



Innovative practice case studies

ESOL – Maximus's external provision

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Maximus – external delivery in West Yorkshire

This case study sets out Maximus's experience setting up a bespoke ESOL offer for Restart participants in Bradford, an area with a high proportion of individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds. Initially, Maximus worked with a local college and then switched to partnering with an Institute for Adult Learning due to funding challenges experienced by the college.

They believe this has been a success, particularly because of the more intensive nature of the course meaning participants develop English skills quickly. Additionally, the curriculum content was designed to cover more employment-specific language.

The local context

Bradford local authority district has higher than average levels of economic inactivity and unemployment (28.6% and 4.8% respectively) than observed both regionally in Yorkshire and the Humber (24% and 3.3% respectively) and Great Britain (21.5% and 3.9% respectively)¹. Bradford also has a large proportion of residents from ethnic minority backgrounds (38.9%)². Notably, over a quarter of residents (28%) are from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds², two groups which often experience low employment rates³ and high labour market disadvantage.

Estimates from representatives at Maximus in Bradford suggested that at least one third of Restart participants required ESOL support before they could appropriately engage in employment support. Bradford Council attended Restart offices fortnightly to conduct ESOL assessments, screening up to 40 participants per day to support referrals into appropriate ESOL provision. However, the demand for ESOL support locally outweighs its availability, with waiting lists extending to over 300 people at some providers.

Further complicating the support landscape for Restart participants, local ESOL provision would typically last around 12 months. Because Restart is a 12-month programme, Maximus felt engaging participants in standard provision would not be appropriate. Therefore, Maximus partnered with a local college to design a bespoke, short-term support offer. Due to funding challenges experienced by the college, they subsequently switched to an Institute for Adult Learning (IAL).

¹ [NOMIS: Labour Market Profile – Bradford](#). Accessed September 22nd, 2025.

² [Census: Census maps – Ethnic group](#). Accessed September 22nd, 2025.

³ [Migration Observatory: Migrants in the UK labour market: an overview](#). Accessed September 22nd, 2025.

ESOL courses are 12 months, so we wouldn't really be able to progress participants into employment in 12 months if we referred them to a standard college... We needed something outside the box, so that's what we did

Maximus

Overview of the provision

Maximus initially collaborated with a college to design two ESOL courses lasting between six and nine weeks, each focused on increasing participants' comprehension of English for work. One was targeted at participants assessed at Entry Level and Level 1 comprehension, and the other for participants assessed at Level 2 and Level 3 comprehension.

Courses were designed specifically for Restart participants, therefore providers determined individual's ESOL levels using assessments already conducted by Bradford Council in Restart offices rather than using their own assessment tools. Feedback from the provider indicated that generally, comprehension at the outset of the courses was higher than anticipated.

"The aim of the course wasn't to teach them English, it was to prepare them for work. It was tailored around vocabulary used in a work environment – doing a CV, interview skills and that – to fast track them to be able to at least have a conversation with an employer"

Maximus

To better support learners with lower levels of English, the course targeting pre-Entry Level and Entry 1 were more intensive at five hours per day across four days each week for six weeks. Conversely, reflecting a higher level of comprehension, courses for those assessed at Entry 2 and Entry 3 were less intensive at five hours per day across two days each week for nine weeks.

Several measures were in place to encourage initial and sustained engagement in classes. For example, a maximum class size was set at 15 learners to ensure learner comfort, and that tutors were able to provide learners with adequate support. However, attendance was often closer to 10 to 12 participants in each lesson. Additionally, courses were delivered in a community venue rather than at the Restart site to offer a less formal environment for learners. Further, reflecting the target demographic of the courses – often individuals with caring responsibilities – classes were scheduled to fit around school timetables.

The venues were local to us, and to our participants, which made a massive difference. What we find is that people want provision on their doorstep otherwise they struggle to get to courses. Both colleges delivered at local, community venues.

Maximus

These design features were mirrored for delivery at the IAL, which began after completion of the first courses at the college.

Successes of the course

Several key successes were drawn from the courses by both Maximus and the education provider. Most importantly, stakeholders noted that the courses offered participants opportunities to engage in new social circles outside of their families and communities that they otherwise would not have crossed paths with. This contributed to general wellbeing outcomes and improved confidence. Additionally, English was often a common language in classes made up of learners from several ethnicities, providing another opportunity for language practice. This was further enhanced by mixed abilities within classes. For example, learners at Level 3 were able to provide support to learners assessed at Level 2, supporting peer learning.

They made a nice little social circle, so they've been able to make new friends and build their confidence. And it worked really well having the mixed groups. They bounced off of each other, so the higher levels supported the lower levels and it brought them together

Maximus

Improved confidence was not limited to confidence in using the English language. Learners were often introduced to a UK learning environment for the first time. For some, this provided an insight into the learning opportunities available to them and reduced their anxieties around entering new environments, including progressing to other ESOL courses.

Challenges

Stakeholders involved in the organisation of the courses identified several challenges and lessons to carry into future bespoke provision for participants of employability support programmes.

Firstly, shortly before the college began delivering the first courses, they experienced funding challenges and were required to extend the overall length of the course. As courses fell below the required number of guided learning hours for the type of provision, they increased the length of the course to 13 weeks. This caused some participants to disengage from the course before it started, or not complete the course. Consequently, Maximus chose not to continue delivering in partnership with the college, and instead engaged with the IAL to deliver the same courses.

We agreed a short intensive course with the college, but it was changed literally a few days before the course was due to start. They had an issue trying to fit the right number of guided learning hours into the short timeframe of the course, so they ended up extending it. It wasn't a huge issue, but some people did drop out.

Maximus

Staffing changes at the IAL during the inception and early stages of the course caused changes in communication between the IAL and Maximus. Consequently, attendance figures were not regularly shared with Maximus, and employment advisers were not able to target participants who were not engaging. Both Maximus and the provider described this as a priority for future courses to ensure courses were well attended.

Finally, stakeholders shared that while community learning environments support engagement for some learners, it was felt that the more informal environment caused some learners to separate the learning environment from their Restart support. This led to a perception that the support was optional and was attributed to lower than anticipated attendance. Moving forward, providers will deliver courses in their main campuses to encourage higher attendance.

Going forwards we'll deliver in a college. Taking it out of a community setting feels like robbing Peter to pay Paul, but it will help ensure classes are well attended and worthwhile for learners

Educational institution

Next steps

Following from the success of the courses, Maximus and the IAL have agreed to deliver another round of each course at the IAL. These will be delivered in the IAL's main site to facilitate a slightly more formal environment. It is felt that this will create a better connection between participants' Restart and ESOL support and encourage higher participation.

Additionally, Maximus locally were successful in their bid to receive Adult Skills Fund funding to deliver their own ESOL provision in-house. Work is underway to identify the target groups and content of these courses, however, it is anticipated that these will largely mirror the provision delivered in partnership with the IAL.