

# Supporting London's Migrant Communities through the Adult Education Budget

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**Learning and Work Institute**

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>AEB</b>	Adult Education Budget
<b>ACL</b>	Adult Community Learning
<b>ARAP</b>	Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy
<b>BAME</b>	Black and Minority Ethnic
<b>CELTA</b>	Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
<b>ESOL</b>	English for Speakers of Other Languages
<b>DLUHC</b>	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
<b>FE</b>	Further Education
<b>FSE</b>	Functional Skills English
<b>GLA</b>	Greater London Authority
<b>HKBNOWP</b>	Hong Kong British Nationals Overseas Welcome Programme
<b>IAL</b>	Institute for Adult Learning
<b>ILR</b>	Individualised Learner Record
<b>ITP</b>	Independent Training Providers
<b>LSF</b>	Learner Support Fund
<b>L&amp;W</b>	Learning and Work Institute
<b>NATECLA</b>	The National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults
<b>PGCE</b>	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
<b>RAG</b>	Research Advisory Group
<b>RARPA</b>	Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement
<b>SPOCs</b>	Single Points of Contact
<b>NATECLA</b>	The National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults
<b>VCSO</b>	Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation

## Executive Summary

The Adult Education Budget (AEB) plays a key role in the provision of skills programmes for Londoners. Since the delegation of the AEB to the Mayor of London in August 2019, the Greater London Authority (GLA) has been granted some flexibility to align AEB policy and commissioning with local priorities. Some of these changes have been designed to make the AEB more accessible to London's migrant communities, and ensure that London's diverse migrant communities can acquire the skills they need to succeed. Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned by the GLA to review the effectiveness of the AEB flexibilities (outlined in Annex 1) introduced to accommodate London's migrant communities' skills needs. This qualitative investigation encompassed a scoping review, and participatory research involving (i) AEB-funded providers, (ii) service users (adult learners and non-learners from migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking backgrounds), and (iii) wider stakeholders. The research project aims to secure impact for London's residents and communities, in line with the Mayor's strategic priorities, as set out in the Mayor's Skills Roadmap for London.

### Positive impact of key AEB flexibilities on migrant communities

**More people from migrant communities are eligible to access provision:** The expansion of the three-year residency waiver for Londoners on certain, long term, immigration routes and the removal of the three-year residency requirement for family members of eligible UK and EU/EEA nationals have broadened eligibility to migrant groups who would have previously been excluded. These groups include refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine who did not arrive on the dedicated emergency schemes, and individuals joining family in settled communities on spouse visas.

**Simplified delivery:** The introduction of full funding for Londoners not in employment who are unable to evidence state benefits, people earning less than the London Living Wage, and for AEB-eligible people seeking asylum has simplified the process of enrolling learners and claiming funding. This has indirectly impacted access by reducing provider risk associated with planning and establishing new provision. The changes also allow providers to redirect the discretionary Learner Support Fund (LSF) to address barriers to learning such as childcare and travel costs, rather than using it for learners' fee contributions under co-funding.

**Improved communication:** The changes have gone some way towards simplifying the system regarding eligibility criteria and funding, making it easier for providers and referral partners to communicate eligibility and funding entitlements to learners.

### Changes in patterns of demand and increasing need for Pre-entry<sup>1</sup> ESOL

**Shifting migrant communities:** The constant changes in the composition of the migrant population in London has led to changes in the patterns of demand for ESOL, with a fall in demand

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<sup>1</sup> 'Pre -entry' level ESOL is often used as a description for very basic English provision 'below' Entry Level 1. While the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum recognises these learning needs within Entry Level 1, learners are unlikely to benefit from Entry Level 1 provision and achieve the qualification. This provision is usually delivered as non-regulated, non-accredited learning. Pre-entry level learners are often people with little or no prior education experience and who are not necessarily literate in their first language. See L&W, [\*Pre-entry ESOL: a factsheet for the South East region\*](#).

from EU migrants since Brexit and an increase from other communities such as new arrivals from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine, and family members settling in the UK.

**Increase in the proportion of ESOL learners at lower levels:** Providers remarked that the changing profile of migrant communities accessing ESOL has led to an increase in the proportion of learners with learning needs at lower levels (Pre-entry and Entry 1). This is particularly the case among refugees and people seeking asylum, some of whom have limited primary or secondary education and who might also not be literate in their first or any language.

**Bespoke non-regulated provision:** To address the diverse needs of learners from migrant communities, providers have relied heavily on the elements of the AEB which can be used to deliver non-regulated learning. This has enabled them to develop a range of responsive bespoke provision ranging from Pre-entry courses for people with little prior schooling and emerging levels of English language, to specialist short courses for those with higher levels of education and English skills.

## Limitations of the flexibilities in promoting access

### Challenges within the funding rules

- The fact that people seeking asylum become eligible for AEB funding only if they have been in the UK for at least six months and are still awaiting a decision on their case has been identified as significantly limiting early access to learning.
- The current funding structure financially penalises providers if learners do not complete their course and achieve their learning aim. This can discourage providers from enrolling ESOL learners, particularly those seeking asylum, who may face abrupt rehousing and inability to continue their courses.
- While the GLA's AEB reforms have introduced measures to simplify delivery, such as full funding for specific groups and clearer communication on eligibility criteria, there remain areas of complexity. This has sometimes led to confusion among curriculum staff, who may apply the rules incorrectly, resulting in the exclusion of eligible individuals. For example, some provider interviewees reported that individuals on long term visas with less than twelve months remaining on their visa from the start of a course are ineligible for funding through AEB, when this is not the case.

### Gaps in the local delivery infrastructure

- The coordination of local demand for ESOL is particularly challenging in boroughs where there is no Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and the need for ESOL consistently outstrips supply.<sup>2</sup>
- A shortage of ESOL tutors is also a significant barrier to expanding the volume of provision.

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<sup>2</sup> ESOL SPOCs support people with English language needs to access suitable ESOL provision in their local area by working with the full range of ESOL providers to sign-post and refer learners. They usually carry out an initial assessment first to identify the learner's needs, levels and accessibility requirements before referral. For details of current SPOCs operating in London see: [London City Hall, ESOL SPOCs, networks, maps and directories](#).

- The limited delivery capacity in the third sector hinders the engagement and progression of learners from migrant communities into AEB-funded provision.

## Barriers to learning

Qualitative discussions with London’s migrant communities, learning and training providers, and wider stakeholders illustrated a range of barriers hampering migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum from accessing adult learning opportunities.

Socioeconomic barriers	Individual and cultural barriers
<p><b>Childcare responsibilities:</b> Childcare is a significant barrier to education for many migrants, particularly those with young children below school age. However, the availability of childcare services, such as crèches, has been limited, especially following the pandemic. This is largely because providers believe that current funding is insufficient.</p> <p><b>Housing instability:</b> Housing instability can disrupt participation in learning. People seeking asylum, and those in bridging or temporary accommodation, are particularly affected, leading providers to enrol them in short, non-accredited courses that may not always best fit their learning needs.</p> <p><b>Work commitments:</b> Some migrant learners find themselves in low-paid and precarious employment, which restricts their attendance in adult education, especially in higher-level classes (Entry 3+).</p> <p><b>Financial hardship:</b> Financial constraints faced by certain migrants, including debt and homelessness, pose significant barriers to accessing adult education, as they prioritise basic necessities over learning.</p> <p><b>Travel and transport:</b> High travel costs in London were noted as barriers for low-income households, especially people seeking asylum, with rising transport costs outpacing travel bursaries.</p> <p><b>Digital poverty and skills:</b> Greater use of online and remote learning post-pandemic has exposed digital poverty<sup>3</sup> and low digital skills, a barrier not unique to, but also affecting, migrant communities.</p>	<p><b>Mental ill-health:</b> The impact of stress, trauma, and other mental health conditions, often associated with the migration process, significantly affect migrants' motivation, confidence, and overall ability to engage in education.</p> <p><b>Language proficiency:</b> Stakeholders reported that limited language proficiency can cause barriers to learning for migrant communities. Language barriers can exacerbate their ability to understand their eligibility and the opportunities available.</p> <p><b>Differences in educational systems:</b> A significant challenge faced by migrant communities, including refugees and people seeking asylum, is the unfamiliarity with the UK's adult education system. This can lead to confusion, discouragement, and ultimately, hinder their learning progression.</p> <p><b>Other cultural expectations:</b> Some stakeholders indicated that cultural norms within migrant communities in relation to education sometimes differ from norms in the UK. For example, adults in some communities prefer to attend men-only or women-only provision, which can be a challenge to accommodate.</p>

<sup>3</sup> According to [Digital Poverty Alliance](#), digital poverty is defined as ‘the inability to interact with the online world fully, when where and how an individual needs to’. Major contributors include financial constraints, geographical access issues, and lack of digital skills.

## Awareness of AEB funding and eligibility

Providers and stakeholders interviewed agreed that awareness of the AEB and its eligibility criteria is low among migrant communities. Some contributing factors identified included a lack of educational experience, unfamiliarity with the UK education system, limited social networks, and a lack of translated materials, with information primarily being available in English. Referral organisations and education providers also struggle to stay well-informed about AEB eligibility. Current challenges reported include inconsistent information flow, instances of incorrect eligibility information, and a lack of time or resources to stay updated on AEB funding or eligibility.

## Effective provider strategies and future plans to facilitate access to learning

Along with examples of bespoke provision outlined above (see p.7), personalised teaching and forming a strong rapport with students are identified as crucial aspects of effective practice. Other successful strategies include designing learning content relevant to learners' lives, providing flexibility to accommodate schedule changes, and mapping progression pathways from ESOL to vocationally focused provision. Future plans among providers include improving employability support, embedding employability-related portfolios into ESOL courses, developing courses preparing ESOL learners for community interpreting or teaching assistant roles, and running study skills courses for specific groups, such as young adult refugees.

## Recommendations

### AEB funding rules and flexibilities

The GLA should:

- **Review the proportion of providers' AEB allocation that is available for the delivery of non-regulated learning via local flexibilities to ensure it is sufficient to meet migrant communities' learning needs.** This would help providers to develop provision which addresses specific barriers faced by migrant communities, including ESOL provision for learners with low literacy skills and other bespoke skills training.
- **Consider fully funding learning for people who are on a joint Universal Credit statement but who are not themselves in work,** subject to financial modelling to understand the impact of this change. Implementation would help ensure that all Londoners not in employment, particularly women, can access the education and training required to move into work.
- **Implement a co-funding income scale** based on a small number of incremental points for co-funding learners earning above the London Living Wage to address the financial hardship experienced by this group. This could include a full funding threshold for ESOL learners.

In engaging with the Department for Education and the Education and Skills Funding Agency on aspects of AEB funding policy which are not delegated to the Mayor, the GLA could:

- **Advocate for the extension of eligibility to people seeking asylum who have been in the UK for less than 6 months.** Early access to learning could improve language proficiency, integration, and progression outcomes.
- **Work to implement a system within the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) to monitor early withdrawal of learners due to Home Office-induced relocations.** This would provide

evidence for future policy adjustments to help address the impact of housing instability on participation in learning.

## Local delivery infrastructure

The GLA, working with local authorities, providers and other key stakeholders, should:

- **Encourage and support the establishment of ESOL Single Point of Contact (SPOC) services in boroughs with substantial ESOL demand but currently lacking such a service.** SPOCs streamline the management of ESOL waiting lists and learner allocation, improving learner recruitment, and managing risks to providers associated with over-estimating demand for courses.
- **Increase financial support for individuals undertaking ESOL initial teacher training to address tutor shortages.** In addition to the current DLUHC-funded ESOL capacity building programme, this could include measures such as a bursary scheme for pursuing an ESOL specialism within a PGCE, funding for ESOL teaching modules for existing tutors in other subject areas who wish to develop an ESOL specialism, and a pathway for current ESOL classroom volunteers to transition to teacher training.
- **Enhance support for third sector organisations serving migrant communities to deliver non-formal<sup>4</sup> ESOL via the AEB.** Delivery of tailored ESOL provision could be facilitated through subcontracting arrangements, with local authorities playing a key role in capacity building to develop new AEB-funded entry and progression pathways.
- **Strengthen AEB guidance** by offering consistent, up-to-date information on eligibility criteria and local funding flexibility for skills provision. This could include simplified information and eligibility flowcharts, webinars, and/or a chat function on the GLA website. Multilingual resources could help improve understanding of AEB opportunities within migrant communities.

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<sup>4</sup> In this report, **formal learning** refers to provision which leads to an accredited qualification. **Non-formal learning** refers to provision which does not lead to a qualification, and may be delivered by AEB providers or other organisations offering learning provision. Within AEB funding, this kind of learning is sometimes called **non-regulated learning** or **non-accredited learning**. It is nevertheless subject to quality assurance, including through [RARPA](#) and Ofsted inspection. **Informal learning** refers to provision that is less structured than non-formal learning. Typically offered by voluntary sector providers, informal learning opportunities may be more social in nature (for example, English language conversation clubs) and learning may be incidental, rather than planned, alongside social activities (for example, a cookery session where migrants also practise speaking English).

## Introduction

The AEB plays a pivotal role in the provision of adult skills programmes for Londoners. With an annual allocation of approximately £320 million, the AEB funds a diverse range of learning opportunities for individuals aged 19 and above, including Adult Community Learning (ACL), but excluding apprenticeships and traineeships. The delivery of these programmes is facilitated by a variety of providers, including Further Education (FE) colleges, local authorities, independent training providers, sixth form colleges, and universities. Since the delegation of the AEB to the Mayor of London in August 2019, the GLA has been granted some flexibility to align AEB policy and commissioning with local priorities, thereby ensuring that London's diverse migrant communities can acquire the skills they need to succeed.

This strategic approach is reflected in the Skills Roadmap for London,<sup>5</sup> which aims to enhance London's economy by ensuring that the city's skills provision is locally relevant, impactful, and accessible. Despite these efforts, significant barriers persist for migrant and refugee communities in accessing skills provision, including people seeking asylum. The UK's adult education landscape, especially concerning London's migrant communities, has been influenced by immigration policies and programmes in recent years.

### Immigration to the UK in 2022 and 2023

In 2022, the UK saw a notable inflow of migrants, estimated at 1.2 million. This represents an increase of 221,000 from the previous year, with the majority of this (80%) consisting of non-EU nationals. The increase in non-EU nationals arriving in the UK was attributed to humanitarian routes (including Ukrainian schemes), which rose from 9% to 19% in 2022.<sup>6</sup> Several geopolitical events in recent years have influenced non-EU migration.

Notably, the UK introduced the Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) (BNOs) visa in January 2021, a response to China's imposition of the National Security Law in Hong Kong in 2020. This visa has allowed Hong Kong BNOs and their eligible family members to relocate, with 52,000 arriving at the time of this report.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, 24,600 individuals from Afghanistan arrived in the UK following Operation Pitting in August 2021.<sup>8</sup> Ukrainian nationals represented another significant group of migrants in London. As of 29 August 2023, the UK received a total of 309,300 Ukraine Scheme visa applications, with 238,800 visas issued.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Greater London Authority (January 2022), *Skills Roadmap for London: Helping Londoners to access good jobs and to lead happier, healthier lives*. London, United Kingdom.

<sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics. (25 May 2023). Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2022

<sup>7</sup> UK Parliament (25 May 2023), *Net Migration Figures*, Volume 733.

<sup>8</sup> Of those, 21,004 individuals arrived under the Afghan the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), while the remaining evacuees did not require resettlement (being either British citizens or having settled status). Cf. Home Office (Updated 25 May 2023), *Afghan Resettlement Programme: operational data*.

<sup>9</sup> The breakdown is as follows: 102,100 applications and 70,000 visas issued under the Ukraine Family Scheme; 207,200 applications and 168,900 visas issued under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme. A total of 185,500 Ukraine Scheme visa-holders have arrived in the UK, with 54,000 via the Family Scheme and 131,400 via the Sponsorship Scheme.

It is worth noting that 2022 saw a significant increase in applications for asylum, reaching 74,751, the highest since 2002.<sup>10</sup> This rise is partly attributed to the easing of global travel restrictions post-pandemic and the sharp increase in small boat arrivals to the UK (with almost all claiming asylum) within a worsening global humanitarian context characterised by a large increase in people displaced globally. In contrast, EU nationals accounted for only 13% of total immigration in 2022, a decline from pre-pandemic levels of 52% in 2018 and 42% in 2019. British nationals returning to the UK constituted the remaining 8% of immigration (88,000) and remained broadly stable since 2018.<sup>11</sup>

The rise in non-EU migration, described above, was intensely felt in London, a city where many individuals have sought sanctuary in recent years. Since 2001, nearly 90% of the 11 million immigrants to the UK settled in England, with 47% (approximately 4.6 million) choosing London and the South East.<sup>12</sup> In 2021, the capital's ethnic minority population accounted for about 55% of its total 9 million residents, a significant rise from just under 40% in 2001, while around 57% of births in London are to non-UK born mothers.<sup>13</sup> London's growing migrant population, coupled with anecdotal reports of high demand for skills provision in areas with a high density of people seeking asylum, has placed considerable pressure on skills providers.

