

Mapping ESOL Provision in the West Midlands Region

November 2018

*In January 2016, NIACE and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion
merged to form Learning and Work Institute*

Learning and Work Institute

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal | Chief Executive: Stephen Evans
A company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales
Registration No. 2603322 Registered Charity No. 1002775
Registered office: 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester, LE1 7GE



Published by National Learning and Work Institute (England and Wales)

21 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GE

Company registration no. 2603322 | Charity registration no. 1002775

Learning and Work Institute is a new independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

We bring together over 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion'.

www.learningandwork.org.uk

@LearnWorkUK

@LearnWorkCymru (Wales)

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without the written permission of the publishers, save in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
Activities.....	4
CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION.....	6
The West Midlands Region.....	6
Refugee resettlement in the West Midlands.....	6
ESOL PROVISION IN THE WEST MIDLANDS.....	7
Funding.....	7
Characteristics of ESOL provision.....	8
Demand.....	12
Additional support.....	13
Partnership working.....	13
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES.....	14
Demand.....	14
Structure and content of provision.....	14
Learners.....	15
Partnership working.....	15
Resources.....	15
ANALYSIS OF THE ESOL NEEDS OF RESETTLED REFUGEES.....	17
Learning needs of resettled refugees.....	17
Refugees resettled in the West Midlands Region.....	18
Analysis of pre-arrival data.....	19
SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS.....	21

INTRODUCTION

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. We strive for a fair society in which learning and work help people realise their ambitions and potential throughout life. We do this by researching what works, influencing policy and implementing new ways to improve people's experiences of learning and employment. We believe a better skilled workforce, in better paid jobs, is good for business, good for the economy, and good for society.

L&W have been commissioned by West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) to undertake an ESOL co-ordination role as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS).

As part of this role L&W has undertaken a mapping exercise to identify the characteristics of adult ESOL provision in the West Midlands region, along with associated issues and challenges. This report presents the key findings from this exercise.

Activities

Research activities included desk research, a survey of ESOL providers and conversations with stakeholders across the West Midlands region.

Stakeholder conversations

A total of 10 conversations were conducted across a range of stakeholders, including local authorities, ESOL providers (including further education, adult community learning, and third sector providers), and refugee organisations. The conversations sought to identify characteristics of current ESOL provision in the West Midlands region, including any issues or challenges in specific areas or across provision in the region as a whole.

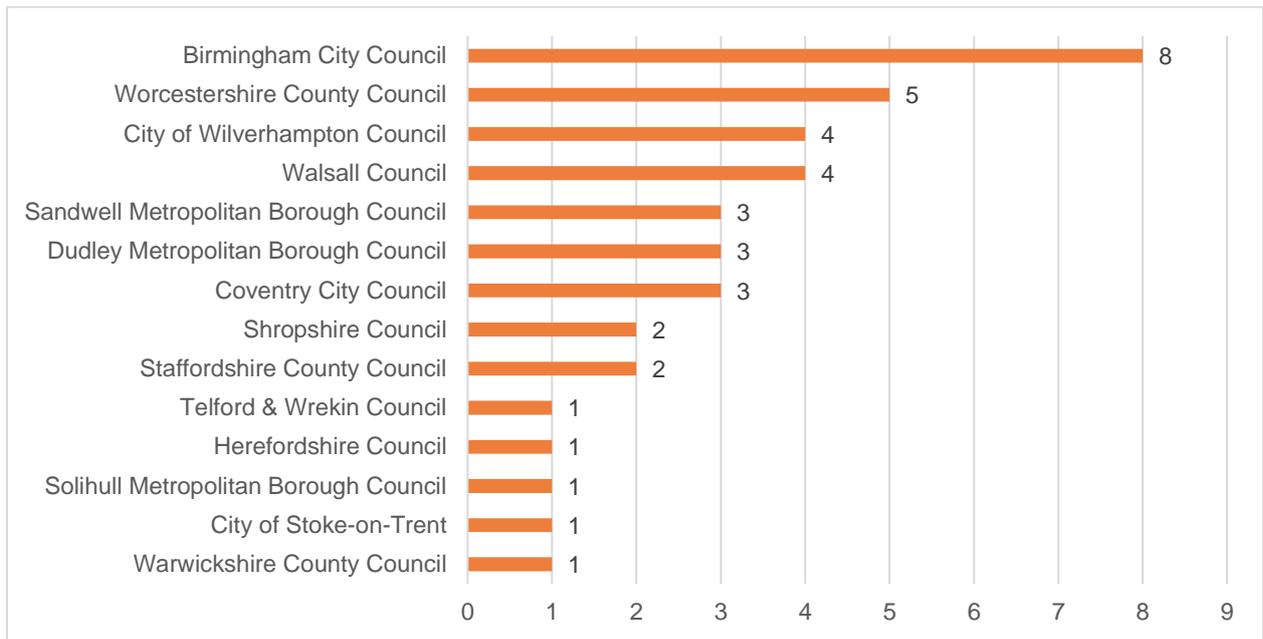
Provider Survey

A short, online survey was distributed to providers across the West Midlands region. The survey received 39 unique responses.¹ This was composed of 17 general FE colleges, 13 third sector providers, seven local authority providers, one independent training provider and one institute of adult learning.

Respondents were spread throughout the West Midlands region (see Figure 1). The top tier local authority with the most responses was Birmingham City Council (8), followed by Worcestershire County Council (5), Walsall Council (4) and City of Wolverhampton Council.

¹ Two responses were removed due to duplication

Figure 1: Respondents' top tier local authority area



CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

The West Midlands Region

The West Midlands Region has an estimated population of 5,860,700, and a working age (16 to 64) population of 3,636,600. The employment rate is slightly lower than England as a whole, with respective figures of 74.0% and 76.0%; the unemployment rate is also higher than England, with figures of 5.1% and 4.2%.²

At the time of the 2011 Census³, 8.5% of the working age (16 to 64) population of the West Midlands region stated that English was not their first language; this is slightly lower than the equivalent figure of 9.7% for England. In total, 1.9% of the working age population could not speak English well, and 0.3% could not speak it at all; these are similar (although slightly higher) to the equivalent figures of 1.6% and 0.2% for England.

Just over two-fifths (41.7%) of those of working age resident in the West Midlands, who either can't speak English at all or can't speak it well, are in employment. This is substantially lower than the equivalent figure of 60.0% for residents whose first language is not English, but who can speak it well or very well.⁴

Refugee resettlement in the West Midlands

Since the beginning of refugee resettlement under the VPRS, the West Midlands region has resettled approximately 10 per cent of the UK refugee total, across seven chartered arrivals. Arrivals are due to continue until November 2019.

