Supporting low-paid workers with an ESOL need to progress in work

Top tips for providers

About this guide

This document aims to help organisations working with low-paid workers who have an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) need. This includes ESOL providers or voluntary sector organisations of all sizes, working in all contexts to develop and deliver provision that effectively supports low-paid workers to progress in work.

It was developed by Learning and Work Institute (L&W) as part of work co-funded by the European Commission and the UK government.

This guide outlines top tips for how to:

★ Engage participants and conduct initial assessment

★ Form partnerships with employers (engagement and delivery)

★ Deliver ESOL for people in work

★ Deliver support to those with an ESOL need to progress in work

★ Evaluate provision and support model and capture impact

Links to useful resources

Are we all speaking the same language? (2018) Unionlearn   bit.ly/2N4FkWj

Progressing resettled refugees into employment: A guide for organisations supporting refugees (2019) Learning and Work Institute   bit.ly/2MEQFxf

Step Up: Trialling new approaches to support low-paid workers to progress in their careers (2018) Learning and Work Institute   bit.ly/2PaAPMs

Tapping Potential: Guidelines to Help British Businesses Employ Refugees (2019) UNHCR   bit.ly/33W9vpj
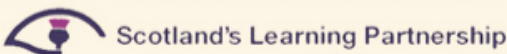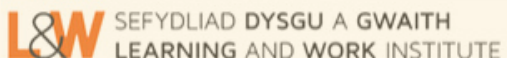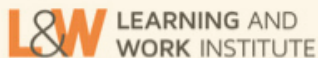
Engagement and initial assessment

Effective engagement and initial assessment is essential to ensure that the participants who access support can benefit from the opportunities and support that you offer and have the best chance of securing a good job, or progressing in work.

▶ **Community outreach**

Use volunteers who are existing participants or members of the community themselves to raise awareness of, and improve engagement with, your support offer. Having cultural and linguistic knowledge of the target community means volunteers are well placed to reach out to people in the community. Consider the cultural dynamics of the communities you work with and develop outreach approaches that are suitable. Word of mouth is often effective.

▶ **Multilingual support**

Promote your support offer in a range of languages and have multilingual points of contact or staff. Accessing support in their first language can be beneficial for individuals with low levels of English, or high or complex needs. A blended approach can be effective too – where participants are exposed to the majority of services in English, as well as having access to support in their first language.

▶ **Partnership working**

Develop links with other community and voluntary organisations in the local area whose participants might also benefit from the support you provide. For example, an employment support service that works primarily with refugees and asylum seekers could engage with new participants through refugee organisations and food banks.

▶ **Thorough one-to-one needs assessment**

Conduct a one-to-one needs assessment with each new participant. This enables you to discuss and record an individual's circumstances, needs, barriers and aspirations so that they can be matched with relevant support. Keep this as a 'live' document to be reviewed and updated to reflect changes in participant's circumstances.

Partnerships with employers

Working with employers is an effective way to reach and support people who are in work to progress in their current role or to begin working in a new job or sector.

Engagement

▶ **Promote the benefits of work-place provision**
Make a business case for the benefits of delivering workplace-based provision, for both the employer and their employees. Benefits for the employer include improved health and safety awareness and procedures, increased productivity, improved communication and better cohesion. For employees, training can mitigate chances of exploitation, isolation and vulnerability at work and boost employee confidence and self-esteem as well as awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Most significantly, it increases opportunities for employees to progress at work.

▶ **Promote the benefits of recruiting people with an ESOL need, refugees and migrants**
Change the narrative. Explain the value of hiring refugees, migrants and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. Employer benefits of creating a diverse workforce include fulfilling corporate social responsibility and improving company reputation, reduced employee turnover, faster decision-making and having a variety of perspectives. Having a team of employees that reflects the customer base can also be valuable, enabling better connecting with customers or generating a new customer base. It also benefits the local community.

▶ **Job matching**
Engage with employers in sectors that your participants can be matched with, based on their prior skills, qualifications and experience.

Partnerships with employers

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Delivery

▶ **ESOL in the workplace**
If possible, deliver ESOL provision on employers' premises. It helps reach adults in low-paid work, including those who have employment patterns that make it difficult for them to access college or community-based provision, and others whose work and other commitments (such as childcare responsibilities) make it a challenge to find time for study.

