubs felt that it provided the opportunity for learners to meet other members of the community, consolidate their language skills and have fun, a sentiment that was echoed by many learners. This suggests that despite the limitations of online, areas that put a lot of effort into maintaining them and engaging learners through them were able to gain some of the positive benefits of the conversation clubs.

Localised approach

Areas planned to tailor their programme to the local area in three main ways: through the content and activities of the taught courses and conversation clubs, by recruiting learners from communities with a high need for ESOL and integration and by delivering the courses within community settings to help integrate learners into the local area. However, the extent to which these approaches were successful varied due to the impact of the pandemic and local venue closures.

Many areas planned to localise their approach by taking the learners on trips to the local area to visit amenities including museums, galleries, local parks as well as post offices, markets, and libraries. However, many of these trips did not take place as planned due to the restrictions of the pandemic. In both terms, some areas however offered virtual trips such as tours of local galleries and museums, which generally they felt learners enjoyed.

One of the common ways that areas incorporated a localised approach was to embed the references and information about the local area into the content of the courses to give learners a sense of local connection and usefulness. Discussions included where things were located (e.g. the dentist, the doctors, the supermarket) and how to get to them, and including pictures and content about the local area within language exercises.

*“What we want to do is to try and say this is relevant to you and us now – this is where we’re living, this is our community, these are our services being provided locally by the city council for you, not just some random YouTube video, this [course] is for you and it’s about your community and comes from your community because we live here....I hope that makes them feel that they belong here and are welcome in this community.”*

Delivery staff

The other strategies for localising approach through targeted recruitment and community delivery locations were strongly affected by local venue closures, as providers were unable to use their local networks for referrals or as venues for the courses. The hope was to use the local settings to make classes more accessible, familiarise learners with the local area and the other local provision available. A few programme leads argued that having volunteers from the community they were

#### **CASE STUDY: Use of local venues**

Salford was able to continue running some courses face to face in different venues in the community including local community centres and local primary schools. Running the courses in these local settings meant that the courses were more accessible to entry level learners than for example in a formal college setting. Community centres, rather than colleges, also contributed to the friendly and relaxed atmosphere of the programme that learners experienced and appreciated.

Running the ESOL courses in local community venues also encouraged wider learner engagement with the community as learners had the opportunity to meet the venue staff who were already embedded in the community and therefore could offer them advice and tips about what was happening in the local area in order to help them integrate. These venues also provided learners with a sense of belonging to the local area and a place where they could feel more comfortable to go to, attend other classes and events running there and engage more with other people in the community.

targeting was also hugely important to help learners feel more comfortable, especially during the pandemic when many were reluctant to engage.

#### **Learner experience**

In general, learners were positive about their experience, with most commenting that the tutors and volunteers were supportive, friendly and able to tailor the teaching to their learning needs and style.

*“Some of it was difficult, but my teacher was very supportive. If I have any difficulties, she supported me. It was a good experience: good teacher, good centre, I was supported and I made friends. Good friends, we talk together.”*

Learner

The main reason learners enrolled on the ESOL courses was to gain English language skills to carry out day-to-day activities such as shopping, booking appointments and navigating public transport. Some wanted to engage more with the local community and make friends. Parents wanted to engage more with their child’s education including

communicating with teachers and helping with homework. Additionally, some learners had ambitions of studying further, getting work and becoming financially independent.

*“I wanted to improve my English as I know it is essential to work in the UK. I would like to stay here and integrate more.”*

Learner

### **Vignette: Amira’s reasons for wanting to learn English**

Amira has lived in the UK for two years. She looked for English classes because she wanted to become more independent and to be able to speak to others in the community. Her son has severe epilepsy and not being able to discuss his health condition in English with doctors and other healthcare professionals is frustrating to her. She also wanted to be able to help her children with schoolwork and to eventually find work. Amira asked her GP about English classes in the community, and they signposted her to the local EFIF programme.

For learners that experienced the courses online, most found the online platform (usually Zoom) straightforward to use even when they had limited experience of it previously. Some parents commented that online courses were more convenient for them as they could more easily fit classes around childcare responsibilities.

### **Vignette: Bilan’s preference for online classes**

Bilan lives with her husband and three children. She looks after her youngest two children full time and initially found fitting ESOL classes around caring for her children challenging. Her provider however organised an evening class, which she can attend after the children are in bed. Bilan is very enthusiastic about her course and feels her English has improved. She also feels she has made friends on the course, which has made a big difference to her as she is otherwise very isolated, especially since the start of the pandemic. Bilan does not think she would be able to attend face-to-face classes and hopes to continue learning online in Term 2.

Generally, learners that experienced both online and in-person delivery felt that in-person classes were more engaging and easier to follow but thought the online class was still effective for learning English. A few

lower level learners felt the online course was hard to follow and would have preferred a course more tailored to their level.

## Chapter 5: Programme outcomes

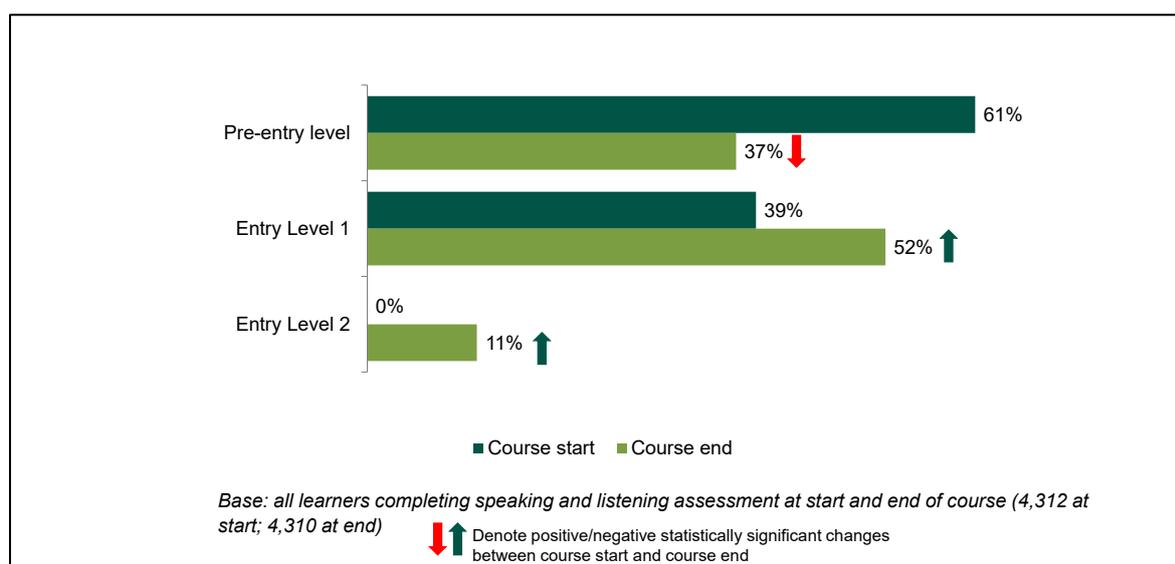
This chapter discusses programme outcomes for learners, staff, and volunteers, identified in the quantitative analysis of learner outcomes and survey data, and supported by qualitative evidence.

Learner outcomes

### Listening and speaking skills

There were marked improvements in listening and speaking skills among learners in both Term 1 and Term 2, as evidenced in the qualitative interviews and pre and post course assessments. At the course end assessment, just over one-third (37%) of learners were at Pre-entry level, compared to 61% at the start of the course, a decrease of 24 percentage points. Around half (52%) of learners had reached Entry Level 1 at the end of the course (a significant increase of 13 percentage points from the pre assessment) and 11% had progressed to Entry Level 2 (an increase of 11 percentage points). **As a cohort, their mean points score in listening and speaking at the start of the course was 3.03, increasing to 4.67 by the end of the course: a mean improvement of 1.64 points.**

**Figure 5: Learners' listening and speaking scores before and after the course**



Across both terms of delivery, many learners interviewed had recognised an improvement in their English language comprehension and speaking skills. This view was also reflected in tutor perceptions. A

few learners were able to carry out the interview in English either entirely or with support from the translator.

A few providers who had done additional work around phonics found this especially helpful in enhancing learners speaking skills. For example, one provider had their family learning tutor carry out phonics workshops with the learners.

Among those providers who were able to carry out conversation clubs, tutors, learners and volunteers all felt that the opportunity to practice speaking in a natural, relaxed and informal atmosphere enhanced the learners' speaking skills.

There was also evidence of progression as a result of these increased skills, for example one learner interviewed in both Term 1 and Term 2 had since taken on additional employment in an English-speaking environment (her previous job primarily served customers who spoke her native language). During the interview the learner reflected that she had gained confidence over both terms of the course, and this helped her to interact with customers in English. In particular she mentioned the role-play and group practice elements of the course had helped to develop her listening and speaking skills, in addition to supporting her confidence to speak in English.

For those that had continued learning or were repeating the course into Term 2, there was also a sense that they preferred the second term more than Term 1. They attributed this to their increased listening skills, which helped them to engage better with the course activities, as well as other learners. By taking part in both terms the learners said they had more opportunity to practice speaking in everyday situations such as going to the GP and other healthcare appointments interacting with neighbours, speaking about special occasions, as well as trips in their local area.

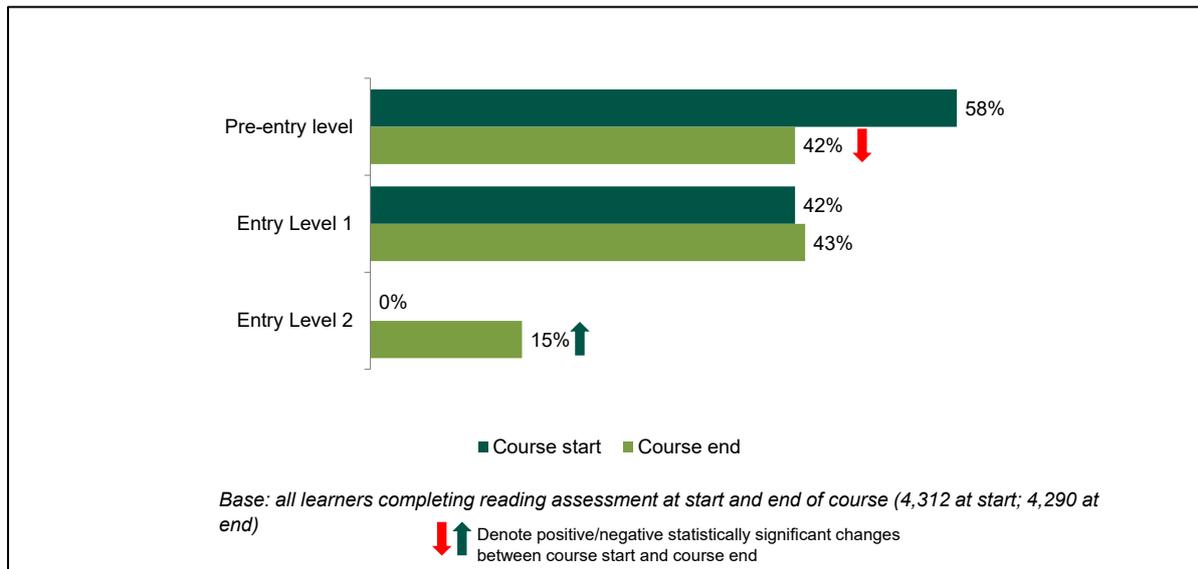
There were a few learners however who felt that their English-speaking skills had not improved as much as they had hoped for. These learners felt the teaching hours were too few and would have liked more teaching hours each week. These learners tended to have a particularly low starting level of English.