As of Quarter one 2018, roughly a third (34%) of the refugees resettled in the West Midlands had been resettled in the Coventry Metropolitan Area; roughly a quarter (23%) had been resettled in Birmingham. The remaining were spread across the unitary authorities (15%), the remaining metropolitan counties (11%), Staffordshire (7%), Warwickshire (6%) and Worcestershire (4%).

² Annual population survey, Feb to April 2018

³ **N.B.** Due to the age of these figures they may now be out of date.

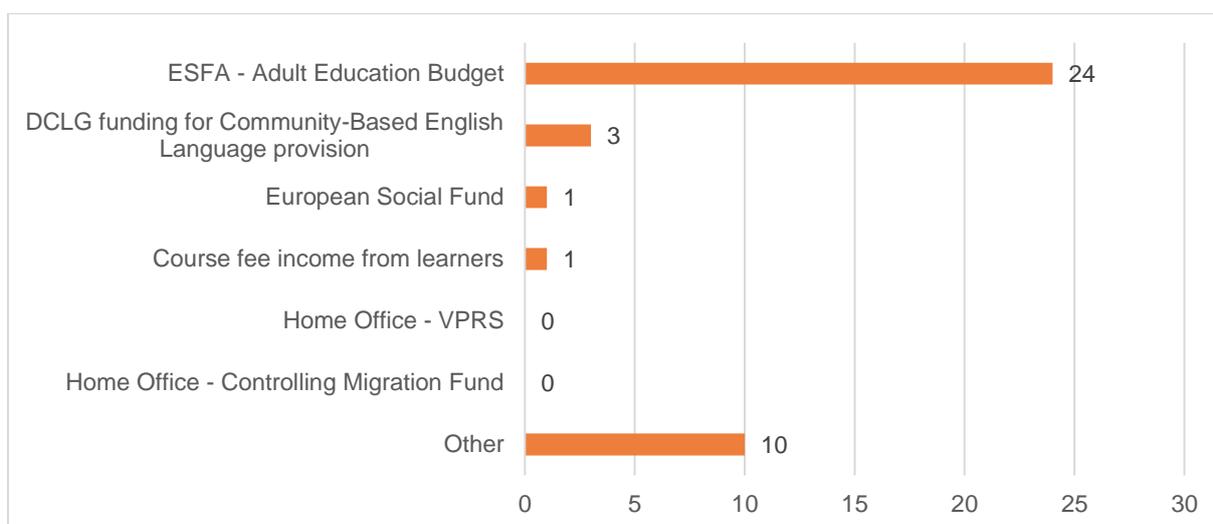
⁴ Census 2011

ESOL PROVISION IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

Funding

The mapping survey asked providers about the main source of funding for their adult ESOL provision. By far the most common source is the Adult Education Budget (AEB), cited by 24 out of the 39 respondents (see Figure 2). Three providers mentioned Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funding, and one the European Social Fund (ESF). Course fees are the main source of income for only one provider. Other types of funding included donations, small grants and English My Way. A number of providers also highlighted their use of volunteers for teaching.

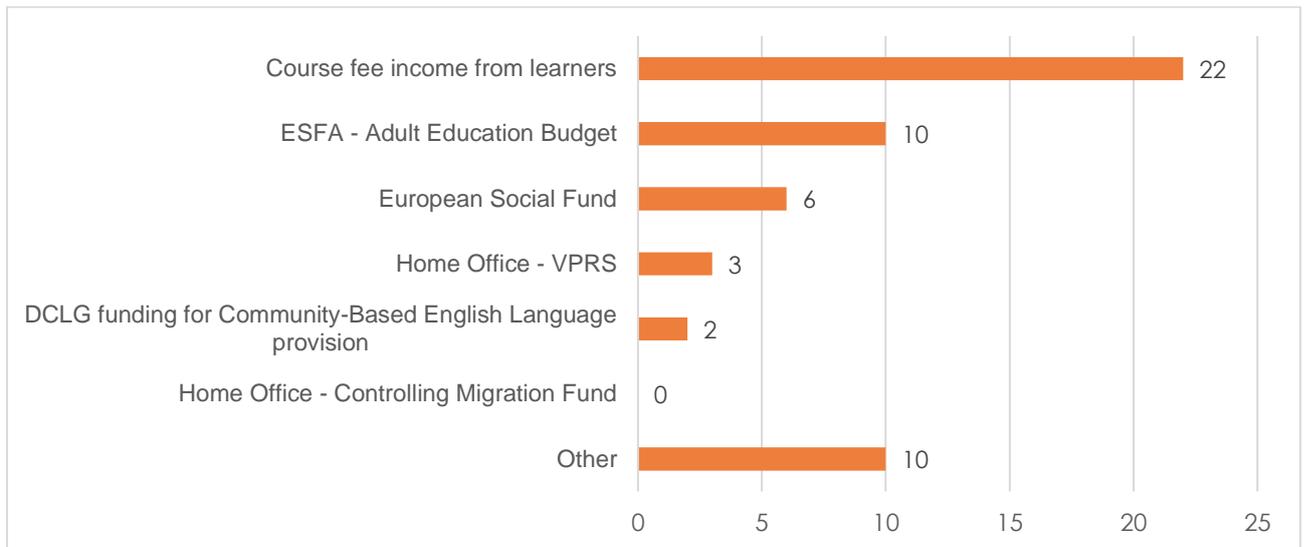
Figure 2: Main source of funding for ESOL provision



Twenty-three providers stated that some or all of their adult ESOL provision is co-funded. This is predominantly based on ESFA funding rules (20), although two stated that provision is wholly funded through learner fees and one that they used co-funding for some short courses.

The survey also asked providers about additional sources of funding for their adult ESOL provision. The most common additional source is course fees, cited by 22 respondents (see Figure 3). This is followed by the AEB (10) and the European Social Fund (6). Three respondents cited VPRS as an additional source of funding and two DCLG funding. Other sources of funding mentioned included Big Lottery Fund and funding through local authority projects.