## Participation in AEB-funded provision in London

London is a 'super-diverse' city, with one in every three residents born outside the UK.<sup>14</sup> While most inhabitants are fluent in English, 22% (1.83 million) of London residents aged three years and over primarily speak a language other than English. Of these, 46% (840,500 residents) reported speaking English very well, and 35% (636,200 residents) speak it well. However, 4% (355,000 residents) have limited English proficiency or don't speak English at all.<sup>15</sup> Boroughs such as Newham, Brent, Ealing, and Enfield have the highest numbers of residents who said they spoke little or no English.<sup>16</sup>

Addressing these language needs, London's AEB is the main source of funding for ESOL provision, funding courses for approximately 40,000 people with English-language needs at a cost of approximately £53 million per annum. Funding for ESOL via the AEB makes up about 16.5% of the total adult education budget, and caters for approximately 18% of the total number of adults served

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Additionally, 28,100 permissions to extend stay in the UK have been granted under Ukraine-related schemes. [Ukraine Family Scheme](#), [Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme \(Homes for Ukraine\)](#) and [Ukraine Extension Scheme visa data](#).

<sup>10</sup> Sturge, G. (March 2022). House of Commons Library, Research Briefing. [Asylum Statistics](#).

<sup>11</sup> Office for National Statistics. (25 May, 2023). [Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2022](#).

<sup>12</sup> Migration Watch UK (13 August, 2021), [Immigration and Population Change in the UK's Towns and Cities](#).

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> Mayor of London (June 2023). [English Language \(ESOL\) for Resettlement: Guidance document for London](#), version 6, chapter 6; Trust for London (April 2020), [London's Poverty Profile](#).

<sup>15</sup> [Census 2021 Reports on Main Language and English Proficiency](#) (January 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

by the AEB in London.<sup>17</sup> According to ILR data provided by the GLA, ESOL courses have seen substantial participation, exceeding other basic skills courses like English, maths, and digital. In the 2021/22 academic year, AEB-funded ESOL courses served 46,300 learners,<sup>18</sup> a trend that continued into the first half of the 2022/23 academic year with 42,520 learners.<sup>19</sup> In the 2021/22 academic year, funding for ESOL courses accounted for approximately 56.56% of the total funding for basic skills training in London, while in the first half of the 2022/23 academic year, this figure decreased slightly to 50.62%.<sup>20</sup>

## The Mayor's changes to the AEB funding rules

To address the unique needs of London's diverse population and in response to domestic and international events and new immigration routes, the Mayor of London introduced a series of strategic changes to the AEB funding rules and eligibility criteria. These changes aim to make adult learning more accessible and help more Londoners, including those from migrant and refugee communities, to move into good jobs. Eligibility, in this context, refers broadly to criteria related to (i) immigration status, (ii) residency duration, and (iii) full funding. The key AEB funding flexibilities considered in this study, due to their relevance to London's migrant communities, include:<sup>21</sup>

1. Removal of the three-year residency rule for Londoners on certain long-term immigration schemes (from 2022/23).
2. Removal of the three-year residency requirement for family members of eligible UK and EEA nationals (from 21/22).
3. Extending full funding for adult education to AEB-eligible people earning less than the London Living Wage (from 2019/20).
4. Introduction of full funding for AEB-eligible people seeking asylum for AEB-funded provision, where previously there was a co-funding requirement (from 2021/22).
5. Extending funding to Londoners not in employment who are unable to evidence state benefits and who were previously locked out of funded training, including unemployed individuals with no recourse to public funds (from 2022/23).

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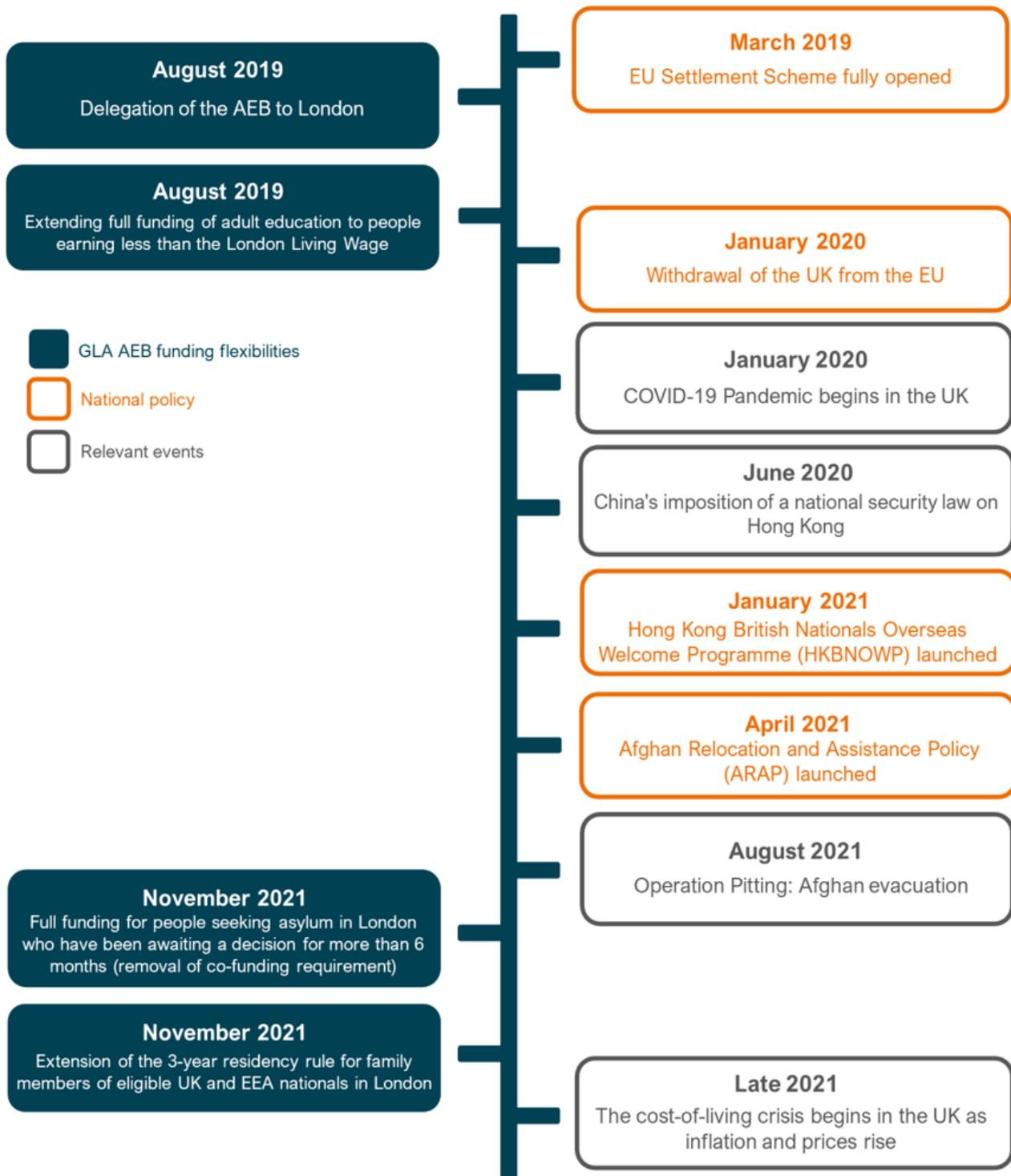
<sup>17</sup> [GLA Adult Education Budget - London Datastore](#).

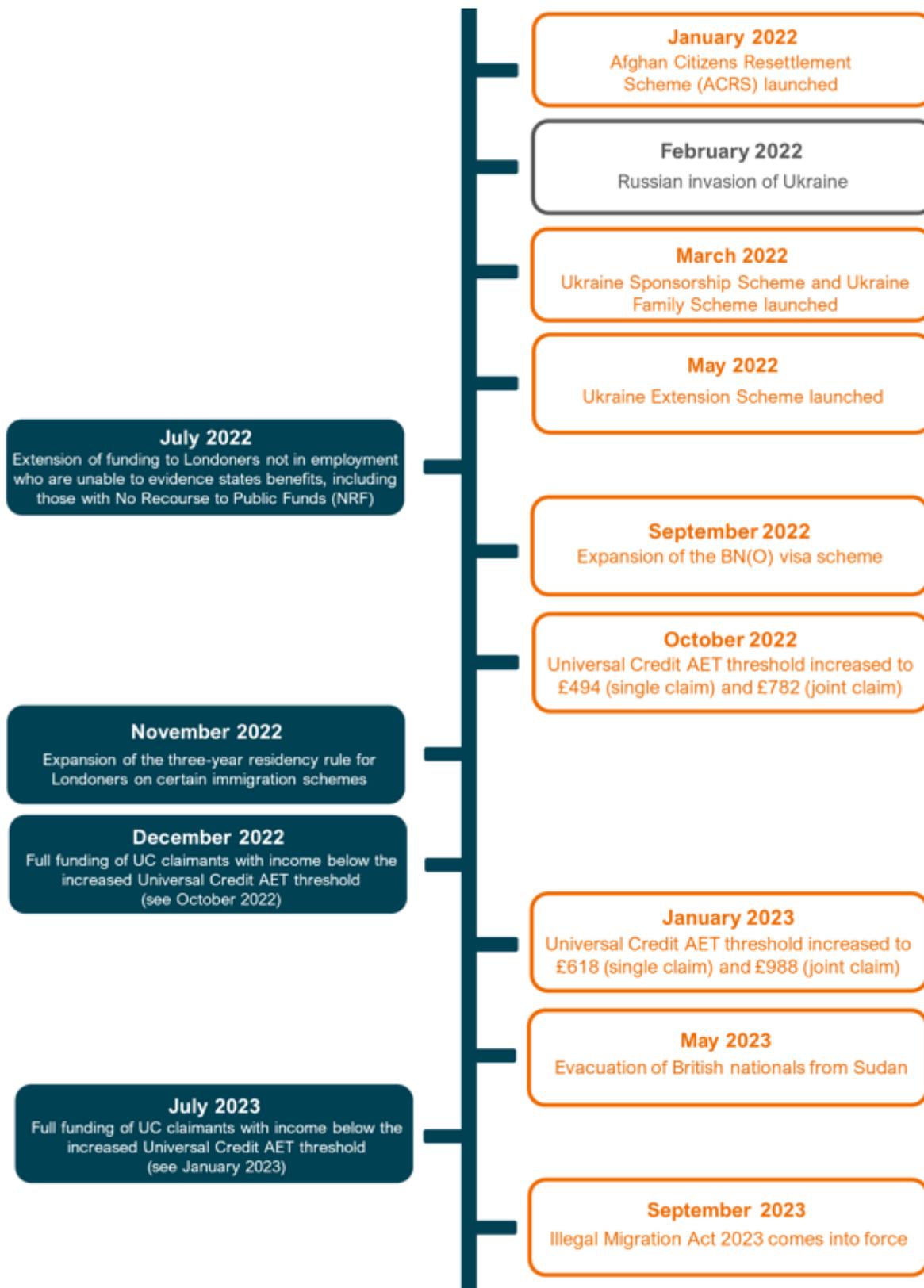
<sup>18</sup> The high participation in ESOL is mainly due to the 38,740 learners at Entry Level, with numbers declining at higher levels - 6,560 at Level 1 and 2,420 at Level 2. Source: Greater London Authority, Individualised Learner Record 2021/22.

<sup>19</sup> The majority of ESOL participation is at Entry Level with 35,050 learners, followed by 6,110 at Level 1 and 2,210 at Level 2. Source: Greater London Authority, Individualised Learner Record 2022/23, August 2022-January 2023.

<sup>20</sup> For more on learner participation to AEB-funded basic skills provision, see Annex 2.

<sup>21</sup> The funding flexibilities are outlined in detail in Annex 1.





## Research objectives and methodology

This study sought to (i) evaluate the impact of the local flexibilities introduced to the GLA's AEB funding rules on supporting London's migrants, including refugees and people seeking asylum; (ii) identify the barriers preventing migrants' access to skills training and AEB-funded provisions, and (iii) propose interventions to remove or reduce these barriers. In doing so, it aimed to contribute to the Mayor's ongoing efforts to ensure that London's skills provision is inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all its residents.

This study was guided by four key research questions:

1. How have the AEB funding flexibilities supported access to adult education for refugees, people seeking asylum, and migrants to London, including arrivals from specific visa schemes such as those from Afghanistan, Hong Kong, and Ukraine?
2. To what extent are migrant communities as well as relevant people and groups, such as referral agencies, aware of their eligibility for adult education and skills funding, and how can this awareness be increased?
3. What are the social and/or economic barriers faced by these individuals in engaging with skills provision in London, and what interventions are required to support these communities in overcoming these barriers?
4. How effective have the rule changes been in removing barriers to refugees and people seeking asylum for AEB funded provision, and if they have not been effective, what can be done to address this?

To answer the research questions outlined above, we took a qualitative approach, involving a wide range of stakeholders across the adult education sector and migration support services in the wider London area. Our methodology comprises:

Initial scoping research enabled us to comprehend the structure, funding mechanisms of AEB, and the local flexibilities and their impacts. A Research Advisory Group (RAG), comprising members from Central London Forward Integration Hub, an AEB-funded FE College, and the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA), provided methodological guidance and quality assurance throughout the research process.

11 semi-structured interviews were carried out with an assorted and widespread array of AEB-funded providers—representing approximately 8.7% of the total providers funded through AEB in London. Providers were carefully selected to include those with first-hand experience of the flexibilities and their impact. Both AEB and non-AEB providers were asked to help the research team identify migrant learners to participate in the research. To understand service users' perspectives, we facilitated four focus groups and five in-depth interviews, involving a total of 23 migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum. This study involved participants with diverse backgrounds, immigration statuses, and English language proficiency levels.

The research team also carried out consultative discussions with wider stakeholders. This involved two focus groups, four depth interviews, and three brief consultations with a total of 14 representatives from local government and various third sector organisations that support

London's migrant communities to access learning and integrate into UK society or offer informal learning provision. Data gathered was analysed using thematic analysis, allowing us to identify and interpret key themes. A detailed description of the methodology can be found in Annex 3.

## Limitations

This study provides an exploratory snapshot of the barriers hindering London's migrant communities' access to adult education and the impact that AEB funding flexibilities have had to date (as of July 2023). This study's main limitations are:

- 1. Participant diversity:** The study's use of purposive sampling yielded a diverse range of participants and provided valuable insights into individual experiences around migrants' access to learning. This methodology is designed to deliver depth of insight rather than fully represent London's super-diverse migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeker population. The experiences and perspectives of non-participants might significantly diverge from those who did participate, especially considering variations in entitlements across different resettlement schemes, visa routes, etc. Only one migrant who participated in this research—recruited via civil society networks—had not approached or engaged with adult learning providers to any degree. Although some participants were not engaging in AEB provision at the time of the study, referral by formal or informal ESOL providers means that they were aware of and engaging with adult education providers to some degree. Furthermore, all of the learner and non-learner participants had English language proficiency of Entry 3 or above.
- 2. Methodological emphasis:** The study's reliance on (inherently subjective and context-specific) qualitative data provides rich, detailed insights that may not be generalisable but provide unique perspectives to complement existing data and evidence held by the GLA. Future studies could enhance these insights by incorporating other data sources, such as the London Learner Survey, to confirm patterns, trends, or correlations.<sup>22</sup>
- 3. Potential response bias:** Participants in the study might have been influenced by social desirability bias, which could affect the accuracy of the responses. They might have provided responses they believed were expected or acceptable rather than their true thoughts or experiences. In many instances, learners' tutors were present during the interviews, in some cases providing interpretation support, which may have impacted interviewees' answers. Where translation support was provided, it should be noted that this adds an additional interpretive layer to interviewees' (primary) experiences and views.
- 4. Language and cultural barriers:** Given the diverse backgrounds of the participants, language and cultural barriers might have affected the quality of the data collected. Even with interpretation support, nuances and subtleties might have been lost in translation. Furthermore, many learners especially those who had not accessed provision before, lacked an understanding of the broader adult education infrastructure in the UK. This unfamiliarity made it challenging for them to grasp some of the questions and even to imagine what more support

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<sup>22</sup> [London Learner Survey](#).

would look like.<sup>23</sup> This limitation speaks more to the cultural and experiential gap between the interviewer and the interviewee rather than a critique of the participants themselves.