### **Reading and writing skills**

The percentage of learners assessed as Pre-entry level in reading fell from 58% to 42% in (a significant decrease of 16 percentage points) between the start and end of the course. There was very little movement

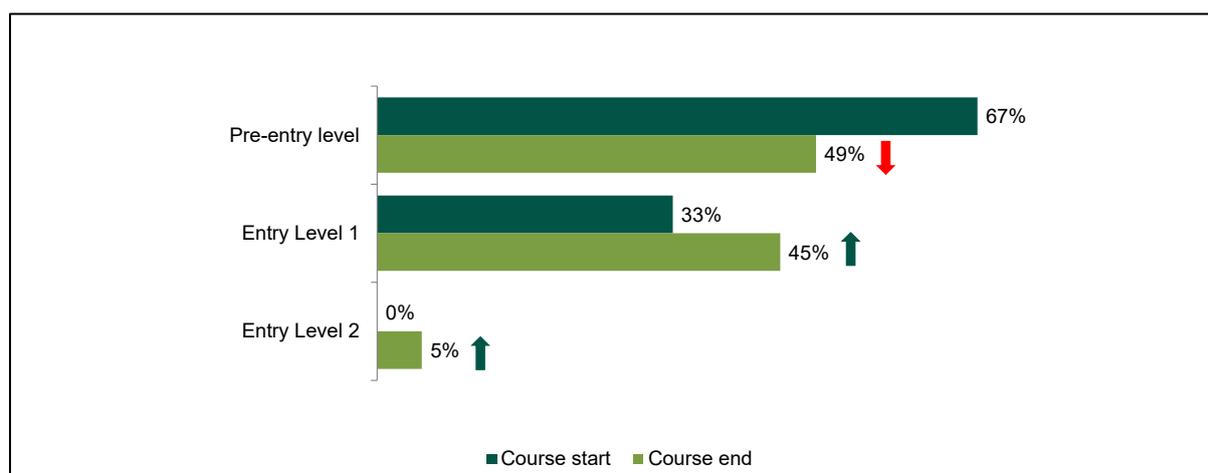
in Entry Level 1 between both time points (42% and 43%, respectively). A small yet significant proportion of learners (15%) had reached Entry Level 2 for reading by the end of the course. **As a cohort, their mean points score at the start of the course was 3.22 for reading, increasing to 4.56 by the end: a mean improvement of 1.34 points.**

**Figure 6: Learners' reading scores before and after the course**



There was also a similar progression in terms of writing. At the start of the course, 67% were identified as Pre-entry level, compared to 49% at the end of the course (a significant decrease of 18 percentage points). The proportion at Entry Level 1 increased from 33% at the start of the course, to 45% at the start of the course). Five per cent had reached Entry Level 2 by the end of the course, reflecting learners' lower starting point in their writing skills. **As a cohort, their mean points score in writing at the start of the course was 2.58, which increased to 3.75 by the end of the course: a mean improvement of 1.17 points.**

**Figure 7: Learners' writing scores before and after the course**



In the qualitative interviews, tutors and learners felt that opportunities for reading, and in particular writing, were fewer than speaking and listening, due to the online delivery mode during the lockdown periods. In addition, tutors felt that online delivery also made it more challenging for them to assess and correct learners' writing skills. In a face-to-face delivery, tutors said it was easier for them to see the learners' writing clearly, and correct it 'there and then', providing immediate feedback as to where they may have gone wrong and how to improve it for future.

One tutor commented that there have been fewer opportunities for learners to practice their spelling, as when working on the computer they are able to use the 'auto-correct' feature. Despite this, some tutors had actively tried to build in opportunities for learners to practice their writing skills, for example one tutor asked their learners to write in their notebooks and take a photo for the tutor to review, from which feedback was provided to the learner.

### **Confidence using English in everyday situations**

Many learners described feeling more confident speaking English and being more able to communicate, compared to before they started the course. This was also reflected in tutor feedback, as well as in the social integration survey<sup>7</sup>.

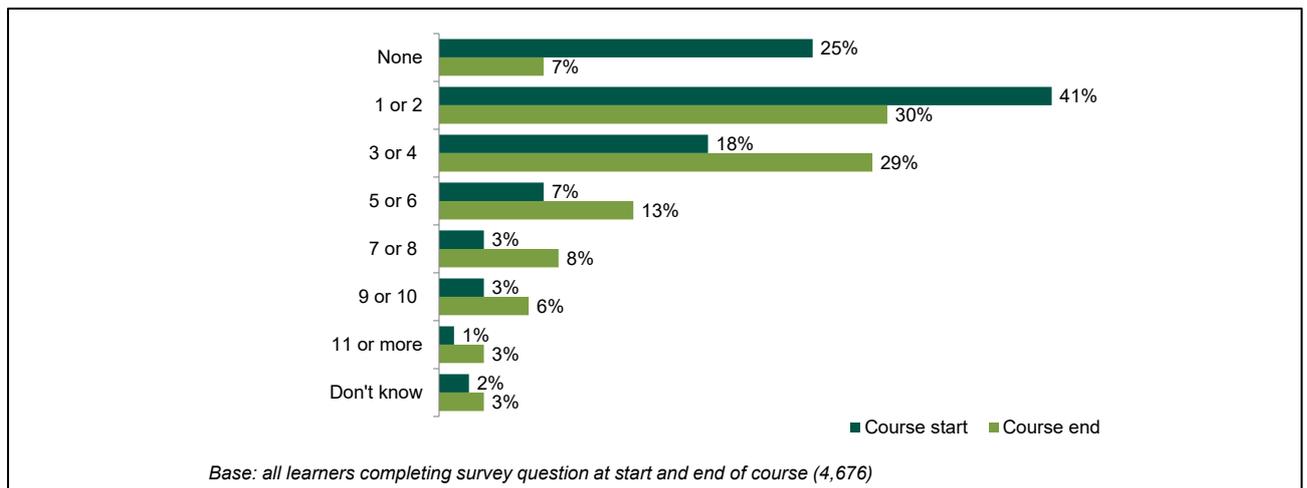
Learners reported more frequent interactions in English at the end of the course, compared to at the start. The percentage of learners who had spoken to no one in English had fallen from 25% to 7% (an 18

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<sup>7</sup> Learners completed a short eight-item survey about their confidence using English, their integration within their community and their use of technology at the start and at the end of the course. Findings are restricted to learners who completed the survey at both the start and the end of the course.

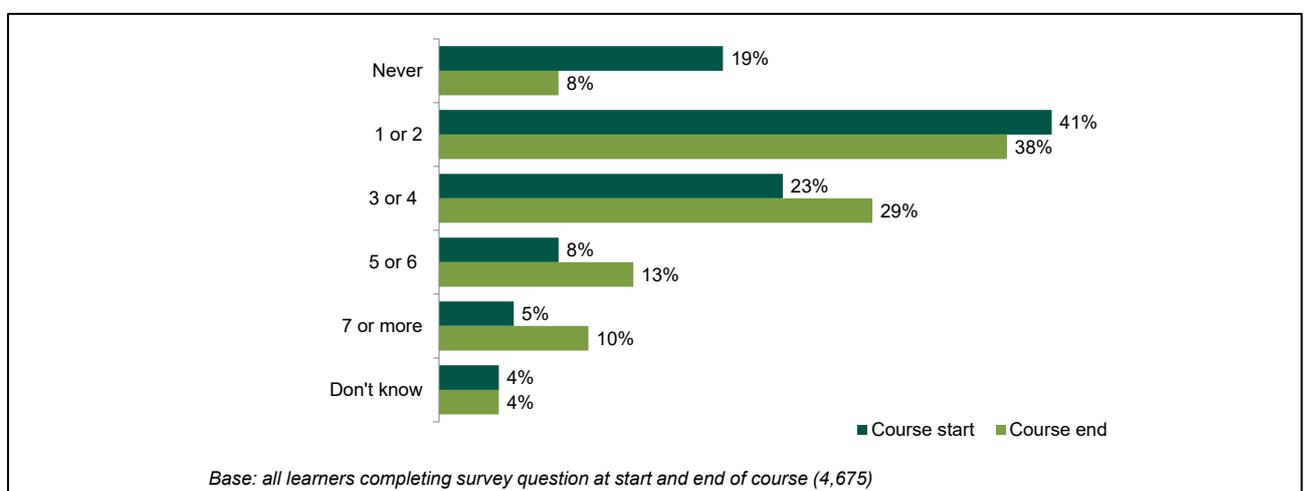
percentage point decrease), as well as those who said they had spoken to only 1 or 2 people in English (falling from 41% to 30%). There were increases in the proportions who had spoken to 3 or more people at the end of the course, compared to at the start.

**Figure 8: Number of people spoken to in English in the last week, before and after the course**



Similarly, learners reported more frequent visits to the shops or the market, either alone or without someone who speaks English. At the start of the course 1 in 5 (19%) said they had not gone to the shops or market in the last week, while less than 1 in 10 (8%) said they had not done this at the end of the course. There were increases in learners who said they had gone to the shops or market alone at least three times at the end of the course, compared to at the start.

**Figure 9: Number of times gone to shops or market in last week, at start and end of the course**



In the qualitative interviews, there were examples of learners having improved their speaking skills, as well as having gained the confidence to use this in their daily life, for example asking for things at the supermarket or pharmacy, booking GP appointments, and communicating with their children's school.

*“I feel more comfortable [speaking English], before I would worry that I will say it in the wrong way. For example, I can speak with my GP, before my wife used to help me, but now I am more confident to speak for myself.”*

Learner

*“I go to school to make friends and have more confidence to talk to another person at the coffee shop, or when I go to the shops. At first I didn't want to talk to other people, but then I learnt English and I have confidence to talk to other people.”*

Learner

There were also learners who felt able to go shopping on their own or use public transport as a result of increased English language proficiency and confidence, something which they had not done before. This suggests the programme was able to address issues like social isolation and support learners to feel more integrated into the local community.

*“There is a noticeable improvement, not only in spoken English, but in their confidence, they can have a laugh and have a conversation too, that's a huge improvement, it's not a nervous conversation, when they are relaxed, you can tell there is a difference.”*

Tutor

A few learners said that their confidence speaking English has grown to such an extent that they now feel comfortable translating in English for friends and family. One learner said that since being on the course she has translated for other parents in her children's school on a few occasions.

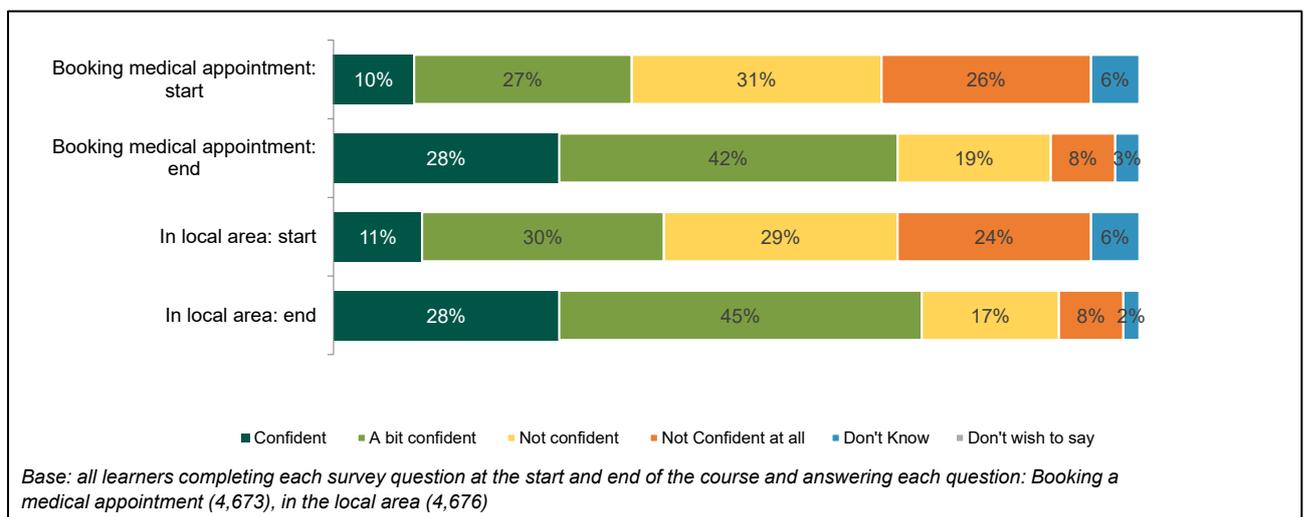
Learners were asked about their confidence making an appointment with a GP, dentist or nurse; about talking to people at their child's school and about talking in English more generally to people in their local area who do not speak their language. On all three measures, the proportion of

learners expressing confidence increased significantly between the start and end of the course.

In terms of booking a medical appointment, only 10% of learners were 'confident' and 27% cent 'a bit confident' at the start of the course. By the end of the course, 28% identified themselves as 'confident' while 42% said they were a 'bit confident'.

Just 1 in 10 (11%) of learners said they were 'confident' at the start of the course to talk to people who don't speak their language, this had risen to nearly 1 in 3 (28%) at the end of the course. Similarly, a greater proportion (45%) said they were 'a bit confident' at the end of the course, compared to at the start (30%).

