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# Migrants in low-paid low-skilled work in London:

research into barriers and solutions to learning  
English

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MAYOR OF LONDON

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# Introduction and method

### Introduction

English language ability is central to individuals' ability to find a job and progress in work in the UK. Many migrants in low paid work, however, do not access formal English language learning provision. In 2013 the Greater London Authority (the GLA), working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, the Skills Funding Agency and the Association of Colleges to improve the English language training offer for jobseekers, commissioned a small piece of primary research to investigate the English language learning experiences of migrants in low paid work in London and to use the information generated by this work to inform and shape the potential future commissioning of English Language provision aimed at low paid, low-skilled migrants in London. In 2013 the GLA commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies in partnership with Alexander Braddell Associates, Workbase Training Ltd and GHARWEG to undertake the research. The aim was to seek interviews with a range of migrants with no or low levels of English from a range of countries who were employed across some of the lower-paid sectors in London.

#### *Barriers to accessing learning*

Occupations and sectors that employ people with low or no language skills tend to offer little scope for skills development. Even where employers are willing in principle to fund training for employees, language learning is often not included in a company's 'learning offer' – despite the indirect costs for employers associated with poor language skills.<sup>1</sup>

The GLA has suggested that other barriers may also play a part in making language learning inaccessible, for example digital exclusion, meeting the demands of two or more jobs and family or other caring responsibilities, and noted that these are not fully understood at present. There are linkages between these issues of course: previous work has indicated that those with poor literacy skills can struggle to use online materials unaided, even were they able to gain access to a terminal or laptop.

The GLA has also pointed to the barriers created through the removal of funding for language learning.

*In broad terms, the funding changes have created a reduction in the supply of Skills Funding Agency-funded ESOL provision, which has had varying impacts on different groups of potential learners.*

*The main groups affected by recent funding changes are:*

- *Those in low-paid work;*
- *People with low-level English language and literacy skills;*
- *Women – especially those with childcare responsibilities. Women make up a high proportion of those in ESOL provision according to the ESOL Equality Impact Assessment, July 2011.*

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<sup>1</sup>Newton B, Miller L, Bates P, Page R, Akroyd K (2006), *Learning through Work: Literacy, language, numeracy and IT skills development in low-paid, low-skilled workplaces: Literature Review*. IES Report no. 433.

Newton B, Miller L, Braddell A, (2006), *Learning through Work: Literacy, language, numeracy and IT skills development in low-paid, low-skilled workplaces: Audit of Learning*. IES Report no. 434

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*The removal of Skills Funding Agency-funded ESOL in the workplace has resulted in a decrease in the availability of language learning opportunities for employees. ... This has had most impact on those in low-paid work.<sup>2</sup>*

#### *Support for language learning outside of formal provision*

The GLA had already started to think about how migrants can best be supported to improve their English language skills outside of formal ESOL provision. Three approaches have been identified, including one that brings statutory services in a locality together to provide ESOL learning opportunities; another based on online learning and a third that uses volunteer language coaches<sup>3</sup>.

Clearly online learning demands both skills and access to ICT, neither of which can necessarily be assumed. Regarding the other two approaches, both look to the broader community and in effect represent an extension of the responsibility for migrants' language learning beyond the ESOL provider. In this respect they have much in common with recent work in Sweden that has enlisted employers, providers of goods and services and native-speaker citizens in a language learning approach for migrants based on everyday interactions.<sup>4</sup> This concept of shared responsibility for language acquisition and social integration is consistent with the Mayor's vision:

*The process [of integration] may continue for a long time after arrival, and must be a two-way process, built on positive engagement by both refugees and migrants and settled communities.<sup>5</sup>*

Work is obviously a key arena for language learning. As noted above, the low-paid workplace presents particular challenges, but over the last decade or so the workplace basic skills movement has developed a range of responses to help overcome these challenges. Some of the approaches have clear relevance for language learning. One such approach is on-the-job learning, using activities arising from task and role<sup>6</sup>; another is based on providing peer support for learning hosted, but not organised, through the employer<sup>7</sup>. Much of the learning provided through unionlearn initiatives is onsite (ie, in work premises). Even where learning is provided outside of working hours, learners pointed to the relative ease of accessing training on work premises, compared to external provision:

*It's very handy, very convenient, it's straight after you finish work, have a cup of tea and then start.*

*Interviewee, Miller et al, final report to BIS 2013*

<sup>2</sup> NIACE, (2012), *English Language for All* London: GLA; see page 9

<sup>3</sup> NIACE (2012) *English Language for All*, London: GLA; see pages 12 - 20

<sup>4</sup> Brendon Clark, Karl Lindemalm (eds) (2011) *Språkskap – Swedish as a Social Language*. Sweden: Ergonomidesign, Folkuniversitetet and Interactive Institute. pp 63-64 [www.tii.se/projects/sprakskap](http://www.tii.se/projects/sprakskap) Also Project ArbetSam <http://www.lidingo.se/toppmeny/omsorgstod/projektarbetsam/arbetsaminenglish.4.1df940d7136538bffd421.html> NIACE for GLA, (2012) *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> GLA, (2011), *London Enriched: The Mayor's Refugee and Migrant Integration Strategy Year 2 Implementation Plan*. London, GLA. p5

<sup>6</sup> Newton et al, (2006), *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, L, Stuart, M, Higgins, T, Cutter, J, Cook, H *Evaluation of the Union Learning Fund: learners, workplace cases and extension to the non-union sector* (final report submitted to BIS 2013, awaiting publication date)

Other developments relevant to the planned research include the London City Strategy Pathfinder English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Pilot funded by the DWP. Located within the London City Strategy Pathfinder areas of East and Southeast London and West London, the pilot aimed to address barriers to employment by the provision of ESOL. While participants expressed satisfaction with their experience of the ESOL Pilot, they suggested provision would be improved by longer courses; more opportunities to *practise* their spoken English; and a *clearer division* of the classes according to language ability and level<sup>8</sup>.

Finally, labour market mobility has made linguistic integration a concern throughout Europe<sup>9</sup> with a number of projects<sup>10</sup> exploring ways to support migrants to learn the majority language and an international team<sup>11</sup> seeking to establish a European learning network to support researchers, learning providers, employers, trade unions and policy-makers in supporting formal, non-formal and informal learning of the majority language by migrants and ethnic minorities for work<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, in addition to understanding the barriers to learning and the ways in which poor language skills can impact on both individual attainment and workplace and profitability, the team was also interested in exploring the enablers that help encourage employees to engage with, remain in and progress in learning.

The research was commissioned to examine the enablers and barriers that impact on English language learning among migrants in low paid and low skilled employment in London. A further aim was to establish the types of delivery of English language that are most likely to work for migrants in low paid and low skilled employment.

This above sets out the background to commissioning of the research and the research aims. In the next sections we provide an overview of the research method.