Figure 3: Additional sources of funding for ESOL provision



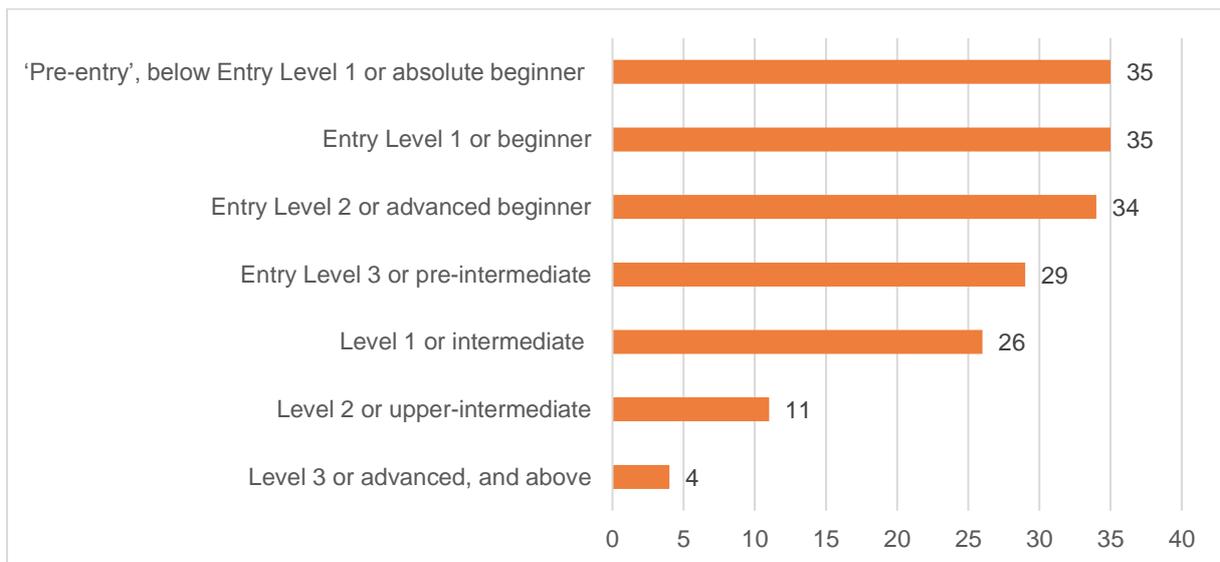
Providers were asked about access to free provision. This can be accessed by all (or almost all) learners in 18 out of 39 providers; for a further 12 providers free provision can be accessed by most learners. For five providers, roughly half of learners can access free provision, and for two providers approximately one in three can. In only two providers does everyone, or almost everyone, pay fees.

Characteristics of ESOL provision

The survey indicated the availability of a wide range of levels in ESOL provision in the West Midlands (see Figure 4). Almost all providers (35 out of 39) stated that they offer Pre-Entry Level provision, with the same number offering provision at Entry Level 1. Availability of provision slowly declines as the level increases, although two-thirds of providers offer provision at Level 1. Level 3 provision is rare, with only four providers offering it.

These findings are unsurprising given that demand for ESOL is typically concentrated at lower levels, and that Entry Level 3 is often considered as a minimum standard for employment. Home Office figures show that roughly half of resettled refugees in the West Midlands have ESOL needs at a Pre-Entry Level or below, roughly a quarter at Entry Level 1 and over one in ten at Entry Level 2.

Figure 4: Levels of ESOL provision available



For 14 out of the 39 providers who responded to the survey, ESOL provision is mostly single level. A further 14 providers have mainly single level provision but make some use of mixed levels where needed. Just under a quarter of providers (9) use mixed level classes in broad groupings (such as Entry 1 and 2 together); only two providers stated that their provision is completely mixed.

Course duration is typically longer than 13 weeks (24 providers), although 14 providers stated that their provision is generally six to 13 weeks in length; for only one provider are courses typically less than 6 weeks. Intensity varies widely between providers. One offers courses of 34 hours per week, with several more offering over 20 hours a week. However, the majority of providers offer less than 10 hours a week, with some as low as two hours per week. Several providers noted that the duration and intensity of their ESOL provision varies between courses.

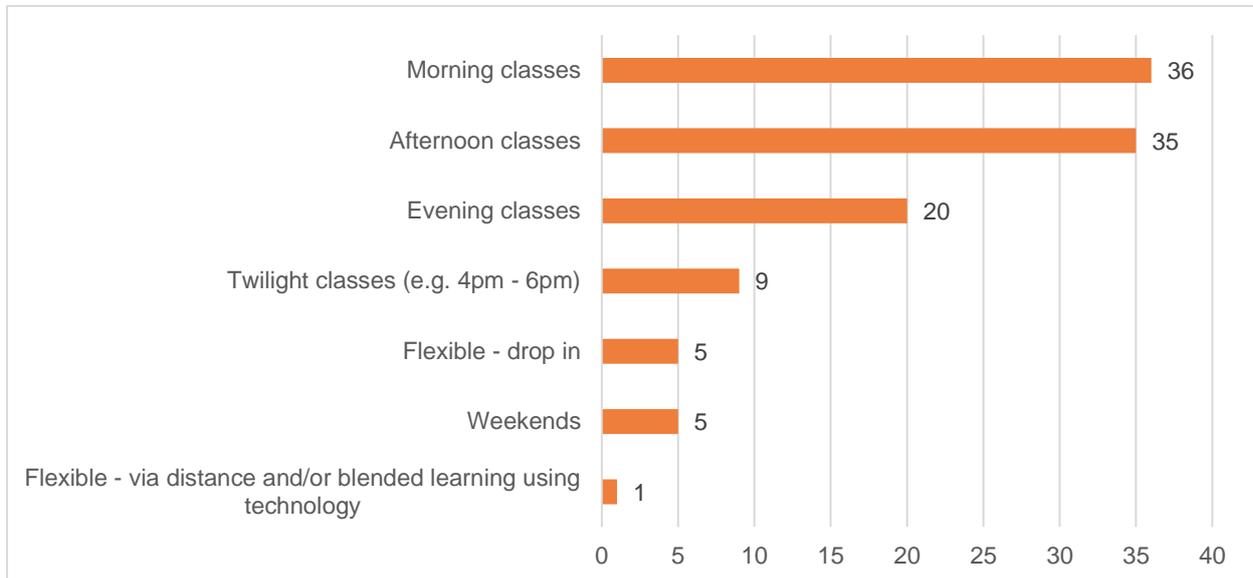
The survey asked providers the times at which their ESOL classes are available (see figure 5). Almost all providers run morning and afternoon classes (36 and 35 respectively). Just over half of providers (20) have classes in the evening; a further quarter (9) have twilight classes. Only five providers offer flexible or drop-in sessions; however, typically this is not a common approach for ESOL provision. When asked about the scheduling of their courses, several providers mentioned that their provision is deliberately designed to fit around learners' commitments such as work, childcare and other educational courses.