**Figure 10: Confidence talking in English in everyday situations, at start and end of the course**



**Vignette: Nahid’s skills and confidence for speaking English have improved**

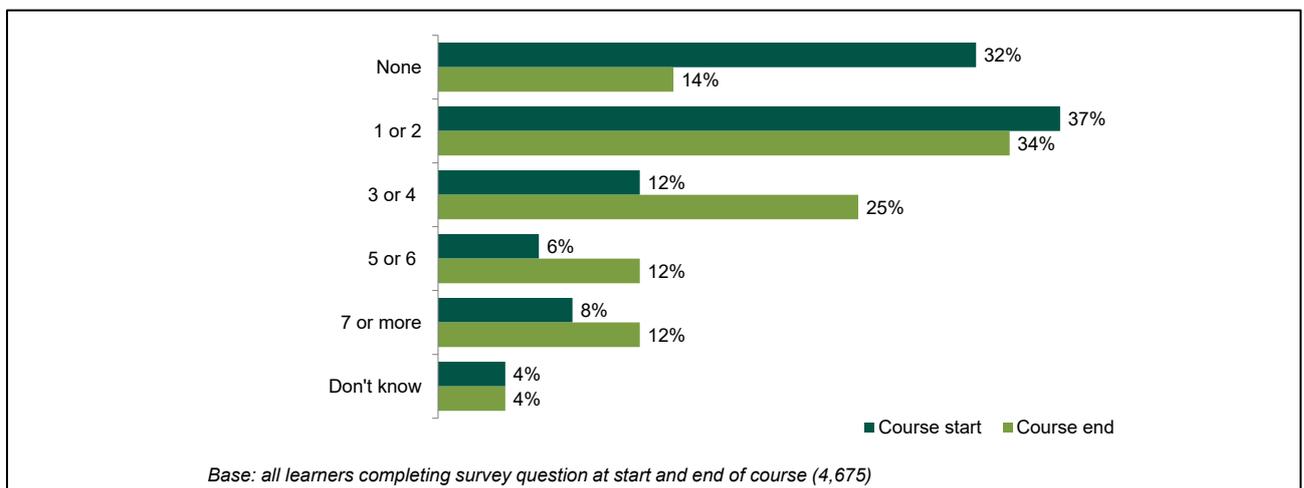
Nahid has lived in in the UK for just over a year and has very limited English skills and social connections in the area. She describes her mental health as poor and felt anxious and nervous at the point of joining the EFIF programme. Nahid has enjoyed the course and feels it has increased her confidence in situations where she needs to speak English. She has been able to ask for help at the supermarket, something she would not have the confidence to do previously: *‘Even if I don’t know how to say things, I don’t feel embarrassed anymore.’*

Nahid describes the tutors and other delivery staff as friendly, supportive and caring. Because of her poor mental health, she at times has felt very upset and anxious in class but feels the support and care from staff, as well as her fellow learners, has helped her manage her situation better.

## Digital literacy

As a result of the increased reliance on technology during the pandemic, both in terms of the course and people's lives more generally, the learner survey included two questions on how often learners used technology (a smartphone, laptop or tablet) to communicate with people. It asked separately about doing things in learners' first language and doing things in English. At the start of the course, around 1 in 3 (32%) said they had not used technology in English at all in the last week, whereas this more than halved to just 14% at the end of the course. At the end of the course, greater proportions of learners had used technology in English 3 or more times compared to at the start of the course.

**Figure 11: Number of times used technology in English in last week, start and end of course**



Tutors and learners both agreed that learners' digital skills had increased a great deal, and this was an unexpected positive outcome of digital learning during the lockdown periods. Tutors fed back that learners were now confident to access online learning platforms, compose and send emails, and using group messaging platforms such as WhatsApp. Tutors felt that these increased digital skills also in turn

facilitated learners' reading skills as they have had to navigate English interfaces online.

**Vignette: Benefits of the course for Ava's job search**

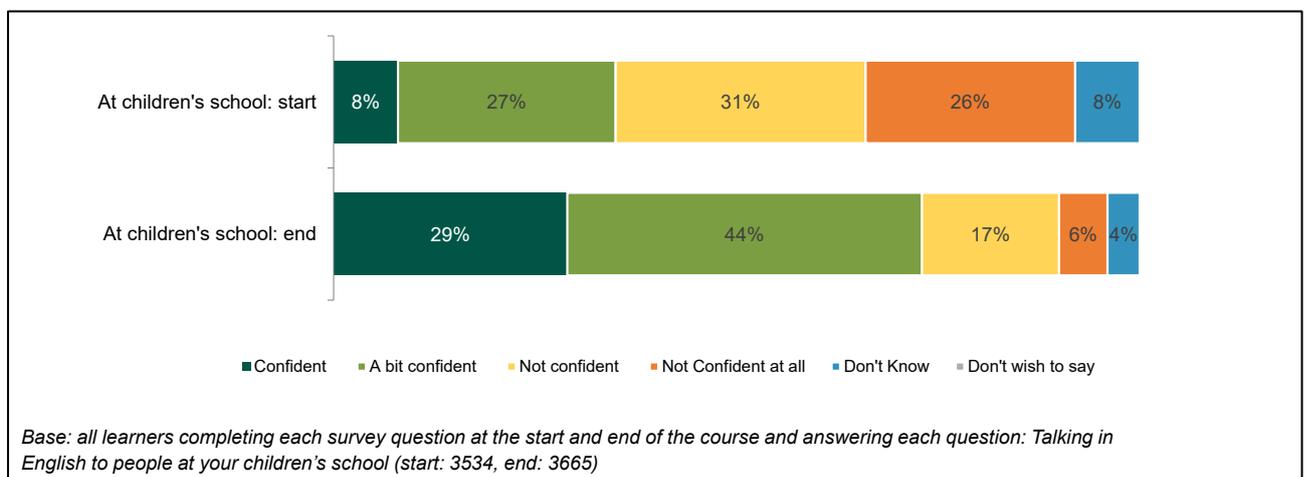
Ava had been on a previous English course by the JCP and had experience of administrative work in construction. She was very complimentary of the course as felt it was tailored to her needs specifically to improve her phonics and email skills. She felt that gaining these skills from the course helped her with job applications and also how to sell herself in job interviews. She now feels more confident about her skills, including everyday English but would like to keep studying.

*“When I go to the shop, I remind myself how to ask things, like a new expression, I can now remember how to explain things like when you use different words, how to use them”*

**Confidence engaging with children's education**

Among learners who said they took their children to school, at the start of the course just 8% said they were confident to talk to people in English at their children's school, this increased significantly to 29% at the end of the course. There was also a significant increase in the proportion of learners who were 'a bit confident' to talk in English at their children's school (27% and 44%, respectively).

**Figure 12: Confidence talking in English to people at children's school, start and end of course**



In the qualitative interviews, some learners who were parents felt more able to support their children's schoolwork. A few parents of primary school aged children felt that they could learn alongside their children for example doing homework together.

*"Yes. I can help my son now, about 80% of the time I can help him. Now his school is online, I can learn with him as well."*

*Learner*

A few tutors reflected that learners who had children were particularly motivated and hard-working on the course, as they were motivated to improve their English skills in order to support their children, such as helping with their schoolwork and communicating with their school.

### **Knowledge of health and wellbeing information**

Many learners reported that their course provider had informed them about the COVID-19 virus, as well as encouraged them to adopt behaviours to reduce its spread, for example regular handwashing, wearing a mask, and maintaining a social distance from others. In Term 2, the discussions relating to COVID-19 tended to focus on how to book the vaccine, as well as looking at concerns around taking the vaccine.

*"We had a lot of newly arrived learners, [the course] was a good starting point to also understand about living in the UK. We talked about the virus, the importance of getting vaccinated especially as some of our learners were from communities where there was reluctance to take it, for example we unpacked conspiracy theories. We also spoke about what we like to do in our spare time, our interests and hobbies."*

*Tutor*

Others learned about healthy eating and exercising, as well as how to contact the emergency services, and healthcare services such as their GP or dentist.

There were a few learners who were experiencing domestic violence or other issues within their home and who were unsure who to discuss this with and where to seek help. Tutors had in these cases offered reassurances and been able to signpost to services that could offer support. One provider had carried out a workshop with a trained facilitator looking at the signs of domestic violence and abuse, as well as how to get help.

*“The teacher is very helpful, every time she says ‘if you need anything just text me’. For example, if you have any problems with your marriage/partner, or abuse, we were advised to talk to the tutor or send them an email.”*

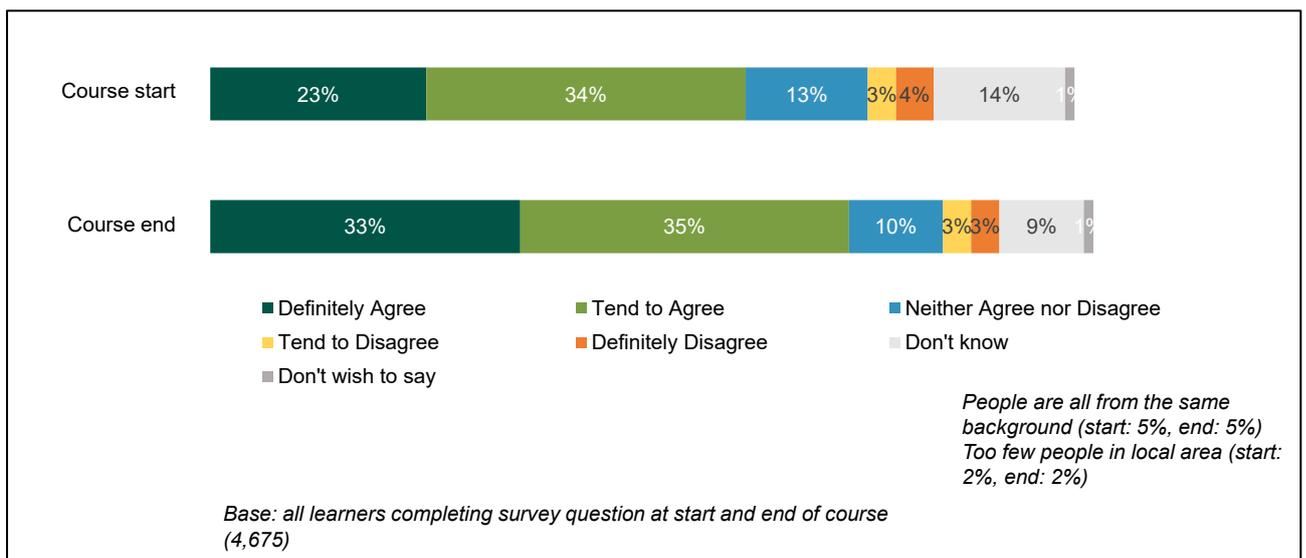
Learner

One tutor feedback that there were some vulnerable learners in her class, for example a woman who was living in a hostel with her young children, and another who experienced exploitation and homelessness. The tutor reflected that the course had a profoundly positive effect on their mental health and wellbeing. Their anxieties were exacerbated by the pandemic, in conjunction with their low starting level of English. The tutor commented that the course helped keep these students ‘afloat’, and that through the course they were shown ‘care and compassion’, a stark contrast to the difficulties they had experienced in their personal life.

### Increased social connections

At the start of the course, just over half of learners agreed that people from different backgrounds get on well in their local area (definitely agree: 23%, tend to agree: 24%). By the end of the course, the proportion of learners who ‘definitely agreed’ had increased significantly (33% vs. 23%).

**Figure 13: Agreement with statement that: ‘your local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together’ (start and end of the course)**



In the qualitative interviews, many learners reported that they had made social connections with other learners, and this was a key benefit of having taken part in the course, considering that a lot of learners otherwise had little or no social contact outside of their households. One learner spoke about how she was feeling lonely, but since starting the course had made friends with the other learners and maintained regular contact with them through WhatsApp.

*“I miss my friends when I am not in class. I like speaking in class and speaking with my friends in class helps me learn.”*

Learner

Tutors described the course as a ‘gateway’ to the community for those learners who had recently arrived in the area and had little or no connections outside of their household, in addition to those who had vulnerabilities or were isolated due to their life circumstances. A few tutors reported that switching to an online delivery format helped more learners to feel more confident to participate in the course, compared to in the face-to-face format. Tutors also noticed that there was more engagement between learners of different backgrounds. According to them, in the classroom setting learners tended to form groups or cliques by country of origin or shared language, whereas the online format forced individuals to mix with others they may not have chosen to sit next to or work within the face-to-face classes.

*“It is difficult to speak online but the tutor encourages two-person discussions.”*

Learner

### **Vignette: Shirin has made new social connections**

Shirin has attended an online course in Term 1 and her favourite element of the class is having conversations with other learners. She feels these conversational tasks, where they discuss their local area, help her learn English but she also values them for the social interactions they provide. She describes her fellow learners as her friends and says meeting them in class is the highlight of her week. Noticing that the learners would like more opportunities to speak informally, the learning provider has organised for them to remain on the video call after the tutor leaves to socialise. Shirin says they use this time to talk about what they have learned but also to talk about their lives and offer each other advice and support.