## Method

The research consisted of one-to-one interviews conducted with migrants during March to May 2013. We are indebted to a range of individuals and organisations that helped us make contact with and recruit the interviewees:

- our research partners Workbase and GHARWEG;
- the Latin American Women's Rights Service;
- the Migrants Resource Centre;
- UNITE the Union;
- Praxis Community Projects;
- Jewish Care;
- Innovation Environmental Ltd;

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<sup>8</sup>Bellis, A, Sigala, M and Oakley, J (2011) Evaluation of the London City Strategy ESOL Pilot: final report. DWP Research Report 744. Available at <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2011-2012/rrep744.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/LINGUISTIC/liam/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/LINGUISTIC/liam/default_en.asp)

<sup>10</sup> Cf *Meet the Need project. Vocational Teaching Material Supporting the Integration of Migrants into the Labour Market.* <http://www.meet-the-need-project.eu/>

<sup>11</sup>Including Alexander Braddell, a member of the research team.

<sup>12</sup><http://www.ecml.at/I2/tabid/891/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

- unionlearn;
- Unison;
- Yarrow Housing; and
- Romec.

In particular we are indebted to Donna Anderson, Fabricio Cappello, Tom Cleverley, Carlos Cruz, Caroline Gottardo, Frances Graham, Lucila Granada, Kerry Hunn, Kirsi Kekki, Emma Lipscombe, Laura Marziale, Dharmi Mehta, Margaret Ofori-Koree, Joycelyn Opong, Barbora Stepankova, Judith Swift and George White. In addition to interviewees recruited through the efforts of these organisations some interviewees were recruited directly through the researchers' own contacts.

Each individual was interviewed face to face by a member of the research team. Where individuals required interpretation services these were provided by volunteers from the collaborating organisations. The interviews were conducted using a discussion guide agreed with the GLA following piloting. Towards the end of the interviews individuals were asked their preferences on a range of issues including best place for language learning sessions to be held and preferred ways of learning language, as well as their motivations and personal needs for learning English. For these parts of the interview individuals were shown pictures of 'word clouds' and asked to indicate with a tick or cross which were their preferences.

### Sample

The GLA had specified that a suitable sample of migrants with no or low levels of English language who were in low skilled and paid work should be recruited to the research (the 'target learners'). The sample should be drawn from those in need of upskilling: where the migrant's English language level is a barrier to, amongst other things, increasing hours/pay, vocational training or applying for higher skilled or preferred jobs. The sample should include migrants in low paid/skilled work who:

- were not managing to learn English or improve their English
- had found ways of learning and/or improving their English, by formal or informal means.

Some 61 people were interviewed between March and May 2013: 38 females and 23 males. The age of the youngest was 17 (a female) and the oldest was 65 (a female). Individuals had been resident in England for between 3 months and 40 years and together originated from 30 countries. Just over two-thirds hope to live permanently in the UK with the remainder either unsure or planning to move to another country one day.

Interviewees worked in the following occupations:

#### Jobs by gender

Job	Male	Female	Total
Cleaner	13	18	31
Carer	1	9	10
Kitchen assistant	2	1	3



Admin	0	2	2
Bar tender	1	0	1
Builder	1	0	1
Education and employment advisor	1	0	1
Health and Wellbeing Project Worker	0	1	1
Housing administrator	1	0	1
HR assistant	0	1	1
Language tutor	0	1	1
Learning and Development coordinator	0	1	1
Nanny	0	1	1
Nursery nurse assistant	0	1	1
Outreach worker	1	0	1
Receptionist	0	1	1
Sales assistant	0	1	1
Shop assistant	1	0	1
Volunteer	1	0	1
Total	23	38	61

Just over half, 54 per cent, worked full time. Average pay was £7.89 an hour (median £6.50).

Interviewees reported a range of educational attainment in their countries of origin. Some had left school without qualifications while others had attained post-graduate and professional qualifications. In a number of instances, interviewees gave indication of limited literacy in English and in several cases there was reason to think interviewees' literacy might be limited in any language.

Regarding language competence, many interviewees reported speaking two or more languages in addition to English (including one interviewee who reported ability to communicate in 11 languages). Only one reported that they used English at home with their family.

Following each interview the researchers gauged each interviewee's spoken English language ability and assigned an estimate of language capability. These Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) estimates ranged from A1 to C2, with the majority falling between CEFR levels A1 and B1.

#### *Limitations of the work*

We recognise that the sample obtained is not representative – in population or statistical terms – of the migrants who work in London. Nonetheless we feel that it offers a useful view of authentic migrant experience.

# Findings

## The themes that emerged from the interviews

In this section we summarise the main points that emerged from the interviews and illustrate these with quotes from the interviewees.

### *On arrival in England*

Many had been supported by relatives or friends when they first came to the UK. The majority reported that they had needed a great deal of help when they first arrived in London (or other town, for those who had not come immediately to London). Many spoke of their fears at that time, their embarrassment at being unable to communicate and the frustration they felt:

*“I heard [i.e. understood what was said], but to speak I was frightened, because I am scared of if I am not right. Now, I think, a little bit better!”*

*“I was like little baby! I think it was hard for me, very hard – because, obviously, I was in a professional level in my country, having lots of opportunities and options and possibilities and then you come over here and then you can't do anything, you couldn't do anything, just sit down and wait for your friend to come to take you to whatever place you want to go.”*

While many did try to find language tuition in the early days, their limited English skills made it difficult for them to find information about language programmes. Some had spotted adverts either in newspapers in their own language, or in another language (or languages) in English magazines. However, often such adverts give only a telephone number and/or address (rather than an email address) and this can then cause difficulties for someone who wants to enquire about the courses – they may be reliant on other people to do this for them. Many had found courses through recommendations from their friends.

While most participants said that courses were useful and convenient, nonetheless this suggests that potential learners may not find the course that is best for their circumstances (ie in relation to where they live, hours worked, etc, rather than programme level or content). Some had used the internet to find programmes; while this is an easier process, it does not guarantee success: one interviewee said she had found ten programmes that were potentially convenient, but of these, only three were free or charged what (for her) was a reasonable price:

*“I checked colleges everywhere, they were all very expensive... maybe one thousand pounds or more.”*

Finding provision is challenging, even for those with access to the internet, and the provision that people do manage to find is often beyond their (limited) means. This could be a deciding factor in their thinking about what to prioritise:

*“We need the money to start in the school, right? And when we came here we don't have this kind of money to do that....I wasn't sure how to do things here so the first thing I thought was, 'Let me try to find a job first and then see how can I do.'”*

One woman had been told that she would be able to get into a college course for free as a benefit recipient, but as she wasn't a benefit recipient she would have had to pay £600 for a year for the course, which consisted of four hours of classes weekly during term time. As she could not afford this, she didn't go. Later she found a Saturday class which she managed to attend twice, but could not sustain due to childcare issues, as the class had no crèche.

