

ESOL for Community Sponsorship supported refugees

This document will give you an overview of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision and how you can support adult refugees to access it.

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What is ESOL?

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) are English classes that are suitable for non-native English speakers who live in the UK. As a Community Sponsorship Group, you are required to source eight hours of accredited ESOL tuition for the adults in the family you support. This resource will help you understand what is required and how you can form an ESOL strategy that works best for your group and the family you support.

Different types of ESOL provision

In this resource, we'll reference two main types of ESOL provision: formal and informal.

| Type | Examples of providers | Cost | Tutors | Content | Initial Assessment? |
|----------|---|--|---|--|---------------------|
| Formal | FE Colleges Adult and Community Learning Centres Private | May require a fee but refugees are often eligible for free classes | Qualified | Grammar Spelling Reading Writing Speaking and Listening | Yes |
| Informal | Faith groups Community organisations Community Sponsorship Groups | Free to attend | Volunteers who may or may not have ESOL teaching qualifications | Usually focus on spoken English Building confidence, developing skills, and introducing learners to other people in their community | Sometimes |

You may also hear ESOL classes referred to as accredited or unaccredited. Accredited ESOL classes are often through colleges or formal institutions and lead to a qualification at the end of the course. The length of course, study hours available and accrediting bodies will vary between ESOL providers so be sure to ask what is offered [when enquiring with a college](#) or other provider when planning your ESOL strategy. ESOL qualifications can be obtained at Entry Levels 1, 2, 3 and Levels 1 and 2. Entry Levels are for beginners, Levels 1 and 2 are for more confident learners. Most Community Sponsorship Groups have welcomed adults who start at the pre-entry or entry level in an accredited ESOL course. You can reference Annex 1 at the end of this resource for a detailed description of ESOL levels.

Your Group's role in ESOL provision

The Home Office requires that every resettled adult family member attends eight hours of ESOL classes per week in order to claim benefits. The Home Office and the [Jobcentre Plus](#) stipulate that the eight hours of ESOL tuition that adult family members need to access must be accredited. In some areas of the UK it may not be possible to access eight hours a week of accredited ESOL – meaning working toward a qualification. If this is the case for you, speak to the Jobcentre as they will have come across this issue before. We have heard of many Groups sourcing or providing informal classes as part of the requirement so do speak with your Jobcentre.

[When writing your application](#) you will need to research how you plan to help the family access eight hours of formal ESOL per week in your area. The number of study hours offered by one provider can also be less than the eight hours per week required by the Home Office so you may need to identify gaps and find ESOL provision from multiple sources. For example, if the family members can only access four hours of classes at the local college each week, see what other ESOL programmes are available in your area.

Funding for ESOL tuition and related costs

The Home Office can provide [£850 funding](#) for each adult refugee to support access to English classes. This is a one-time payment available during your 12 months of support. This funding is only available on request, and a funding request must be submitted through your Lead Sponsor for families arriving on or after 01

April 2021. The aim of this money is to enable learners to access formal ESOL provision.

Work with your Lead Sponsor to decide how the money will be used as it does not have to go directly to paying teachers or institutions but to alleviate any barriers to study. For example, if the family must take an expensive bus from their home to the nearest town to access their classes, the funding could be used to pay for bus passes for the year. Or if the family members have small children, the funding could pay for childcare.

Preparing your ESOL strategy

ESOL classes should be planned before refugees arrive so that relevant arrangements are made with the provider in advance. For example, before the family arrives, it is helpful if you can arrange an appointment for the adults to register and take an initial assessment to check their language level. Also, you can clarify what documents are required to prove their eligibility to study. This will usually involve the refugees presenting their Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs) and letters confirming their benefit entitlement. Many Groups have found that refugees claiming Universal Credit can either download the award letter from their online journal and present this, or they can print a screenshot of their most recent payment screen and ask the Jobcentre to stamp it to confirm it is genuine.

Before your Group welcomes the family, you will [receive information about the family](#) members' level of education and the languages they speak. This information may be quite vague as language proficiency is self-reported and recorded in terms of "speak easily" or "speak not easily". Thus it will be important to make a formal English assessment of the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing before enrolling refugees on a chosen ESOL course.

Refugees may be able to register themselves without support, and colleges may prefer this as it helps to gauge the language level of that person. If you are attending registration with an interpreter, you will need to be clear with the family member that the interpreter will not be present during the assessment, and even outside of the assessment, staff may wish to speak to refugees directly in English to help them assess their language level. If courses within the local area are oversubscribed, you can also consider referring people to neighbouring areas.

Finding ESOL classes in your area

The following areas have high demand for ESOL and therefore have ESOL Hubs or Advice Services where learners can take an initial assessment and then be placed on a course that is suitable for them.