- 5. Unintended focus on ESOL:** Although the intention was not to solely focus on ESOL, a significant portion of our interviews involved stakeholders who were primarily engaged in ESOL provision. This reflects the prominent learning need in migrant communities. The emphasis on ESOL arose from several factors: (i) for many migrants, ESOL serves as an initial step into other types of learning; (ii) training providers often integrate other subjects, such as numeracy and digital skills, within ESOL programmes; and (iii) those responsible for ESOL delivery were frequently recommended by providers and stakeholders as the most suitable interviewees for this study. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that, in shedding less light on access to non-ESOL types of AEB-funded education and training, there is a risk of reinforcing the stereotype that all migrants require ESOL support.<sup>24</sup> In future research, it would be helpful to extend the focus to include migrants who do not have ESOL needs.

## Report structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

**Chapter 1** explores the extent to which the Mayor's changes to the AEB funding rules have improved access to skills provision for migrant communities and why, drawing on qualitative discussions with AEB-funded providers and wider migration stakeholders.

**Chapter 2** provides an overview of barriers migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum face when accessing AEB-funded provision and adult education and training more broadly in London.

**Chapter 3** provides a summary of the key findings from fieldwork along with a list of recommendations that our research suggests could strengthen the system and further improve access to AEB-funded learning for London's migrant communities, including refugees and individuals seeking asylum.

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<sup>23</sup> The difficulty that participants had in conceptualising additional support could stem from several factors, including (i) a limited understanding of the UK's adult education system, (ii) limited exposure to support mechanisms in the past; (iii) cultural perceptions of education (e.g., viewed as a solitary pursuit or a matter of personal responsibility), and/or (iv) urgent survival priorities overshadowing long-term educational planning. It should be noted that these assumptions are derived from qualitative discussions with refugees, migrants, and people seeking asylum, as this issue was not directly explored in this study due to scope limitations.

<sup>24</sup> The most recent Census figures show that of all those Londoners who said they did not speak English as a main language (22% of all Londoners), 81% spoke it well or very well. [Census 2021 Reports \(london.gov.uk\)](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/major/census-2021).

# 1. Impact of AEB funding flexibilities

## Key findings

These findings are based on evidence from AEB-funded education and training providers and wider migration stakeholders.

- The new flexibilities have enhanced access to AEB-funded skills provision for various migrant groups, including arrivals from Hong Kong, Afghanistan and Ukraine, people seeking asylum, and individuals on spouse visas, by expanding their eligibility.
- The changes have eased the process for providers delivering AEB-funded learning to eligible migrant groups, freeing up the Learner Support Fund (LSF) for addressing other access barriers such as travel and childcare costs.
- To address the needs of learners from migrant communities, providers have relied heavily on the element of the AEB which can be used to deliver non-regulated, non-accredited learning. This has enabled them to develop a range of Pre-entry and other bespoke provision, and it was suggested that more local flexibility to deliver a greater volume of non-formal, non-accredited learning would be welcomed.
- Despite improvements, persistent challenges limit the efficacy of the flexibilities, including funding rules such as the exclusion of people within the first six months of their seeking asylum in the UK early withdrawal penalties, and the overall complexity of funding rules and eligibility criteria which can lead to misunderstanding and errors in how they are applied.
- Providers report marked shifts in the pattern of demand for ESOL in London with regard to the levels of learning that different migrant communities need, with increased demand for Pre-entry and lower Entry levels, and decreased demand for Levels 1 and 2.
- Gaps in the local delivery infrastructure, such as poor coordination of ESOL demand and supply in some key boroughs with high levels of need; a shortage of suitably qualified ESOL tutors; and limited capacity in the third sector to deliver AEB-funded ESOL also limit the impact of the changes to the funding rules.

**This chapter presents our findings on the extent to which the Mayor’s changes to the AEB funding rules have improved access to skills provision for migrant communities.** It is based chiefly on evidence from the qualitative interviews with AEB-funded education and training providers and discussions with wider migration stakeholders which include third sector migrant support organisations, ESOL advice services/SPOCs and public services, together with some additional material drawn from the scoping review.

The analysis covers: respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the key new funding flexibilities in enabling access to learning; the impact of AEB funding rule changes on patterns of demand for learning from migrant communities; how education and training providers have developed their offer in response to changing demand; and the limitations of the funding rule changes.

## **The impact on ESOL and migrant learners in London's first year of devolution**

A 2020 evaluation of the first year of delegated AEB in London,<sup>25</sup> found that the most common increases in provision were support for learners on low incomes; courses relevant to the GLA's priority sectors; support for ESOL learners, and core skills learning opportunities. However, support for learners with specific immigration statuses<sup>26</sup> had largely remained the same, with only 27 per cent of providers reporting an increase in provision. One contributing factor to this was that there were no changes to eligibility rules related to immigration status upon AEB devolution. Additionally, many providers were already serving populations with high numbers of migrants, leading to consistent demand in these areas. Most providers were not planning to make any changes to their support for learners with specific immigration statuses in the following 2-3 years (52 per cent), and only 27 per cent planned to increase their provision for this group. On the other hand, an evaluation of the GLA's Skills for Londoners Innovation Fund (2021),<sup>27</sup> found that the programme had a substantial impact on ESOL provision in London, given that around a third of the projects provided ESOL training. Evidence suggests that the Fund enabled learners to better participate in their local communities and to better perform day-to-day tasks in their local area.<sup>28</sup>

## **Impact of key flexibilities on enabling access**

We asked providers specifically about the impact of the key funding rule changes of interest to the research in enabling access for migrant communities to AEB-funded provision. Their responses suggest that they have had positive consequences in three main ways:

- The flexibilities have extended eligibility to a number of migrant groups who need it and who would otherwise have been excluded from AEB-funded provision.
- It has become more straightforward for providers to deliver AEB-funded learning to some migrant groups who are now eligible for full funding.

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<sup>25</sup> IFF Research (2020), Devolved AEB Evaluation Report. IFF Research, London, United Kingdom.

<sup>26</sup> At the time of the report, these statuses could include (a) Refugee Status; (b) Discretionary Leave to Enter or Remain; (c) Exceptional Leave to Enter or Remain; (d) Indefinite Leave to Enter or Remain; (e) Humanitarian Protection; (f) Leave Outside the Rules; (g) The husband, wife, civil partner of any of the above; (h) Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 Leave, or (i) Calais Leave to Remain.

<sup>27</sup> ICF (2021), Evaluation of the GLA Skills for Londoners Innovation Fund final report, ICF International, London, United Kingdom.

<sup>28</sup> ICF (2021), Evaluation of the GLA Skills for Londoners Innovation Fund final report, ICF International, London, United Kingdom.

- The changes have gone some way towards simplifying the system with regard to eligibility criteria and funding, making it easier for providers and referral partners to communicate eligibility and funding entitlements to learners.

The **expansion of the three-year residency waiver for Londoners on certain immigration routes** and the **removal of the three-year residency requirement for family members of eligible UK and EEA nationals** have extended eligibility to key migrant groups who would otherwise have been locked out of AEB-fund provision. Providers and stakeholders reported that these flexibilities have had a significant impact on both the number and profile of learners who are accessing their provision. The following two tables evidence the impact of these flexibilities.

### **Removal of the three-year residency requirement for family members of eligible UK and EEA nationals**

AEB providers report that the removal of the three-year residency requirement for migrants coming to London to join British or EEA family members has been particularly effective in enabling women on spouse visas to access ESOL. In boroughs where these communities are established, providers have seen a large increase in demand from those who were previously ineligible.

*I could say that the number of students has increased due to this. Participation has increased and we're able to claim our funding for most of the students by using that. Most of the students in [borough name], even [locality], they've come on a spousal visa, so that's really, really helped.*  
(Third sector provider)

### **Expansion of the three-year residency waiver for Londoners on certain immigration schemes**

A local authority provider reported that they were able to contact 51 newly eligible individuals whose details they held and invite them for initial assessment when the flexibility was introduced. Similarly, a respondent from an FE college said:

*At [local learning centre] I think there were about 60 or 70 people on that waiting list who couldn't access ESOL because of the three-year rule. And then when it was relaxed, we got them in so we made a massive difference to their lives, and they were so delighted to join because obviously when you just move to a country if you don't have the language, it's the thing you need. It's the biggest barrier to everything, isn't it? Helping your children at school, accessing healthcare, getting a job, chatting to your neighbours. Whatever it is you know, all the things that you just need to do, to have a good life.* (FE college)

Several other respondents noted that these changes are beneficial from a language learning and integration point of view, as it means migrants in the UK long term can start learning English and engage with the education and training system as soon as they arrive in London. This opens the potential for them to access support to think about their own futures and progress into further learning and work. In the words of a FE college respondent, *'The sooner you do it, the better, then you don't get people fossilized in their coping strategies'*.

**The extension of full funding of adult education courses including ESOL to people earning less than the London Living Wage** has simplified course delivery for providers. **Similarly, the introduction of full funding for AEB-eligible people seeking asylum, where previously a co-funding requirement existed,** has further streamlined this process. The evidence suggests that many providers previously used the discretionary LSF or other internal funding to co-fund learning for certain groups such as ESOL learners, people on low pay or people seeking asylum. Removing the need to do this has simplified the process of enrolling learners and claiming funding.

*That has had a massive impact. Massive because we used to have people coming along who were doing, I don't know six hours a week cleaning maybe and having to pay. So yes, huge. What we used to do before was we would use our learner support grant to help people who are on low income and lots of forms would have to be filled in. People would have to bring in the evidence of their income and outgoings. It would be very time consuming and difficult for them. [...] We haven't had to do many of those applications. (Local authority)*

One college respondent reported that over 90 per cent of their ESOL learners are now fully funded as a result of these flexibilities.

#### **General impact of the AEB funding flexibilities: Insights from MIS**

One FE college reported a marked change in the accessibility of funding for potential learners who were previously ineligible after the introduction of the funding flexibilities. According to the college, data from its Management Information System (MIS) reveals that:

- Over the last three years, the fully funded low-wage flexibility has supported nearly 10,000 AEB-funded learners, accounting for over 20% of all learners. While not exclusively migrants, this data represents a substantial increase in accessibility for this group.
- Similarly, the flexibility for people seeking asylum has supported approximately 500 learners annually.
- The exemptions from the three-year residency rule for adults on certain immigration routes and UK/EEA family members have supported 200 and 10-20 learners respectively this year.
- The introduction of funding for Londoners not in employment, unable to evidence state benefits, has been particularly relevant for young adults still living in their family households, supporting nearly 1,100 learners.

Providers generally felt that, from the perspective of learners on low wages and people seeking asylum themselves, the flexibilities have probably had little impact on their ability to access provision as they could largely do so without paying anyway (e.g. through the LSF). However, the evidence suggests that the changes have had an indirect impact on access in two important ways.

### **1. Securing provision**

First, providers of all types reported that the fact that they can now claim full funding to cover the cost of delivery for these learners puts the provision that they access, including ESOL, on a

sounder footing when the organisation is considering what provision to deliver from a risk management perspective. By extending eligibility to key migrant groups with high levels of demand for ESOL, the flexibilities have reduced the perceived risks associated with low recruitment. A respondent from an Institute of Adult Learning reported that the profile of ESOL learners has changed post-Brexit, with fewer EU migrants, many of whom were in relatively well-paid work and able to pay co-funding fees, and a greater number from other locations who are earning below the London Living Wage. In that context, without the flexibility, it may have become increasingly difficult to deliver AEB-funded ESOL.

## 2. Redirecting funds to address other barriers

Secondly, by eliminating the need to make claims on the LSF for learner co-funding contributions to course fees (where the learner was unable to afford the fee contribution), it allows providers to target LSF funding at addressing other barriers to learning, such as childcare and travel costs.

*Instead of having to apply to that fund and using that money up, we can enrol [people seeking asylum] immediately on a free course. So it frees up that discretionary money that we have access to support learners. (Local authority)*

The respondent continued by stating that, when co-funding was in place, many people seeking asylum had been unable to attend classes because the LSF was not sufficient to cover the costs of both course fees and support to overcome wider barriers to access.

However, one provider stated that the rising cost of living meant that even those earning above the London Living Wage are now experiencing financial hardship. As a result, applications are now being made to the LSF on behalf of these learners to cover the cost of course fees. The respondent suggested that it would be helpful to explore the possibility of introducing a sliding scale of eligibility for full funding above the London Living Wage, rather than having a single cut-off point. Although the rising cost of living is an issue affecting migrant and non-migrant communities, and this change would apply to any AEB learner, research suggests that Londoners in low pay are more likely to be from migrant backgrounds<sup>29</sup>.

**Recommendation:** *Introduce an income scale for the co-funding of learning for learners earning above the London Living Wage.*

An income scale for co-funding would help to target support at those who need it to overcome cost barriers to learning. To avoid making such a system unduly complex, the scale could be based on a small number of incremental points. One point could act as a threshold for the full funding of ESOL, to further promote access for learners from migrant communities and simplify the system for providers.

**Extending funding to Londoners not in employment who are unable to evidence state benefits and who were previously locked out of funded training, including unemployed**

<sup>29</sup> L&W (2020) *The Impact of the Coronavirus Outbreak on London's Low Paid Workers*

<https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/the-impact-of-the-coronavirus-outbreak-on-londons-low-paid-workers/>

**individuals with no recourse to public funds** was identified as being particularly helpful in improving access for spouses—especially women—whose partners are working. The evidence from providers also suggests that this change has supported access for other groups. For women experiencing relationship breakdown or abusive relationships, it was stated that providing evidence of full funding eligibility had often proved very difficult and acted as a barrier to access. This implies that the ability to access funding without needing to provide evidence of eligibility from their partners not only removes a financial barrier but also a significant emotional and practical one. A college respondent stated that the most significant impact of this change has been in removing financial barriers for young adults studying full time who are living with family and are not eligible for Universal Credit, although the interviewee was unable to say what proportion of those affected are from migrant communities.

However, local authority refugee resettlement coordinators working to support resettled refugees highlighted that a barrier continues to exist for refugees who are not in work but who are on a joint Universal Credit statement which exceeds national set income thresholds. These adults, primarily women, continue to be required to co-fund their course fees, even where they have no access to the household income.

**Recommendation:** *Consider fully funding people who are on a joint Universal Credit statement but who are themselves not in work, informed by modelling on the financial impact of this change.*

This change would align rules between groups who are not in employment, ensuring they can all access the education and training required to make social connections and move into good work.

## Changes in the demand for AEB funded provision since introduction of new flexibilities

**Most providers interviewed found it difficult to say whether the flexibilities have resulted in an increase overall in demand from migrant communities, due to the consistently very high level of demand for ESOL, particularly in inner London, and the ongoing need to manage ESOL waiting lists.** As one local authority respondent observed, demand per se is not affected by the funding rules, but by who needs ESOL. Echoing this point, a college respondent said:

*We've always had huge demand, so it's really hard for me to say whether the demand has increased or decreased because the demand is huge in the area. We are not able to meet it simply because of the size of the college, the size of the provision. (FE college)*

Another factor which limits the ability of providers to ascertain whether engagement from particular migrant groups has changed is the limited data collection and analysis which takes place on the profile of learners. Although providers may request and record information from learners on their immigration and residency status, as this information is not required in the Individual Learner Record (ILR) submission for funding, most providers do not log this information for analysis.

A local authority respondent from an inner London borough also noted that a key factor influencing demand on the service is the availability of other project funded ESOL in the borough, which eases pressure on the AEB. Citing the example of a programme, English for Integration, funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to deliver Pre-entry ESOL, the respondent stated that all Pre-entry learners had been referred there, and now that it has finished, they are coming back to the adult learning service. Similarly, funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), Controlling Migration Fund (CMF), and European Social Fund (ESF), which also ended recently, may have impacted increased in demand for mainstream funded provision.

Overall, the evidence suggests that, **by widening the eligibility criteria for funding, the flexibilities have made it easier for providers to identify eligible learners and either enrol them onto courses or place them on waiting lists.** Several providers and representatives from ESOL SPOCs in boroughs with very high levels of demand for ESOL observed that it can nevertheless be challenging to manage ESOL enrolments to sustain viable classes due to the distinctive characteristics of the learner cohort. For instance, when they are not part of a settled local community, ESOL learners can be quite geographically mobile. In this context, being able to draw on a larger pool of potential learners has helped providers not only to ensure that courses remain filled but also to increase the number of learners in classes.