Only five providers offer classes at weekends, with one additional provider mentioning that they occasionally offer weekend classes if they have sufficient demand. It is worth noting that regional ESOL co-ordinators in other areas have reported some success with weekend provision.

Only one provider mentioned the use of distance or blended learning. Although these approaches have the potential to increase the accessibility and availability of ESOL

provision, previous work by L&W⁵ has identified that low levels of literacy and/or IT skills can act as barriers to learners accessing such provision.

Figure 5: Times of ESOL provision

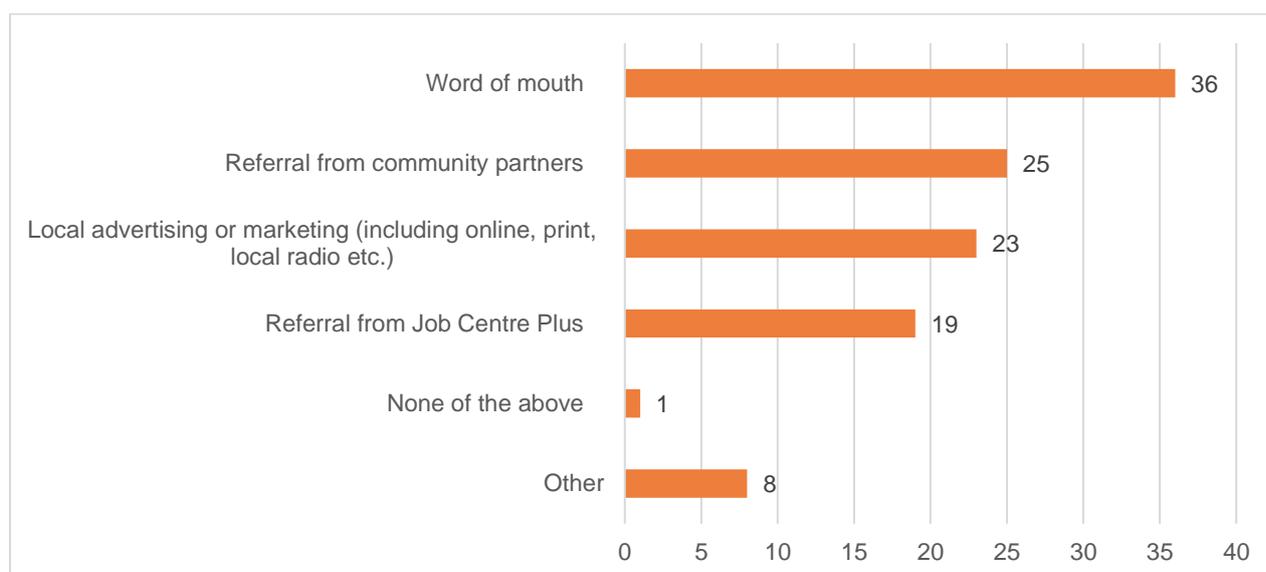


Learners are able to enrol onto ESOL provision at any time at just under half of providers (18). The remaining providers have a mixture of termly enrolments (11), semester-based enrolments (7), enrolments only in September (2) and half-termly enrolments (1).

Providers were asked about the recruitment methods for their ESOL provision. Almost all providers (36) mentioned word of mouth (see Figure 6). Referrals from community partners were identified by roughly two-thirds of providers (25); a similar number (23) mentioned local advertising or marketing. Just under half of providers (19) receive referrals from Job Centre Plus. A range of other recruitment methods were mentioned, such as community outreach and recruitment through community figures (such as refugee advocates or legal advisors).

⁵ Learning and Work Institute (2016) *Technology for English Language*

Figure 6: Methods of recruitment for ESOL provision



The survey asked providers about accreditation of their ESOL provision. Roughly three-quarters of providers (29) offer accredited ESOL provision; the most common accreditation are Skills for Life ESOL qualifications (23), followed by Functional Skills English (19), unit-based awards in English (8) and International English qualifications (7).

Over half of providers (22) routinely offer non-ESOL qualifications to learners in ESOL provision. This includes qualifications in a wide variety of subjects, with the most common being maths and IT.

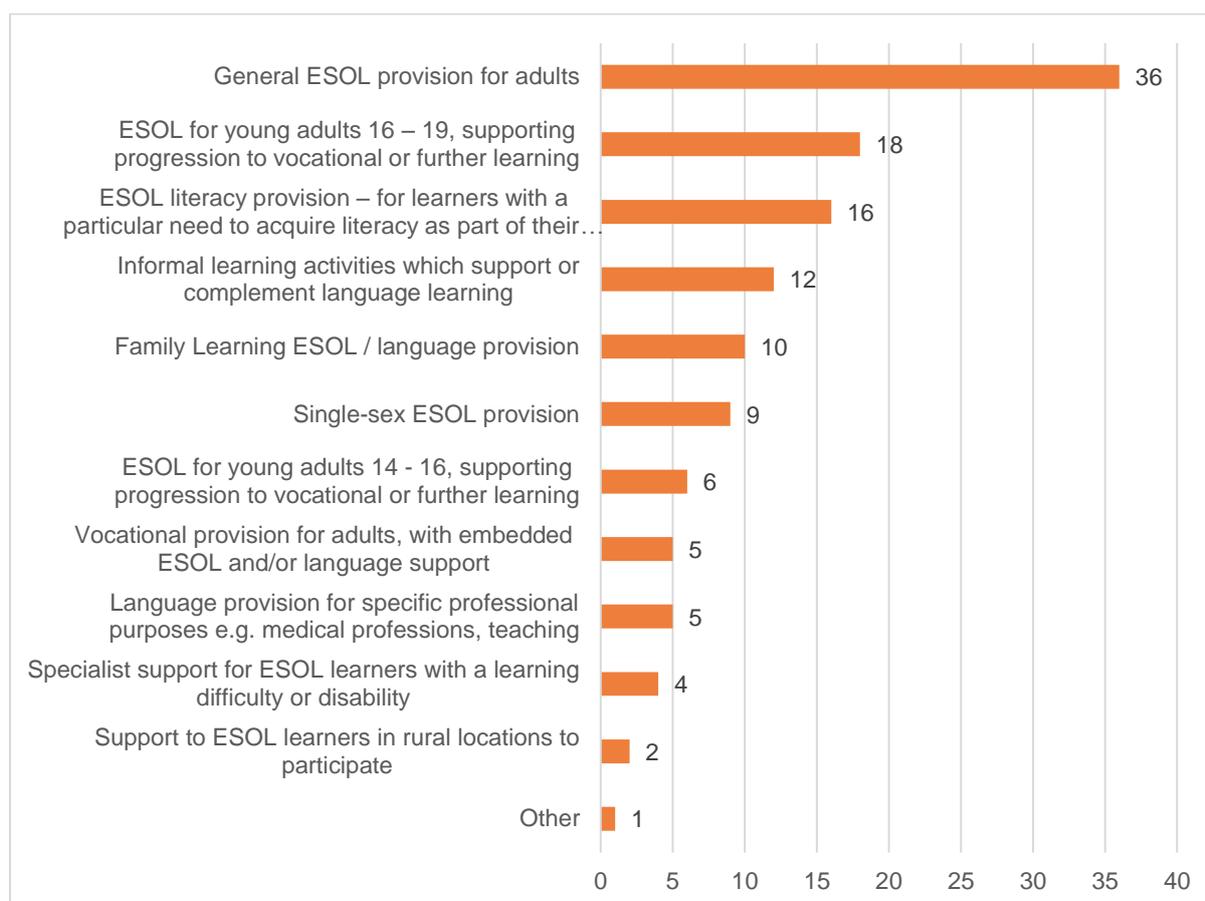
Figure 7 shows the different types of ESOL provision offered. Almost all providers (36) offer general ESOL provision for adults. The next most common is ESOL for young adults in order to support progression to vocational or other learning (18) and ESOL literacy provision (16). A total of nine providers provide single-sex provision. Out of these, eight provide women-only provision and one provides both women-only and men-only provision.