Support in finding ESOL classes in your area can also be found at your region's [Strategic Migration Partnership \(SMP\)](#) who employ ESOL Coordinators who can help you locate classes.

Considering the circumstances of learners

Consider childcare needs for younger children and possible solutions. Some providers will offer childcare services. If parents can attend classes at different times, it may be possible for one parent to study while the other is caring for children. Also remember that the Home Office funding can be put towards paying for childcare if required.

You should consider any healthcare needs, either of the learners or children being placed in a crèche. For example, adults with mobility issues may find it difficult to travel significant distances. You may not know about particular circumstances until the family arrives.

Setting up your own ESOL classes

We recommend enabling refugees to attend mainstream English courses, meaning courses provided by colleges or adult learning centres, where they can make social connections with other students. However, if these are unavailable in your area, it may be necessary to commission classes, for example from a local charity or private company/tutor. Some Groups may be fortunate enough to have qualified ESOL tutors within their team who can provide ongoing support.

Mainstream courses may be unavailable for a short period, for reasons like a lack of capacity at the college/learning centre, refugees arriving mid-term or providers not delivering the learning level needed. In more rural areas there may not be

classes available within a reasonable distance, and you may have to look at longer term solutions.

While commissioning classes just for the family you support is not ideal, as it may not provide the same level of social interaction and independence, it does enable you to influence the content of the class to meet the specific needs of the learners you're supporting. For example, if a family member needs to develop specific language skills for an area of employment they are aiming for, you can ask the provider to focus on this. Equally if you have young adults who need an academic focus this can be provided for.

However, if you are commissioning classes, it may be better to explore inviting other English learners to these classes too. The potential advantages of this are that other external students can enhance the dynamics of the group, particularly where a group is very small. External students could also be asked to pay something towards the class to offset the costs of running the lessons.

If you are going to commission provision, please consider the following:

- Can the syllabus be negotiated to suit specific needs?
- What the projected costs will be?
- Childcare and healthcare needs and possible solutions.

If you proceed with this route, you will need to be very clear with the refugees about the limitations of this provision, for example if it is being provided for a limited period until classes become available, or until they progress to a level that would enable them to enrol in classes. People may naturally prefer the option of individual tuition, particularly if it is provided at home or a convenient location, rather than enrolling in college.

How to support language learning once the family begins ESOL classes

You should consider how you can embed English language learning in your ongoing support of refugees. For example, role playing and practicing phone calls and encouraging learners to make the call themselves, labelling items around their

house or working with learners to identify their language needs and supporting this with informal or volunteer support.

Support refugees to check that time in classes are appropriate and do not clash with other commitments such as Jobcentre Plus appointments (also note that people receiving benefits are not allowed to study more than 16 hours per week and claimants must inform their Jobcentre Plus of their learning hours as part of the conditions for claiming benefits).

Empower learners to attend English classes independently and offer them appropriate support when needed. You will need to ensure they are aware of public transport routes and costs. Occasionally, some courses can assist with travel costs, so check with the provider.

Some courses might be short-term or minimal hours, so as mentioned above you may need to support learners to access further classes to enable them to progress to the next level. It may be that informal provision or additional support from volunteers will be sufficient to achieve this- but check with your Jobcentre Plus!

Community Sponsorship Groups should provide extra informal English practice support for refugees, where a volunteer or group member meets the learner regularly either in their homes or in public places to practice basic English with them. This would supplement the formal ESOL provision and can prove invaluable in helping people progress more rapidly.

A key benefit of this kind of ESOL support is that unlike traditional college courses you are more likely to be able to tailor what is learnt to the individual's needs. You can encourage them to be open with you about the challenges they face with their language needs, allowing you to base what is practiced specifically on this. The following case study highlights the importance of this.

Case Study: Omar's ESOL lessons with CHARIS Refugees

At the age of 14 Omar was forced to flee Syria, along with his parents and three siblings. The family were displaced to a refugee camp in Iraq where they spent the next six years. During this period the family lived in a tent and had no opportunities for education. Finally, at 20 years old, Omar and his family were resettled to the UK, and arrived in Somerset. Omar describes the suddenness of arriving, feeling scared

and unsure about what the future would hold. He saw that life was different and strange in England.

Omar arrived in early summer, and the ESOL teachers for the refugee charity, Charis, had planned some family English language activities during the summer holidays, which we call 'Out and About' lessons. These included things like taking the steam train to a seaside town, and visiting a local apple farm and museum. These were fun, outdoor activities, with opportunities to learn and practice English woven in, and were among the first experiences Omar and his family had in their new country. It provided a great opportunity to start building relationships with the teachers, other volunteers and everyone involved.