Tutors reflect that there was generally limited scope for them to build in opportunities for learners to connect with the wider community, and this was attributed to the lockdown restrictions. Despite this, many tutors had identified creative ways to connect learners to their wider community, for example doing online tours of local places of interest and tourist attractions. Learners enjoyed these sessions and said they looked forward to visiting once restrictions allowed.

### **Increased citizenship opportunities**

A few tutors and leads felt that the EFIF course had helped learners to become engaged citizens, as the course content covered content affecting wider society. This included the Census, local elections, COVID-19 guidance, as well as information about recycling.

*"The citizenship skills [element of the course] should not be underplayed, for example even if the result of the programme is that they learn about the Census, getting the community to engage with the Census is really important, they are becoming active citizens – they will naturally want to learn about England. For example, the library, their children's education, engaging with their teacher and school."*

Project lead

### **Increased motivation and enjoyment in learning among learners**

Many tutors felt that the EFIF classes had provided learners with an enjoyment and appreciation for learning, which they may not have experienced before. The course was felt to be a 'first step' to learning among people who may be daunted by learning or the learning environment, especially as some learners had little to no experience of formal education both in the UK and in their country of origin. For these learners, the ESOL course was their first introduction to a more structured learning programme.

As a result of this, learners had developed a motivation for study, and recognised its importance in opening up opportunities for themselves and their families. Learners identified that learning English would help them on the path to further study in English, specific vocations / areas of interest, as well as future employment.

*"[As a result of taking part in the EFIF course] learners would understand that learning is good for them and will get them places, they have got an aspiration, there are things out there that they could do".*

Project lead

One lead reflected that the course has been especially effective in engaging communities that tend not to take part in their local community, or where integration with other communities is particularly low.

*"It [the EFIF course] is a starting point for adults who don't speak English as a first language, so without this programme nothing else fills this gap in terms of how Adult Education are funded to deliver ESOL programmes. This has been seen by everyone I have spoken to across [other LAs] as a really valuable programme, it gets a whole group of disengaged community engaged in learning. Whatever happens beyond this programme you will have a certain amount of success – it starts that engagement with a disengaged community. Without it you are reliant upon a percentage of the community to do a formal ESOL course."*

Project lead

### **Progression opportunities**

There was an acknowledgment from tutors and leads that many learners had limited or no formal prior education in either the UK or their country of origin and some lacked confidence in an educational setting as the environment was unfamiliar.

Despite this, many learners aspired to further study after their course and were keen to develop their English proficiency further, with many signing up to Term 2 (and among some providers, an additional Term 3).

*"I hope the lockdown will finish very soon, I would like to go to college to learn English, and then find a job compatible with my children. I would like to be a hairdresser at some point, but it is hard to do this with my son. I would also maybe like to work in an office."*

Learner

At the time of the Term 2 interviews, tutors were planning to introduce learners to the new ESOL courses starting in September 2021, with

some providers planning to hold a progression or course open day later in the summer. Tutors expected that many learners would progress onto further ESOL courses in September 2021. During the fieldwork period, there were also examples of learners progressing onto other courses run by the same provider, such as arts and crafts classes. These were seen as opportunities to further their English learning as well as socialise with other members of the community.

### Volunteer outcomes

Some providers made use of volunteers in the delivery of the EFIF classes either during the classroom (when COVID-19 restrictions allowed) or digital classes, through the use of conversation clubs, as well as in separate online, one-to-one sessions. Other providers had planned to use volunteers in their delivery but felt unable to as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns and associated venue closures.

Volunteers tended to be former students of other ESOL courses, and for one provider they were employees of the local authority. There was variation in the extent to which volunteers were offered training as part of their role. A few volunteers were not offered any specific training, while others were offered teacher training, for instance an accredited level 3 teaching assistant qualifications, while others were invited to CPD and knowledge sharing days. A few had received training on digital skills, as well as council-wide training around safeguarding and health and safety.

Volunteers reflected that they had experienced many benefits as a result of volunteering on the EFIF programme, either as a classroom volunteer (digital or in person) or through the conversation clubs. Among volunteers who had been previous ESOL learners, the opportunity for them to practice their English further and increase their own confidence in speaking was identified as a key benefit. A few volunteers also identified that the role had opened up new opportunities for them, for example the opportunity to do a Level 3 teaching assistant course, with the view to progress to a learning support assistant role. A few tutors reflected that they had started out as learner-volunteers themselves, and had expected that some of the volunteers would also take this progression route.

Many volunteers felt that they had gained team working and digital skills, in addition to the opportunity to meet others and stay connected. This was particularly appreciated during the lockdown periods, with some volunteers having experienced isolation.

*"I enjoy volunteering and when I feel that I give back to the community, especially with the learners who have difficult backgrounds, I was really happy to help and contribute to their progress. "*

Volunteer

Volunteers mentioned many benefits of taking part in the programme including improving their confidence and wellbeing, these are explored further in Chapter 5. Some reported feeling very isolated and anxious at the start of the pandemic but said volunteering had given them a sense of purpose in the community and social connection to other learners.

*"Before joining, I was very low, very depressed. [Because I am volunteering] I see people, make friends and I am encouraged to learn. Now I feel I am useful, I have a goal in life and I can help others."*

Volunteer

Additionally, they commented on how working with and seeing learners progress was particularly rewarding. During the pandemic, volunteers also had limited opportunities to practice their English and taking part in ESOL classes was therefore also beneficial to their own learning.

*"You can see improvements week to week. You'll teach them something one week and they'll really struggle and the next week we'll go over it and they'll be really strong."*

**CASE STUDY: Denise's positive volunteering experience**

One volunteer was a qualified trainer and early years educator, and had previously worked in a school setting. Previous experience of work had eroded her confidence, to the extent that she decided to stop working and become a stay-at-home mother. This volunteer had not worked in 4 years, and came across the opportunity to volunteer via email from the adult college where she used to study. She was attracted to the opportunity to get a Level 5 qualification in teaching, and liked the idea of making use of her existing skills and giving back to the community.

In this area, volunteers were paired with learners on a 1-2-1 basis, matched on characteristics and strengths of each individual. Her role was to meet with learners around once a week between taught classes, using tools such as books and workbooks relevant to that week's course content. In this role, she felt well supported by the tutor and management team. Watching others grow their confidence each week, through small conversations or reading a book, contributed to rebuilding her own confidence. She also felt she benefitted from watching others achieve things they thought were impossible. When her child is old enough, she plans to pursue a Level 5 tutoring qualification (she was unable to work towards this alongside the course due to childcare logistics).

*"When you see the smiles on their faces, you realise you have both achieved something, and it builds something in both of you."*

Volunteer

**Local Authority outcomes****Working relationships and local partnerships**

Many areas made use of their pre-existing relationships for learner recruitment and project delivery, such as local colleges and children's centres, community venues and faith groups. Personal links of staff within the ESOL delivery team (e.g. via ex-colleagues, friends, organisation they've previously worked in) made up a lot of the pre-existing relationships. In addition, some areas found that they had developed new partnerships in the recruitment and/or delivery of the programme, for example with cultural centres or community venues. Others were hopeful that long term partnerships could be formed with some of the organisations they had been working with, as a result of the positive working relationships they had experienced so far. For example, one LA had made links with a local church and had hoped to continue this partnership in future, as it worked well with learners as a venue for the classes.

One lead reflected that there has been a lot of work involved to forge partnerships and develop working relationships with community organisations such as faith and religious groups, schools and children's centres, and cultural centres. The lead felt it was important to work with partners in a mutually beneficial way so that they can develop their own skills and infrastructure.

*"You have to do the footwork, literally going out talking to the faith leaders, community leaders, being part of lots of networks, can't do it on your own – have to link with these groups and use the infrastructure that there's there."*

Lead

Programme leads were hopeful that the new relationships will strengthen over time and be valuable to other forms of provision, beyond ESOL, creating a positive legacy of the EFIF. An example of this was in Bedford, where six organisations delivered ESOL. When one class was full, or a learner was not able to attend a specific day, the organisations were able to refer between themselves and ensure the learner was able to attend at least one ESOL session in the area. Previously to being part of EFIF, these organisations had not partnered together or shared referrals.

By Term 2, some areas felt that the EFIF programme and the classes it had on offer were embedded within the council and was well publicised internally, through council intranets and bulletins. This internal multi agency approach was new for some areas, or they had not received referrals from specific internal teams before, for example the social services teams. Internal referrals also came from housing and health teams. Leads felt these referrals may not have been accessed by potential learners if delivery was not done at a local level, as these connections between council teams were immediately available and could be made more easily.

Leads found the DLUHC EFIF forums useful, and appreciated the opportunity to learn from other LAs who were also delivering the EFIF programme. These strengthened and emerging relationships that have been made possible by EFIF act as a foundation for future ESOL partnerships as well as wider areas of work more generally where collaboration would be beneficial.

Drivers of positive outcomes

## **Use of Level 5-qualified ESOL tutors**

Many areas felt that the requirement for tutors to have a Level 5 ESOL qualification was integral to facilitating learners' English language proficiency within a relatively short period of time. There was a sense that increased investment in the programme (through the use of qualified tutors) had sped up learners' progress, and therefore programme outcomes. There was a sense that when working with pre-entry level learners, there is a need for skill and experience which can only be provided by qualified ESOL tutors.

*"You need teachers who are used to pre-entry and low level learners, this is not about formal teaching. That's the key to delivery."*

Delivery staff

Providers however acknowledged that volunteers who have the same native language as some of the learners still play a vital role in the delivery, particularly as classroom support and in offering translation. Having volunteer translators was seen to help low level learners learn faster, as well as support their communication with tutors and other learners. The volunteers were also said to act as a motivating factor for attendance, as well as to provide additional social interactions for learners.

Other providers noted that volunteers played a key role when the classes were moved online, for example by helping learners resolve technical issues. This enabled tutors to continue focus on teaching, and it helped to minimise loss of teaching time. Volunteers were also seen to function as role models for new learners.

*"Volunteers are hugely important too though. They can offer friendship and inspiration, creating an atmosphere of openness and diversity of thought. They have a much more holistic and softer approach."*

Delivery staff

## **Community-centred recruitment and delivery**

Recruitment was often focussed on places within the local community, such as children's centres and schools, leafleting within the local area, and local shops / shopping centres. This was in addition to more traditional advertising, for example on the provider's website.

Programme leads and delivery staff noted that targeted recruitment was effective in engaging people who may not typically have easy access to a learning environment, such as a college, or who would be less likely to seek out an ESOL course through an online search.

*"It's a massive marketing effort, it's the only way you get people as learners like these don't have the technology to look at a college website or the confidence to come straight into the college. You have to go out to them. It's a long and hard effort but once it starts, people tell their friends, you get people asking can I bring my cousin for a taster."*

Delivery staff

Many areas intended to partner with venues for recruitment and /or delivery that were of cultural relevance to learners, e.g. a local community centre, place of worship or cultural centre. As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, there was variation in the extent to which LAs could make use of such venues. Areas that had intended to partner with schools or use school / childcare settings as venues were most likely to face disruption to their plans as these settings did not feel comfortable receiving learners on site in the context of social distancing guidance. Community spaces and places of worship could be used by some areas, particularly venues that were of sufficient size to allow social distancing between learners.

### **Supporting learners' access to, and use of, digital learning**

The transition to online learning brought new challenges for learners as well as tutors and volunteers, with many sceptical as to how effective online delivery would be. Despite this, many reported that an online delivery mode had also brought benefits such as engaging learners who may be less able or willing to attend a class in person. This included people with health conditions or disabilities, as well as parents with limited or no access to childcare.

It should be noted that online delivery did not work for all learners, with some providers having seen reduced enrolment and/or engagement with the course.

*"Online elements in general have worked better than expected in terms of learner engagement. However, having face-to-face courses is also key for engagement"*

*and for creating a community and integrating learners into the wider community.”*

Delivery staff

Some programme leads felt that successful online delivery was as a result of intensive digital support provided to learners. This included providing access to devices, as well as data plans. Many learners only had access to a mobile phone and sometimes this was shared with other household members, for example children who also needed to access devices for school. Providers supported their learners to access online learning platforms such as Zoom, as well as building in online etiquette, for example showing learners how to use the ‘raise hand’ function to ask a question, the use of the chat and mute functions.

Some providers also used WhatsApp to maintain engagement with learners and support their access to digital learning, for example using ‘voice notes’ to communicate an answer if the learner was unable to write it or sending in a photo of their work for review.

A few tutors reflected that they had seen a significant development in their learners’ digital skills and confidence.

*“For the learners this has been brilliant, the learners thought that they wouldn’t have been able to work on a mobile phone, but they have. [Online learning has] challenged misconceptions about their own capabilities and given them so much confidence in themselves. Digitally they have learnt a lot.”*

Delivery staff

### **Relevancy of course content and the ability to tailor it to the needs of the learners in the class**

Learners said they found the course content interesting, enjoyable, and relevant to their everyday lives. This promoted engagement with the course and supported their learning.