Over half of providers (21) stated that part of their provision was specifically intended to support refugees. This included bespoke classes for resettled Syrian families, Arabic-speaking specialist provision, a non-accredited driving theory course and courses in British culture and values.

One provider gave an example of provision specifically targeted at hard-to-reach female migrants with no formal education, few resources or technical skills. Their provision is informal and delivered by volunteers. Community-based, it is delivered at the lowest possible local level in order to reach individuals who may not be able or willing to travel outside of their local community to attend classes.

Providers described various types of informal ESOL provision, such as conversation clubs, one-to-one support, enrichment/cultural activities and cooking with English classes.

Figure 7: Types of ESOL provision available



Demand

The survey asked providers to estimate the number of ESOL learners from different age groups accessing their provision. All 39 providers have learners aged 19 and over, with a mean of 388 learners per organisation a year and a maximum of 3,500. Just over half of providers (21) also have ESOL learners aged 16 to 18, with a mean of 64 per organisation and a maximum of 500. Roughly a quarter (10) of providers have learners aged 14 to 16, with an average of four learners per year and a maximum of 20.

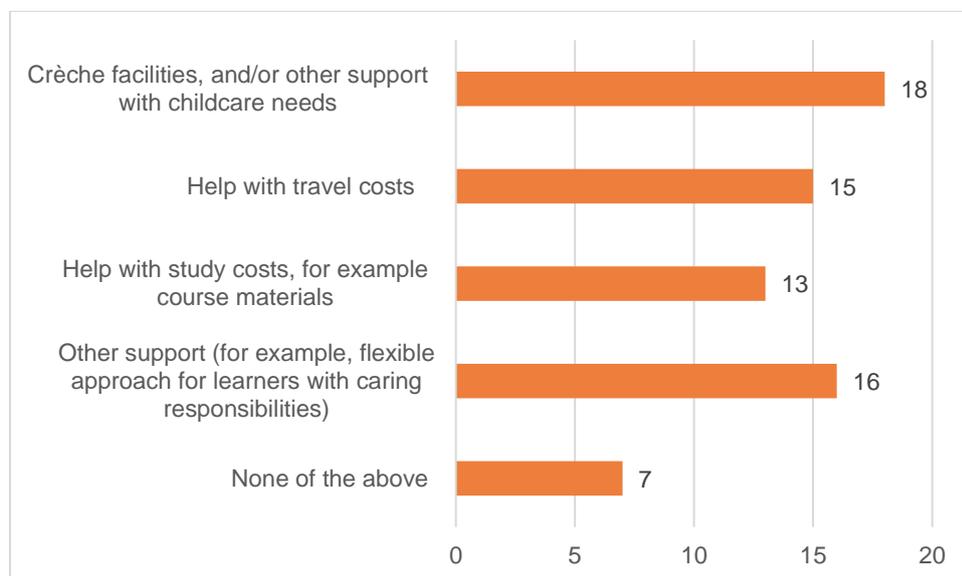
Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data shows that each year from 14/15 to 16/17 there were approximately 19,000 learners enrolled on ESOL course at a college⁶ in the West Midlands region: 19,770 in 14/15, 18,330 in 15/16 and 19,140 in 17/18. There was a range in individual colleges from fewer than five learners a year to over 4,000. Each year, between 10 and 15 percent of learners were full time.

⁶ Includes general FE colleges, sixth-form colleges, special colleges and specialist designated colleges

Additional support

The survey asked providers what additional support they provided to ESOL learners (see Figure 8). Almost half (18) provide support related to childcare, with a further 15 providing help with travel costs and 13 help with study costs.

Figure 8: Additional support



Partnership working

The survey asked providers about their partnership working. Roughly three-quarters (28) stated that they work in partnership with other organisations to plan or deliver their ESOL provision.

A range of different partners were mentioned. The most common was Job Centre Plus, from which several providers receive referrals for their ESOL provision. Other providers mentioned schools, other local providers and local authorities. One provider mentioned partnership working with the police, both for the delivery of ESOL to low level offenders and for the co-delivery of sessions on Prevent. Another mentioned working with hyper-local groups, identified through community development work; these groups are paid to provide venues for ESOL provision, identify learners and maintain attendance. Other partners include community centres, churches, DWP, housing associations and third sector organisations.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