**Recommendation:** *Support the establishment of SPOCs for ESOL in boroughs with substantial demand and currently without such a service, to improve coordination of ESOL demand.*<sup>30</sup>

In boroughs lacking a SPOC, providers struggle to ascertain the actual demand for ESOL, as potential learners tend to express interest with several providers, leading to overestimation of demand, limited data collection and analysis, challenges in learner recruitment and risk management issues associated with establishing new provision. The GLA can help to catalyse the establishment of SPOCs, including working to support their development by local authorities who may not yet recognise the potential value for residents of this type of activity.

## Changes in patterns of demand and increasing need for Pre-entry ESOL

**Providers were much clearer on changes that they have seen to patterns of demand for ESOL, in terms of the level of learning that different migrant communities need.** These qualitative insights shed further light on the findings from the ILR data on participation in ESOL. Respondents confirmed that the composition of the migrant population in their local area, and consequently who is seeking to access learning and what they need, presents a constantly shifting picture influenced by a mix of historic settlement, the international geo-political context and national immigration policy. They identified the following migrant communities as some of the most numerous in recent times: refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine; family members joining settled south Asian communities (Pakistani and Bangladeshi), Spanish and Portuguese passport holders from Latin America; eastern Europeans (particularly from Greece and Albania), people from Hong

<sup>30</sup> [English Language \(ESOL\) for Resettlement](#) (6 June 2023).

Kong, and migrants from Turkey and Africa. Across the board, providers reported a fall in demand from EU migrants since Brexit. All the providers we spoke to reported that the majority of their migrant learners are women.

Evidence from across the providers and stakeholders interviewed consistently indicates that **the changing profile of the migrant communities accessing ESOL has led to an increase in the proportion of learners at lower levels and a corresponding drop in the proportion of learners at Levels 1 and 2.** Particularly among refugees and people seeking asylum, respondents reported seeing many learners at Pre-entry and Entry 1 level, including some who have little or no initial education and are not literate in their first language.

*In the last couple of years there's been a massive increase in the need for Pre- entry and particularly amongst the people now coming in through the asylum route – Pre- entry, Entry one, maybe Entry 2 but that's rarely. (Local authority)*

Almost all the providers involved in the research offer Pre-entry ESOL, with progression up to Entry 3, Level 1 or Level 2. The exception is the Institute of Adult Learning, which does not offer ESOL to learners who are below Entry 1. The respondent reported seeing an increase in the proportion of ESOL learners at lower levels and attributed this to the shift in the balance of demand caused by the drop in EU migrants seeking courses at the higher levels.

On account of their arriving in the UK and approaching providers in significant numbers, and data profiles being more easily collectable and readily available,<sup>31</sup> providers in this study perceived recent Ukrainian arrivals as having a good standard of education, including many with experience of higher education, and wanting intensive English language support to enable them to access good jobs.<sup>32</sup> The improved ability of providers to collect information on learners' prior skills, qualifications and preferences for this group, made possible the development of bespoke provision in many cases, which meets the needs and aspirations of the learners. A similar data-informed approach to provision design for other migrant and non-migrant adults would likely be of benefit.

## **Impact of funding rule changes on types of provision offered to migrant Londoners**

**The changing profile of London's migrant communities, and the fact that the flexibilities have brought more individuals into scope for AEB-funded learning, has required providers to offer more Pre-entry ESOL and develop other new provision to meet their learning needs.** In doing so, it is evident that they have relied to a considerable extent on the use of funding for non-regulated learning. However, although it was not always possible to understand whether the specific provision being described was funded through the Community Learning element or the local flexibility element of AEB. Interviewees generally referred to the funding as 'local flexibility' or

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<sup>31</sup> Visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine [Humanitarian Schemes Statistical bulletins](#)

<sup>32</sup> While the feedback from providers in this study indicates a specific trend among Ukrainian refugees, it is important to emphasise that perceptions of specific groups can be influenced by factors such as the volume of arrivals and timing, the availability of data, and wider cultural stereotypes. As such these insights may not reflect the diverse needs and characteristics of all individuals within those communities.

'RARPA funding'.<sup>33</sup> This approach has enabled them to offer new, bespoke provision which does not lead to a regulated qualification and can address specific needs with episodes of learning that might not follow conventional delivery patterns and enrolment timetables.

## Examples of bespoke provision

### Language proficiency and skill development

**A college has developed a bridging course to support progression for learners from Entry 2 to Entry 3.** This addresses the needs of learners who need more time to develop their language proficiency than is offered by the qualifications. The words of a FE college representative reflect this issue:

*Often the gap between Entry 2 and Entry 3 is quite a jump. So we have bridging courses and we've got quite a comprehensive course file that allows people to build on their skills. [...] The flexibility has allowed us to put on courses that aren't leading to a qualification. The jump between certain levels is too much for some people to take. We used to have to send them away for a year, say 'go and practise your language skills and then come back in a year, whereas now we can keep them progressing in their language skills, and that's been really beneficial to them. And because often they live within their own language community, they don't have many opportunities to develop their English skills, so actually they'd come back in a year's time, and they've gone backwards in their English. (FE college)*

**Several providers reported running short, very targeted courses focusing on a particular skill which complement formal ESOL classes.** These include:

- A local authority adult learning service offering spelling and grammar workshops,
- A college providing workshops on grammar for Turkish speakers,
- A local authority adult learning service offering basic literacy for ESOL learners using a phonics approach.

### Support for transient and hard-to-reach learners

**Colleges, local authorities and third sector providers all reported delivering non-accredited ESOL to people seeking asylum and Afghan refugees** living in bridging hotels, either in the hotels themselves or in community venues nearby. This approach was designed to make the learning accessible and also to manage the challenge of delivering to a potentially very transient learner cohort. In some instances, providers are using a roll-on, roll-off delivery model, with start dates throughout the year to accommodate new arrivals and learners who are moved on.

### Courses tailored to the needs of specific migrant groups

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<sup>33</sup> RARPA stands for Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (in Non-Accredited Learning). It is the recognised approach for quality assuring publicly funded non-regulated learning, and the acronym is widely used as shorthand to refer to this type of provision.

A third sector provider described how increased demand for ESOL from women on spousal visas, with school aged children and arriving via the Afghan resettlement schemes, has prompted them to offer Pre-entry ESOL and basic IT classes in schools, which is the first time they have delivered in those settings.

**Since Ukrainian nationals began arriving in Spring 2022, most providers interviewed have delivered non-accredited classes tailored specifically to the needs of this group.** The timing of their arrival meant that providers had to develop an offer outside the usual timetable, and the needs of many for short, intensive language learning, lent itself to the creation of bespoke provision. For example, a local authority has run an on-going programme of community-based employability and ESOL courses, each lasting five weeks and enabling rolling cohorts of learners to quickly upskill their English and prepare for work, with support from a bilingual volunteer. The respondent noted that they would not normally offer courses to a single community, so this has been an innovative step. Meanwhile, a college delivered an intensive ESOL ‘summer school’ with 15 hours of contact time per week, with progression to formal classes in September with twelve hours per week guided learning hours.

*What made us put them on an intensive course is just the fact that majority of them, nearly everyone, is really, really well educated with university degrees and they just needed to improve the English so that they can find suitable jobs. I mean, not just any job but a job which is relevant to their education and experience. (FE college)*

It is evident that such strategies adopted by AEB-funded providers aim to encourage engagement, improve learner outcomes, and accommodate learners' personal circumstances. These will be revisited in chapter 2, particularly in relation to how they help learners of migrant, refugee, or asylum-seeking backgrounds overcome barriers keeping them out of learning.

## **The need for more non-formal learning provision**

**Learning providers and stakeholders highlighted the importance of the flexibility to offer non-regulated, non-accredited learning**, currently up to 10 per cent of a provider's AEB allocation, **for addressing the unique needs of migrant communities, especially refugees and people seeking asylum.** Several suggestions were made for other provision that could be developed through this route. These included, for example: (i) pronunciation classes for Cantonese speakers from Hong Kong, who have a good level of English in other skill areas but are held back in the labour market by the challenges they face in speaking; (ii) and intensive ESOL targeted at refugees with professional backgrounds in fields such as health.<sup>34</sup> One suggestion was to increase the funding allowance for local flexibility to potentially 20 or 25 per cent.

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<sup>34</sup> The emphasis on non-regulated learning might arise from challenges in finding suitable qualifications for specific needs, such as pronunciation for Cantonese speakers. Intensive ESOL for professionals, like those in health, may aim for contextualised training without general ESOL exam preparation. It should be noted that these are the research team's assumptions and wasn't explicitly stated by providers.

**Recommendation 3:** *Review the proportion of providers' AEB allocation that is available for the delivery of non-regulated learning via local flexibilities.*

Having the flexibility to use funding to develop bespoke, non-accredited provision enables providers to respond to the learning needs of migrant communities. It allows them to offer courses which, in terms of timing, content and delivery models, can address some of the structural and personal barriers to learning which different migrant groups face. Increasing the scope for providers to deliver non-traditional, innovative alternatives to existing provision through local flexibilities would help to make ESOL provision more accessible, relevant, and impactful. To support effective use of local flexibilities, existing networks of stakeholders and practitioners could be encouraged to share good practice in the development and delivery of tailored, non-accredited provision.

## ESOL and Functional Skills English

It was notable that providers engaged in the research did not refer to the use of Functional Skills English (FSE) qualifications for learners with ESOL needs, and we want to highlight it here as a potential topic in need of further investigation. FSE is primarily designed for people whose first language is English, and its main focus is on reading and writing skills. It is also a statutory entitlement and therefore, fully funded. Earlier research<sup>35</sup> suggests that some providers have used a Functional Skills delivery model with learners eligible only for co-funding for ESOL to fully fund their learning, particularly at Entry Level 3 and above. Whilst some providers cite benefits for ESOL learners gaining Functional Skills qualifications, such as parity of recognition for progression to further learning, many feel that FSE is less well suited to the needs of ESOL learners, particularly at lower levels, and prefer to offer ESOL qualifications where possible.

In the absence of feedback from providers engaged in this research, the issue was discussed with the project's Research Advisory Group. One provider suggested there may have been a shift towards offering ESOL qualifications instead of FSE to their ESOL learners, as a result of changes in the rules on co-funding, and reforms of the FSE qualifications, perceived to have made them less accessible to ESOL learners. Further investigation of this issue is needed to better understand the extent of the practice and its impact on learners.

## Limitations of the flexibilities in promoting access

This section outlines the limitations of recent flexibilities in enhancing access to AEB-funded learning for migrant communities. It highlights delivery challenges identified by providers and stakeholders that may counteract the flexibilities' intentions. Specifically, it examines factors related to the current policy, funding context, and delivery infrastructure, and includes any proposed changes. Barriers to learning experienced by migrant communities themselves significantly influence their access to provision; these are reported in chapter 2.

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<sup>35</sup> L&W (2020) *ESOL Learners' Progression to Functional Skills*

## Challenges in the funding rules

Three key challenges were identified within current funding rules which impede the ability of some migrant communities to access or continue in learning, and which undercut the potential benefits caused by the widening of eligibility under the recent flexibilities.

### 1. Six-month rule for people seeking asylum

People seeking asylum become eligible for AEB funding only if they have been in the UK for at least six months and are still awaiting a decision on their case. This rule means that people seeking asylum must navigate life in the London, often with little or no English skills, without any formal learning support. This is strongly illustrated by the following quotation:

*"There's some people that really need to learn English because they can't even speak English. If you let them stay for six months in a hotel waiting for school, how would that be possible for that person to communicate, especially in London? Everything that you need to do, you need to do it in English. If they can't get you assessment because you have to stay for six months, how will I be able to help myself? How will I be able to approach people if I can't even speak English?"* (Non-learner seeking asylum)

**Providers also routinely identified this as a fundamental obstacle to people seeking asylum accessing learning, and one noted that, as most asylum claims now take much longer than six months to process, this restriction seems arbitrary and unhelpful.** This restriction is based on national AEB funding rules<sup>36</sup> set by the Department for Education, and delegation has not so far been able to address this issue.

**Recommendation:** *Encourage review of the six-month rule on access to AEB funding for individuals seeking asylum.*

As individuals now typically wait much longer than six months for a decision on their asylum claim, and the majority of asylum applications are ultimately successful, we recommend advocating for a reconsideration of this rule. Permitting people seeking asylum to access AEB-funded learning from their point of entry could significantly improve their education prospects and contribute to their successful integration into UK society. This recommendation should be twinned with recommendation 5.

### 2. Funding penalties for early withdrawals

**Respondents from all provider types expressed concern that what was described as the 'punitive funding regime' around the AEB, which financially penalises providers if learners do not complete their course and secure achievement. In practice, this can mean that learners from migrant communities are not always enrolled on the course that best meets their learning needs.** Although several providers noted that this is not specifically an issue linked to migrant communities, the precarious employment of many migrants and refugees, as well as the precarious housing situation of people seeking asylum and people in bridging and temporary

<sup>36</sup> [Adult Education Budget \(AEB\) Funding Rules 2023 to 2024](#)

accommodation, means that they are vulnerable to being rehoused and unable to continue learning at short notice.

This 'limitation' of the funding flexibilities is revisited in Chapter 2, as it forms a key barrier preventing individuals seeking asylum from engaging and persisting in learning. In the context of this chapter, it is of interest due to its impact on providers' retention and achievement rates. In this regard, a college reported that around 60 learners accessing its provision who were people seeking asylum were moved away, and as some of them had not yet taken their exams, the college lost 20 per cent achievement funding on each learner.

While providers were clear that concerns about the loss of funding in these circumstances does not cause them to turn learners away, they acknowledged that in some cases where early withdrawal seems likely, it may cause them to enrol learners on short, non-regulated courses which are less risky, even though these may not be the most suitable option from the point of view of language learning.

*We would probably be suggesting that they go to a conversation club rather than join a class. They're clearly not going to get very far. But often, you don't have that knowledge at that point. So, we tend to enrol in good faith and hope for the best. (Local authority)*

There was a strong feeling from respondents that there should be more flexibility within the funding system to recognise the challenges that providers and learners face, often in circumstances that are completely outside their control, and avoid penalising either party. To this end, they proposed potential adaptabilities, such as the inception of a unique code on ILR returns. This code would signify when a learner has been unable to complete a course due to rehousing by the Home Office. The main intention here is to protect providers from financial penalties in circumstances beyond their control. Additionally, respondents advocated for a broader definition of 'success' within the system.

**Recommendation:** *Investigate the feasibility of implementing a unique tracking system within the ILR, which allows providers to identify when a learner withdraws prematurely due to Home Office-induced relocation.*

Since housing instability interrupts learning trajectories and impacts the retention and achievement rates of learning providers, it is essential to monitor these occurrences and understand their scale across London boroughs. Providers should have the capacity to denote in their ILR returns when a person, including those seeking asylum, withdraws from a course due to a Home Office-instigated relocation.

### **3. Confusion around the funding rules and eligibility criteria**

The AEB funding rules, especially regarding immigration and residency, can be confusing. This often leads to misunderstandings among curriculum staff, resulting in eligible individuals being excluded (more on this in Chapter 2). Our research highlighted confusion about visa duration eligibility for AEB funding. Some providers believed individuals with less than twelve months left on their visa could not access funding. However, the GLA clarified that learners only need a visa

covering the course duration, not necessarily a full 12 months. Dedicated guidance for providers and civil society organisations was produced alongside this rule change.<sup>37</sup>

## Gaps in the delivery infrastructure

Three key areas for development in the AEB delivery infrastructure have been consistently identified as impeding migrant communities' access to education and training:

### 1. Poor coordination of local demand for ESOL

As discussed above, particularly in those boroughs where need for ESOL consistently outstrips supply, providers find it very challenging to manage demand so that learners are efficiently placed onto suitable courses. Some boroughs have established a Single Point of Contact (SPOC)<sup>38</sup> to manage this activity, so that eligibility checking and initial assessment are carried out centrally, and waiting lists are coordinated across providers. However, not all high-demand boroughs have this system and, as the flexibilities have increased the number of eligible learners, providers anticipate increased coordination difficulties. In the words of a local authority provider,

*What we find is you might have 400 on the waiting list, you might open appointment slots and they will get booked up, but then actually the turn out when you come to the enrolment sessions - we might only have 50, 60 per cent of those people actually turn up. That's probably because they're on waiting lists with so many providers and it's not coordinated. (Local authority)*

A third sector provider confirmed that it is common for prospective learners to register with multiple providers in the hope of securing a place on a course, which causes planning and funding problems as providers struggle to estimate accurately how much provision to run. Although they have large numbers of people expressing an interest in joining an ESOL class, only a proportion of these actually enrol. It was stated that typically only ten out of 40 or 50 learners who attend an initial assessment day might go on to take up a place on a class with that provider. Respondents stressed that better local coordination is needed, and one local authority provider reported that they are attempting to establish a SPOC but have so far been unsuccessful due to wider indifference within the local council.