A sizeable proportion had started out by learning at private language schools and this appears to be a common route to language learning for some types of migrant. Prices are variable and in some cases appear to offer quite good value, although the fees nonetheless were viewed as expensive by interviewees on low wages. So, for example, one had found a course at a private college that cost £500 for nine months training, three hours a day, Monday to Friday. Another had attended a series of private language schools in London for 15 hours a week (three hours a day) at a cost of about £1,000 per year for a period of about five years. As she was in the UK on a student visa she was required to study for at least 15 hours per week and had found it difficult to meet the requirements while working to support herself:

*"It was hard to juggle work and the lessons."*

In one case an interviewee had seen a notice for free classes and had taken a placement test. She was told by tutors that they would call her, but never received a call. This experience persuaded her that it would be better simply to pay for classes.

While noting the expense of some courses, nonetheless many are seen as being very good:

*"I went to [name of] College. It was an ESOL course. It cost £3,100 for 8 or 9 months. It was good because I joined the IELTS course and it helped a lot to improve my writing. I attained IELTS 6"*

Others, though, paid what (for them) were significant sums of money for courses they found unsatisfactory. For instance, one had paid £120 a month for four hours tuition a week, but this had not met his needs:

*"[The class was only quite useful because] when you go to a class and there's like 20 people trying to learn English, it's quite difficult to get the level because everyone has a different level - so, 'quite useful'."*

This issue, the difficulty of finding the type of provision that is appropriate for the individual's own needs (both initially and continuing, to aid progression and improvement), is a theme that runs throughout many of the interviews and across charitable, public and private language provision.

Those who had completed programmes were often uncertain of the level, even where they have gained a certificate. It was clear that some courses provide only certificates of attendance. While for many attainment of a certificate appeared not to be an important issue, those learners who were particularly keen to demonstrate their language skills to employers were more likely to express disappointment at this and perceive value in a certificate of attainment:

*“I need English and English qualifications, proof that I can speak English. There are fewer barriers and you can do anything if you have English.”*

*“The course is not certificated and I dream of getting a certificate!”*

#### *Informal, self-directed learning*

Most interviewees reported one or more informal learning strategies, such as watching English-language films and television programmes with the English subtitles switched on. Quite a few interviewees mentioned that they made a point of reading the free newspaper, *The Metro*. Others had more sophisticated strategies.

*“I built my own dictionary, all the 'a', 'b', 'c', you know - that's an excellent way to learn.”*

*“Language exchange is very useful. That is the one I recommend to all my friends. It's a very good way not only to learn the language, [but] to get friends. 'Cause with friends you get invited to activities, you know what is going around – it's social integration. From the books sometimes, it's not real language. When you talk to people, it's real language. Also Livemocha<sup>13</sup>. Livemocha is like a website where you can also join in and do an exchange with anyone in the world. You just join them and you connect with people who are online and do an exchange. It's very good!”*

By contrast, other interviewees reported little or no informal self-directed learning. In some instances there appeared to be a correlation between the interviewee's level of educational attainment and the sophistication of their self-directed learning strategies: those reporting higher levels of educational attainment reported more strategies.

Several interviewees reported volunteering with a view to both to learning more English and to breaking out of their own personal low skills equilibrium.

*“I decided another way to learn English is [by] putting me on the front spot. So I am supporting my local neighbourhood, on the neighbourhood residents' association, and also the housing association. So I attend meetings on a regular basis and have to present.”*

In addition to such local volunteering, interviewees reported volunteering for organisations that operated in fields where the interviewee wished eventually to secure paid work. This sort of volunteering helped expose the interviewee to vocationally-relevant language and communicative practices.

In general, successful strategies appeared to combine the creation of opportunities for authentic, non-familiar interaction with setting aside regular time for conscious attention to language forms. Interviewees who appeared to be making slow or no progress often described the inverse (i.e. lack of linguistically extending interaction and no conscious attention to language form).

<sup>13</sup> <http://livemocha.com/>

Finally, a number of interviewees described the language learning help they gave to other migrants.

*“When I was a security guard there was a group of Colombians working there as cleaners and I used to teach them [English], on Saturdays. It was very funny! My English was very poor, but I was keen to help them. Because they haven't got any language. My language was better. I told them, 'It's going to be very basic, but at least you will learn.' And I have done a lot of courses in English at the beginning so I was experienced in how to learn the language and I could give ideas to these students [in how to learn the language].”*

#### *Learning through work*

While it was the case that some of our interviewees did say that their employers were very helpful, and indeed some of our interviews were facilitated through employers who were providing access to ESOL, these were a minority. A majority of interviewees reported that work was where they spoke the most English and this included interviewees who characterised their jobs as narrow and said that they often spoke languages other than English with colleagues. While many interviewees said that working helped them to improve their English or at least practise their speaking and listening skills, many also felt that their job offered them little scope or support for expanding their English. This perception was common to interviewees with different levels of English (including some interviews who appeared to speak virtually no English) working in jobs that demanded a range of communication skills, from the minimal to the relatively extensive and varied.

Several of the interviewees worked with or for people who spoke their own language and have little interaction with English speakers. Thus we found groups of Spanish and Portuguese, or Latvian and Russian cleaners, who spoke their own language while at work. One said that she emailed and texted her colleagues about their work assignments in Portuguese, because they spoke so little English.

Where they worked in mixed groups then English was more likely to be the common tongue. Sometimes this led to colleagues helping each other with unfamiliar words but largely the impoverished nature of the work environment meant that communication around work tasks was minimal and routine. This was exemplified by a Latvian man working as a kitchen porter who said that as the work was so basic it did not need any real communication – mainly just pointing and naming. What communication there was tended to be of the ‘Put that there’ nature.

Many interviewees said that they received little or no systematic support at work to develop their English. They reported that individual colleagues and managers were frequently helpful on an ad hoc basis, but the extent of help was variable. Where managers were better at giving this form of informal support it was very much appreciated, but often the help given is limited and arbitrary and often consists only of explaining occasional words and phrases. Any help received is often dependent upon the personal good will of individual colleagues in response to individuals’ own requests for ad hoc support. One interviewee was in a white collar job but there no effort was being made to help her improve her English language skills:

*“This job keeps me at a level, but it doesn’t teach me anything more.”*

In contrast, though, one interviewee said that his employer had given staff a briefing on how to deal with angry service users and was interested in supporting communication issues. Another interviewee praised his manager for the support given to him to help him develop his communication skills:

*To, like, being next to me and, like, if I’m writing an email, about the deliveries, orders and stuff, just double-check that everything is written in a good way. Or when I’m speaking, trying to help me. That help is really useful. Very. It’s like a personal class.*

This interviewee went on to say that his employer had also given training in how to interact with customers and some written instructions to help employees learn. This too was viewed as helpful:

*I need to interact with the customers, 'cause I need to sell wines and food and coffee. They giving us some [instructional] papers to learn, to improve. That’s very useful.*

This does call for socially skilled behaviour in managers, to avoid making their employees feel bad about their language skills:

*“Sometimes I feel embarrassed about it, but they say, ‘Don’t worry, it’s fine. English is not your first language. Little mistakes will happen. It’s no problem.’ They have been very supportive.”*

Many of the interviewees indicated that English was not viewed as an issue by their employers and they could therefore ‘get away with’ low level English language skills. As the need to communicate is usually a prime motivation for continuing to learn, they lack this motivation; and because many of these jobs are so narrow and involve such minimal interaction it is difficult for them to progress without additional support.