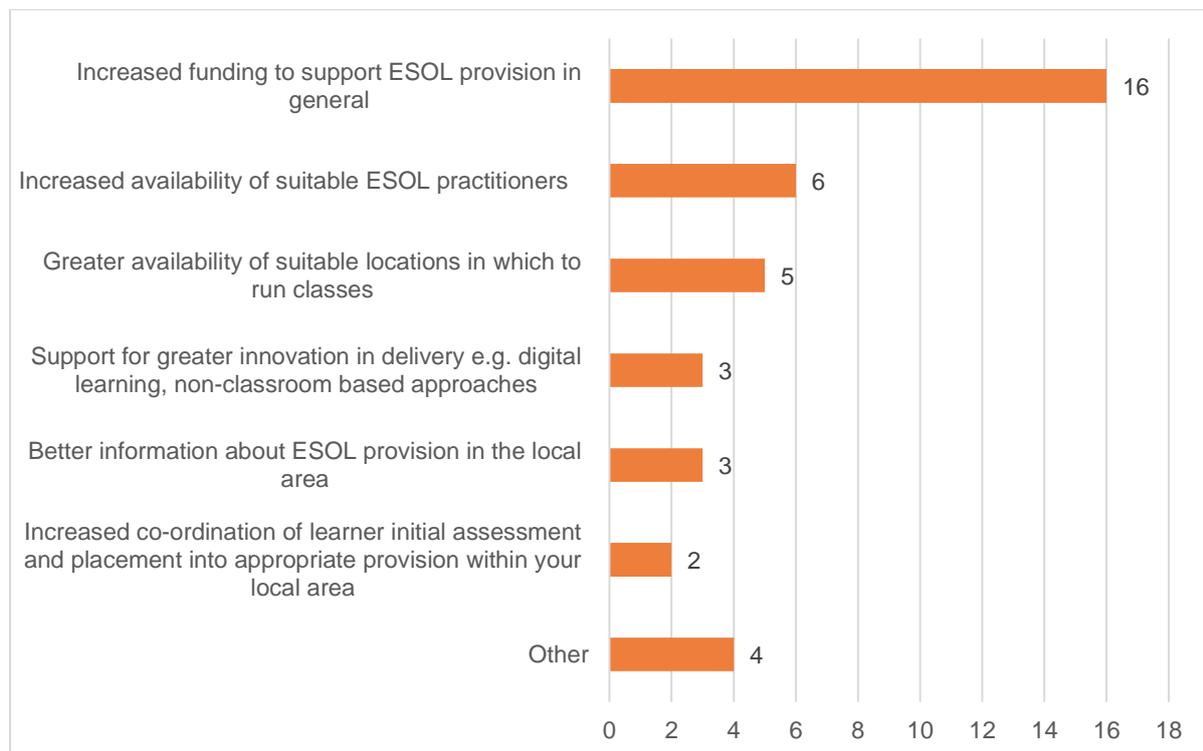
Demand

Providers were asked about over-subscription to their ESOL provision. Approximately half (20) considered some of their provision to be over-subscribed. Although providers described a high level of demand across all levels, it is particularly acute at lower levels (i.e. Pre-Entry and Entry Levels) and for non-accredited or informal provision. This was supported by the stakeholder conversations, where a particular shortage at Pre-Entry and Entry Level was described. It was also noted that some learners may not be able to attend classes at their preferred type of provider e.g. if the local college has a waiting list.

Conversely, the remaining 19 providers in the survey did not consider any of their provision to be over-subscribed, with one noting that they sometimes struggled to attract enough learners for a full class.

Figure 9 shows the factors that providers think might help to alleviate over-subscription. Aside from increased funding (16), the most common factor was increased availability of suitable ESOL practitioners (6), followed by a greater availability of suitable locations in which to run classes (5). Other factors identified included capacity building of the voluntary and community sector and multiple access points for JCP referral students.

Figure 9: Factors that would alleviate over-subscription



Structure and content of provision

A common theme amongst the stakeholder conversations was the need for more informal provision, such as conversation classes or friends' groups. Providers may not always be

able to run or secure funding for this type of provision, but it is considered important to help support learners and orientate them in the community.

Another recurring issue was the need for flexibility in provision, whether regarding timing, duration, intensity or an inability to cater for specific needs. For example, it was noted that some learners would benefit from linking their provision to a vocational course (such as childcare) or from a course more appropriate to a professional background (such as IELTS). The length of time required for a formal course was noted as a barrier by one stakeholder, with another suggesting that short, focussed courses were more relevant to those in employment. Conversely, some learners may have no formal educational background and therefore require additional support. Several stakeholders mentioned the challenge of fitting provision around employment.

Other challenges identified were a lack of intensive support for learners, no specific provision for 16 to 18-year olds and insufficient funding for small classes. One stakeholder described a need to link community delivery with progression to more formal learning.

Learners

The survey and stakeholder conversations identified a number of learner-specific challenges. These included:

- A lack of readiness amongst some learners to access formal learning and additional needs of learners at lower levels
- The large variance in learning needs between different refugee families
- Providing childcare support or family-friendly venues in a culturally sensitive way
- Travel to provision and geographic spread of families
- Mental and physical health issues
- Financial issues
- A reluctance amongst young adults to engage with learning providers

Partnership working

The stakeholder conversations identified several challenges related to partnership working. One stakeholder described a lack of strategic focus in capacity building (i.e. in the VCSE sector). Another felt that provision was not always joined up at county and district levels, and that colleges and Job Centre Plus may not always refer learners to local community learning provision. It was noted that working with other providers was often a challenge in itself, but that it could be beneficial in developing links for learner progression.

Resources

Stakeholders mentioned a range of resources that would be useful in helping to support ESOL provision for resettled refugees. These included:

- Guidance for civil society organisations on accessing funding

- Guidance on refugees' rights and entitlements
- Guidance for the VCSE sector on their legal obligations
- Information about how the system for ESOL provision and funding works
- Good practice examples for how local authorities have set up ESOL provision for resettled refugees, and of how refugees have been integrated into local areas
- Training for volunteer tutors
- Guidance on providing childcare
- Guidance on PREVENT and radicalisation
- Apps for digital learning, assessment and screening
- Information about Pre-Entry level provision
- Guidance on ESOL for 16 to 18-year olds
- Pre-Entry level teaching resources
- Online support groups or events

ANALYSIS OF THE ESOL NEEDS OF RESETTLED REFUGEES

Learning needs of resettled refugees

There is general agreement amongst experts, researchers, refugee support centres, government representatives, the public and refugees themselves that English language skills and an ability to communicate are a key determinant for the successful integration of refugees into communities and for their ability to live independently and realise their aspirations.⁷ Resettled refugees themselves often place an even higher level of importance on these abilities than researchers and policymakers,⁸ with research identifying a general drive to learn English and a high regard for education.⁹