▶ **Share the responsibility**
Split the delivery of ESOL provision between the employees' and the employer's time. For example, running sessions split between employees' lunch-break and paid working hours.

▶ **Provide employer specific training**
Embed language provision in sector or employer specific training courses. This can be for individuals who already work, or for those who aspire to work in a different sector or company. For those moving into a new company, partner with an employer to provide training courses with an English language component and one-to-one support, and a guaranteed job interview from the employer upon completion of the course.

ESOL provision for the in-work cohort

Rather than taking a blanket approach to developing provision, designing ESOL provision that is suitable for and responds to the needs of this cohort is crucial. Thinking about content, format and flexibility of the provision will improve learners' engagement and progression.

▶ **Shorter course structures**

Provide shorter, flexible courses as they are more accessible for those with uncertain or temporary statuses and those with irregular work patterns. Shorter courses make it simpler to track the learning that has already been undertaken, and to know where a person might most appropriately re-join learning at a later stage.

▶ **Flexible provision**

Offer flexible English language provision (such as drop-in sessions). Those in work may not be able to commit to attending courses at a set time due to working hours.

▶ **Informal provision**

Provide informal provision – a relaxed environment can help develop social networks which refugees and recent migrants may be seeking. Use peer learning mentors to run a conversation class, either in the workplace or in the community.

▶ **Provision outside working hours**

If workplace-based learning is not feasible, make sure that your participants have opportunities to access ESOL provision and in-work progression support outside of working hours – for example, in the mornings, evenings and at weekends.

▶ **Blended provision**

Think about offering blended learning options. This can help to increase accessibility for people in work. However, some learners may not have the digital skills or devices to effectively engage with this provision so ensure that relevant support is available.

▶ **Vocational ESOL courses**

Provide courses which link ESOL with skills and trades which participants already possess (e.g. plumbing, construction or carpentry).

In-work progression support for people with an ESOL need

Ensuring that participants have access to suitable, high-quality support is vital to achieving outcomes such as higher earnings or improved job security. This approach also helps people develop soft outcomes such as higher confidence and motivation or better knowledge of the labour market.

▶ **A personalised approach**
Base your support on individual need rather than it being informed by a prescribed approach. Conduct a thorough needs assessment upon engagement to understand an individual's needs, experience and aspirations. Use this to create an individualised action plan which can help progression.

▶ **One-to-one support**
Provide individuals with regular one-to-one support from an adviser or case worker who can flex support to meet individual need. Ideally, this would be support from the same adviser each time to ensure consistency and accessibility. For participants with an ESOL need, conduct longer and more regular sessions than you might do for others and arrange face-to-face sessions to ensure effective communication.

▶ **Coaching and mentoring**
Work with peer mentors or volunteers to provide mentoring support which can develop motivation and confidence – two important factors that facilitate progression.

▶ **Wraparound support**
Ensure participants have access to holistic support which meets their employment needs and wider needs such as language, mental health, or financial.

▶ **Partnership working**
Develop links and work in partnership with training providers, specialist provision and intermediary organisations with links to employers.

Capturing impact

Evaluating your provision is about assessing the quality and value of what you are delivering. Robust evaluation will provide effective feedback on your support offer, as well as help determine whether the current offer is meeting participant's needs and whether there are any issues that need to be resolved. It therefore helps you continually improve your provision.

▶ **Make a plan**

To make sure your evaluation is of a high quality, you should develop a plan. This approach will ensure that evaluation processes are embedded in your support model and capture the information you need from the beginning. The plan should include the following questions:

- Why are you evaluating the provision?
- What you will be evaluating?
- How you will evaluate it?
- When you will evaluate it?

▶ **Gather management information**

To understand how effective your support model and provision are, you should consider gathering and analysing management information (MI). Ideally, MI should be collected from point of entry and capture the following:

- Referral route
- Benefit claimed at referral
- Housing status
- Highest qualification level at referral
- Health (physical and mental health issues)
- Refugee status
- Ethnic group
- First language (and additional languages if relevant)
- If an ex-offender
- Family status by number of children

During their support journey, types of provision accessed by each participant, and engagement rate (i.e. duration or frequency of engagement with different support types) should be captured.

▶ **Success measures should include:**

- Job outcomes by earning levels
- Job outcomes by sustainment (13 weeks, 6 and 12 months)
- Education outcomes by qualification type and level