Typically, interviewees wanted feedback to help them improve and new communicative challenges to help them extend their English. A significant number of interviewees in skilled as well as unskilled roles reported that they had exhausted the English language learning potential of their jobs, while at the same time expressing frustration at the lack of feedback on their English that they received at work. Many – and most of the more skilled workers – also identified work as a preferred location for English language learning.

There were two notable exceptions to this lack of (or superficial) support for learning in work: a residential care provider whose learning and development team had recognised that lack of written English was a problem and had arranged for ESOL literacy classes to be provided for staff; and a facilities and engineering-related services organisation that had worked with the trade union to provide ESOL provision on site.



At the care organisation the learning and development team had arranged for retired teachers to provide 1:1 classes to staff. The volunteers spent an hour a week working with the care assistants on their report-writing and on general confidence-building too.

*“The volunteer teacher is very helpful. She helping me to talk with everyday, every time. The teacher she guides me, ‘You should have to talk to with the people. Don’t shy. Don’t be shy. And you can improve.’ And it’s helping me a lot. She help me a lot.”*

In the past this employer had also organised a workplace class that consisted of a group of seven or eight learners undertaking two courses, each lasting a couple of months and which provided the learners with the opportunity of working towards a City and Guilds literacy qualification.

In the facilities and engineering-related services organisation ESOL classes had been arranged after a workplace need for the course was identified via employer-led meetings to discuss employment rights at which it had become clear that workers did not understand what was being discussed. The union [CWU] branch secretary and a Union Learning Representative had subsequently met with a company manager and agreed the course. The course is a Functional Skills English course running from Entry 1 to Level 2. It is being delivered by one of the London Further Education colleges and consists of 18 weekly two hr sessions (hence 36 Guided Learning Hours). The sessions run from 13.00-15.00, with one of the hours being counted as work time and one hour in the employee’s own time at the end of their shift.

In addition we interviewed attendees at a Saturday morning ESOL class. This had been organised by a trade union in response to the recognised need amongst their members. These free classes were viewed as very convenient and were seen as helping them to address language deficits that had in some cases been identified at their place of work.

The occasional nature of the class posed problems for some learners.

*“[The class] comes and goes. You don’t learn very much. When you come back, you already forget what you learned the last time.”*

Even if this learner felt her progress was limited, she still found the class beneficial.

*“It helps a lot. One thing, makes myself confident. And makes you standing for yourself, for your rights. I be able to say, ‘No!’ without feel frightened in case they are... sack me or something.”*

### *Moving on*

Many interviewees wanted to find work in other occupational areas. Only a few were not interested in moving on. Where this was the case, it was often because of caring responsibilities and their primary desire was for a job that allowed them the daytime free for these responsibilities.

Not all of the jobs they wanted to move into were likely to be better paid: for instance some spoke of wanting to get into security or taxi driving, or to move from a sales assistant to a sales rep.



Mostly people wanted to move jobs because they simply wanted a different type of work. Some would prefer work that provided more opportunities for social interaction and with better working hours and conditions.

In a few cases, people were in these casual jobs purely as a means to support themselves while they learnt English – in other words the job was intended only as a temporary measure. Two of these were individuals who had previously been government lawyers and who were now working in low-paid positions – one as a cleaner, one as a carer - in order to enable them to learn English and then to study Law at postgraduate level in England.

In some cases interviewees did have previous employment experience which they were unable to use in England because of problems demonstrating the equivalence of qualifications. Alternatively, where they have previous experience that could potentially be assessed and certificated, their English held them back, as in this example of a plumber working as a cleaner, who said:

*“Plumber, I know how to do it. I don’t have the qualifications here. I done here but for agency. For a month.”*

*“For the moment this work is best because I don’t have to communicate a lot, but bit by bit I will learn how to. When I can communicate effectively I would like to be a mechanic. I have never worked as a mechanic, though, so I will have to do a course in mechanics.”*

Some of our interviewees held degrees and postgraduate awards gained in their home country or from another country they had lived in and were now working in low paid, insecure jobs. Irrespective of whether they were seeking a different or a better paying job, the majority of the interviewees recognised that in reality they would need better English before they could actively seek a new job.

*“Because I’m looking front [i.e. forward], I don’t want to stay in cleaning forever. I speak to manager last week about this. IT is my profession. My problem is language.”*

However, their low pay and in many cases their hours of work and domestic responsibilities made it difficult to attend courses:

*“It’s hard to fit family life with work and study, it’s difficult.”*

*“Busy, busy, busy!”*

This last comment came from a woman with two jobs – one in care, one in cleaning, in two different parts of London, and with child care responsibilities on top of this – and sums up one of the major barriers: time. One man described the lengths he went to in order to make sure he could fit in classes as well as two jobs while a woman described how hard it was to pay attention in class after starting work early in the morning:

*“I was working as a cleaner, working as a receptionist and doing the studies at the same time. I used to start six o'clock, from six to eight and then rush, have a breakfast on the train and then rush into the college and then go to another two hours working in the evening.”*

*“When I was working previously as a cleaner in Kensington I was working from 6.30-8.30 then going to classes at 9 and it was really difficult, sometimes at 10 I was sleeping in my class and it was hard because I had paid a lot of money for the course and could not take advantage.”*

Many migrants are simply so busy trying to earn enough money that they have little or no time to seek out learning opportunities or to attend them. A Polish man, who had searched unsuccessfully for English language programmes that he could afford when he came to London and was now working as a builder said:

*“Then I had time but no money; now I have money but no time”*

Another interviewee told us he had given up part-time study and part-time work due to the burden of travel-to-work time, and the cost of tuition. In addition he said:

*“Also, a lot of employers, they have a rota system. They don't allow you to study.”*

Similarly, an interviewee who was in a supervisory role pointed to the difficulties that could be caused if employers did not take people's language problems seriously:

*“I think some people they have really difficulties, specially reading and writing. And then it like affects us too, 'cause we have to manage them and then [the employer] doesn't do anything about it. Because I had to physically go here [employer's main office] and arrange for that lady to actually go and attend the English class.”*

Set against this, though, we also heard from one employee who worked for a large hotel and who said that if his employer knew he wanted time off for study purposes then he would arrange the roster to allow him time off when he needed it.