The importance placed by Government on English language for effective refugee resettlement is demonstrated by the requirement for English language provision for refugees arriving through the VPRS programme. However, a number of recent reports have identified concerns over the ability of refugees to access appropriate, accessible and timely ESOL provision; particularly in the context of the diversity of the refugee population and their prior educational experience.¹⁰ A recent report by Refugee Action, a leading national refugee charity, argues that current arrangements are inadequate and that more needs to be done to ensure access to suitable ESOL provision in a timely manner. However, the cumulative impact of reductions and changes to ESOL funding over the last 10 years has been a substantial reduction in the number of places available in ESOL provision. This was identified by Refugee Action as a core contributor to the current shortages and inadequacy of provision. Changes introduced in 2011 also included the withdrawal of the discretionary

⁷ See, for example: Cheung, S.Y. and Phillimore, J. (2013) *Social Networks, Social Capital and Refugee Integration*. Research report for Nuffield Foundation, Nuffield Foundation; Doyle, L. and O'Toole, G. (2013) *A lot to learn: refugees, asylum seekers and post-16 learning*. London: Refugee Council; Refugee Action (2016) *Let Refugees Learn. Challenges and Opportunities to Improve Language Provision to Refugees in England*. Available at: <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/letrefugeeslearnfullreport.pdf>; Refugee Action (2016 a) *Refugee Action response to APPG on refugees – Refugees Welcome Inquiry*. September 2016. Available at: <http://refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Refugee-Action-response-to-APPG-on-refugees-Refugees-Welcome-Inquiry-Sept-16.pdf>; Tip, K. L., Morrice, L., Collyer, M. and Brown, R. (2016) Policy Briefing: ESOL for formerly resettled refugees in England. ESOL policy and delivery mechanisms. University of Sussex. Available at: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=policy-brief-on-language.pdf&site=252>

⁸ Cheung, S.Y. and Phillimore, J. (2013) *Social Networks, Social Capital and Refugee Integration*. Research report for Nuffield Foundation, Nuffield Foundation. An e-survey with 233 respondents to identify integration priorities of refugees, practitioners, researchers and policymakers

⁹ Refugee Action, (2016) *Let Refugees Learn: Challenges and opportunities to improve language provision to refugees in England*, http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/support_us/campaign/join_a_campaign/let_refugees_learn/our_report

¹⁰ Refugee Action (2016); Tip et al (2016); The Centre for Social Justice (2017) *The Syrian Refugee Crisis: a resettlement programme that meets the needs of the most vulnerable*. Available at: <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Syrian-Refugee-Crisis-Final-002.pdf>

Learner Support Fund, impacting the availability of childcare and transport support for those most in need of accessing learning.

Recent research by L&W into ESOL provision for refugees in London¹¹ identified a number of key issues in the provision of ESOL for resettled Syrian refugees that are relevant to other locations. These included:

- **Support for Pre-Entry provision, and for learners with low literacy.** Substantial demand was identified in these areas, with a shortage of easily accessible, suitable provision.
- **The importance of informal, non-accredited learning pathways.** Informal and community-based provision can be an important stepping stone for some learners, particularly those with less experience in formal learning and/or with difficulties reading or writing in their own language. However, this should be provided as an addition to, rather than in place of, formal provision.
- **Childcare provision to support access to ESOL.** Provision of childcare can be crucial in enabling resettled refugees to attend ESOL classes, particularly for women. However, there is a general shortage in the availability of child care, whether from a lack of on-site creche facilities, a shortage of childcare places or lack of affordability. Some parents may also wish to remain with their children whilst learning.
- **Availability of information at a local level.** There is a general lack of easily-accessible information about the availability of ESOL provision at a local level.
- **Sufficiency and flexibility of learning hours needed, and appropriate content, in ESOL provision.** Provision that is flexible enough to respond to the needs of resettled refugees is not always available. For example, courses do not always start at a time which coincides with the arrival of new refugees. Content and structure needs to be tailored to the needs of different groups, to provide enough learning hours to meet aspirations whilst not overwhelming those with little experience of formal education.
- **Fast-track options tailored to employability.** Resettled refugees are generally keen to access employment as soon as possible. Volunteering and work placements are often seen as helpful in supporting transition into work, particularly when matched with previous skills and experience.
- **Other barriers to refugees learning English.** Resettled refugees will frequently experience a range of issues in addition to English language needs, including issues related to mental and physical health, housing needs and debt advice.

Refugees resettled in the West Midlands Region

Home Office analysis of local authority data found that refugees resettled in the West Midlands are broadly in line with national figures in terms of age, gender and household

¹¹ Learning and Work Institute (2017), Mapping ESOL Provision in Greater London

composition: roughly half are of working age (18 to 64), with an approximately even split between men and women and an average household size of four individuals. Just under half are categorised as survivors of violence or torture; again, in line with the national figure.

ESOL proficiency levels of resettled refugees in the West Midlands were found to be lower than the UK as a whole: roughly half of resettled refugees aged 16 plus have ESOL needs at a Pre-Entry Level or below, roughly a quarter at Entry Level 1 and over one in ten at Entry Level 2. Over four-fifths of resettled refugees were accessing any ESOL, in line with national figures; just-under four-fifths were accessing formal ESOL, higher than the national average.

Analysis of pre-arrival data

As of Quarter 1 2018, pre-arrival data was available for 560 individuals and 142 families. In total, 280 of these individuals were adults: 135 males and 145 females.

Proficiency in English

Overall (including children), only 39 resettled refugees were either proficient in English (7) or were basic English users (32). This represented seven per cent of the refugees resettled by Quarter 1 of 2018. Out of the 142 resettled families, seven (4.9%) contained an individual with proficiency in English and 21 (14.8%) had a basic English user.

Out of adults, only 27 (9.6%) were either proficient in English (5) or were basic English users (22). There was little difference between men and women. In total, one out of the 135 adult males was proficient in English and nine were basic English users. This compared to four out of 145 adult females who were proficient and 13 who were basic users.

Literacy in first language

Pre-arrival data identifies individuals who are 'illiterate' in their own language¹². Almost all adults were reported to be literate in their first language. However, given differences in the alphabet and script, it is likely that many resettled individuals will need further support to develop literacy skills in English.

Only 3.9 per cent (22) of adults were categorised as 'illiterate', although roughly one in seven families (21, 14.8%) contained one adult who was identified as illiterate. These figures indicate that only one family had more than one adult identified as being illiterate in their first language.

Male adults were slightly more likely to be categorised as illiterate in their first language, with a figure of 8.9 per cent (12) compared to 6.9 per cent (10) for female adults.

The local authority areas with the highest numbers of adults in the 'illiterate' category were Birmingham (11) and Coventry (7).