### 2. Shortage of ESOL tutors

The shortage of ESOL tutors was widely stated by respondents from colleges, local authorities and wider stakeholder organisations to be a barrier to expanding the volume of provision. Learning providers reported that they are struggling to recruit suitably qualified and experienced tutors, and the calibre of applicants when they seek to recruit is generally low.<sup>39</sup> They stressed that there is evidence of interest in teaching ESOL, but the cost of initial teacher training acts as a barrier to

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<sup>37</sup> [Information for AEB providers | London City Hall](#)

<sup>38</sup> ESOL SPOCs support people with English language needs to access suitable ESOL provision in their local area by working with the full range of ESOL providers to sign-post and refer learners. They usually carry out an initial assessment first to identify the learner's needs, levels, and accessibility requirements before referral. For details of current SPOCs operating in London see: [London City Hall, ESOL SPOCs, networks, maps and directories](#).

<sup>39</sup> Research into the professional learning and development needs of the ESOL workforce carried out by at national level by L&W in 2021 found broad consensus among managers that most new entrants to the profession are not adequately prepared to teach ESOL by their initial training. Jubair Ahmed, Helen Plant and Alex Stevenson (2021) *ESOL Workforce Development: final report and recommendations* (unpublished report for the Education and Training Foundation).

qualification, particularly as rates of pay in the sector are not high.<sup>40</sup> There was a clear sense from respondents that a shortage of tutors is undermining the potential of the new flexibilities to improve access to learning.

For instance, while noting that the extension of the three-year residency waiver has had a major impact on increasing the number of eligible individuals who want to take up education and training, a respondent from an ESOL SPOC stated:

*The flip side to that is the providers are still finding themselves with no teachers or they're finding it very hard to find lecturers and to have the capacity to expand. So, you've got at this point a much larger learner base that you could potentially fund, but they're still on a waiting list because you don't have enough teachers to teach them. (SPOC)*

Respondents stated that they would like to see funding made available locally to incentivise take-up of initial ESOL teaching qualifications such as Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA).

**Recommendation:** *Provide financial support for individuals to undertake ESOL initial teacher training, to help address the shortage of suitably qualified tutors to meet local ESOL demand.*

The GLA is already supporting the take-up of CELTA, through funding from the ESOL Capacity Building Fund from the DLUHC. Building on this work, there is scope to explore funding options so as to expand the range of provision that is funded and thereby offer more diverse entry points for prospective practitioners. This could include: a bursary scheme for those who wish to pursue an ESOL specialism within a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), funding to access modules on teaching ESOL in the post-16 sector for existing tutors in other subject areas who wish to develop an ESOL specialism; and the development of a pathway to ESOL teaching for those who are already volunteering in the ESOL classroom and would be interested in progressing to teacher training with some additional support for skills development.

### 3. Limited delivery capacity in the third sector.

A respondent from one of the inner London ESOL SPOCs suggested that the most effective way of growing learning provision and promoting access to AEB-funded learning for migrant communities across London would be by building the delivery capacity of local third sector migrant support organisations. While these do not currently meet the quality criteria to apply for AEB funding through GLA's procurement process, many already offer non-formal and informal English classes

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<sup>40</sup> It is worth pointing out that there is limited financial support (in the form of bursaries) for ESOL initial teacher training, which is not considered a priority subject compared to English or Maths. Cf. GOV.UK. (Updated 16 May 2023). [FE ITE bursaries funding manual: 2023 to 2024](#).

to their service users. They have strong relationships of trust with their target communities and clear potential to provide entry and progression pathways into AEB-funded learning.

*The key issue is [GLA] are asking for MIS processes to already be there, which I understand, but maybe there should be a bit more support for organisations to build on that. Because if you have a good teaching and learning infrastructure, the MIS side of things, you can learn. It's harder to do it the other way around, right? So maybe a bit more work with organisations and with teams within the GLA that specialise in relationship with the VCS - like the community engagement team, for example - a bit more partnership with them. (SPOC)*

Our interviews with stakeholders, including several third sector migrant support organisations, underscore that the transition from community-based informal classes to AEB-funded ESOL and other learning opportunities is presently inconsistent. Evidence indicates that awareness of AEB opportunities and eligibility criteria is low (more in chapter 2), leading some organisations to hesitate before referring their service users to mainstream provision, fearing they might struggle to fulfil requirements such as regular attendance.

**Recommendation:** *Capacity building support for third sector organisations in touch with London's migrant communities, to enable them to deliver non-accredited AEB ESOL.*

Third sector organisations that work with migrant communities often command a high level of trust. While these organisations would often be too small to hold AEB contracts in their own right, more could be done through sub-contracting arrangements to harness their potential to enable access for learners to AEB-funded provision. Local authorities could play a key role in supporting capacity building of third sector organisations to deliver tailored, non-formal AEB-funded ESOL. Bringing more of these organisations into the fold of AEB funding would also provide new entry and progression pathways for learners to other AEB-funded learning, including accredited ESOL and wider skills development opportunities.

## Conclusion

Our research found a high level of consistency in the messages from providers and wider migration stakeholders about the impact of the new flexibilities on access to AEB-funded skills provision for London's migrant communities. The evidence suggests that overall, the changes have had a positive impact. They have extended eligibility to migrant groups with high levels of need and have made it easier for providers to deliver to them. The profile of learners eligible to access AEB now accurately reflects the current pattern of need within London, with high demand from refugees, people seeking asylum, low-paid workers and family members of existing residents, and reduced demand from EU citizens. Nevertheless, a range of system-level issues continue to undermine the effectiveness of AEB funding in meeting the diverse skills needs of London's migrant communities. Interview participants highlighted the need for further action to maximise the potential of delegation to ensure that providers can deliver, and adults are able to access, an appropriate mix and breadth of learning opportunities.

## 2. Barriers to engaging with skills provision in London

### Key findings

- Migrant learners have a diversity of motivations for engaging with adult education. Most discover opportunities through word-of-mouth within their social and community networks, and many report a significant boost in their confidence and independence as a result of their learning.
- A range of socioeconomic challenges restrict migrant learners from accessing and persisting with skills provision, including a lack of childcare services, severe housing instability, precarious and low-paid employment, the cost of travel and transport, digital poverty, and more general financial constraints related to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.
- Many migrant learners also face individual and cultural barriers to engaging with adult education such as struggling with the impact of poor mental health and trauma, as well as low language proficiency, adjusting to the UK education system, and navigating distinct cultural attitudes towards education.
- Institutional barriers are also prevalent, with various challenges arising from the AEB eligibility criteria creating difficulties for migrants attempting to access AEB-funded skills provision. Even when migrants are eligible, there remains limited employment support and a lack of suitable provision at the right level, particularly at the lower levels.
- Awareness and understanding of the AEB eligibility criteria and available funding opportunities is low across migrant communities, providers and third sector organisations.
- Providers broadly consider flexible provision to be an effective support strategy for addressing some of these barriers. Other approaches to supporting migrants in accessing skills provision include increased collaboration with third sector organisations, as well as clearer progression pathways and improved employability support for learners.

This chapter explores the social and/or economic barriers that impede certain individuals from engaging with skills provision in London, triangulating evidence from migrant communities, AEB-funded learning and training providers, and wider migration stakeholders. It first delves into the motivations that inspire migrants to participate in adult education, their strategies for discovering relevant learning opportunities, and the impact this learning has on their lives and careers. Subsequently, it identifies and analyses the various barriers that may hinder their engagement with skills provision in London, encompassing socioeconomic obstacles, individual and cultural barriers,

as well as broader institutional challenges.<sup>41</sup> The chapter then highlights the awareness levels of migrant communities, referral organisations, and adult education providers regarding AEB funding rules and eligibility criteria and discusses some of the supportive strategies these providers utilise to facilitate migrants' access to AEB-funded provision.<sup>42</sup>

## **Introduction: Migrant communities and adult education**

Qualitative discussions with individuals from migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking backgrounds suggest that they enrol in adult education courses for a variety of reasons. Predominantly, these learners are motivated by the desire to enhance their English language skills, thereby opening up career opportunities and preparing them for employment in the UK. Other significant motivations include building confidence for everyday life, fostering connections and integration with local and national communities, and preparing for the 'Life in the UK' test as a step towards obtaining British citizenship.

The majority of learners engaged in this research discovered their courses through word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family members, both in-person and using social media. Those with more advanced digital skills often found courses through internet searches, while others were informed about available courses by various third sector organisations and local authorities. Some learners, who had previously participated in adult education classes, were referred to their current course by their former teachers.

The impact of adult education on learners' lives and work is multifaceted. Most notably, learners reported a significant boost in their confidence when engaging in social interactions in English. The learning experience has also fostered greater independence in managing daily tasks, such as scheduling medical appointments, and has facilitated the English language learning of their children. Some learners reported that their new language skills have paved the way for career initiation or further education, such as university studies. In one instance, a learner successfully used their improved English skills to obtain British citizenship.

Nonetheless, there are a number of factors limiting or hindering migrant communities' access to learning and skills provision. International literature suggests that key barriers to educational opportunities for adult people seeking asylum and refugees include financial barriers, such as the cost of learning.<sup>43</sup> Non-financial barriers also come into play, including lack of time due to family or

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<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that, while the barriers discussed in this chapter are presented as distinct categories for the sake of clarity and structure, they are in fact interrelated and often overlap. The categorisation is a heuristic tool, intended to aid understanding rather than to suggest rigid divisions between these barriers.

<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that, while the perspectives and experiences of migrant communities in London are fundamental to this research, the number of direct quotes from these respondents is limited by several factors. First, the use of interpreters for some interviews would mean that these quotes could not be directly attributed to the respondent. Second, the low level of English proficiency demonstrated by some learners would require their quotes to be significantly edited for these to be viable. Third, the use of an automated service for transcribing interview recordings resulted in some transcripts being of too poor quality to draw quotes from, largely due to the service struggling to interpret the diversity of accents. Despite the limited number of direct quotes, the feedback received from migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum is at the core of this chapter.

<sup>43</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018), *Skills on the Move : Migrants in the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris, France.

work commitments; lack of information about learning opportunities or funding, or scholarships;<sup>44</sup> discrimination, or programmes' lack of adaptation to the specific needs of migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum.<sup>45</sup> Institutional barriers create their own challenges, such as those related to the design of welfare systems, the rules governing access to training opportunities, or the laws governing the rights of migrants to live in the host country.<sup>46</sup> One significant challenge is that asylum housing often leaves people seeking asylum and others who are rehoused in remote areas where they are unable to access the adult education and support services that they need.<sup>47</sup> Although London does not have 'remote areas' as such, some respondents in this research are housed a significant distance away from their nearest available provision, and reported that the prohibitive cost of travel has made it difficult to afford to attend their course.

In the specific context of the UK, affordability and English-language proficiency have been identified as key obstacles, not only in the context of education but also in other aspects of life in the capital, such as accessing services and funding or progressing in work. Furthermore, issues around funding eligibility criteria and a lack of join-up with other funding streams and programmes for migrant communities are often highlighted in sector research, particularly in relation to AEB ESOL provision.<sup>48</sup> This section expands the evidence base on barriers to learning.

## Socioeconomic barriers

### Lack of childcare

**The most frequently cited barrier by providers, stakeholders, and migrants is childcare.**

**Many migrant learners are parents or have other caregiving responsibilities, which significantly restrict their ability to dedicate time for studying, whether it is on-site or at home.** Migrant learners with young children below school age must either attend online classes from home, where they have the digital access and skills needed to do so, or bring their child with them to in-person provision where, in both contexts, several learners reported that studying while also looking after their children can be distracting and disruptive.

For learners whose children are in school, there is a need to drop their children off and pick them up at specific hours, therefore limiting the times at which they can attend adult education classes and the distance they can travel in order to access learning. Consequently, demand for provision that fits around school hours has grown, such as weekday morning and weekend classes. While childcare services can provide a solution to this barrier, providers noted that crèches and other

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<sup>44</sup> Slade, B.L. and Dickson, N. (2021), *Adult education and migration in Scotland: Policies and practices for inclusion*, *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, (27)1.

<sup>45</sup> Milburn, F. (1996), *Migrants and minorities in Europe: implications for adult education and training policy*, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, (15)3; Zegers de Beijl, R. (2000), *Documenting discrimination against migrant workers in the labour market: A comparative study of four European countries*, International Labour Office, Geneva, Switzerland; Sheared, V. et al. (eds.) (2010), *The handbook of race and adult education : a resource for dialogue on racism*, John Wiley & Sons, San Francisco, United States.

<sup>46</sup> Costello, C. and Freedland, M. R. (eds.) (2014), *Migrants at Work: Immigration and Vulnerability in Labour Law*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom.

<sup>47</sup> Bouttell, L. (2023), *Exploring the place of adult learning for refugees and people seeking asylum in migration policy for integration in England and Scotland*, *Studies in the Education of Adults*.

<sup>48</sup> Rolfe, H. and Stevenson, A. (2021), *Migration and English Language Learning after Brexit*, Learning and Work Institute, Leicester, United Kingdom.

childcare options, such as childminders, have become increasingly scarce as many local services ceased operations following the pandemic. At the same time, where childcare is available, some parents are reluctant to be separated from their children or hand them into the care of a stranger. One provider does offer an on-site crèche, but it is not accessible to all learners. As they mentioned,

*We have one centre where we have a crèche, so whenever we speak to any students, we'll say to them, 'You can attend our class, we've got a crèche right next door, and we've got our crèche workers there,' and it works absolutely wonderfully. However, that happens to be for the Pre-entry class. If you're a higher level, there's no crèche available. This happened to me when we had an enrolment day. I spoke to this lovely lady, she had a child, but she was Entry 3, so I had no courses for her where there was a crèche available. That's probably the biggest obstacle. (Local authority)*

Respondents working in the voluntary and community sector felt that, although childcare services are possible under the AEB funding rules, very few providers offer such services or only offer childcare via a registered childminder. These respondents believed that increased awareness of all delivery models is necessary to ensure that providers understand this and are incentivised to offer crèche facilities. However, while a funding rate uplift was applied which providers could use to provide more wraparound support such as childcare, some providers claimed that this funding is not sufficient to cover the real costs of providing childcare services, emphasising that more is necessary if all providers are to afford such facilities.

## Housing Instability

Both learning providers and wider stakeholders pointed out that **housing instability presents a significant barrier to learning for migrant communities in London**. Qualitative evidence suggests that rising cost of housing across the city often forces low-income migrant groups, such as Afghan and Syrian refugees, to relocate frequently, sometimes even outside of London. This instability, exacerbated by rising rent prices, disrupts their ability to commit to and complete learning programmes.

The precarious housing situation of people seeking asylum and bridging hotel residents is particularly disruptive. Their temporary and uncertain living conditions mean they can be relocated at short notice, often before they can access learning provision or part-way through a course.<sup>49</sup> This not only interrupts their learning but also negatively impacts providers retention and achievement rates. A third sector provider shared what seemed to be a common scenario:

*They've been coming to courses and stuff, then two or three weeks before the exam they're moved. They're just told in the morning, 'You just get your stuff and you're leaving by 10*

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<sup>49</sup>people seeking asylum ' housing is arranged by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI), which contracts with local authorities, social landlords, and private landlords throughout the UK, barring London and the south-east due to a housing shortage. People seeking asylum are allocated housing on a 'no choice' basis, often in regions where housing is less expensive, under the dispersal policy. People seeking asylum can be moved for various reasons, such as changes in the availability of accommodation, or once their asylum claim is accepted or rejected. For example, once granted refugee status, they must find their own housing and cover rent, either independently or with government assistance. Chartered Institute of Housing, Housing Rights Information (England & Wales). [Refugees, asylum seekers, trafficking survivors and people with discretionary leave and humanitarian protection.](#)

*o'clock.' And most of them are taken to the north of the country and they can't even come to sit their exams. So that's affecting retention and achievement. (Third sector provider)*

This housing uncertainty impacts the engagement of people seeking asylum, bridging hotel residents and others who are relocated at short notice, for example, victims of domestic violence and people who are rough sleeping, in two main ways. Firstly, the fear of being unable to commit to finishing a course due to potential relocation discourages many from enrolling. Secondly, learning providers, wary of the potential for early withdrawal, often enrol people seeking asylum in short, non-accredited courses, which may not be the most suitable for their learning needs or not at all.

In addition to these challenges, providers have also noted the prohibitive cost of supporting learners who have been relocated. For instance, some institutions have considered covering train fares for learners to return and sit exams when they are close to the end of the course. However, current rules do not allow claims for travel from outside London, making this solution unfeasible.