*“I find it very interesting. Even though I go [to college] once a week, I receive homework and this keeps me busy for the whole week.”*

Learner

Tutors and learners reflected that the use of role play to practice speaking in everyday situations worked well, as did exercises where learners spoke about their country of origin and culture, such as cultural events, culinary traditions and ceremonies. One learner commented that previously she did not know how to make an appointment with the GP, but by practising this on the course she became confident in making appointments on her own.

*“I liked listening and speaking – I think this will help me pick up the language more quickly.”*

Learner

Tutors felt they had freedom to adapt the course content to the particular needs of the learners in their class. For example, one tutor commented that their older learners preferred to focus on speaking and listening rather than reading and writing. Another tutor commented that she was able to tailor some of the topics to the learners' interests, for example talking about children's first aid with parents, and tailoring discussion of jobs to the particular jobs the learners were interested in doing.

The small class sizes also helped tutors to better understand their learners' progression and to offer more support to learners who were struggling, as well as providing additional activities to learners who were working at a higher level. One area had started to offer booster sessions for learners with very low literacy levels or those not able to speak at all, as a way to get them to a level where they could engage with the main ESOL course.

## **Chapter 6: Value for money considerations and costs per learner**

### Delivering value for money

This section considers the available evidence of the EFIF programme's ability to deliver an advantageous combination of cost, quality and sustainability to meet learner / participant needs. In other words, to what extent has the scheme maximised benefits per pound invested?

Benefits from the programme are focused on the improved ability of participants to communicate more confidently in English, allowing them to make more use of local services, improve social integration and support progression to further learning. It can also improve the wellbeing and life satisfaction of volunteers.

Robust measurement of such benefits compared to a no-programme counterfactual is challenging and goes beyond the scope of this evaluation. Measuring improvement in English language skills is achievable and provides valuable inputs to this study, but the quantification of important, wider benefits such as increased volunteer wellbeing is particularly difficult and was not attempted.

However, the evaluation process has revealed a great deal about the relationship between programme design, its characteristics and the delivery of benefits. This allows us to identify elements of the programme that have likely improved overall value for money and those that seem to have had a weaker or potentially detrimental impact on overall value for money. In turn, this helps to give an overall assessment of the programme's value for money and identifies lessons and potential improvements for the design of future programmes.

### **Overall assessment of VFM**

The evidence from this study overall points to good outcomes for participants for example with improvements in individuals' English language skills and increased confidence using English in everyday situations such as interacting with school, and a sensible use of resources to achieve these.

The programme design took pragmatic steps to provide a service conducive to learning and able to attract and retain high-need participants, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

## Positive evidence

This section brings together the evidence where programme components/ characteristics seem to have boosted benefit delivery (and therefore value for money). These components are:

- **Use of Level 5 tutors.** Although the teaching staff costs were the greatest expenditure (accounting for over a third – 35% - of all costs across the programme), providers considered that the increased investment in the programme (through the use of Level 5 ESOL qualified tutors) had enhanced learners' progress, and therefore programme outcomes. Providers felt that their skill and experience was needed when working with pre-entry level learners.

Another area noted that compared to previous programmes, which were volunteer led, Level 5 practitioners were of superior quality in their teaching skills and ensured the sessions had a clear objective and a good pace. When observing a volunteer led session in a previous programme, the lead noted that:

*“The ESOL levels of each learner differed and the person teaching ESOL had no understanding of how to teach according to the level of English proficiency.”*

Programme lead

Programme leads in LAs felt that Level 5 qualified practitioners are well suited to dealing with classes with varied levels of proficiency and addressing this to ensure that all learners get the most out of the sessions. One area lead felt that Level 5 tutor-led ESOL made the programme a lot easier to manage than relying on volunteers. This was because it was easier to ask paid staff to be adaptable and move the teaching online, or change the date of lessons at short notice. Whereas volunteers had less incentive to be flexible.

- **Blended learning** and the focus on **digital inclusion** was viewed as highly beneficial, particularly if initial face-to-face sessions were used to build confidence / skills with digital engagement among learners before they moved to virtual taught lessons. Volunteers were identified as particularly valuable in supporting learners in this regard. Likewise, the availability of digital support (dongles, tablets) where needed was also valued, although in some instances these were purchased and not used. Greater value for

money could be achieved by assessing digital access needs at assessment and provisioning accordingly.

The benefit of blended learning and digital support included: flexibility in timetables, to improve access for those with, for example, caring responsibilities; improved digital skills which translated to improved confidence and access to local amenities (e.g. filling out online forms for the doctor, looking up local information online), as well as employability (e.g. able to create a CV, search for jobs, have digital skills to take into a role).

- **Use of volunteers for learner support, particularly on digital access.** Providers acknowledged that volunteers still play a vital role in the delivery, particularly as classroom support, 1-2-1 conversation sessions, digital inclusion and in offering translation; they enabled tutors to continue to focus on teaching. Volunteers were also seen to function as role models for new learners. Therefore, whilst Level 5 practitioners were vital for high quality delivery and providers/local authorities leads were in favour of sessions being led by them, it was key for Level 5 practitioners to be supported by volunteers.
- **Longer courses (around 12 weeks) were more effective** in developing entry-level language skills. Those who delivered condensed courses (2.5 weeks) or took a modular approach (where modules were c. 4 weeks) tended to refer learners onto further courses at the same level as opposed to progressing them. Moreover, longer courses where taught sessions were spread out allowed conversations clubs / 1-2-1s with volunteers and wider practice between lessons, which providers and participants felt helped to embed learning.

## **Challenges and potential areas for improvement**

It is unsurprising and logical that some elements of the programme appeared to be less impactful or effective than others. All programmes operate in an uncertain and changing environment and an element of innovation in approaches is healthy when designing a new, locally-led programme. This evaluation provided an opportunity to identify such factors and the potential ways to improve future design.

- **Social clubs and IAG.** While social clubs and IAG delivered some benefits to participants, reports from providers suggest that they

were of more benefit to those with higher baseline levels of English. Many course participants were distant from the labour market (for various reasons including childcare commitments as well as limited English language skills) and IAG on progression to further learning was more useful to them than IAG on careers and employment. Most advice given was focused around progression onto other courses, which many tutors felt able to provide themselves.

- **COVID-19 and programme delivery.** The COVID-19 pandemic forced a large and unanticipated change in how the scheme was run and delivered. It is likely that this reduced impacts in the short-term (for example due to the lower than target volumes of participants, discussed in Chapter 2) but the delivery partners reacted quickly to adapt the offer by changing their recruitment approaches and moving to online or blended delivery. This mitigated the impact of the pandemic on the programme to some extent and evidence from the pre-and post-assessment scores suggests that participants continued to receive a good level of instruction and make progress in improving their English language skills across all four aspects (reading, writing, speaking and listening).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some areas were not able to recruit and deliver ESOL sessions to the number of learners stated in their bid for EFIF funding (see Chapter 2) and therefore the anticipated benefits of the programme were lower than first planned. Whilst this has value for money implications and increases the cost per learner compared with the original planned costs, area leads were keen to highlight inadvertent positive outcomes of this situation (such as smaller class sizes leading to more individualised attention for learners). Alongside this, areas were keen to point out that the monetary 'value' of the programme captured only some of the value which the programme brought to people's lives.

*“This programme whilst not reaching the high numbers of residents delivered by previous similar projects, has provided higher quality delivery and support than previous projects which have been more dependent on volunteers for delivery. It has also provided value for money for the*

*borough when taken in the context of the hard-to-reach target group and the impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.”*

- Programme lead

As a result of reduced learner numbers, class sizes tended to be smaller than originally targeted. This led to the tutor / volunteer to learner ratio being smaller, giving each learner more contact with the staff in the sessions. Through this, area leads were keen to point out that the quality of the sessions was higher, as learners had a greater opportunity to receive one to one tuition. One area lead suggested that often in large classes, a few learners can get lost or fall behind, the small size of many classes meant tutors could give individual learners feedback and answer their questions. They felt there was a higher quality with smaller class sizes.

For learners who had no other connection to the local community/ services or other people, before their engagement with EFIF, the value of taking part in the programme was not tangible in a monetary form. Many learners interviewed were socially isolated even before the Covid-19 lockdowns and did not know many or sometimes any people in their local area. The survey and qualitative evidence showed positive impacts on speaking to more people in English and going out independently to interact in the local community (see Chapter 5). This highlights that the ESOL sessions provided a key opportunity for friendship and broader social integration, as well as an opportunity to speak English. One area lead was sure that the ESOL sessions had a positive impact on learners' mental health and sense of social connection during pandemic lockdowns:

*“Whilst we didn't meet our target numbers, the programme has provided a very valuable access route to welfare support, social connection and opportunities to progress into learning for a number of residents who, due to their lack of English language, would have been very adversely affected by the pandemic.”*

- Programme lead

## Recommendations – value for money

The evidence suggests that future programmes should:

- Continue to focus on the delivery of classes by highly-trained teachers such as Level 5 ESOL practitioners.
- If targeting people with very low or no English language, avoid the use of conversation clubs and work-focused IAG sessions, which were found to be less beneficial to target groups than other approaches.
- Avoid short courses, which according to providers were less likely to lead to level progression.
- Include more complete assessments of components that could not be fully assessed in future evaluation plans, such as the role of delivery model.

### Costs per learner

Cost per learner figures have been estimated and are included here to provide a benchmark figure for this programme, which can be used for comparative purposes to the original 'expected' cost per learner, to previous programmes and to similar programmes in future.

Using the DELTA returns and cost data gathered by IFF Research, an average cost per learner has been calculated.

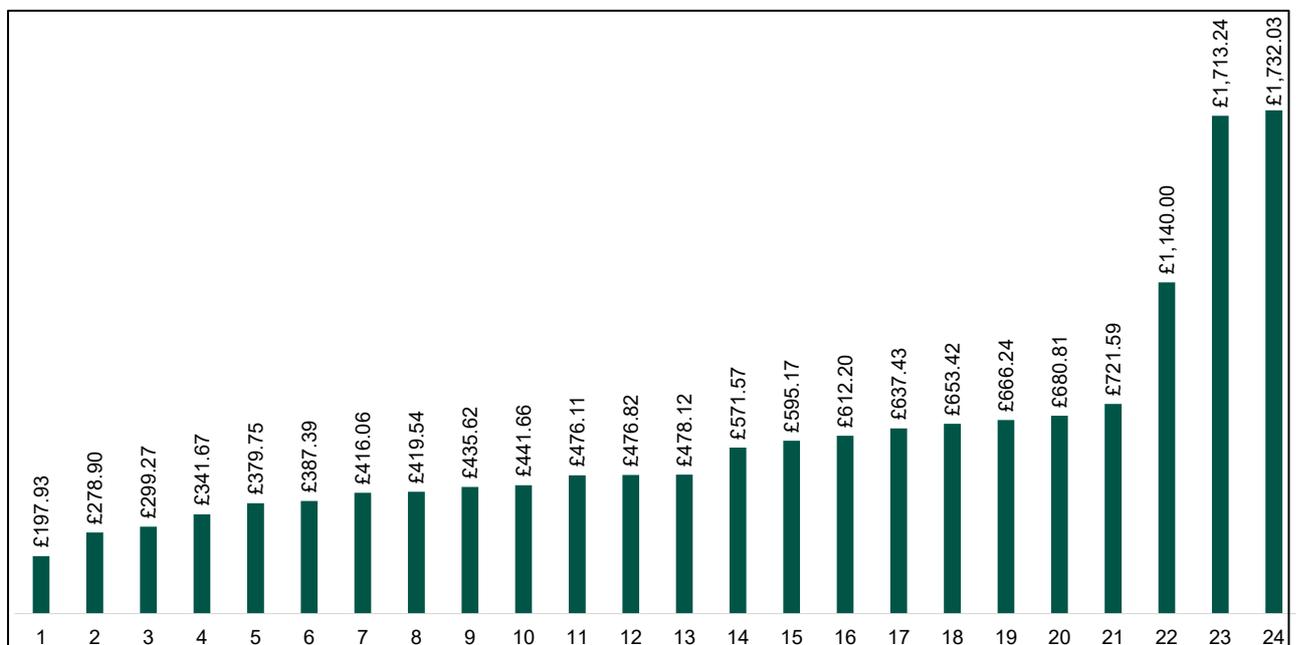
A key difference in the EFIF programme compared to previous MHCLG (now DLUHC) funded community-based English language programmes such as ICELP (2019-2020) is that all classes were required to be led by a Level 5 practitioner (Level 5 Diploma in Teaching English). Previous programmes were run by national organisations, and the ESOL sessions could be delivered by volunteers. By introducing the requirement for Level 5 practitioners in all taught sessions, the cost of delivery rose, partially to pay the salary of practitioners. For this previous programme, there was a cost per learner of £268. Funding for EFIF, with its requirement to use Level 5 practitioners, and with an IAG element, was anticipated to have a cost per learner of £459 for taught sessions and £140 for social activities.