¹² This terminology is taken from the pre-arrival data. L&W recognises that there is not a binary distinction between being 'literate' and 'illiterate'. However, with no further information available on how the categorisation is made or the level of proficiency in literacy skills, we assume that this refers to a very low level of proficiency in literacy.

Education

In total, 117 adults, or 41.8 per cent, had received less than seven years of education. The vast majority of these had received between one and six years (107), with only 10 individuals having zero years of education.

Women had generally received more education than men. Almost half of male adults (48.9%) had received less than seven years of education compared with just over a third (35.2%) of women.

The most common amount of education was seven to 12 years, received by 50.7 per cent (142) of adults; 55.9 per cent of female adults had received this compared to 45.2 per cent of male adults.

In total, 14 adults (five men and nine women) had a Bachelors degree and seven (three men and four women) a technical or vocational certificate.

Occupation

A total of 65 adults (23.2%) had previous occupations which may indicate a need for some specialist provision. This included 49 individuals in skilled trades and 16 in professional occupations (including technical, legal, medical and academic).

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

This report has identified the key characteristics of ESOL provision in the West Midlands region and the main learning needs of resettled Syrian Refugees. Home Office data indicates that refugees resettled in the West Midlands have lower levels of ESOL proficiency than the national average, but that a higher proportion have accessed formal provision. Pre-arrival data demonstrates that, on arrival, roughly nine in ten resettled adults do not have basic English skills. Approximately two-fifths of adults have received fewer than seven years of education, with men over-represented in this group. However, all but a very small proportion have received at least a year of formal education. Almost all resettled adults are literate in their first language, with fewer than one in 20 adults illiterate. Just under a quarter of adults have a previous occupation that may indicate the need for some specialist provision.

Resettled refugees have a range of learning and support needs. Common issues include: support for lower levels of proficiency and literacy; availability of informal and non-accredited pathways; childcare; information about local provision; sufficient and flexible provision; the need for employability-focused provision; other needs such as health, housing and debt advice.

Key features of ESOL provision in the West Midlands identified by the research include:

- The main source of funding for ESOL provision is predominantly the Adult Education Budget, with many providers also receiving income from course fees.
- There is a good range of provision across all levels of ESOL up to and including Level 1; almost all providers who responded to the survey provide some form of Pre-Entry Level provision. Classes are mostly at a single level, with some use of mixed level classes in broad groupings.
- Classes are most frequently scheduled during the daytime (morning or afternoon), with evening classes available at roughly half of providers. Little flexible or weekend provision was identified.
- For roughly half of providers, learners are able to enrol onto ESOL provision at any time. Less than a quarter of providers had twice-yearly enrolments or less.
- Word of mouth was the most common method of recruitment cited by providers. Less than two-thirds mentioned referral from community partners or local advertising. Roughly half of providers cited referral from Job Centre Plus.
- Approximately three-quarters of providers offer ESOL accreditation; the most common type of accreditation is Skills for Life.
- Over half of providers routinely offer non-ESOL qualifications to learners in ESOL provision. This includes qualifications in a wide variety of subjects, with the most common being maths and IT.
- Just over half of providers have some provision that is specifically intended to support refugees.

- Childcare is the most common type of additional support provided to learners, although this is available in less than half of providers. A third or more of providers have support relating to travel costs or study materials.
- Roughly three-quarters of providers stated that they work in partnership with other organisations to plan or deliver their ESOL provision. The most common partner was Jobcentre Plus.
- Approximately half of providers consider some of their provision to be over-subscribed, with demand particularly acute at lower levels and in non-accredited or informal provision.
- Stakeholders identified a need for more informal provision to help support learners and orientate them in the community, and a need for flexibility in provision, whether regarding timing, duration, intensity or an inability to cater for specific needs.
- Issues identified with partnership working included a perceived lack of focus in capacity building and lack of joined-up working at county and district levels.

Next steps

The findings presented in this report suggest several areas in which support for ESOL provision should focus in order to successfully meet the requirements of resettled refugees.

1. **Actions to increase the capacity for and availability of provision at a pre-entry level, with support for learners with low levels of literacy or experience of formal education.** Pre-arrival and Home Office data demonstrates that a large proportion of resettled refugees have a need for low level ESOL provision, and that over two-fifths of resettled refugees have less than seven years of prior educational experience. Although the mapping exercise showed that most providers offer ESOL provision at a Pre-Entry Level, many report that their provision is over-subscribed at lower levels.
2. **Further development of strategic planning and co-ordination of ESOL delivery, including the dissemination of information about the availability of provision.** Partnership working is well established in the West Midlands region, with roughly three-quarters of providers indicating that they worked in some form of partnership to plan or deliver their ESOL provision. However, many providers reported issues with over-subscription, whilst some were under-subscribed. Previous work indicates that small increases in strategic co-ordination can result in significant increases in available capacity; if required, up to a quarter of VPRS funding can be used to develop ESOL infrastructure. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has made an Integrated Communities English Language Co-ordination fund available to selected local authorities, including Birmingham, Sandwell and Walsall to support further development of the ESOL infrastructure.
3. **Actions to address barriers to ESOL provision, such as childcare or travel.** Although childcare was the most common type of additional support provided to learners, it is available at less than half of providers and is a significant barrier to provision for many resettled refugees, particularly women. It is recognised that

providers' ability to provide childcare and other forms of support has been affected by reductions in ESOL funding, but actions to address such barriers would significantly increase the accessibility of provision for many resettled refugees. Additional flexibility in the timings of classes or enrolment (e.g. weekend provision) could also be beneficial.

4. **Actions to increase the diversity of funding sources for ESOL provision in areas of high demand.** The main source of funding for the majority of providers was the Adult Education Budget. Course fees were also common, with over half of providers charging them; a variety of other funding sources were mentioned by a small number of providers (e.g. DCLG, VPRS, CMF). Availability of sustainable funding is a major limiting factor in the provision of ESOL. Providers should ensure that they make full use of available funding, including flexibilities in the Adult Education Budget in relation to non-regulated learning where this can aid accessibility for learners or meet local priorities.
5. **Further use of informal and non-formal learning to supplement formal ESOL provision where there is a lack of available hours or a need for further support.** Evidence indicates that informal and non-formal learning can support or supplement formal ESOL provision in a number of ways, such as by providing opportunities for English language practice, increasing the time learners spend interacting in English and (in the case of family learning) help parents to become involved in their children's learning. However, such provision should be considered as complementary, rather than as a replacement, to formal provision.