The question of whether improved English skills would lead to better work opportunities, whether in their current field of work, a prior occupation or in some new area of work is a particular interest for the GLA, as their focus is on maximising economic growth within London (and skill use is a key contributor to economic prosperity). As we noted earlier, many of our interviewees were indeed hoping to move into other types of work. They were also keenly aware that the limitations in their language skills limited their ability to seek new employment.

However, we recognise that, except where interviewees seek a more responsible role in the same organisation, such considerations are not necessarily of key interest to employers. It is therefore of interest to note that those individuals who were happy in their current work and planning to stay, and – importantly – were receiving language training – also reported real benefits in their current job. For example, one care assistant who intended to stay in her job said that, as a result of the

English language training she was receiving, she now felt better able to cope with report writing, more confident about interaction with other people and with communicating both in and outside of work.

#### *Further study and progression*

Although most of the interviewees who had taken some type of initial language programme felt that the courses they had found had mostly met their needs, in many cases they had not continued past an initial basic course. The majority of interviewees who were not currently attending classes said that they would be interested in taking further English language classes in the future, but a range of factors militated against their participation at present.

Timing and location was an issue. Many of the cleaners' jobs involved unsocial hours and part-time hours; several therefore had more than one job – one in the morning and one in the evening and often at quite a distance from each other. These individuals therefore also spent a considerable of time in travel. For many, fitting in the classes had been a struggle and it is unsurprising that several referred to being too tired to study after work or to being tired during their classes:

*“By the time I go home, I am tired and I don't feel like do anything else.”*

We were told of one free ESOL programme that had run for a while at a school, so that mothers whose children were at the school could attend after dropping off their children.

*“Classes in speaking English were put on at St Stephens school for mums whose children were in the school. It was 4 hours a week, and free. It was a very nice school, in Vauxhall.”*

#### *Different needs*

It should not be assumed that all learners had the same needs. Some wanted just to be able to communicate better. Pronunciation and idiomatic speech was a concern for many. However, some were keen to improve their reading and writing. There were sometimes differences in the levels of attainment within a class and even amongst groups of ostensibly equivalent level learners there were differences that had implications for what different people were seeking from the classes:

*If you have a class that's all different levels it's very difficult learning. Some of the people were at different levels and it became very difficult to progress. For example, the African students had no problems with spoken English but wanted help with reading and writing, whereas I wanted help speaking and listening.*

Once people attained a reasonable level of English their needs could become more finely differentiated:

*“Sometimes I feel very embarrassed when someone ask me how to write something.”*

*"I was thinking to do another one [i.e. course] of pronunciation. Because sometimes people don't understand some words I say and that is quite annoying so I want to be able to pronounce the word properly."*

We noted earlier that many were afraid to speak out of concern for their poor language and pronunciation. Even for some of the more proficient speakers of English this remained a concern:

*"I don't really like speaking in public. Speaking in Czech in public I wouldn't mind, but in English I'm still quite conscious of my accent so I don't really seek opportunity [to speak publicly]"*

She said that only a few of her colleagues spoke 'educated English' and so there was a lack of models for spoken English available to her in her workplace, to help her improve her pronunciation. This appeared to be holding this individual back from applying for the sorts of work in which she was interested. Another interviewee reflected on the fears that she had felt when she first came to the UK but had the following advice:

*"Casting my mind back how I came in to the country, even the [high] level of English that I had, the first thing was fear. You are afraid to interact, because you don't know what you will say wrong. So I wasn't saying much, because I thought I wouldn't be right. So that fear - we need encouragement. We need to know that if we don't interact we wouldn't know the help we need. So you have to interact. Don't be afraid what you're saying is wrong. Say it anyway so that you will be corrected. And sometimes what you say may be correct, even though you think it is not."*

Some of the (comparatively) older people voiced preferences for older approaches to learning. They felt they learnt better using rote methods such as copying and saying, but modern teachers did not use these methods.

Many of the learners said that one of the main things they particularly valued from either scheduled classes or someone taking a personal interest in them was that this helped them remain motivated. One said that she found it hard to find the motivation and dedication she needs to learn. With busy lives it could be difficult to study independently. One said that he had books that he had bought meaning to use them to help improve his English, but he rarely looked at them:

*"I never open them [English learning books]. Time to time I do a few exercises. I'm not very systematic at it. Because in the grammar book, to improve - sometimes I do it for one week then I stop. I prefer to go a course so I know that I have two hours a week and I will learn English there. At home there is always something different to do."*

### *Use of IT*

The great majority (nine out of ten) of the interviewees had access to and made frequent use of the internet. It was really just a few, mainly older, people who did not. Most had a personal computer and those who did not typically said that they had a friend with a laptop and could use this. Almost all had a mobile phone; many (more than six out of ten) had smartphones. Just under half

of interviewees reported being able to use their personal phone at work, the other half that use was prohibited.

One Latvian interviewee used her smart phone while travelling to her cleaning job on the bus to look at learning materials that she had found online – she had found useful materials on YouTube - or had made herself, by photographing materials:

*“YouTube is very good because it has these sorts of presentations. I have also taken photos of children’s [English language] books on my phone, so that I can study those too when I like, special for me!”*

Many were using email, Skype, Facebook, shopping online, reading the news. Despite the ubiquitous use of technology, in many cases using it to find language courses or to translate words and phrases, nonetheless most people felt it was much better to have access to a tutor of some kind:

*“If I have time if I find a word that I don’t understand and I look it online and now with my smartphone is easier so I get meaning of a lot of things that before it was impossible look in a dictionary for things like that. But as well I think you need the traditional tutor with a grammar book.”*

As this interviewee indicates, online resources are useful but have their limitations. People particularly referred to the use of Google Translate and online dictionaries. One interviewee had no family or friends to help her, so she had used Google Translate to prepare for going shopping – but then had tried to avoid having to speak to anyone while in the shop. One person said that she liked online shopping because it enabled her to pick up new words and use of the online dictionary helped her to expand her English vocabulary. Several – primarily the Spanish, Latvian and Russian interviewees – mentioned the use of online English courses. Many reported using Google Translate and similar software to look up words. It should be noted however that some interviewees – again, mainly older interviewees – avoided the use of online resources due to their general lack of confidence with the technology. One interviewee said that he was unaware that there were opportunities to study English on-line for free.

#### *Interviewees’ motivations and preferences*

Towards the end of the interview individuals were asked their preferences for learning and their main motivations. Interviewees were shown ‘cloud lists’ (see appendices X to Y) which gave options for type of learning, preferred activities, motivation for learning and preferred location of learning activities. Interviewees were also encouraged to suggest any items that were not on the list. There was no limit to the number of choices they could make in response to each of these questions.

In the following sections we report the findings from this part of the work. We are mindful that the people we interviewed cannot be viewed as representative of the migrant population as a whole. We simply present these data as overall summaries of the motivations and preferences of the group of migrants we interviewed.