In 2020-2021, the calculated actual **cost per learner on taught EFIF provision was £478**, and **£180 for social activities**. These figures exclude four areas which were unable to return data to IFF about expenditure breakdown, and one area who returned data but presented anomalous figures and has been excluded from the analysis.

Average figures from the remaining areas are closely in line with the anticipated costs of delivering Level 5 practitioner-led ESOL. The cost per learner at an overall level (considering both taught and social club provision) was an average of **£356**.

Figure 14 shows the range in the **cost per taught learner figure** between 24 areas<sup>8</sup>.

**Figure 14: Cost per taught learner, by 24 areas**



Areas were asked to break down their costs across several components, including central administrative/ project management costs (including salary costs), teaching staff costs, costs related to digital literacy / digital inclusion, childcare support costs, other learner support costs (e.g.,

<sup>8</sup> Excluding areas which did not provide data or were excluded due to high outliers. Areas 23 and 24 have higher costs per learner than the others for specific reasons - one struggled with recruitment due to Covid (achieving one-third of their original target) and their teaching costs were quite high relative to learner numbers as a result. The other intended to deliver all taught classes on a face to face basis but were not able to do so again due to Covid, but still had some associated costs with setup and management.

materials), venue hire and volunteer related costs (e.g., expenses). The greatest expenditure across all the areas combined was teaching staff costs. Just over a third of all expenditure was on teaching staff costs (£1,294,427 - 35%), followed by central administration (£1,089,238 – 30%). The third biggest costs, making up 7% (£262,253) of all expenditure was costs related to digital inclusion (e.g., provision of tablets, dongles, etc).

**Figure 15: Total expenditure, split by cost type**

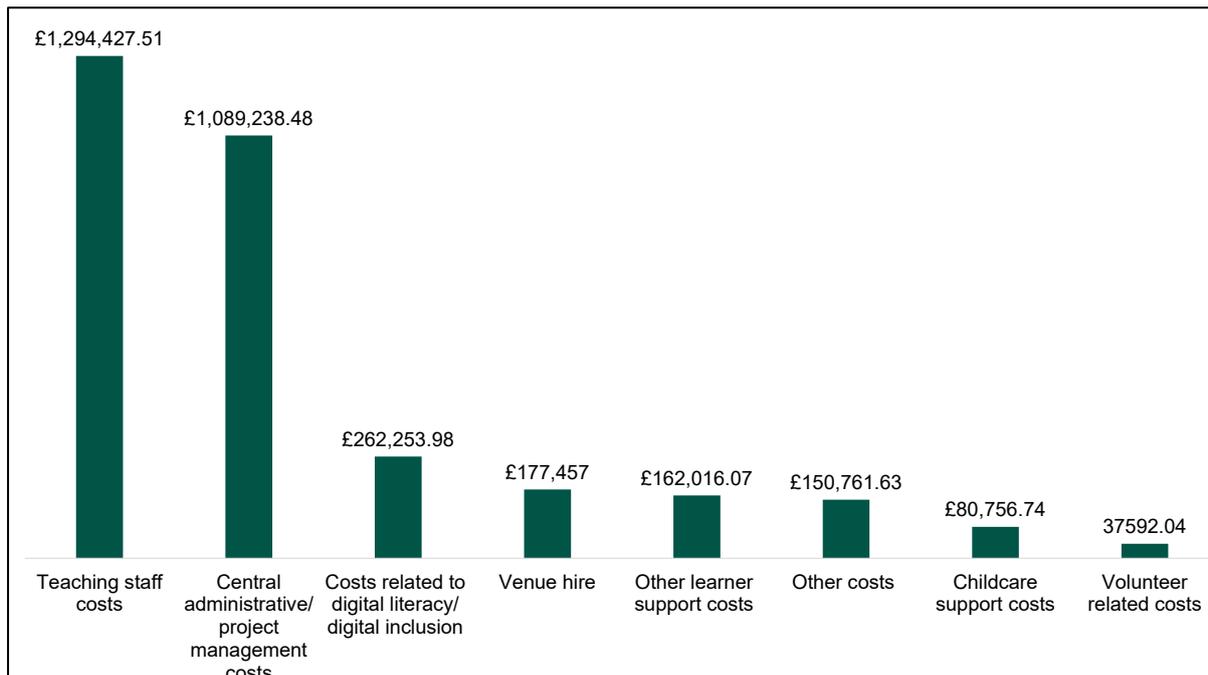
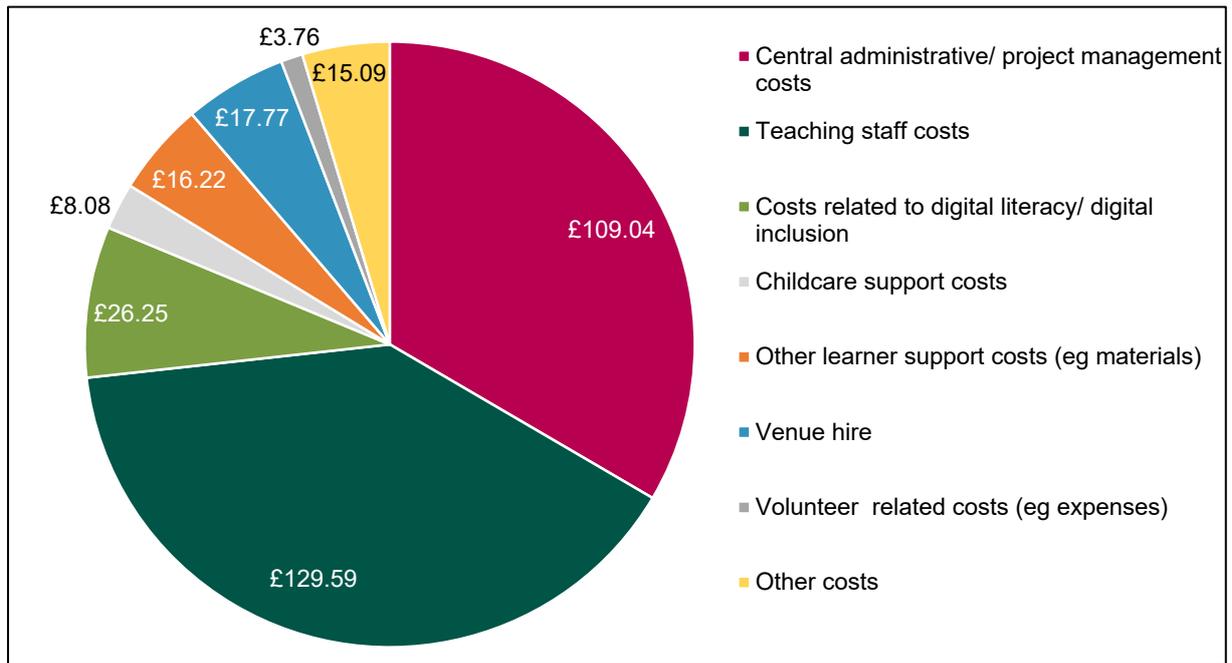


Figure 16 visualises how the average programme level cost per learner splits across different expenditure types. For example, the average digital inclusion cost of one learner on the programme was £26.25. Not all areas could provide such a detailed expenditure breakdown and so the chart is indicative of the relative breakdown between elements: it should not be used to calculate the overall average cost.

**Figure 16: Cost per learner by expenditure type**



## **Chapter 7: Programme reflections**

### **Lessons learned**

Area leads and delivery staff noted several learnings from delivering the ESOL programme. Some lessons learnt in Term 1 were able to be actioned for/during Term 2 to improve processes, with most of the initial teething problems dealt with.

### **Online delivery**

The main issue faced was the fast turn-around needed to deliver online sessions, which as has been noted throughout the report, was new for a lot of areas. In Term 1, online classes required significant amounts of one-to-one support for learners, and this was very resource intensive. One lead noted that this took up a lot of her time, which otherwise could be spent on overseeing or teaching classes and that it would have been better to have dedicated support staff, for example volunteers, doing this role. Others noted that online delivery was dependent on being able to provide digitally excluded learners with devices or internet dongles in order to access classes and were looking at ways to partner with other services to ensure they could continue to offer this support in the future. By Term 2, areas seemed to have mostly gotten to grips with delivery digitally, using volunteers and tutors to heavily support with getting learners online in the first few sessions. Onboarding and carrying out the initial tech set ups face to face was viewed as the most effective method, where this was possible between lockdowns.

Across the areas, there were varied approaches and systems used when face to face onboarding was not possible, for example, a WhatsApp group to remind learners of when the class was and to answer any access initial technical issues, appeared to work well. It felt accepted within areas that this initial 'intense' period of support was worth it, for getting the learners online and engaged.

Some areas felt the move to online teaching had forced them to review their learning materials and to explore more digital resources. This had been a positive experience for these areas who felt the resources would be valuable for future ESOL delivery more broadly. A positive legacy of EFIF is that it gave many areas and organisations the kickstart to digitise their materials and learn how to deliver online and support learners at home. Digital skills now feel embedded into ESOL delivery in these areas, where in previous delivery of ESOL, this wasn't the case. Some

areas are considering continuing with at least some digital teaching in the future.

Digital delivery had improved learners' own digital skills. Whilst this was not a core outcome that the EFIF programme was intending to achieve, the impacts of COVID-19 on delivery forced learners to engage with digital technologies to sign up to sessions, access the lessons, complete homework, and use email or text to speak with classmates or tutors. For some, this contact over WhatsApp has led to friendship. In the future, digital skills should remain a part of the syllabus, as they can improve learners' skills, which can help learners move towards social integration, as they are more able to access and understand other essential online services.

### **Reading and writing**

Some felt their course would be improved by having more resources available to tutors. This was particularly the case with materials to support learners to improve their reading and writing abilities. Compared to Term 1, once tutors felt more comfortable with teaching online into Term 2, teaching reading and writing was more common. The format still was not ideal, and many tutors struggled to feel they were covering reading and writing fully through online classes. Some areas were able to find workarounds, but they felt cumbersome and not the best use of time (e.g. photographing written work, printing it, marking it, scanning it back in). One area purchased a piece of software for learners to type responses to questions in class and get automatic feedback from tutors (rather than physically writing), they wished they had invested in this sooner as it worked well for them. Some areas set up WhatsApp groups to set tasks between sessions, to monitor reading and writing skills and encourage learners to practice.

Overall, areas felt they had some way to go in delivering all four elements as successfully online as they could in the classroom (specifically reading and writing), although acknowledged that this was a factor of the circumstances in which they had to deliver, not the original requirements. Some tutors had a preference of teaching reading and writing skills in a face-to-face environment, from a practical perspective.

### **Sharing learnings**

Across Term 1 and Term 2, areas were enthusiastic about the DLUHC forum held between the areas, to share ideas and find out how delivery and recruitment was going in other places. When reflecting on the fund

as a whole, some areas would have liked some more of this kind of peer-to-peer support and sharing. One area lead suggested the creation of a virtual 'hub' to host resources which all areas could contribute to and easily access. For example, tutors could add successful activities or links to tours they had enjoyed, they felt this would have been a good legacy if it were introduced. One lead felt it could be suitable for all partners (not just area leads) to join the DLUHC forum.

An app created by the team working with Manchester City Council has been used or is of interest to several council areas who are part of the EFIF programme. Talk English (the provider in Manchester) commissioned Northcoders to develop a web-based app to connect learners with their teachers and classmates, support independent learning and build an online record of learning and achievements. Talk English introduced the app at the start of Term 1, and they have made the app available at minimal cost to other local authorities delivering EFIF programmes. Rochdale introduced the app in January 2021 and Birmingham introduced the app in April 2021.

Manchester City Council also led a collaborative approach to delivery of EFIF programmes with six other local authorities (Rochdale, Oldham Council, Salford, Bolton, Kirklees, and Birmingham). Through the collaboration, Manchester provided a range of support and resources to these local authorities and their delivery, as well as the opportunity to share good practice and issues at regular meetings. This partnership was already well established, as Manchester City Council were a national provider in the Integrated Communities English Language Programme (ICELP), so had experience taking on a leading role and supporting other local authorities.