## **Precarious and low-paid employment**

**The precarious and low-paid nature of employment among many migrants is a significant barrier to their access to adult education, as emphasised by both providers and stakeholders.** The majority of these learners are unable to attend adult education classes due to their work commitments and the scarcity of evening classes. For instance, one local authority noted that such individuals often populate their waiting lists for classes. They stated,

*If they're on [the waiting list] for a long time, one of the reasons is often that they are taking work and their availability is one afternoon a week or a Friday evening. The reality is that you're going to wait a long time if that's the only time you're ever going to be available. (Local authority)*

The need to prioritise paid work over education is particularly pronounced among working migrants in London, particularly those on non-standard contracts like shift work or zero-hours contracts, which further complicate their ability to prioritise education. As one third sector organisation pointed out,

*People would rather find a low-paid job and go to work to support their family than attend some English class, because their primary concern is to secure their families first, especially in low-income households. (Third sector organisation)*

This issue is particularly acute for those in higher-level classes (Entry 3+). While their level of English allows them to secure jobs, they often find themselves in roles with limited prospects for progression. Their irregular work patterns, coupled with the strict attendance requirements of mainstream provision, often lead to poor retention. Consequently, qualitative evidence suggests that providers—bound by quality assurance guidelines like those from Ofsted—may be compelled to withdraw these learners from the programme due to insufficient attendance.

## **Financial constraints**

**Research participants shared that the financial constraints faced by migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum, amplified by the cost-of-living crisis and the soaring cost of housing, can reduce migrants' motivation to engage with adult education.** It is worth noting that unemployed dependents of people on Universal Credit who exceed income thresholds set

nationally, are still required to co-fund their fees,<sup>50</sup> alongside high rent prices and living costs. These financial hardships often force these individuals to prioritise basic necessities such as food and housing over their learning needs.

Debt is a prevalent issue among many migrants who have incurred substantial costs to reach the UK, often through intermediaries or 'middlemen'. Homelessness, too, is a significant concern, particularly for those seeking asylum. One provider shared a poignant example,

*We had about three or four students, one of them disabled, on the streets, who didn't have anywhere to go. And there wasn't any support for them. (Third sector provider)*

**For refugees and people seeking asylum, their primary focus is often on addressing immediate needs such as housing, food, and childcare.**<sup>51</sup> This focus on survival can make it challenging for them to commit to an adult education course.

In response to this, one third sector provider partnered with a community organisation to provide meals in a community venue, offering not only sustenance but also opportunities for social interaction. Stakeholders felt that the most important action needed to address learners' financial constraints is flexible provision held at a variety of times, both online and in-person, therefore allowing learners as much flexibility as possible to schedule their education around their work hours.

## Travel and transport

**The cost of travel in London presents a significant barrier to adult education for learners from low-income households,** especially for people seeking asylum. One learner shared his experience of residing in a hotel located a considerable distance from their college. The prohibitive cost of travel forces them into lengthy walks to attend classes. Another learner, despite receiving a travel allowance on her Oyster card as part of her course, often faces delays in payments or insufficient funds to cover her travel expenses

**The issue of funding not keeping pace with the rising cost of tube fares was highlighted by providers.** Bursaries have not increased in line with these fares, leaving learners to bear the brunt of the shortfall. This financial strain can lead learners to risk travelling without paying, a decision fraught with severe consequences, including arrest and potential deportation:

*They apply for the [travel] bursary, but you can't get the bursary for week one. You have to go through the process and even when you get it, it doesn't cover all your costs. So if you're living on £8 a week and you've got a journey to college, I mean, one of my students told me*

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<sup>50</sup> [GLA AEB Grant Funding and Performance Management Rules 2023-24](https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/jobs-and-skills/training-providers-teaching-skills/adult-education-budget/information-aeb-providers), sections 156 – 158. Available at: <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/jobs-and-skills/training-providers-teaching-skills/adult-education-budget/information-aeb-providers>

<sup>51</sup> Individuals seeking asylum often face significant financial hardships as they are prohibited from working until granted refugee status. Those living in private residences receive a weekly allowance of £47.39 from the government, while those housed in temporary hotels get £9.58 per week (source: <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get> ). These amounts, already minimal, are further devalued in the face of inflation and the increasing costs of essential goods in the UK.

*that he regularly dodged his fares on the day, which, you know, could result in him being deported from the country if he was caught. (FE College)*

## Digital poverty and digital skills

**The shift towards blended or hybrid learning methods following the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the issue of digital poverty, as highlighted by both providers and stakeholders.**

The completion of homework for in-person courses now often necessitates digital access, with some courses being delivered entirely online. This poses a significant challenge for learners who cannot afford personal laptops or the necessary digital software for their courses, such as Microsoft Office. For example, one learner interviewed who cannot afford a laptop currently uses their phone to complete homework but finds it inadequate for studying.

*I need a laptop because my [phone] screen is small and, you know, you want to switch from this page to that page, but you lose the page. It's hard working on Google Classroom, and you get lost because lots of notifications come and you are distracted when you are using your phone. (AEB-funded learner, ESOL Level 1)*

Although many providers offer on-site computers for learners to use free of charge, the cost of transportation to these sites can be prohibitive for many.

**Moreover, a lack of digital skills presents another barrier for migrant communities in accessing and persisting with adult education.** Learners highlighted issues that are common within online adult learning, such as finding the process of logging into computers at colleges overly complicated and struggling with navigating online content. Many learners express a preference for in-person learning, citing wasted time on setting up calls and dealing with technical difficulties. The quality of online classes can also be compromised by poor audio and internet connections, particularly when video is not available, as learners cannot rely on body language to understand certain words.

Despite the travel and transport-related barriers discussed in the previous section, most learners expressed a preference for in-person provision as it allows for them to bond, make friends, and practice their English together:

*I really don't like to participate in online classes [...] the process of learning online is very different to in person, yeah. You don't have any connection. You just hang up, disconnect and everything is gone. But here in the person in the class, we can talk, we can have a chat with each other in the break and we can make friends. These things improve our English as well. (AEB-funded learner, ESOL Level 1)*

As affirmed by previous L&W research in the Welsh context, many learners, especially those at lower levels, require face-to-face teaching for effective language acquisition, social interaction, and support in managing cultural displacement and isolation<sup>52</sup>.

Significantly, **digital exclusion extends beyond the classroom, as a lack of digital access or skills can make it difficult for potential learners to gather information about available**

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<sup>52</sup> Learning and Work Institute Wales and the University of South Wales, *A review of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) policy for Wales*, July 2023.

**opportunities and how to access them.** Consequently, it can prevent potential learners from accessing information about provision, and ultimately the provision itself.

## Individual and cultural barriers

### Mental health

**The impact of stress, trauma, and other mental health issues, often associated with the migration process, on migrants' ability to engage in education was reported by most respondents across all categories.** The impact of trauma is particularly pronounced for refugees and people seeking asylum who often have poor mental health linked to the circumstances that led to their displacement.

**The destitution many migrants face can exacerbate already fragile mental health.** For instance, one provider cited a learner who had her shoes stolen at her hotel and came to college in stocking feet. Many providers have reported an increase in mental health needs that are impacting learners' ability to attend and stay engaged with their classes. One third sector provider has a wellbeing service, and demand for this has significantly increased, largely due to feelings of loneliness, unfamiliarity with the host country, and the effects of 'brain waste'.<sup>53</sup>

*In terms of their mental health, that has really increased [...] just trying to fit in within a new culture and feeling lost and lonely - there's lots of loneliness. So those kinds of issues and a lot of trauma [...] and there's lots of underemployment. Like somebody who has a PhD in their country and who was highly successful and now not being able to progress and being underemployed. (Third sector provider)*

**Counselling and mental health services can provide some support, but they are not a panacea.** Many learners, struggling with mental health issues, end up dropping out of their courses. Learners have reported days when poor mental health makes it impossible for them to attend classes, and they often feel that their providers lack understanding of these challenges. One learner reported struggling with communicating his mental health needs to his teacher due to a language barrier and lack of familiarity with discussing the topic:

*Sometimes my mind is not in the right place. Sometimes you're not like mentally healthy enough. And then I just don't come. I don't want to come because my mind is not in the right place. But it's hard to explain to the teacher (AEB-funded learner, ESOL Level 1)*

However, it should be noted that providers' options to accommodate these issues are sometimes limited due to certain requirements, such as attendance policies, as discussed earlier in chapter 1.

**Moreover, mental health issues and trauma can significantly impact migrants' motivation and confidence to access education.** Many stakeholders noted that women with little or no experience of education often lack the self-esteem to enrol in educational courses, emphasising that they may feel that education is not for them, or that they are not 'worthy' of these opportunities. Training providers and stakeholders felt that these issues are often compounded by the trauma of

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<sup>53</sup> "Brain waste" here refers to 'the non-recognition of the skills (and qualifications) acquired by a migrant outside of the [country of reception], which prevents them from fully using their potential'. This phenomenon can result from various barriers, including language proficiency, non-recognition of foreign credentials, and discrimination. Brain waste definition, [European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs](#).

the migration process, the hostile environment policy, and the anti-immigration sentiment prevalent in the media.

Negative media narratives can make migrants feel defensive and insecure, affecting their self-worth and their willingness to engage with formal education services. As one third sector organisation pointed out, the media's portrayal of refugees and migrants can significantly impact their mindset and their aspirations for a better life:

*One of the biggest problems is the media which they listen to. When they hear things about how the local British people think that that refugees are a problem, it puts them in a very defensive mode and makes them very insecure. The way these conversations take place in the media really impacts their mindset, how they feel about themselves and their self-worth, you know? (Third sector organisation)*

Overall, mental health is a significant barrier to education for migrants, and it is intertwined with other challenges such as the hostile immigration policy, media narratives, and personal trauma.

## Language proficiency

**Stakeholders reported that low language proficiency can cause barriers to learning for migrant communities. Language barriers can exacerbate their ability to understand their eligibility and what opportunities are available to them.** For those who manage to reach the point of attempting to enrol on a course, they often find conversations with providers confusing and lack the confidence to follow up these interactions.

Additionally, diagnosing learning needs such as dyslexia can be more challenging in ESOL learners, and these needs often go unidentified. While providers may receive some funding through the Additional Learning Support fund to address these issues, the lack of expertise can be a barrier.

## Differences in educational systems

**A significant challenge faced by migrant communities, including refugees and people seeking asylum, is the unfamiliarity with the UK's adult education system.** This lack of understanding, as highlighted by many stakeholders engaged in this research, can lead to confusion, discouragement, and ultimately, hinder their learning progression.

Providers and stakeholders pointed out that newly arrived migrants often find the UK's adult education system unfamiliar and challenging to navigate. While they quickly adapt to immediate living needs in London like rent and bills, their understanding of rights, entitlements, and the nuances of UK public and social services frequently remains limited, particularly among those not integrated into established communities. Stakeholders largely attributed this knowledge gap to the lack of accessible, clear and multilingual information about the UK's further education and adult education systems. Several third sector organisations highlighted that people seeking asylum, for instance, often have scant information about available educational opportunities and how to access them, an issue that is exacerbated for those housed in hotels, where the dissemination of accurate information is often hampered by mixed messages and misconceptions about services and entitlements.

One stakeholder working with new arrivals from Hong Kong emphasised that many of these individuals often find the UK's adult education system and its funding rules perplexing due to its contrast with the system in their home country<sup>54</sup>,

*For newly arrived Hong Kongers, having to access some form of classes, not really knowing how London is, how huge it is, what borough boundaries means – all of that being in place, the AEB changes can be quite difficult to understand. (Local Government)*

## Other cultural preferences

**Beyond language barriers and the complexities of navigating the UK education system, providers and stakeholders reported that certain cultural preferences within migrant communities present additional challenges. These differences, particularly in attitudes towards education, can sometimes create further obstacles to learning.** A key cultural preference often revolves around gender roles and the participation of women in education and work. For instance, providers reported that, in some communities, there is a preference for men and women to attend separate classes.

Providers highlighted that this cultural norm creates a high demand for female-only provision, which is often scarce. Additionally, stakeholders reported that educational goals can vary based on cultural norms. For example, while some women may pursue ESOL courses, they might not be as interested in skills training or employability-related classes. This apparent lack of interest often reflects their priorities for learning, such as supporting their families or navigating daily life, rather than being driven by employment goals. These priorities may be shaped by their life experiences and expectations prior to moving to the UK.

## Institutional barriers

### Limited availability of appropriate courses at the right level

Exploring the changes in patterns of demand for AEB-funded provision since the introduction of new flexibilities, Chapter 1 demonstrated that **the changing profile of the migrant communities accessing ESOL in London has resulted in a higher proportion of learners at lower levels, creating a demand-supply gap for suitable provision at these levels** (i.e., Pre-entry and Entry 1). This gap, reported by providers, stakeholders, and learners, disproportionately affects female migrants, particularly those who have little or no prior education. In this respect a third sector organisation shared,

*We often find that it's women who have had absolutely no education their whole lives, who have a hard time finding anything to support them. So, for people who have no literacy, there's simply no option, there's nothing really provided to help them get started. (Third sector organisation)*

The lack of appropriate provision has led to disappointment among learners. For example, one learner, confident in reading and writing but struggling with understanding UK accents, was only offered ESOL Level 2 Reading, despite her priority being to improve her speaking and listening

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<sup>54</sup> Adult education pathways for Hong Kongers: GovHK: Study Options for Adult Learners ([www.gov.hk](http://www.gov.hk))

skills. Similarly, another learner finishing Level 2 ESOL expressed frustration at the absence of any higher-level ESOL course at her college, as she wished to take her learning further.

**The relevance of course content is another concern.** Providers and stakeholders conveyed that learners often prefer language instruction contextualised to their occupational areas and daily life, enabling them to apply their English skills at work and in everyday situations. Specifically, it was mentioned that,

*Because then they can apply this immediately in their own work in some way, they can immediately pick it up and start practicing at work. Because usually people go two, three, four weeks and they're being told something which they cannot apply in their own life. And they said, 'Well, I'm wasting my time because these things, I'm not using them'. (Third sector organisation)*

**The volume of ESOL provision is another challenge, with current offerings insufficient to meet demand.** Some stakeholders attributed this to providers' inability to expand their offer due to difficulties in recruiting more teaching staff (for more on the shortage of ESOL tutors, see chapter 1). Others pointed out that the volume of provision each learner can access is not enough to enable rapid progress in English language skills development. As one FE college noted, '*Funding 180 hours a year is nothing when you're new to the country. The funding needs to be much more.*'

**The inflexibility in enrolment times is another barrier.** While many providers have set enrolment times throughout the year, with some having only one enrolment point in September, this structure may not align with the immediate language needs of newly arrived migrants. Although most learners on waiting lists are typically offered provision within the same academic year, except those who register for course in the summer term, a prolonged wait may impact their enrolment or motivation. An ESOL advice service reported,

*We found that basically learners that had waited for only around two weeks between the time they came to us and the time that they were able to enrol with the provider, 80 per cent of them were able to enrol. If they waited for two months longer, their enrolment rate went down to 20 per cent. (ESOL advice service)*

This example suggests that enrolment rates were highest when learners waited for a shorter time between their first contact and enrolment. However, maintaining a modest waiting list can aid providers in sustaining course numbers, compensating for common learner drop-out occurrences, as discussed earlier in this report.

## **Employment support**

**Improved employment support for migrant learners was considered necessary by many respondents, including providers, stakeholders and learners themselves.** These learners emphasised that it remains difficult to find and secure a job after finishing an ESOL course and felt that they need more help with making links to employers who can offer sustainable work with opportunities for progression. As well as potentially improving the quality of work learners enter after finishing their course, providers conveyed that increased employment support could help ESOL learners to think more clearly how their English language learning relates to their career ambitions, as many don't currently have a strong sense of this.

Learners from migrant communities tend to be in low-skilled jobs which make few demands on their English (e.g., cleaner, barista), limiting opportunities to progress their English and leaving many to plateau after initial progress.

*What we found that the trend is that they work with people speaking their language. And they don't actually practise English at work. (FE college)*

Stakeholders agreed that these learners tend to become trapped in 'bubbles' where they only speak their native language. They then often access low-paid work which is very isolating and involves no mixing with English speakers, resulting in them remaining in the UK for years with no access to opportunities to learn English and stuck in poor work. Extending employment support to migrant learners could potentially help these individuals access better work where they could both earn money and practice their English skills.

## Awareness of AEB funding and eligibility

### Awareness of migrant communities

**Providers generally reported that awareness among migrant communities of the AEB eligibility criteria and available funding opportunities is low.** This lack of awareness is often due to migrants with limited educational experience not considering education as an option, and those with more experience feeling unfamiliar with the UK education system, particularly where the availability of adult education and free provision is considerably different in their country of origin (see subsection *Differences in educational systems*).