### Type of learning

Interviewees were asked to identify the main sorts of help with language learning they would appreciate. In order of frequency of choice, the top six items were: (1) 'Helping me to practice speaking English' and 'Correcting my mistakes' (43 people chose each of these); (3) Helping me with pronunciation (41); (4) Helping me with reading and writing English (40); (5) Teaching me new words and expressions (38); (6) Encouraging me and taking an interest in my learning to keep me motivated (34).

### Motivation

Interviewees were asked their main motivations for learning or improving their English language. The three reasons that were most frequently chosen were: (1) To help me move into another type of work (where English is more important) (27 people chose this); (2) So I can get into/do more education or training (26); (3) To help in my day to day work (23); (4) To make socialising easier (English friends, movies, TV) (21).

### Preferred activities

Migrants were shown examples of activities that could be used to help with English language learning and asked to choose their preferred types of activity. There were two main preferences, although there was a wider spread of responses on this question: (1) Taught sessions with a tutor or coach (12); and (2) Practising English conversation (11).

### Preferred location for learning

Interviewees were asked 'If you could choose where you could have some sort of English language sessions, what do you think would be a really convenient location to learn English?'. They were shown a list of options and could choose as many as they liked. They could also make their own suggestions. The most popular location was 'at or near the workplace' (half of the interviewees chose this), closely followed by College/Adult Education Centre/Training Centre (just under half the interviewees chose this, although it should be noted that women were more than twice as likely than men to choose this). The same number of people (20) chose 'At home' and 'at a community centre' while 18 thought that the local library would be a good place to have lessons. Eleven women, but only one man, thought it would be convenient to have classes 'at or near children's school/playground/childcare place'.

### People who could help migrants with language learning

Interviewees were asked to identify the people who were best-placed to help them with language learning. Again, people could choose as many options as they thought appropriate. The great majority (45) said that a teacher or tutor was the best person to help them learn English and a third (20) said a supervisor/manager at work would be a good person to help them to learn. A third also said that friends at work would be helpful and just slightly fewer (19) said that someone who wanted to learn their language would be helpful (ie, a language exchange arrangement in which each person learns the other's language).

### Accessing support more widely

Before moving on to consider the implications of this work it is perhaps worth noting the challenges that confront migrants in finding out about sources of help more widely, not just in terms of finding English language provision. In this final extract, an interviewee pointed to the difficulties that migrants are likely to encounter in finding out about sources of help and any entitlement and the lack of signposting to sources of help:

*“For me is like when you came in the UK you don't know about the councils [i.e. local authorities] and the NGOs [i.e. third sector organisations] and those types of organisation, they will help you a lot. And I found a lot of help from them, from Tower Hamlets Council and from Praxis, or from Crisis or whatever. But that's gonna give you a lot of help and most of the time it's completely free - which is the best. So, for me it's, if you came into the UK, everyone need to know: the council and the NGOs and stuff, they're going to help you - with your English or to find a job or other things.”*

# Summary, discussion and possible solutions



### Summary of points

By and large, interviewees state that improving their English is a priority for them. Most reported having undertaken some formal ESOL or EFL learning during their time in London (or elsewhere in the UK), often when they first arrived in the UK. Most report the intention of undertaking classes in the future.

A key barrier is a lack of any centralised resource that points migrants to language learning opportunities or indeed to any entitlement they might have. Access to information is fragmented, and which learning opportunities are found depends not just on the geographical area in which the individual is searching but also the route through which the individual seeks information. It would appear that only a minority of learning providers publish advertisements in foreign languages and – perhaps even more critically – in non-English publications. That said, it was evident that the majority of our interviewees did read the *Metro* and the *Evening Standard* and these could be better exploited by providers. Where organisations are found through Google searches (as appears to be increasingly the case) often there is no option other than to phone for details – not easy for someone with limited English skills. Across the spectrum of interviewees a common complaint was that the course did not provide the particular focus they wanted – irrespective of whether that be pronunciation, grammar, idiomatic expression – and this had clearly not been evident at the point at which they signed up.

Those who were not currently undertaking structured learning largely attributed this to lack of time, lack of money – or both – and/or being too tired. It would appear that most, having attained a level of English that allows them to function, find it difficult to prioritise language learning over the other demands on their time and resources. In this sense, motivation to attend classes is an issue.

This was true of groups at either end of the spectrum of English language competence, as well as those between. Thus a proportion of interviewees, despite having been resident in the UK for many years, presented essentially as non-English speakers reliant on other people from their own language community to enable them to communicate. They are clearly able to function (hold down one or more jobs etc) in this way but the insularity serves to reduce their opportunities to learn English informally.

By contrast, other interviewees, typically with high levels of educational attainment in their country of origin, had managed to develop their English to a level adequate to allow them to secure skilled work. They too, however, reported that it was hard to make time to attend formal classes.

Many interviewees – including those who report dissatisfaction with the narrowness of their jobs – said that nonetheless their job provides them with greatest exposure to English, even when many of their colleagues are from overseas (this may reflect the fact that most interviewees report using a language other than English at home). Almost all interviewees, whatever their degree of English, cite confidence in their ability to communicate in English as a limiting factor in their ability to perform at work (or seek the work they desire) and in activities outside work. A lack of

guidance and personal feedback limits interviewees' ability to benefit from the language development opportunities of work and participation in activities outside work.

The majority of interviewees have access to ICT outside work and are internet-savvy, reporting use of social media (e.g. Facebook), Skype, YouTube, shopping, and downloading applications. Interviewees in higher skilled roles tend also to have access to ICT at work. This is not the case however, for those in jobs such as cleaning and kitchen work. Regarding the use of personal mobile phones, in some jobs (including residential care work and some cleaning jobs) this is discouraged while in others (including domiciliary care and remote cleaning work) it is required (for communication between worker and manager).

### **Learning preferences**

Regarding learning, the overwhelming majority of interviewees expressed a preference for structured learning in a group, led by someone who could offer constructive feedback and help them extend their communicative range. For many, pronunciation was a particular concern but several also wanted to improve their reading and writing skills. Vocabulary and grammar were often mentioned. Work was consistently identified as a convenient location – if protected time for learning could be secured. Many interviewees noted the importance of being mentally fresh when they studied and expressed a preference for day-time learning. One issue on which many of the interviewees agreed was that it was important to have someone (preferably with English language learning expertise) take a personal interest in their learning. A significant number of interviewees identified their manager and/or work colleagues as suitable people to help them improve their English (often based on positive experience of receiving ad hoc help from such sources).

Interviewees wanted structured learning tailored to their level and particular concerns (e.g. pronunciation, formal written English, idiomatic expressions etc.) with personal feedback and some degree of expert guidance. The majority want to belong to a community of learners. They see this as valuable not only in terms of motivation and encouragement, but also for making social contacts. In addition, many want exposure to new areas of authentic communication in order to extend their range of English.