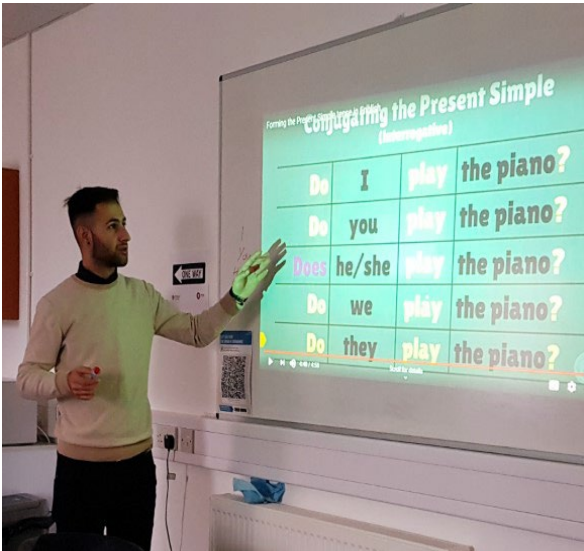
At the start of the new academic year Omar's younger siblings were able to access formal education at a local college, but at twenty Omar was categorised as too old, and not eligible for any course without standard UK qualifications. He joined one of the English classes provided by Charis, which had a mix of abilities and ages. This worked well for him in the beginning, as he learned the basics of the language. However, the mix of students became more problematic as a group of young adults, including Omar, began making rapid progress compared to others and were highly committed to reaching a level of English that would allow them to access higher education.

The decision was taken to split the group and provide a fast track course for the remainder of the year to help these young adults catch up the lost years and have the opportunity to access college or university. The group were also encouraged to explore future opportunities by attending events such as the regional UCAS fair.

Omar's dream had always been to make films and, a year after arriving, he was ready to apply to a local college. He was able to represent himself at an interview, demonstrating his English and explaining his passion for film making. On this basis he was accepted onto the programme. The college have been hugely supportive, and Omar is enjoying his studies there. He is working towards an Extended Diploma in Media, and was delighted to achieve top marks in his recent exams.

Omar's goal is to go to university and become a film maker. He is also keen to help other young people to work hard and achieve their goals, and is now volunteering in his free time with the ongoing English classes at Charis. Omar is a fantastic

example of what can be achieved in spite of the many obstacles faced by those starting life in a new country, and of the difference targeted ESOL teaching can make to their future success. As much as you are able, you can build the support you offer around the individual goals of the learner you support.



Above: Omar helping in the ESOL class, and in the recording studio at college.

Informal ESOL opportunities

In your application to the Home Office, you'll be asked how you plan to provide informal ESOL opportunities to the family you support. There are a variety of ways to do this; teaching online, groups that play games and practise the work the formal providers have given, groups that include children or groups or projects that encourage the learner to visit libraries, art galleries and museums and, finally, projects that lead to work, for example volunteers working with refugees to set up a pop up cafe.

The example we'll look at more closely is 'Stepping Stones', which works to overcome one of the common barriers to accessing ESOL: childcare.

ESOL Stepping Stones
First steps for mums and babies



This is a model that's been developed by the University of Manchester, where volunteers can access free resources to support parents with very young children.

These resources can be downloaded for free or purchased as hard copies [from their website](#). The course is for 12 weeks and lasts for approximately 45 minutes a session. The topics that are covered include 'Healthy Baby', 'Out and About' and 'Shopping'.

The concept works as a first step for the learners and on the final session the learners are signposted to other provision. This course has been piloted successfully in nine venues across Manchester and the project's developers have had interest across the UK.



Pictured: ESOL 'Stepping Stones' in action

Online resources

Online study has the advantage of flexibility and may be particularly useful for those with

health or mobility issues that inhibit their attendance at classes. The disadvantage is that

they do not provide for personal interaction, but your group will be providing plenty of opportunities for this to happen. Online learning can be good for a number of reasons, but be aware it requires work to set up this kind of learning, and support students with the various learning platforms. It also requires them to have access to good internet access at home, and the relevant hardware.

Below are some places to start exploring online ESOL resources:

- There are a range of materials that available for use from the [Talk English website](#).

- You can also find [vocational resources](#) aimed at specific areas of employment available online.
- [ESOL Manchester](#) has links to many different online programmes.
- [Blackburn and Darwen's ESOL website](#) also has useful links.
- A complete self-study ESOL guide by [English for Everyone](#).

There are many more online resources available, some of which can be found in our [Useful Education Links](#) section on Reset's training website.