**Migrants often learn about AEB-funded courses through word-of-mouth, which means that awareness is most limited among those not networked into established migrant communities.** Consequently, recent arrivals with fewer local connections face greater difficulties in finding information about AEB-funded provision:

*The ones who've recently come into the country and who have no family connections whatsoever, or any connections, usually they take a very long time to find out that classes are free, that classes are available for them. I've met quite a few people who've been here for a year and just didn't realise that classes were available for them. (Local authority)*

Interestingly, one local authority suggested that women tend to become aware of available provision sooner than men as they're often more integrated into social networks and communities and are more likely to be targeted by social services who can refer them onto AEB-funded courses.

*Especially with the men, they don't know. I think that there tends to be faster support for the women because they have children, so they're quickly connected to social services and education services and within that process they find out about English classes. (Local authority provider)*

However, cultural norms can also influence interest in adult education, with some women feeling that education is not for them, leading to reluctance in pursuing advertised opportunities or researching their eligibility (for more, see earlier subsection on *Cultural differences*).

Accordingly, **stakeholders highlighted the need for strong migrant-led social networks that can share information about educational opportunities**, with community leaders who have had

positive experiences of adult education in the UK and can serve as role models to demonstrate the benefits of education for all. In addition, for those not able to access support networks, publicity materials being made available in community languages would further extend the reach of adult education in migrant communities.

## **Awareness of referral organisations and adult education providers**

**While migrant communities may have limited awareness of AEB funding and eligibility, stakeholders largely agree that it's not essential for individuals to understand these intricacies. Instead, the focus should be on ensuring that organisations providing advice and support to migrants are well-informed and can guide them appropriately.** As a third sector organisation explained,

*What they're looking for is any college or place that they can go to where they'll learn, so they'll go to a children's centre or an adult education centre or library, or to the local college and just say, 'Have you got anything for me?'. I'm not sure how much it matters that they know either who's doing the funding or where it's funded or the eligibility criteria, because they simply go to a place and say, can you help me find a course? (Third sector organisation)*

**However, some organisations supporting migrants struggle to find information about learning eligibility and funding.** Limited resources and the need to prioritise immediate care for service users often mean they lack the time to actively search for updates on funding flexibilities or eligibility criteria. Even when they receive information from providers, the flow of information can be inconsistent, and there have been instances of colleges providing incorrect eligibility information. This has been particularly problematic for Hong Kong nationals arriving through the Hong Kong BN(O) programme, who have reportedly received varying information depending on their source of advice.

*I've heard from Hong Kongers who went to their local councils asking about these ESOL classes or other education opportunities and they have got different responses. They've had the local authorities telling them that they have to pay for all these classes. And some of the local authorities, they completely had no idea about what is there for Hong Kongers. (Local Government)*

Stakeholders, therefore, emphasise the need for regular information-sharing between providers and third sector organisations about updates to funding flexibilities and best practices. A centralised information point for updates on funding and eligibility was suggested as a potential solution, with the caveat that any changes to information sharing must be sustainable in the long term.

**Some providers also admitted to struggling with understanding the provision eligibility for individuals with different migration statuses, attributing this to the complexity of the AEB funding rules.** Many providers are required to attend seminars focused on explaining the eligibility criteria, with one pointing out that, if training providers with fluent English are having difficulties understanding the funding rules, then migrant communities with little or no English will certainly struggle too.

Moreover, the transition from informal, non-AEB funded provision to AEB-funded provision often presents another hurdle. Small community organisations providing informal learning often lack awareness of the opportunities available through AEB and how these could benefit their service users. This lack of knowledge weakens the progression routes from informal to formal learning provisions.

**Recommendation:** *Enhance guidance and support for providers and stakeholders on using the AEB to improve access to skills provision for migrant communities.*

This need emerges from two areas:

1. Frontline staff, who interact with potential learners, should have accurate, current information about AEB eligibility criteria. Additional support, including simplified funding rule explanations, eligibility flow charts, online tutorials, webinars, and chat functions on the GLA website, could improve awareness among curriculum and enrolment staff and frontline workers in third-sector migrant support organisations.
2. Multilingual publicity materials would further improve migrant communities' awareness of available AEB opportunities.
3. Providers need clarity on using AEB local funding flexibility for wraparound support to address migrants' practical, personal barriers. Guidance materials and case studies could promote awareness of funding for childcare, interpreters, or bilingual support staff, helping learners with mental health difficulties access suitable support.

## Provider strategies to support migrant access, retention and progression

As explored in Chapter 1, providers offer more bespoke AEB provision tailored to learners' personal needs, partly because of the funding rule changes. This section revisits some of these strategies to the extent that they serve to encourage engagement, improve learner outcomes, and accommodate learners' personal circumstances.

- **Flexible learning schedules.** Many providers recognise the importance of offering courses at various times to accommodate changes in learners' personal circumstances, such as increased childcare or work commitments. As a result, a wide variety of delivery options are available, including twilight, weekend, and evening provision, whole-day courses, and summer school,

*If their job changes and instead of getting Tuesday and Thursday off they're getting Monday and Wednesday off, we've got a group that we can put them into. (FE college)*

- **Online provision is another strategy** used by many providers to accommodate learners' personal responsibilities. To address concerns about online learning, some providers adopt an incremental approach, transitioning learners from face-to-face to hybrid classes to gradually build their confidence and willingness to learn online. As discussed earlier in this chapter, online and flexible learning appears to work particularly well with learners who have childcare and professional responsibilities as it offers them the flexibility to fit learning around other commitments.

- **Providers often collaborate with third sector organisations, schools, and job centres to extend their reach and enhance learner engagement.** These partnerships also facilitate enrichment activities and effective signposting to services that address wider barriers.
- **Classroom support is another crucial aspect**, with some providers having learning support assistants in their ESOL classes and others creatively leveraging higher-level learners to support those at the Pre-entry level.
- Several providers reported offering **introductory courses to working as a teaching assistant, tailored to the needs of lower level ESOL learners.**
- To support learners to practise their English and develop their language skills more effectively, providers offer a range of other courses, and it is common **for ESOL learners to be enrolled on a non-accredited course alongside their ESOL course. These include conversation clubs, digital skills and ESOL with Maths.**
- To try and meet the high demand for ESOL in the borough, a local authority provider runs five-week short conversation courses in the community. These act as a stopgap for learners where there are no places on accredited courses, or the timing of their arrival does not coincide with enrolment.

## **Examples of effective practice and future plans for supporting migrants to remain and progress within AEB funded provision**

**Providers have identified a variety of effective practices in adult education, with a strong emphasis on personalised teaching.** The ability of teachers to establish a strong sense of rapport with students is considered crucial. This not only fosters trust but also enables the identification of personal challenges that may affect a learner's attendance and participation. Some providers even ensure that learners progress through ESOL levels with the same tutor to strengthen this rapport and support progression.

**Effective progression pathways are another key aspect of successful practice.** One provider reported mapping out pathways from ESOL to vocationally focused provision, facilitating learners' transition into work. This provider is working with a national awarding organisation to develop a range of progression opportunities for ESOL learners who reach Entry 2 and 3, including Entry 1 and Entry 2 courses in customer service skills, basic food safety, and volunteering. Other effective strategies include making learning content relevant to learners' lives, using task-based learning to boost engagement and persistence, and providing flexibility for learners to change classes in case of schedule conflicts.

**Looking ahead, all providers had at least one plan for increasing their support for migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum to access AEB funded provision.** Many aim to improve their employability support, with one aiming to embed employability-related portfolios into their Level 1 and Level 2 ESOL courses, while another is exploring developing the development of new courses for ESOL learners that prepare them for jobs as community interpreters or teaching assistants.

**In addition to bolstering employability integration, some providers are working towards a more holistic approach to address learning needs.** This includes running higher study skills courses for learners, such as young adult refugees aspiring to enter higher education. Other future encompasses offering intensive ESOL classes during the summer for learners with children and expanding the provision of IT equipment, such as laptops.

## Conclusion

Migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum face a wide range of inextricably linked socioeconomic, individual, and structural barriers to accessing and persisting with adult education. Key challenges include a lack of childcare facilities, mental health concerns, housing instability, and financial limitations. A lack of information on available opportunities and alternative pathways to traditional, level-based annual progression are additional hurdles. Providers broadly considered flexible and bespoke provision to be an effective strategy for addressing some of these barriers. By providing varied class times and online options, learners can select a time and place that aligns with their professional and personal commitments, as well as learning aspirations, minimising transport costs. Other approaches to supporting migrants in accessing AEB-funded provision and other skills provision include collaboration with third sector organisations, as well as clearer progression pathways and increased employability support for learners.

### 3. Summary and recommendations

The final chapter summarises the main points and effects of the Mayor's changes to the AEB funding rules for London's migrant communities. It also highlights the ongoing challenges that prevent these communities from fully participating in skills training in London. Finally, it outlines a series of actionable recommendations for removing or reducing the barriers hindering migrant communities' access to adult education, with a particular focus on AEB-funded learning.

#### Key findings

##### **The positive impact of AEB flexibilities on accessibility**

The new funding rules have considerably expanded access to AEB-funded skills provision. Expanded eligibility now includes previously excluded migrant groups, leading to an increased learner demographic. The full funding for individuals earning less than the London Living Wage or those seeking asylum has streamlined the enrolment process and improved accessibility indirectly by reallocating funds to address other learning barriers. Furthermore, the changes have enhanced the clarity of eligibility criteria and funding entitlements communication.

Despite these advances, the overall demand from migrant communities remains consistent, driven predominantly by the need for ESOL, rather than the funding rules. Changes in the migrant population and evolving international contexts have led to shifts in ESOL demand, noticeable from the fall in demand from EU migrants post-Brexit and an increase from other communities.

Education and training providers have heavily used non-regulated learning elements of the AEB to cater to the needs of learners from migrant communities, offering a range of Pre-entry and bespoke provisions. These provisions include short, targeted courses, non-accredited ESOL for certain groups, Pre-entry ESOL and basic IT classes, and introductions to specific roles, among others. Greater local flexibility to deliver more non-accredited learning is sought.

Successful strategies employed by AEB-funded providers to support migrant communities to access and remain in learning include personalised teaching, course relevance, and flexible scheduling. Future plans emphasise enhancing employability support, further personalising ESOL courses, and expanding digital provision. As London continues to welcome diverse migrant communities, these strategies and plans will be vital in ensuring inclusive and effective adult education.

##### **The limitations of flexibilities and other obstacles to learning**

Although funding rule flexibilities have positively impacted migrant communities' access, certain systemic issues continue to impede full access. Specific rules, such as eligibility for AEB funding for people seeking asylum only after a six-month UK residency, limit access. The existing funding regime's financial penalties for incomplete courses by learners pose challenges for those at risk of sudden rehousing. Moreover, local data and demand coordination, a shortage of ESOL tutors, and limited delivery capacity in the third sector remain as barriers for expanding learning provision.

Despite strides in improving access, migrant communities face considerable barriers, including financial constraints, childcare responsibilities, unstable housing, and limited digital access and

skills. Cultural and individual factors such as mental health issues, language proficiency, and unfamiliarity with the UK education system further complicate their learning journey.

A lack of awareness regarding AEB funding among migrant communities, coupled with gaps in suitable provision at lower ESOL levels, poses additional barriers to learning and signifies the need for greater community outreach. Challenges in understanding eligibility rules and misinformation among referral organisations and providers underline the necessity of multi-modal, consistent and clear communication.

## Recommendations

This section presents action recommendations informed by our research, geared towards enhancing the system and promoting access to AEB-funded learning for London's migrant communities, refugees, and individuals seeking asylum. It is important to note, however, that more research is required to validate and expand upon our findings, as the full impact of recently introduced funding flexibilities may only materialise over time. It is suggested that these pertinent issues should be consistently monitored through the GLA's AEB evaluation programme. The following recommendations are primarily focused on two critical areas: (i) AEB funding rules and flexibilities and (ii) the local delivery infrastructure.

### I. AEB funding rules and flexibilities

**Recommendations in this section are addressed to GLA.** The following three recommendations propose the introduction of further flexibilities to the delegated AEB funding rules for London.

**Recommendation 1:** *Review the proportion of providers' AEB allocation that is available for the delivery of non-regulated learning via local flexibilities to ensure it is sufficient to meet migrant communities' learning needs.*

Having the flexibility to use funding to develop bespoke, non-accredited provision is critical for enabling providers to respond to the learning needs of migrant communities. It allows them to offer courses which, in terms of timing, content and delivery models, can address some of the structural and personal barriers to learning which different migrant groups face. For instance, non-regulated learning can support the creation of roll-on, roll-off ESOL courses with start dates throughout the year, specialist short courses which aim to support ESOL learners in key regional skills shortage areas to resume their existing occupation, courses that run to more intensive timeframes and online tutor-led courses. Increasing the scope for providers to deliver non-traditional, innovative alternatives to existing provision through local flexibilities would help to make ESOL provision more accessible, relevant, and impactful. To support effective use of local flexibilities, existing networks of stakeholders and practitioners could be encouraged to share effective practice in the development and delivery of tailored, non-accredited provision.

**Recommendation 2:** *Consider fully funding learning for people who are on a joint Universal Credit statement but who are not themselves in work.*

A barrier to access remains for refugees who are not in work but who are on a joint Universal Credit statement which exceeds national set income thresholds. These adults, primarily women, continue to be required to co-fund their course fees, even where they have no access to the household income. The proposed change would bring consistency to the rules for different groups

who are not in employment, ensuring they can all access the education and training required to make social connections and move into good work. A financial modelling exercise should be undertaken to understand the likely impact of introducing this measure, prior to implementation.

***Recommendation 3: Introduce an income scale for the co-funding of learning for learners earning above the London Living Wage.***

Providers and stakeholders welcomed the introduction of full funding for those earning below the London Living Wage. However, they suggested that a 'cliff edge' remains, and the cost of living means that many Londoners earning above the LLW experience financial hardship. An income scale for co-funding would help to target support at those who need it to overcome cost barriers to learning. To avoid making such a system unduly complex, the scale could be based on a small number of incremental points. One point could act as a threshold for the full funding of ESOL, to further promote access for learners from migrant communities and simplify the system for providers.

**The following two recommendations propose actions as part of the GLA's on-going engagement with the Department for Education and the Education and Skills Funding Agency.** They aim to encourage reform of aspects of the wider AEB funding architecture which currently impact negatively on access to and continuation in learning for certain migrant communities. In particular, they seek to address the concern that providers may be reluctant to enrol people on courses whom they believe are at risk of non-completion.

***Recommendation 4: Investigate the feasibility of implementing a unique tracking system within the ILR, which allows providers to identify when asylum-seeking learners and others are withdrawn prematurely due to Home Office-induced relocation.***

Housing instability, particularly the unforeseeable relocations faced by people seeking asylum and others in temporary accommodation, interrupts learning trajectories and impacts the retention and achievement rates of learning providers. It is therefore essential to monitor these occurrences and understand their scale across London boroughs. Providers should have the capacity to denote this in their ILR returns when a person withdraws from a course due to a Home Office-instigated relocation. While non-regulated learning offers a workaround, it may not meet the comprehensive learning needs of migrants. This enhanced ILR system would provide a more accurate depiction of completion and robust evidence base for policy adjustments.

***Recommendation 5: Encourage review of the six-month rule on access to AEB funding for individuals seeking asylum.***

The enforced delay that prevents individuals who are seeking asylum from accessing AEB-funded learning was highlighted in our research as a barrier both to effective engagement and to effective language learning, with wider negative implications for learners' integration and progression. As individuals now typically wait much longer than six months for a decision on their asylum claim, and the majority of asylum applications are ultimately successful, we recommend advocating for a reconsideration of this rule. Permitting people seeking asylum to access AEB-funded learning from

their point of entry could significantly improve their education prospects and contribute to their successful integration into UK society.<sup>55</sup>

## II. The local delivery infrastructure

**While the GLA has a clear role in strategically influencing the implementation of the following four recommendations, taking them forward also requires the involvement and commitment of providers, local authorities, and wider migration stakeholders.**

***Recommendation 6: Support the establishment of Single Points of Contact (SPOC) for ESOL in boroughs with substantiated demand and currently without such a service to improve coordination of ESOL demand.***

SPOCs, also known under localised names such as ESOL Advice Services, enable effective management of ESOL waiting lists and the allocation of learners to suitable local provision. This is paramount in the ever-evolving context of London's migrant communities. In boroughs lacking a SPOC, providers have limited access to data on learner profiles, and struggle to ascertain the actual demand for ESOL, as potential learners tend to express interest with several providers, leading to overestimation of demand, challenges in learner recruitment and risk management issues. The GLA can help to catalyse the establishment of SPOCs, including working to support their development by local authorities who may not yet recognise the potential value for residents of this type of activity.