Despite having access to internet and being web-savvy, very few interviewees are making use of the great range of free, high quality English language learning that is available online. (Considerable use is made of Google dictionary functions, however, as an instant reference tool.) Many interviewees said they were unaware of online learning resources. There was also some evidence that learners were not taking advantage of online learning for the same reason as they were not studying the teach-yourself-English books that many reported having bought – too many other demands on their time.

Based on this, it appears that interviewees need some sort of structure to lend coherence, purpose and a sense progression to any self-directed learning, without which persistence becomes an issue. For many interviewees, learning incorporated into work would be ideal. For a minority of our interviewees, gaining evidence of attainment (through attainment of certificates/qualifications) is an additional concern.

## Discussion

Research into how adults acquire a foreign language suggests that a number of factors are important for successful learning, including motivation (and persistence), opportunity for authentic communication (in relatively safe and supportive contexts), and opportunity (and often support) to notice language forms.

Issues related to these factors were raised many times by our interviewees. Despite reporting positive prior experiences of formal ESOL, virtually none were currently in provision. Just a few, more highly educated individuals were in private provision. The majority of those who were attending classes were doing so through their employer or their trade union and those classes were free. Although the majority of our interviewees said they would like to return to classes at some point in the future, there was little to suggest that any were likely to return to FE or even EFL provision anytime soon. If these migrants are to be supported to improve their English, that support must be available to them in their daily lives. In addition, the progress of individual is affected by factors related to culture and personal identity, as well as aptitude, with some individuals appearing to have a greater facility for language learning than others.

**An important first point to note**, then, is that given the range of backgrounds, life circumstances and approaches and objectives around English language learning uncovered in this small sample, it seems clear that **any system of learning support must accommodate this diversity**.

**Secondly, it should also make use of what already exists**. It is clear from our research that extensive and diverse support networks already exist. To gain full value from them, however, a coherent structure is needed and a sense of leadership would be helpful. For example, a central access and dispersal site would help migrants orient themselves and identify the most relevant types of support available to them, including linking up migrants with people who are interested in helping migrants with language issues.

**Third, we note that some employers do make systematic efforts to support their employees** in improving their English and in learning more widely. In suggesting that there is scope for more employer support we would not want to minimise the efforts some employers and the many managers and employees are already making to support migrant staff improve their English. We have sought only to identify ways in which employers who want to support their employees might be able to do more. We also note that there are likely to be significant differences in both the motivation and the capacity of larger and smaller companies to offer such support. For a larger company, supporting English language learning might be viewed as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility policy, but a smaller company, operating within narrower parameters, might legitimately question what they can afford in terms of support for language learning, particularly for jobs such as cleaning where communicative demands related to work tasks are limited (although even there, we would suggest that the communicative demands related to role remain significant, including those related to health and safety and employment rights and responsibilities.)

We certainly would not want to be seen as recommending initiatives that would add to the costs of smaller companies. However, we also note that those employers who do adopt a positive approach to language learning may come to find such an approach as being of benefit not just to the individual but the rest of the team as well – and hence, ultimately, to the employer. There are other reasons too why employers might want to consider supporting English language learning: for instance, the Hilton group offers support to its employees and finds that doing so helps them attract a better type of employee as this is seen as adding value to the job offer. In one of our interview sites the employer had provided language training in order to improve the quality of reporting in the organisation.

We also recognise that unions engaged in learning activities do much to help with language learning. In one of the sites we visited during the interviews, the employer and union had identified language learning needs amongst the workforce (related to issues around employment status) and put in place a learning programme, supported by a union learning representative (ULR). One union had set up its own language training provision as a service to its members. We have noted in other recent work the value of ULRs in engaging with learners with basic skill deficits and believe that employers and unions working together to support language learning is an extremely valuable approach. Recent work funded through the Union Learning Fund has seen unions encouraged to extend support to non-unionised workplaces and to locations such as housing associations and temples. This suggests further routes through which language learning can be supported in future.

Irrespective of whether workplace learning is led by the employer, the union or both, it is clear that those in front line management roles have a crucial part to play. Ideally, then, attention should be paid to the development of support for people in front line supervisory/management positions to help them understand how to support people with little English to learn. This might include guidance on what is helpful and what is counterproductive along with work around wider employment issues such as language development activities and materials that can be pinned onto everyday tasks and roles, such as dialogue with a supervisor, health and safety issues, report writing, reading wage slips etc.

### Work in Scandinavia

Two recent projects in Sweden suggest possible approaches. The Språkskap project (2009-10)<sup>14</sup> aimed to support Swedish language learning outside of the classroom by maximising the learning potential for migrants in everyday interactions with Swedish speakers. To this end it developed guidance and tools for migrants on language learning; for Swedish speakers on how to support migrants acquire Swedish in everyday interactions; for learning providers on how to support second language migrants learn outside the classroom; and for private and public service providers on how to create opportunities for language learning by migrants.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf Brendon Clark, Karl Lindemalm (eds) (2011) *Språkskap – Swedish as a Social Language*. Sweden: Ergonomidesign, Folkuniversitetet and Interactive Institute. pp 63-64 [www.tii.se/projects/sprakskap](http://www.tii.se/projects/sprakskap)

The ArbetSam project (2011-2013)<sup>15</sup> has applied similar principles to workplace learning, specifically in the care sector where, as in London, a high proportion of workers are from overseas. In the ArbetSam approach, the employer is encouraged to take responsibility for the migrant worker's language skills in the same way as the employer would their vocational skills. Swedish-speaking staff are trained as peer 'language advocates' (i.e. informal language coaches), language learning is incorporated into employer training (with the support of local FE colleges) and migrant workers take part in regular reflective practice discussions to develop their ability to talk about their work in Swedish. Employers report that these discussions greatly enhance training in areas such as dignity and personalisation.

### Learning through Work approach

In response to the difficulties encountered in securing release for workers in low skilled roles to attend ESOL and Skills for Life learning, the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and others funded the Learning through Work project (2005-09)<sup>16</sup> to explore the potential for on-the-job basic skills learning, led by employers and facilitated by learning providers. This project found there was significant potential for guided learning materials, supported by coaching and mentoring, to support basic skills learning - even in narrow jobs with limited communicative demands.

Since then Skills for Care, responsible for the skills of the adult social care workforce, has developed and published a resource based on this approach: the *Learning through Work* guides<sup>17</sup>. This has proved popular with a range of care employers including employers based in London.

### Improving access to language learning

We now move on to set out our recommendations for how to improve access to English language learning opportunities in London. These suggestions are based on the interview findings, previous GLA reports and other relevant work, including current and recent projects the team members have been involved in.

### Scaffolding to support language learning

To complement and reinforce established ESOL provision, we suggest a coherent system of support for language learning outside of formal provision.

Such a support system could take in both workplace and community learning and would offer roles to a variety of partners including employers, learning providers, trade unions, community organisations and public sector bodies such as the BBC, as well as individual members of the community.

The system should aim to address the key issues facing these learners: motivation and persistence; access to opportunities for authentic communication in English; and constructive attention to language forms.

