English: the Key to Integration in London

Evaluation report – Executive summary

March 2016

Contents

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1. Executive summary

1. The need for additional support for ESOL speakers – and particularly for the mothers of young children in London, was brought into sharp focus within the last few years. In a study conducted by NIACE, and published by the GLA in 2012,[1] concern was expressed that changes to ESOL[2] funding, as set out in *Skills for Sustainable Growth,*[3] have had a negative impact on a number of vulnerable groups and, in particular, on 'women with childcare responsibilities'[4]. Given the high proportion of ESOL learners in London (50% of all those accessing courses in the UK are based in Greater London) it is particularly pertinent that alternative strategies to such provision should be explored.[5] The value of this is not only for the learners themselves, but also for their children, who would benefit, potentially, from greater parental input to their education, particularly in the early years.

2. In October 2013, the Greater London Authority [GLA] launched a £2,000,000, wide-reaching programme - '*English the Key to Integration in London'*. The main goals of the over-arching programme were to improve the quality of teaching provision for children and young people from non-EU backgrounds[6] for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL) and to enhance the English skills of mothers from non-EU backgrounds in order to encourage their greater involvement in the school community.

3. Under the programme, the GLA had five main objectives:

   • **Objective 1** sought to strengthen the skills of teachers to support EAL pupils and students from non-EU backgrounds

   • **Objective 2** supported the development of resources for EAL pupils and students

   • **Objective 3** sought to improve the English language skills of non-EU mothers with beginner or Entry level English (as a speaker of a first language other than English)[7]

   • **Objective 4** sought to increase the involvement of these mothers in their children's school

   • **Objective 5** was to produce an evaluation report

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[1] NIACE (2012) English Language for All. London: GLA. [Online] Available:
https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/English%20Language%20for%20All.pdf
[2] English for Speakers of Other Languages
[3] BIS (2011) English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Equality Impact Assessment [Online] Available at:
http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/e/11-1045-english-for-speakers-of-other-languages-equality-impact.pdf:Accessed: 11/04/14
[4]Ibid
[5] See for example, DEMOS (2008) A Common Language: Making English Work for London. [online] Available:
http://www.demos.co.uk/files/A_Common_Language_web.pdf. DEMOS is currently undertaking a review of ESOL provision nationally.
[6] In a European context, the term third country nationals is sometimes used instead of 'non-EU', but this can cause confusion in countries in which 'third country national' is a term used in relation to individuals in transit or applying for visas.
[7] Women with childcare responsibilities and those with low levels of language and literacy were particularly badly affected by reductions in ESOL courses

1.1   Eight projects were funded under Objectives 3 and 4. These projects were led, variously, by schools, by federations of schools, by social enterprises and by local authorities.

Projects' aims

4.   Each of the eight projects was designed to support the development of a greater mastery of English amongst mothers and all of the projects had shared goals in line with Objectives 3 and 4. The stated local aims of each differed, however, with some focusing on the longer-term outcomes they anticipated for children of participating mothers (increased attainment, improved reading and writing) and others focused more on the short-term, medium-term and longer-term outcomes for mothers, from improving their language skills and so enabling participation in their children's learning, to enabling them to have the skills to enter employment or further learning or to promote community cohesion and integration.

Strategies used to recruit and retain parents

5.   The eight projects funded under Objectives 3 and 4 were based in schools across different educational phases (children's centres, primary schools and secondary schools) and sought to engage mothers who faced a range of different barriers to engagement in their child's education. The projects were predominantly working out of school-based venues (whether in school classrooms or in a linked children's centre) and not just in the community venues that have often been considered as the most effective means of engaging with learners (see Phillimore, 2011,[8] and Bellis et al., 2011[9]). In setting up their strategies for recruitment and retention, projects used a number of different approaches, based on different working hypotheses.

6.   Projects successfully recruited more non-EU mothers than were originally targeted (a total of 982 mothers have been recruited), reaching mothers from 79 different countries, mothers from local communities that had not previously engaged in ESOL classes, mothers with different life experiences and levels of education and mothers with no prior knowledge of the English language.

