

**Response:**

# Inclusive Talent Strategy consultation

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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### **3.1 What other barriers might Londoners face to accessing work or training?**

ESOL already mentioned as a barrier in the consultation document.

### **3.2 What steps can London government, employers, skills, employment and health providers take to better address these barriers?**

N/A

### **3.3 What national changes might be required to enable some of these barriers to be addressed?**

The two-decade old ESOL Core Curriculum requires reform to ensure that ESOL methodology and assessment are up to date. The Core Curriculum is no longer in line with research evidence on second language acquisition and uses learning objectives designed for first language English speakers who may need help with reading and writing but do not require assistance developing competence to understand and communicate in English

Curriculum reform will allow learners to have access to effective language teaching which provides them with the skills needed for both daily life and to thrive in education and employment. Key changes which will equip learners with the skills to access the labour market include introducing a focus on vocabulary development, teaching the skill of decoding spoken language, and the development of curricula which enable learners to acquire sector-specific language to meet their future education or vocational aspirations.

There is a need for the content of the curriculum to contain a focus on language for work alongside language for study. Many learners aspire to progress into mainstream provision while others need to take GCSEs to (re)qualify for their desired fields of work.

It is also necessary to build targeted language development for learners with prior skills and experience to allow learners to break down the language barriers to employment. Local Skills Improvement Plans may provide useful information to establish local, national, and regional skills needs and employment trends.

Please see The Bell Foundation's Qualifications and Curriculum Review for more information.

### **3.4 How can we create clearer pathways for Londoners to transition from lower to higher level learning and into employment?**

Progression routes within and beyond ESOL provision are key to learners' success. This includes planning how ASF-funded courses will complement other local provision and the use of progression routes beyond discrete ESOL and into employment. The de-facto approach to set ESOL Entry Level 3 as sufficient to transfer into mainstream education provision and employment has led to many learners struggling and either dropping out of education or seeking skilled work. Employers and providers should assess the language load of mainstream vocational and education courses such as catering, IT, and GCSEs to create language profiles which describe the minimum levels of English required for a successful transition from ESOL onto these courses and communicate these to learners.

The lack of data gathered on the number of learners with ESOL needs means that Government departments, funding bodies, ESOL providers and Ofsted do not know what provision learners attend and cannot track how well learners progress to further study or employment. At a national level, the introduction of a yes/no ESOL marker in the Individualised Learner Record would provide accurate data on ESOL enrolments, retention and outcomes for all types of provision including study programmes, adult provision, and apprenticeships.

Local contacts can provide useful information and data, for example local authorities, providers, LSIPs and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). ESOL single point of contact services in London provide the idea basis for information gathering, enabling individual boroughs and local providers to understand the profile of learners in their area and to target provision appropriately.

### **3.5 How can we encourage more people to gain basic skills (including maths, English and digital skills) needed for work and study? What other skills should we prioritise?**

It is important to ensure that learners with English as a second language are provided with suitable careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). Job recruitment can vary considerably from country to country. Second language speakers need specific advice on the recruitment process, what UK employers look for and how they can best market their skills in the UK labour market.

The Gatsby Foundation's Good Career Guidance Benchmarks provide a good starting point to create effective advice and guidance to the target group of second language speakers. The further education sector does not yet have a system where ESOL learners' prior skills and experience are documented. Moreover, many ESOL

teachers and managers have experience of recruitment practice in the state but not the private sector. They need training so that they can advise on both.

### **3.6 How can we improve ESOL provision in London and encourage more employers to invest in ESOL provision for their employees?**

The Bell Foundation's funded and evaluated pilots, such as High Trees initiative with Lambeth Council's ground maintenance team, show that when ESOL is delivered onsite, co-designed with employers, and tailored to job-related tasks, learner confidence and workplace communication improve.

At work, learners found it difficult to learn or practice English, as their colleagues spoke the same first language as them (Portuguese, Albanian and Polish). As a result, they found a variety of tasks at work challenging, including interacting with residents on estates, asking their supervisor questions, and reading instructions or emails. Co-designed ESOL classes, focused on tasks such as reporting accidents, health and safety, speaking to clients and members of the public, with other topics such as the alphabet and numbers introduced as 'scaffolding' to prepare learners for more advanced areas.

By ensuring that course content is directly relevant to the job, employees better understand health and safety guidance, customer interactions, and written instructions. These practical gains benefit both worker and employer.

### **3.7 Are there examples of good practice in addressing the affordability of childcare, housing and transport to support people into work?**

N/A

### **3.8 What more could we do to support the FE workforce to deliver our essential skills offer, and adapt to new priority sectors?**

An out-of-date ESOL core curriculum – alongside a confined exam focus – have affected teachers' subject-specific knowledge and skills, and the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment. This means that there is work to do to upskill the teaching workforce. In addition, the long-term funding focus on beginner learners has affected the capacity of many teachers to teach the higher levels of English required to achieve ESOL Levels 1 and 2. Initial and in-service training have lacked focus on the assessment of learners' language skills as key to the planning and monitoring of learning.

We recommend:

(i) Ensuring that teachers have the skills and understanding to assess learners' language skills and needs across the learning cycle – from initial and diagnostic to on-course and final assessment. The latter is especially relevant when learners' progress is internally assessed and validated. The result of assessment activity should be outcomes with sufficient quality and depth to enable effective planning of learning, monitoring of progress, and in-the-moment support during lessons.

(ii) Developing the capacity and focus of teachers to provide appropriate stretch and challenge in lessons, so that learners make the progress which they are capable of.

(iii) Developing appropriate tools to assess and monitor learners' skills development, especially for listening and speaking.

(iv) Developing teachers' capacity to incorporate vocational training, and employability and employment content into discrete ESOL course planning and delivery.

### **3.9 How can we help self-employed Londoners thrive by accessing the skills, experience and networks they need?**

N/A

## ABOUT

This briefing has been developed by The Bell Foundation, a charitable, evidence-led foundation that aims to improve educational, employment and justice outcomes for people who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). The Foundation collaborates with leading universities and think tanks to develop an evidence base and works with a network of schools to develop and deliver practical solutions to help improve the attainment of pupils who are at risk of underachieving. In 2024, the Foundation supported over 22,000 teachers and educational professionals to support children who use English as an Additional Language through the training of teachers and webinars. A series of policy briefings about our three programmes, EAL education in schools, ESOL and post-16 English education, and overcoming language barriers in the criminal justice system, is available on our website here:

<https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/our-work/with-post-16-and-adults/evidence/>

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