ESOL for further education

The [International English Language Testing System](#) (IELTS) is a standardised system that measures the language proficiency of people who want to study or work where English is used as a language of communication. In the UK, it is typically used for university admissions and visa applications where English is a requirement. It is not a requirement for refugees to obtain an IELTS qualification, and it will have no bearing on their immigration status. However, it may be required for those that wish to pursue further or higher education, or those who have a higher level of English and wish to obtain an internationally recognised qualification to demonstrate this.

If you are supporting someone who wishes to pursue further education, we suggest you support them to contact the institutions concerned directly.

The role of the Jobcentre Plus with ESOL

All adults who are resettled through Community Sponsorship will be entitled to receive welfare benefits. Like all working age adults in the UK there will be an expectation to find work however, the level of English spoken may limit job opportunities. The Jobcentre Plus accept that learning English for eight hours per week contributes to long term employment prospects.

They may also refer people with limited English to Jobcentre Plus commissioned ESOL or employability programs. Different Jobcentre Plus branches will approach this in different ways and how successful they are at referring people into classes is highly dependent on the provision available locally, as well as the commissioning and referral agreements they have with local providers. We have found that where

Universal Credit is being claimed for a couple, Work Coaches may prioritise the main applicant and support them to get on to an ESOL course as part of their claimant commitment. However, they may also be able to refer the partner at a later stage.

Courses commissioned by the Jobcentre Plus can have a strong focus on employability, they can be short-term and intensive (e.g. four or five days a week for six to 12 weeks) and may only include speaking and listening English classes. We would advise you to have a conversation with the family member and the Jobcentre Plus around the content and level of the class, and whether it is the most appropriate option. At times, you may need to advocate with and for the refugee with the Jobcentre Plus if they would prefer a different class.

Annex 1

ESOL Levels and Equivalency

NB: There are only six levels going from absolute beginner (pre-entry) to fluency, both spoken & written (Entry 2, UK GCSE)
This demonstrates how hard it is to progress across these levels, or use them as relevant markers of progression. This means that it will be important to manage expectations.

| | Speaking & Listening | Reading | Writing | Equivalency |
|------------------|--|--|--|-------------|
| Pre-Entry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer questions for basic personal information • Follow basic instructions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise letters and/or numbers • Recognise common signs and symbols | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write letters and/or numbers • Write their name, address and telephone number | |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Entry 1</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask and answer questions for personal information in full sentences • Give and follow basic instructions and directions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and understand short texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics • Read and obtain information from common signs and symbols | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a form giving basic personal details accurately (30 words) • Write a short note giving details of present activities in simple sentences using capital letters and full stops accurately (30 words) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy skills expected of a native speaker at age 7 |
| <p>Entry 2</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask and answer questions about daily routine, study and/or work • Give a short account of something that happened in the past • Ask for things in familiar situations (out shopping, at the train station, at the library) • Talk about likes and dislikes in familiar contexts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and understand short, straightforward texts on familiar topics • Read and obtain information from short documents, familiar sources and signs and symbols | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a short record of a single personal past experience or activity (80 words) • Write an informal description of a person or place using adjectives (80 words) • Spell common words • Use capital letters and basic punctuation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy skills expected of a native speaker at age 9 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|--|--|
| <p>Entry 3</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of information, comparing people and places • Tell simple story (factual or fictional) using time markers and past tenses • Give personal information in a formal context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and understand short, straightforward texts on familiar topics accurately and independently • Read and obtain information from everyday sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write an account or narrative either factual or fictional of a sequenced past event (120 words) • Write an informal letter about a planned future activity or event (120 words) • Separate writing into paragraphs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy skills expected of a native speaker at age 11 |
| <p>Level 1</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of information about personal past events • Describe a process using time markers and the imperative (instructions) • Make formal requests for factual information, descriptions and comparisons • Give advice and suggest possible solutions for common everyday problems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and understand straight forward texts of varying lengths on a variety of topics accurately and independently • Read and obtain information from different sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a record of extended personal data for official purposes (200 words) • Write a formal report making comparisons between, e.g. countries, lifestyles, jobs (200 words) • Write an informal letter setting out a problem (real or imaginary) and asking for advice (200 words) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equivalent level to GCSE grades 1-3 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Level 2</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give opinions clearly, adapting their speech to the listener, medium, purpose and context • Engage in discussion in a variety of different situations • Follow detailed explanations and complex step by step instructions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and understand a wide range of texts of varying length and details | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write information, ideas and opinions clearly and effectively • Using appropriate register for the context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equivalent level to GCSE grades 4-9 |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|---|

For further information about levels, please see the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum at excellencegateway.org.uk Adapted from Trinity College London ESOL Skills for Life Syllabuses