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<sup>15</sup><http://www.lidingo.se/toppmeny/omsorgstod/projektarbetsam/arbetsaminenglish.4.1df940d7136538bffd421.html>

<sup>16</sup> Cf Stuart, M, Winterton, J. (2009), *Learning through Work – Phase 2 Evaluation Report*. Leeds: Centre for Employment Relations Innovation & Change, Leeds University Business School; also Newton, B, Miller, L., Braddell, A (2006), *Learning through Work: Literacy, language, numeracy & IT skills development in low-paid, low-skilled workplaces: Audit of Learning*. Falmer: Institute for Employment Studies, Research Report No. 434.

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/publications/Learning\\_through\\_Work\\_guides.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/publications/Learning_through_Work_guides.aspx)



It should be highly visible to migrants, London-branded and stamped with official endorsement to lend it credibility and authority with employers as well as with learners. It should offer learners a comprehensive programme of blended learning opportunities, allowing for progression and recognition of achievement. To accommodate the diversity of its target learners, it should be multi-faceted and inclusive: open to all, with multiple points of entry.

#### Leadership, co-ordination and signposting

We believe this could be a low-cost, high-return system. There is reason to think that much of the expertise and many of the resources needed to construct and support the system are already available – but fragmented and scattered across a range of locations. We suggest therefore that that there is a need for leadership to establish and co-ordinate the system.

Aspects of the system might include some of the following:

- An overarching virtual learning community for London. This community might combine social networking, online learning (including self-assessment and progress tests, possibly leading to certification) with guidance and signposting to other resources, including learning, employment and the National Careers Service. FE colleges and private language schools might well see value in supporting such a project, as might employers. There might be scope for partnership with the BBC, which already features a section in the English Learning website on language for London<sup>18</sup>. At the least this should include a dedicated host website, with this website being widely publicised through the media we know that migrants use: the free newspapers, bilingual/foreign language newspapers; and adverts on public transport. This would require a small amount of research to identify existing sites and materials (for example, the British Council Nexus website, the BBC, etc) and to initiate links between relevant organisations.
- Development of an English language ‘passport’ to help learners track and evidence their language development – the European Language Passport<sup>19</sup> might serve for this, and could perhaps be badged by an appropriate organisation – or consortium - in London. It would also have the added value to businesses of identifying migrants’ skills in other languages.
- Guidance for individual migrants on language learning techniques and strategies. To help ensure relevant to diverse learners, this might include testimony from successful learners of varied backgrounds.
- Development of a self-directed learning syllabus. This would reinforce the learner-training described above by setting out a series of self-directed study goals with suggested links to online learning activities, volunteering opportunities, mentoring networks and so forth. To support motivation and persistence, rewards from participating retail outlets, attractions, service providers, recruitment agencies, colleges etc could be offered as hooks and incentives to encourage migrants to engage in and complete elements of the programme.
- Development of guidance to show:
  - employers how to support language development at work without expensive classes (through guided learning materials, coaching and mentoring, supervisory feedback, peer

<sup>18</sup> Welcome to London <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/multimedia/london/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about>

learning and support groups), possibly in conjunction with an employer ‘kitemark’ for those who demonstrate their commitment to supporting language learning

- migrant workers how to form self-facilitated study groups at work. Support could include linkage of such groups to an online learning / e-support scheme and to voluntary mentors; also guidance for both the study groups and their employers on how to create a self-directed learning programme of e.g. a 12 week set of one-hour weekly meetings.
- A drive to persuade more employers to sponsor workplace ESOL learning, making use of support from both union learning representatives and, in non-unionised workplaces, the Workplace Learning Advocates initiative<sup>20</sup>.
- Networking of individuals and organisations already committed to work in this field. For example there are some specialist training companies<sup>21</sup> who offer courses to organisations dealing with migrants to enable the organisations to communicate effectively to people who have limited English (this training has obvious relevance to many employers, and could also support the development of volunteer coach-mentors).
- A London-wide voluntary coaching and mentoring scheme, possibly making use of Skype, that enables migrants to benefit from personalised feedback and guidance (in its report to the GLA, NIACE noted the value of this approach). Many of the interviewees said that they would really like to be able to have English conversation and have their pronunciation corrected. However, they have little money and their working hours could make face to face meetings problematic. One possible way of facilitating such sessions would be to recruit volunteers who would be willing to have short conversations via Skype. These could either use the materials available through the BBC or funding might be sought to allow the development of simple support materials such as word lists for different occupations, events, visitor attractions, things to do with school, so that for example the volunteer and their learner could have a conversation using the new words, with feedback being given towards the end. The use of Skype would minimise the inconvenience of travelling to a meeting place and mean that the meetings could take place at almost any time. It is possible that employers with CSR schemes could support employees acting as tutors from their workdesks at specified times.
- Given our recommendation that the hosting website (and its provisions) be widely advertised, we suggest that a way to reduce the costs would be to make design of the publicity (posters for tubes, buses, newspapers etc) the subject of a competition to be offered to design students in London colleges.
- Regular language learning/support features in the free, mass circulation London newspapers.
- Links to volunteering schemes that include structured support for language development, perhaps facilitated by learning providers, offering migrants the opportunity to extend their English while contributing to the community, learning more about local culture and extending their social network. Again, employers as well as community organisations might see value in supporting this type of approach.
- A programme of social activities enriched by semi-structured language learning. Many of the interviewees were attracted to the suggestion (given in the ‘your preferences’ section of the discussion guide) of visits to events or attractions followed by a discussion based on the

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.workplacelearningadvocates.org.uk/>

<sup>21</sup> For example, see [www.chalmersbyrne.co.uk/](http://www.chalmersbyrne.co.uk/)

activity. Given the focus on volunteering at present, and the fact that many employers in London encourage volunteering amongst their workers as part of their CSR activity, it should not be either difficult or onerous to recruit an initial cohort of volunteers to lead walks to London landmarks and events and then host discussions afterwards. In subsequent years those in the walking groups could themselves become walk leaders as their language skills improve. A set of cards with words appropriate to each walk/event/visitor attraction could be developed and then given out ahead of the walk, so that the learners could understand the words when used in context and then use them in the facilitated conversations afterwards. It is not suggested that these sessions be very long – unless it is a visit to some kind of scheduled event - it is likely that people would be happy with, say, a half hour walk followed by one or two 15 minute conversations (ie, conversation with one or two other people in the group).

- Similarly, language learning sessions developed around other social activities – knitting, cooking or gardening activities or reading clubs.

#### *Capacity and choice*

Were we to suggest ways to increase awareness of existing provision this potentially could lead to a surge in demand that would exceed capacity. Similarly, formal and/or on-line provision does not suit everybody. We believe our proposals have the potential to enormously increase capacity through a range of routes: employer-led informal workplace learning, access to existing online learning, recruitment of volunteer mentors etc and importantly would increase individuals' awareness of the full range of options available to them.