In areas with multiple partners commissioned to deliver taught and social EFIF provision, there was some collaboration. For example, in Bedford, delivery partners ran regular meetings with each other, to discuss how delivery was going and share best practice and tips (e.g. local venues becoming available). This created an open 'active partnership' for referring between partners and understanding what other local delivery partners were doing. Bedford used the EFIF programme to maintain their newly formed 'ESOL Advice Service'. Some of these partnerships were new and this was a positive experience for those involved. In a small number of areas however, there was felt to be less coordination between partners, with some partners not knowing what other partners were doing so were unsure what they could offer the learners.

Areas for improvement for the programme

This section focuses on areas of improvement to the EFIF programme as a whole, as well as local delivery, as identified by staff, volunteers and learners. It should be noted that the EFIF programme is designed to complement rather than to replace existing ESOL provision.

## **Design of the programme**

A few areas suggested that the **eligibility criteria** for the programme was too narrow. They reported recruiting some individuals who perform slightly above the threshold on the English language assessments, but who have no confidence speaking English and very limited opportunities to practice and would therefore benefit from going on the course

*"It's quite a restrictive programme in terms of the eligibility requirement. We've had a few learners coming through who were just beyond that level but who have no confidence to use English or limited opportunities to use it."*

Programme lead

Programme leads in some areas commented on what they perceived to be restricted eligibility for EFIF, for example because some people who could benefit from it were in work or were asylum seekers. Some felt there was no, or insufficient, funded provision available for ESOL learning for these specific learners. There is provision available for those in work under the DWP Skills for Life budget, and for asylum seekers, as funded by the Home Office through Adult Education Budget (AEB) provision. The existence of this provision is the reason why these specific groups were excluded from EFIF funding, as it would duplicate spend. This suggests a need for these funding routes to be better promoted, and for better signposting to alternative funded provision.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the design of the EFIF programme's eligibility criteria was often commended, as it offered ESOL classes to many who were previously not eligible for other funding. For example, one area felt that often funding was for entry-level 1 course, which would have not been suitable for this cohort of learners, as the content would have been too high level, as well as being designed around moving towards the labour market. Funding for ESOL from DLUHC is made specifically with a focus on integration and cohesion, not solely education, hence why these are eligibility requirements are in place in terms of language level. The current AEB offer is higher than pre-entry and entry level 1. EFIF was seen as

meeting the demand of a cohort previously not funded, that being pre-entry learners.

*“If it wasn’t funded by EFIF, these activities just wouldn’t happen for this group of learners, having the social elements and these activities is really important for the learner’s wellbeing”.*

Programme lead

A few programme leads said they needed a **longer lead time** before the courses had to be up and running and felt this would have enabled them to tailor the delivery more to the local area, within the restrictions of the pandemic. They however acknowledged that the additional time may not be needed in a ‘non-COVID year’.

The main improvements suggested across Term 1 and Term 2 were **longer courses and more frequent classes**. Local authorities were given flexibility in terms of how they delivered their courses, but most used a two-term model. Both delivery staff and learners expressed a preference for a longer course. Staff argued that learners with very low levels of English, as well as low levels of literacy, need a longer course in order to make an impact on their ability to use English in everyday situations. With a longer course, learners would have more hours of guided learning, meaning language skills could become embedded between sessions. Tutors felt that repetition of learning was fundamental for pre-entry learners, so more frequent classes, which took place over a longer period of time, would be instrumental in moving learners onto the next level with their language skills.

Some said these learners were often not ready to go on to college courses without a more substantial course, while others felt a longer course would enable lower levels learners to progress onto higher level courses in the area.

Learners echoed this sentiment. While many were pleased with the progress they had made, they felt they still had a lot to learn in order for them to achieve their learning goals and become more independent.

For many areas, learners’ progression involved re-enrolment onto the same level course, suggesting the courses were not long enough to allow for progression. Some leads and tutors suggested a six-month course, others felt a year-long course would be suitable. The EFIF taught and social sessions were viewed as a ‘starting point’ and a way to initially engage students in learning, and with wider council services and

other organisations support. Many areas hoped that this initial engagement would encourage learners to stay involved with their organisation and continue learning.

Staff and learners also suggested more frequent classes, and some areas implemented this change between Term 1 and Term 2. Some staff argued that particularly pre-entry learners would benefit from two classes a week rather than one, as they tended to forget new vocabulary between classes and have very limited opportunities to practice, especially during the pandemic. This was also mentioned by learners, who felt more frequent classes would help them to consolidate learning, as well as give them more opportunities for social interactions in an otherwise relatively isolated every day. Some areas learnt in Term 1 that a long session via Zoom could cause learners to become disengaged and exhausted, due to the length of time looking at a screen. Therefore, some areas opted in Term 2 for more regular, shorter sessions instead, which was felt to be more effective.

Some staff members also argued that a longer course or more frequent classes were needed due to the vulnerability of the learners. Staff felt learners on the course tended to be extremely isolated and, in some cases, displayed signs of mental health problems due to loneliness and isolation. They considered that more frequent classes or a longer course could potentially have a bigger impact in terms of connecting learners to others and their community. The childcare funding available was limited, and as many learners were dependent on childcare to be able to attend this limited areas' ability to offer more frequent classes.

## **Delivery of the programme**

The **enrolment and assessment materials** were viewed as needing improvement by some area leads and tutors. The forms were not designed to be used online, as they were produced before areas knew the specifics of how they would carry out delivery, and whether this would be taking place face to face or online. Many areas adapted the forms themselves for online use (e.g. producing a Google Form). In the future, DLUHC could produce forms that are suitable for use with fully digital or blended delivery.

Some leads said the **enrolment and assessment process** was time consuming and suggested delivery staff did not always fully understand the importance of the data they were collecting. Some suggested DLUHC could do more to streamline these processes. Many areas took to digitalising the assessment, social integration survey and enrolment

forms themselves (e.g. using a Google Form), and this was shared with other areas to use. This made carrying out assessments far easier and is something these areas will implement in the future (if face to face enrolment was not an option). For future programmes, DLUHC could develop the online forms themselves, for consistency across all programme areas, as conducting the assessments over the phone or Zoom made tasks such as conducting the writing assessment more difficult.

*“The level of English required to complete the assessment in a reasonable time is beyond the learners’ capacity. In order to extract the information, a volunteer would be required to spend close to half an hour per learner, its very time consuming”*

*Programme lead*

Due to the flexibility allowed in the design of the programme between areas, some areas enrolled and delivered the course in an ad-hoc style (for example rolling weekly recruitment/lesson start dates). This was not conducive to administering the assessments and surveys especially with different learners turning up each week to different sessions, with assessments not always being carried out before joining classes. This impacted some areas’ ability to return data for all learners, or data they felt was fully accurate. As noted elsewhere in the report, a few leads worried about whether the data in the social surveys will reflect the impact the courses had on learners’ integration, or whether the response to the findings would be eclipsed by COVID-19. This was specifically a worry regarding questions about getting out into the local area and speaking with new people. However, as shown by the data, improvements were seen in social integration indicators, despite the COVID-19 context.

Some staff felt that **streaming learners by ability** would have been beneficial, mostly in Term 1. Staff noted that even among pre-entry learners there was significant variance in their level of proficiency, as well as their learning speed and style. They felt having some learners with very low levels of English and literacy meant that they had to adapt lesson plans and content and that this had a detrimental impact on higher level learners. Some of the learners interviewed echoed this and felt that by needing additional support they were slowing down the rest of the class and that other learners would be able to learn quicker without their presence. Areas where learners had been streamed mentioned this as an effective element, which was enabled by online delivery. There were however examples of providers who felt the mixed

ability worked well and enabled more interactions between learners as they helped each other progress.

Delivery staff and programme leads noted that while the requirement for qualified L5 ESOL teachers was a very positive development, tutors could benefit from having access to translators, especially in classes with pre-entry learners. Areas that had engaged **volunteers as translators** in classes felt this was invaluable and that it allowed them to engage low level learners quicker. Learners interviewed echoed this and felt having someone who could translate for them in class enabled them to learn quicker and made it easier for them to ask questions.

In some areas, there was limited collaboration between tutors, and between tutors and volunteers. Some tutors felt it would have been beneficial to encourage more collaboration and resource sharing.

### **Outcomes and progressions**

A few programmes leads and delivery staff argued that there was a need for the programme to recognise a **broader set of progressions** or outcomes for learners. As outlined in the previous section, after one or two terms of learning, many learners were not ready to progress on to the next level of English language courses (assessment data showed the overall proportion of learners at Entry Level 2 by the end of the course was 15%). Tutors felt that learners' vulnerability, in terms of their levels of English and literacy, social isolation, mental health and age, meant that many were unlikely to progress directly onto college courses, next level English courses or move towards the labour market. Instead, they requested recognition for other outcomes achieved as part of taking part in the EFIF for pupils. It was often recognised by tutors and volunteers in the social activities that students had grown in confidence and made new friends, which should be equally recognised as having a positive impact on learners' lives, alongside language proficiency. Indeed, some of these observed changes were captured through the social integration survey (as outlined in Chapter 5).

This recognition is done to some extent through local certificates from tutors/courses, and end of course celebration events. One area lead recognised that whilst learners were too far from the labour market to benefit specifically from employability advice, they were able to integrate softer skills around timekeeping and communication skills, that transfer well into an employment context.

The evaluation seeks to consider wider short-term and long-term outcomes (e.g. increase in confidence to use English in everyday situations for learners, increased awareness of local heritage, cultural, and leisure sites / events). In future evaluations, the theory of change could be referenced more often with area leads, to reassure them that the programme seeks wider outcomes beyond English language proficiency and employability. Findings from the social integration surveys could be shared with area leads and tutors to highlight the other ways which learners have progressed.

Across Term 1 and Term 2, **continuity in funding** was also mentioned as an improvement to ESOL delivery more broadly (i.e., beyond the EFIF programme). Some raised concerns about building a presence locally and creating demand, without being able to guarantee continuity of service. Many leads felt that the learners on EFIF were often not eligible for other funding and felt strongly that something similar for pre-entry learners needed to continue to be funded.

One delivery partner was concerned about the progress of the last year being eroded if the EFIF programme or similar investment did not continue to be funded, as they had created some positive new connections with other partners, and learners who they had not previously engaged with before. As noted previously in this chapter, networks, learnings and infrastructure developed through the EFIF funding within local authority areas will have a positive legacy but without funding, it is reasonable to assume these networks will not be as easy to maintain.

## Chapter 8: Conclusions

The overarching aims of this evaluation were:

- To assess the impacts of the intervention on learners, in terms of English language proficiency and improved social integration; and
- To assess whether a place-based design for intervention improves deliverability, i.e. explore whether local partnership works.

### Learner outcomes

**The EFIF programme led to improved English proficiency among participants.** This improved across writing, reading and speaking assessments before and after the course. The average improvement in mean scores was 1.17 points for writing; 1.34 points for reading; and 1.64 points for speaking and listening. Comparison to the reported figures for mean scores for the CBEL programme indicates that EFIF learners had lower scores (both pre and post-programme) but showed a higher improvement for speaking/listening in terms of the increase in average assessment points.

**Improvement was stronger for speaking and listening than for reading and writing.** Around one-quarter (24%) of participants moved up at least one level in speaking and listening, compared with 16% who did so for reading and 18% who did so for writing.

**Taking part in EFIF provision also led to improved social integration among learners,** as evidenced from the social integration survey conducted before and after the course. Learners reported **more frequent interactions in English** at the end of the course, with the proportion speaking to 3 or more individuals in English over the previous week increasing from one-third (34%) to almost two-thirds (62%). Among participants with children, **more felt confident speaking to people at their child's school in English,** increasing from 8% to 29% by the end of their course. Learners were **more likely to 'definitely agree' that people from different backgrounds get on well in their local area** by the end of the course (23% at start compared to 33% at programme end). This was supported with qualitative evidence, many learners described feeling more confident speaking English and being more able to communicate, compared to before they started the course, for

example in the local supermarket or pharmacy, booking GP appointments and using public transport.

**Digital literacy and use of technology increased over the programme.** Prior to the course 30% had used technology 3 or more times in the space of a week, this increased to more than half (53% following the course) – although it is not possible to identify how much of this was influenced by the general increase in online activity necessitated by the pandemic.

Wider outcomes reported by learners, and supported by providers, in the qualitative interviews included **improved knowledge of health and wellbeing** (including Coronavirus measures, which were reinforced in classes), **reduced social isolation, improved mental health, and increased motivation to progress in learning.**

### **Taking a place-based approach**

Assessment of the delivery of EFIF needs to take into account the unprecedented context of the Coronavirus pandemic and successive lockdowns (local during Term 1, national during Term 2). This **hindered recruitment and the extent to which provision could incorporate planned activities and local visits.** However, providers continued to tailor course content to their local areas and strived to maintain their links with local venues so that planned activities could be re-instated when restrictions eased.