***Recommendation 7: Provide financial support for individuals to undertake ESOL initial teacher training, to help address the shortage of suitably qualified tutors to meet local ESOL demand.***

GLA is already supporting the take-up of CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching of Adults), through funding from the ESOL Capacity Building Fund from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Building on this work, there is scope to explore funding options so as to expand the range of provision that is funded and thereby offer more diverse entry points for prospective practitioners. This could include: a bursary scheme for those who wish to pursue an ESOL specialism within a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), funding to access modules on teaching ESOL in the post-16 sector for existing tutors in other subject areas who wish to develop an ESOL specialism; and the development of a pathway to ESOL teaching for those who are already volunteering in the ESOL classroom and would be interested in progressing to teacher training with some additional support for skills development.

***Recommendation 8: Capacity building support for third sector organisations in touch with London's migrant communities, to enable them to deliver non-accredited AEB ESOL.***

Third sector organisations that work with migrant communities often command a high level of trust. They have a profound understanding of the issues and challenges the communities face, together with experience of developing responsive services and support. Some already provide informal ESOL classes that are tailored specifically to the needs of their service users. While these organisations would often be too small to hold AEB contracts in their own right, more could be

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<sup>55</sup> In the year ending March 2023, the UK granted protection to 73% of initial decisions ([Refugee Council, Quarterly asylum statistics](#)). This totals 22,648 individuals (including dependants). The breakdown includes 16,805 granted refugee status post-asylum application, 120 temporary refugees, 947 with humanitarian protection, 362 with alternative protective leaves (e.g., discretionary or UASC leave), and 4,414 resettled via resettlement schemes. See, UK Government, GOV.UK. (Updated 25 May 2023). [How many people do we grant protection to?](#)

done through sub-contracting arrangements to harness their potential to enable access for learners to AEB-funded provision. Local authorities could play an enhanced role in supporting capacity building of third sector organisations to deliver tailored, non-formal AEB-funded ESOL. Bringing more of these organisations into the fold of AEB funding would also provide new entry and progression pathways for learners to other AEB-funded learning, including accredited ESOL and wider skills development opportunities.

**Recommendation 9: *Strengthen guidance and support for providers and other stakeholders regarding use of the AEB to support access to skills provision for migrant communities.***

The evidence points to two key areas of need:

1. Frontline staff within provider and stakeholder organisations who are in direct contact with potential learners must have accurate, up to date information regarding eligibility criteria for accessing AEB. However, our evidence suggests that this remains inconsistent, and organisations would greatly welcome additional support to understand and apply the rules. This includes understanding how AEB can be used alongside other sources of funding, such as the 'ESOL tariff' provided to LAs by the Home Office on some resettlement schemes, to maximise impact for migrant communities. Additional information and support would help to improve awareness and understanding of eligibility criteria among curriculum staff and enrolment staff in learning providers and frontline staff in intermediary organisations, such as third sector migrant support organisations. These could include simplified information on funding rules, an eligibility flow chart, You Tube tutorials, webinars, and/or a chat function on the GLA website to deal with specific queries. Furthermore, multilingual resources would not only ensure comprehension within migrant communities of available AEB opportunities.
2. Not all providers are clear on how they can use AEB local funding flexibility to deliver wraparound support to address some of the practical, personal barriers to participation experienced by learners from migrant communities. For instance, funding could help to meet the costs of childcare or fund interpreters or bilingual support staff to support learners with mental health difficulties to access appropriate support. Guidance materials and case studies of effective practice in providers' implementation of wraparound support would help to promote greater awareness of how the funding could be used for such purposes.

# Annex 1. Timeline of AEB funding flexibilities supporting migrant communities (2020/21-2022/23)

The following pages outline the funding flexibilities introduced between 2020/21 and 2022/23 academic years, providing an overview of the various funding arrangements and provisions aimed at supporting access to adult education, with a focus on flexibilities particularly likely to benefit London's migrant communities. This information is current as of August 2023.

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In the 2019/20 academic year, the GLA extended fee remission for adult education courses including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses to people earning below the London Live Wage.<sup>56</sup> This was complemented by the launch of the Skills for Londoners innovation fund, designed to support London's AEB grant-funded provider base to deliver activity that meets the Mayor's priorities for education and skills in London, demonstrates innovation and delivers key outcomes.<sup>57</sup> In addition, as part of the Mayor's ESOL Plus Programme which launched, pre- AEB-delegation, in 2018, three pilot projects which aimed to encourage cross-sectoral partnerships to improve access to ESOL for Londoners with English language needs, and address well known barriers to learning, such as childcare and low-paid and insecure work were funded.<sup>58</sup>

## 2020-21 Academic Year

### (January 2021) Hong Kong British Nationals Overseas Welcome Programme (HKBNOWP)

An immigration route opened in January 2021, providing British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) status holders from Hong Kong and their eligible dependants with the opportunity to come to the UK to live, study and work, on a pathway to citizenship. BN(O)s are not eligible for AEB; however, some may arrive and become eligible through other immigration routes (e.g. as people seeking asylum).

### (April 2021) Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)

Bespoke resettlement scheme launched in April 2021 for current and former Locally Employed Staff (LES) in Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup>

- Any current or former locally employed staff who are assessed to be under serious threat to life are offered priority relocation.

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<sup>56</sup> Learners are determined to be in receipt of low wages if they earn less than the London Living Wage as an annual gross salary on the date of the learner's learning start date. Learners will be deemed to earn less than the London Living Wage as an annual gross salary if they earn less than the hourly London Living Wage at that point in time, multiplied by 37.5 (hours per week), multiplied by 52 (weeks per year). Based on the 2021/22 London Living Wage, this would be £21,547.50 (GLA, 2022. *GLA AEB Grant Funding and Performance Management Rules for Grant-funded Providers For the 2022 to 2023 funding year (1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023)*). This threshold is updated each year and is an increase from the 2019 threshold of £20,572, which was based on the 2018/19 London Living Wage.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. [Skills for Londoners Innovation Fund](#).

<sup>58</sup> [Supporting the ESOL Sector | London City Hall](#).

<sup>59</sup> UK Government (Updated 23 February 2023). [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy](#).

- Husbands, wives, civil partners, and children of people arriving via ARAP are also eligible for AEB provision.
- In addition to being AEB eligible, a maximum of £850 is available per adult (19+) arriving under ARAP for ESOL funding up to Level 1. This can be drawn down via Local Authority Resettlement Teams and is intended to facilitate access to informal ESOL, or 8 hours of formal provision per week, within one month of arrival.

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## 2021-22 Academic Year

### (November 2021) People seeking asylum

Concerns about financial barriers for people seeking asylum in accessing AEB provision led to the introduction of full funding for AEB-eligible people seeking asylum for AEB-funded provision, where previously there was a co-funding requirement. This flexibility is only applicable to people seeking asylum who have been in the UK for more than six months and are still awaiting a Home Office decision on their immigration status, rather than newly arrived people seeking asylum.

### (November 2021) Family members of EEA citizens

Family members of EEA and UK Nationals were previously eligible to access AEB provision without holding three years' residency, yet this was removed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in 2021/22, leaving many progressing ESOL learners locked out of provision that supports English language development and social integration. In response, the GLA reinstated the waiver for family members of eligible UK and EEA nationals<sup>60</sup>

- This waiver has now also been adopted by the ESFA for the non-devolved AEB.

### (January 2022) Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)

Resettlement scheme for up to 20,000 over the coming years, prioritising those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law, as well as vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk, including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+ people.<sup>61</sup>

- Those resettled through the ACRS are granted 'indefinite leave to remain' and are therefore AEB eligible on arrival.
- There is no 3-year residency requirement for those with Indefinite Leave to Enter/Remain.
- Husbands, wives, civil partners, and children of people arriving via the ACRS are also eligible for AEB provision.

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<sup>60</sup> GLA, 2022. *GLA AEB Grant Funding and Performance Management Rules for Grant-funded Providers For the 2022 to 2023 funding year*.

<sup>61</sup> UK Visas and Immigration and Home Office (Updated 16 August 2022), *Afghan citizens resettlement scheme*. UK Government.

- In addition to being AEB eligible, a maximum of £850 is available per adult (19+) arriving under ARAP for ESOL funding up to Level 1. This can be drawn down via Local Authority Resettlement Teams and is intended to facilitate access to informal ESOL, or 8 hours of formal provision per week, within one month of arrival.

### **(March 2022) Ukraine Sponsorship and Family Schemes**

The UK Government introduced two new visa routes to allow persons affected by the war in Ukraine to come to the UK. Any individual with any of the statuses listed, and who is a resident in London, is eligible to receive funding and is exempt from the three-year residency requirement rule:

- **Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme:** Introduced on 18 March 2022, allows Ukrainian nationals and their family members to come to the UK if they have a named sponsor under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- **Ukraine Family Scheme:** Introduced on 4 March 2022, allows applicants to join family members or extend their stay in the UK.

## **2022-23 Academic Year**

### **(May 2022) Ukraine Extension Scheme**

From May 2022, allows Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members to apply to extend their permission to stay in the UK. To qualify, they must have held permission to be in the UK on or between 18 March 2022 and 16 May 2023 (– the permission does not need to cover the whole period). Ukrainian nationals who previously held permission to be in the UK, but whose permission expired on or after 1 January 2022 are also able to apply to the scheme.<sup>62</sup>

- From September 2022, individuals on this scheme, as well as their family members, are eligible for AEB provision and are exempt from the 3-year residency requirement rule.

### **(September 2022) British Nationals evacuated from Afghanistan**

British Nationals evacuated from Afghanistan under Operation Pitting, as well as British Nationals evacuated from Afghanistan by the UK government before 6 January 2022, were added to the list of those eligible for AEB provision on arrival.

### **(November 2022) Three-year residency rule**

Under previous versions of the funding rules, learners who were not otherwise exempt, were required to have been ordinarily resident in London and have been residing in the UK for at least the previous three years on the first day of learning, to access funding for adult education in

<sup>62</sup> UK Visas and Immigration and Home Office (Updated 22 February 2023), [Apply to stay in the UK under the Ukraine Extension Scheme: Guidance for Ukrainian nationals and their family members to apply to stay in the UK under the Ukraine Extension Scheme](#). UK Government.

London. New funding rules removed the three-year residency requirement for Londoners on certain immigration routes.<sup>63</sup>

- Londoners who have British/Irish nationality and those of other nationalities who have permission to live in the UK long term (at least 12 months) are now eligible for AEB-funded provision immediately on arrival in London.

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<sup>63</sup> Any individual with any of the following statuses listed, and is a resident in London, is eligible to receive funding and is exempt from the three-year residency requirement rule: (a) Refugee Status; (b) Discretionary Leave to Enter or Remain; (c) Exceptional Leave to Enter or Remain; (d) Indefinite Leave to Enter or Remain; (e) Humanitarian Protection; (f) Leave Outside the Rules; (g) Ukraine Family Scheme; (h) Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine); (i) The husband, wife, civil partner of any of the above; (j) Afghan Local Engaged Staff under the intimidation policy (formally known as Locally Engaged Staff under the intimidation policy); (k) the husband, wife, civil partner or child of any of the above; (l) Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 Leave, or (m) Calais Leave to Remain.

## Annex 2. GLA AEB Learner participation in basic skills training

Table 1: Learner Participation in AEB-funded Basic Skills Training, London, 2021/22 and 2022/23 (August to January) Academic Year

Academic year		2021/22	2022/23 (Aug-Jan)
Basic Skill	Level	Learner Participation	Learner Participation
English	Entry Level	13,050	8,850
	Level 1	6,600	5,120
	Level 2	9,000	7,250
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>27,190</b>	<b>20,550</b>
Maths	Entry Level	12,300	7,800
	Level 1	5,720	4,220
	Level 2	7,760	6,000
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>24,530</b>	<b>17,500</b>
ESOL	Entry Level	38,740	35,050
	Level 1	6,560	6,110
	Level 2	2,420	2,210
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>46,300</b>	<b>42,520</b>
Digital	Entry Level	3,380	2,040
	Level 1	1,870	1,540
	Level 2	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>4,770</b>	<b>3,420</b>

**Note:** In both tables, the "Total" rows show the aggregate number of learners for each skill across all levels.

## Annex 3. A note on methodology

Below, we provide a detailed description of the qualitative methodology adopted in this study.

### Scoping research

The research began with a rapid scoping review to understand the structure and funding mechanisms of AEB, the local flexibilities introduced to the GLA’s AEB funding rules, and previous studies on the impact of these changes.

### Research Advisory Group (RAG) set up

A RAG was established, including members from Central London Forward Integration Hub,<sup>64</sup> an AEB-funded FE College, and the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA). The RAG provided guidance and quality assurance throughout the research process, from fine tuning the methodology to quality assuring the interim report and ensuring the research is effective in achieving its objectives.

### Participatory research with AEB-funder providers

11 semi-structured interviews were conducted online with a diverse and geographically dispersed range of providers delivering AEB funded provision within London. AEB-funded providers we spoke to included FE Colleges, Local Authorities, an Institute for Adult Learning (IAL), and Independent Trainings Providers (ITPs)—approximately 8.7% of the total providers funded through AEB.

Type of Provider	Number of Interviews
FE Colleges	3
Local Authorities	5
Institute for Adult Learning (IAL)	1
Independent Training Providers (ITPs)	2
<b>Total interviewed</b>	<b>11</b>

The interviews explored perceived barriers for migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum in accessing AEB funded provision, and the impact of AEB funding flexibilities on these groups. Purposive (non-probability) sampling was used to engage participants with first-hand experience of the flexibilities and their impact. Providers were also asked to facilitate the identification of learners from migrant backgrounds who were interested to participate in group or individual interviews (snowball sampling)<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Funded by GLA, and part of the ‘No Wrong Door’ agenda, [Central London Forward](#) runs the Central London Integration Hub. The hub promotes integration of employment and skills services in central London, and to support partnership working and collaboration, so that the system delivers better results, with a focus on disabled residents and refugees.

<sup>65</sup> Snowball or chain sampling involves utilising well informed people to identify critical cases or informants who have a great deal of information about a phenomenon.

## Participatory research with service users

The research team conducted a mix of in-person and virtual focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with a total of 23 migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum.

### Number of interviewees by learner status

Service Users	Quotas
Learners in AEB-funded provision	15
Learners in informal provision	6
Non-learners	2
<b>Total interviewed</b>	<b>23</b>

### Number of interviewees by educational level and course enrolled

Level and course enrolled	Number of Interviewees
Entry Level 3 ESOL	11
Level 1 ESOL and Maths	3
Entry Level 1 ESOL	6
Level 2 ESOL, GCSE Maths	1
<b>Total in learning</b>	<b>21</b>

Participants spanned various educational backgrounds, learning levels, backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, and immigration statuses (e.g., refugee resettlement programmes, refugee family reunion visas, nationality-specific bespoke immigration routes). This information could not always be captured in detail due to the nature of group interviews and focus group discussions.

The interviews aimed to understand the barriers these groups face when accessing AEB-funded provision, the differences in these barriers across demographics, their relation to broader participation barriers in London, and the impact of AEB funding flexibilities. Interviews were conducted both in-person and virtually, adapting to the needs and preferences of the participants. When interviewing individuals with low levels of English proficiency, interpretation support was provided by bi-lingual provider staff (see the limitations of this noted in the methodology section in the introduction to this report).

## Consultative discussions with wider stakeholders

The research team conducted online focus groups and four depth interviews with 14 representatives from organisations that support London's migrant communities to access services and support, and understand the issues that impact upon their participation in education. The breakdown can be found in the below table.

Stakeholder group	Number of Representatives
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Voluntary and Community Organisations (supporting adult migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum)	7
ESOL Single Points of Contact (SPOCs)	3
Professional Organisation for ESOL Practitioners	1
Local Authorities' Employment Support Services	2

The research team was also involved in several GLA-led meetings, including with groups convened by the London Strategic Migration Partnership such as a meeting of local authority refugee resettlement coordinators, and the Migration and Refugee Advisory Panel (MRAP). In addition, contributions were invited from other groups such as the Homeless Migrants Advisory Panel, and Civil Society Forum. These qualitative discussions explored the barriers that migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum face in accessing education and training in London; potential strategies for improving access to these services; as well as the information accessibility for organisations that refer and signpost migrants to AEB-funded education and training, along with the challenges they face and potential improvements.

## **Data analysis and synthesis**

The qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis. Our inductive approach allowed the research team to identify, describe, and interpret key themes emerging from the data collected.