The local, place-based nature of EFIF meant that providers could be more **agile and flexible** in making changes to their local plans. **Local knowledge and relationships proved** critical in enabling providers to maintain their delivery in the face of pressures arising from the Coronavirus pandemic, such as having to change venues and move to more online provision. **DLUHC allowed the funding to be responsive** to local needs to change delivery, which supported areas to continue being able to deliver the programme.

Programme leads and delivery staff identified the following elements as underpinning the positive outcomes observed:

- The use of Level 5-qualified ESOL tutors; especially in the context of having to adapt materials and move delivery online.

- Community-centred recruitment and the use of community spaces for delivery; which providers felt had attracted learners who were traditionally more 'hard to reach'.
- Relevancy of course content to the local context, and the ability to tailor it to the needs of the learners in the class; and
- The adoption of digital technologies and supporting learners' access to, and use of, digital learning. Although face-to-face delivery was still preferred, EFIF demonstrated the potential of digital learning for people previously believed to be unable to access this method at all.

## 1. Survey and assessment measures

### ASSESSMENTS

All learners completed a trio of standardised ESOL for Integration Fund assessments about their proficiency in English just before the start of the course, and again at the end. These assessments have been used to (a) provide a profile of the learners who took up the course and (b) measure learners' progress over the length of the course.

Administered by the course tutors (approaches to assessment are outlined in Chapter 3), the assessments provide measures of a learner's proficiency in (a) reading English, (b) writing in English and (c) their ability to speak and understand English (labelled a 'speaking and listening' assessment).

At the start of the course, each learner began with a Pre-entry Level assessment for each of the three learning areas (reading; writing; speaking and listening). For each learning area, they were given a Pre-entry Level score from 0 to 3. Those who scored 3 on the Pre-entry Level assessment went on to complete an Entry Level 1 assessment, from which they could score between 4 and 7.

According to DLUHC guidance, eligibility for the course entailed:

1. Being no more than Pre-entry Level for two of the three learning areas; and/or
2. Not scoring a 7 for any of the three areas.

Those who did not fulfil either of these criteria were expected to have English language skills too advanced for the course. In the event, a proportion of the learners did start the course with higher levels of skills than the eligibility criteria (see Chapter 2).

The same Pre-entry and Entry Level 1 assessments for the three learning areas were repeated at the end of the course. However, if a learner scored a 7 for a particular learning area, they went on to complete an Entry Level 2 assessment, from which they could score between 8 and 11.

So, each learner achieved one of the following scores, separately for reading, writing and speaking and listening, before the course, and again at the end:

Score	Label	Descriptor for reading <sup>9</sup>	Descriptor for writing	Descriptor for reading and listening
<b>Pre-entry level</b>				
0	Non-completer	Unable to answer any of the questions; unfamiliar with any written form of the language	Unable to attempt first question within the time; letters copied incorrectly or copied from right to left or in random order.	Pronunciation if not intelligible; does not understand the question; unable to respond.
1	Emerging	Basic skills, may show some awareness of individual letter or number forms; may recognise the social sight words.	Basic skills; able to form numbers and some letters using upper and lower case and some digits; writes from left to right.	Basic skills, needs prompting and rephrasing; pronunciation is intelligible despite errors in pronunciation of some sounds.
2	Consolidating	Satisfactory skills, reads and recognises most individual letter and number forms; may be able to recognise or read social sight words.	Satisfactory skills; able to correctly copy numbers and letters of the alphabet; uses and spells correctly some familiar words using knowledge of basic sound-letter correspondence and letter patterns to aid spellings; completes two words with a degree of	Satisfactory skills, minimal prompting and rephrasing needed; pronunciation is intelligible.

<sup>9</sup> These are the descriptors from the assessment guidance. In places the table uses paraphrasing or omits criteria that do not make sense without seeing the full assessment (e.g. reference to particular questions).

			accuracy; writes from left to right.	
3	Established	Good skills – reads and recognises almost all individual letter and number forms; able to recognise and read social sight words.	Good skills; able to copy numbers and letters of the alphabet; uses familiar words and spells them correctly using knowledge of basic sound-letter correspondence and letter patterns to aid spellings; completes 3-4 words with a high level of accuracy; writes from left to right; writes without support and all words are legible and mainly accurate.	Good skills – no prompting or rephrasing needed; pronunciation is intelligible.
<b>Entry level 1</b>				
4	Non-completer	Unable to obtain meaning from a combination of key words, symbols and digits; may not be able to respond to all questions or prompts; unable to follow a short narrative on a familiar topic.	Limited; can use and spell correctly a limited range of personal key words.	Needs prompts or questions repeated; gives single word answers; does not understand the questions; unable to respond; may misinterpret questions; may not be able to respond to all questions

				or prompts; some sounds may be mispronounced.
5	Emerging	Basic skills– able to obtain some meaning from a combination of key words, symbols and digits; begins to follow information from a short narrative on a familiar topic; gives minimal responses; may not be able to respond to all questions or prompts.	Basic skills; can use and spell correctly some key personal words; shows an awareness of upper and lower case; able to form letters and digits accurately.	Basic skills; may need prompts or repetition of question; gives minimal responses; may miss out or use extra words, use incorrect words in sentences or order words incorrectly; may not be able to respond to all questions or prompts; pronunciation is intelligible despite errors in pronunciation of individual words.
6	Consolidating	Satisfactory skills - able to obtain meaning from key words, symbols and digits; some awareness of simple sentences; can follow information from a short narrative on a familiar topic .	Satisfactory skills; can use and spell most key personal words mostly using upper and lower case correctly; can write at least one simple sentence with a capital letter, full stop and awareness of word order.	Satisfactory skills; may need repetition of question; may be able to give a fuller response; pronunciation is intelligible with an awareness of intonation; grammatical errors do not impede communication.

7	Established	Good skills – good awareness of key words, symbols and digits; can follow information from a short narrative on a familiar topic.	Good skills; can use and spell key personal words accurately using upper and lower case correctly; can two simple sentences with capital letters, full stops and awareness of word order.	Good skills – does not need repetition of questions; responds to questions with at least two longer sentences or a minimum of three simple sentences; makes few grammatical errors, which do not impede communication; pronunciation is intelligible and intonation does not cause the listener to strain to follow meaning.
<b>Entry level 2 (administered at the end of the course only)</b>				
8	Non-completer	Unable to obtain any or only limited information from notices and short texts.	Only gives minimal responses; frequent errors which may impede understanding.	Responds to questions with at least two longer sentences or three simple sentences; makes few grammatical errors which do not impede communication; has difficulty following or provides minimal response to questioning or needs significant prompting; asks question but not

				grammatically correct; pronunciation is intelligible.
9	Emerging	Basic skills; able to obtain some information from notices and short texts; able to recognise familiar words.	Basic skills; responses minimal or significantly under length; frequent errors which may impede understanding; lack of use of past tense; errors in functional language; uses capital letters and full stops.	Basic skills; able to ask and answer questions using appropriate grammar; provides responses and questions with some prompting but brief; unable to use past tense; errors impede communication; clear intonation minimally used to convey meaning.
10	Consolidating	Satisfactory skills; able to obtain information from notices and short texts; able to recognise familiar words and follow a short narrative.	Satisfactory skills; completed tasks at appropriate length; errors but do not impede understanding; use of past tense, but not consistent; some use of adjectives; some errors in functional language; uses capital letters, full stops and proper nouns.	Satisfactory skills; use straightforward language appropriate for context; responds without prompting and makes relevant contributions to discussion with some adjectives; able to obtain specific information by asking relevant questions; mostly able to use past tense correctly; mostly clear pronunciation with some intonation to convey intended meaning.

11	Established	Good skills; able to obtain all or most information from notices and short texts; recognises familiar words and follow a short narrative; uses knowledge of simple and compound sentence structures to work out meaning.	Good skills; completed tasks at appropriate length; few errors, and these do not impede understanding; use of past tense and adjectives; no significant errors in functional language; correct use of punctuation.	Good skills; follows and responds to questioning, providing appropriate information and asking relevant questions; correctly uses adjectives, past tense, pronunciation and intonation; ability to express views clearly with appropriate vocabulary.
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## **CONFIDENCE, COMMUNICATION AND INTEGRATION WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

In addition to the assessment of their English skills, learners were also asked to complete a short eight-item survey before they started the course and again at the end. The survey asked about how often learners talked to people in English; their confidence using in English in different situations; and what they felt about community integration in their local area. Because courses were run online during the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey also included questions about learners' use of technology (phones, computers, tablets) to communicate with others, either in their first language or in English.

As with the assessments, learners' survey responses have been used to (a) provide a profile of the learners who took up the course and (b) measure learners' progress over the length of the course.

The eight measures have been grouped into:

### ***Frequency with which learners spoke English to other people:***

“Apart from your English class, how many people did you speak to last week using English” (with a score from ‘none’ to ‘11 or more’)

### ***Confidence using English with people in their local area:***

“How many times have you gone to the shops or market, either on your own, or without another person who speaks English, in the last week?” (with a score from ‘never’ to ‘every day’)

“How confident are you...” (with a four-point scale from ‘confident’ to ‘not at all confident’)

- “to book an appointment in English with a doctor, dentist or nurse?”
- “to talk in English to people at your child’s school?”
- “talking to people who don’t speak your language (more than just saying hello)?”

## **FEELING ABOUT INTEGRATION IN THEIR LOCAL AREA**

“To what extent do you agree or disagree that your local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?” (with a five-point scale from ‘definitely agree’ to ‘definitely disagree’)

## **USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

“How many times have you used technology (laptop, smartphone, tablet) to speak to others in your first language in the last week?”

“Apart from with your English class, how many times have you used technology (laptop, smartphone, tablet) to speak to others in English in the last week?”

Both use a scale from ... (with a scale from ‘never’ to ‘every day’).

## 2. List of participating Local Authorities

**Table A.1. Local authorities which received EFIF funding**

<b>Area</b>	<b>LA offered funding through the ESOL for Integration Fund</b>
Barking and Dagenham	Barking and Dagenham, London Borough Council
Barnet	Barnet, London Borough Council
Bedford	Bedford Borough Council
Birmingham	Birmingham City Council
Bolton	Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Brent	Brent, London Borough Council
Burnley	Burnley Borough Council
Coventry	Coventry City Council
Croydon	Croydon, London Borough Council
Derby	Derby City Council
Dudley	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Enfield	Enfield, London Borough Council
Harrow	Harrow, London Borough Council
Kirklees	Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council
Leicester	Leicester City Council
Luton	Luton Borough Council
Manchester	Manchester City Council
Newcastle Upon Tyne	Newcastle City Council
Newham	Newham, London Borough
Nottingham	Nottingham City Council
Oldham	Oldham Metropolitan Borough
Redbridge	Redbridge, London Borough Council
Rochdale	Rochdale Metropolitan Borough
Salford	Salford City Council
Slough	Slough Borough Council
Stoke-on-Trent	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Tower Hamlets	Tower Hamlets, London Borough Council
Wakefield	Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Westminster	Westminster City Council
Wolverhampton	City of Wolverhampton Council

## 3. Breakdown of case study interviews by area, Term 1 and Term 2 fieldwork

An overview of interviews conducted in Term 1 and Term 2 is shown in below. Due to challenges with recruitment and attendance relating to Covid-

19, Oldham were unable to run any courses in Term 2 and were replaced as a case study by Westminster.

**Table A.2. Term 1 case study fieldwork – number of interviews**

Area name	Programme lead	Delivery staff	Volunteers	Partners	Learners
Barnet	1	2	0	0	3
Bedford	6	5	2	0	5
Bolton	1	1	2	0	3
Croydon	1	4	0	0	5
Derby	3	3	1	0	1
Kirklees	4	2	4	0	7
Manchester	1	2	0	0	5
Newcastle	2	6	3	1	3
Oldham	1	2	0	0	3
Redbridge	1	3	3	0	3
Salford	2	4	1	3	3
Wolverhampton	3	7	1	1	2
<b>TOTAL: 132</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>43</b>

**Table A.3. Term 2 case study fieldwork – number of interviews**

Area name	Programme lead	Delivery staff	Volunteers	Partners	New learners	Term 1 learners
Barnet	1	2	0	0	1	3
Bedford	2	4	0	0	4	1
Bolton	1	0	0	0	5	2
Croydon	1	0	0	0	0	0
Derby	1	5	0	0	2	0
Kirklees	2	2	1	0	12	1
Manchester	1	2	1	0	5	2
Newcastle	2	2	4	2	3	0
Redbridge	1	3	1	1	3	1
Salford	1	2	1	0	0	4
Westminster	2	2	2	0	4	0
Wolverhampton	1	5	1	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL: 112</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>14</b>