7.   Projects' approaches to identification and recruitment ranged from informal personal approaches in school playgrounds to dedicated community outreach activities. Not all of the initial approaches that were tried to recruit mothers proved successful. It should be noted that no one approach could be regarded as the *best* way to recruit mothers; projects tended to have a portfolio of approaches, adapting to circumstances and opportunities. In particular, strategies that the eight projects said were successful in reaching mothers and getting them to engage in the classes or involvement activities included:

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[8] Phillimore, J. (2011) New migrants and lifelong learning: impacts, gaps and opportunities [Online]Available at: http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/Jenny-Phillimore-migration-evidence.pdf
[9] Bellis A, Sigala, M and Oakley J. (2011) Evaluation of the London City Strategy ESOL Pilot: Final Report [Online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214518/rrep744.pdf Accessed: 17/12/14

- **Active recruitment** by project leads and project staff in school playgrounds, through events such as coffee mornings and via Children's Centres. This appeared particularly successful where it was supported by staff (whether project staff or teachers in schools) and/or other mothers who could speak the home language of the mothers.

- **Letters written in community languages**. These had the benefit of being culturally and linguistically targeted, though relied on mothers being literate in their home language, which was not the case in all circumstances. It also relied on a cultural expectation of information letters from the school, and of the need to respond to such letters.

- **Flyers/banners posted in the school/children's centre**. These were used to draw attention to project activities, including those that were not related solely to English classes. They had the benefit of raising the profile of the activities, though also relied on basic levels of literacy.

- **Word of mouth,** with members of the classes talking to other mothers. Such informal publicity often occurred alongside one or more of the previous recruitment approaches and proved to be an effective strategy across a number of the projects.

8. Both recruitment and retention were assisted by the provision of **crèche facilities**, which enabled mothers with pre-school children to take part in activities on the same premises as their child (or children) but without having to make additional provision for younger siblings. It was not always easy for projects to establish such crèches, however, as the schools in which they worked did not always have appropriate facilities or available rooms. In some cases, the lack of sufficient (or, as in one case, any) crèche services limited the take-up of places available on some courses, restricted the type of mothers who could attend (mainly those without pre-school-aged children), or affected retention when alternative family-based or community-based arrangements broke down.

Underlying hypotheses and assumptions

9. During the course of the evaluation initial project visits, the evaluation identified five distinct working hypotheses, over and above the overarching GLA hypothesis about the link between maternal skills in English and their engagement in their children's schools. Each of the working hypotheses appeared to underpin at least one project delivery model, and some projects had more than one working premise. The five hypotheses can be distilled as:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Mothers' language skills are best promoted in an informal setting

- **Hypothesis 2:** Mothers' language skills are best promoted through a tailored, focused programme

- **Hypothesis 3:** Providing opportunities for wider family activities encourages mothers' participation in English classes

- **Hypothesis 4:** Mothers' language skills are best developed through a continuum of support that addresses both individual needs and those of the family

- **Hypothesis 5:** Mothers develop their English language capacity more effectively in a programme that is focused on wider social integration

Projects' outcomes

10. There was good evidence that progress was made by mothers in projects that provided structured ESOL classes, whether these were the sole focus (as in Hypothesis 2 - that *mothers' language skills are best promoted through a tailored, focused programme*) or in relation to some other support programme, whether *addressing individual needs* (Hypothesis 4) or *focusing on community integration* (Hypothesis 5).

11. There was little evidence to support Hypothesis 1 (that *mothers' language skills are best promoted in an informal setting*) as a strong model for supporting English language development or integration. Equally, there was also little evidence to support Hypothesis 3 (that *providing opportunities for wider family activities encourages mothers' participation in English classes*); as noted by the projects themselves, conversion rates to ESOL classes from such activities were generally low.

12. Pre-and post-assessment data was available for around one third of the 929 mothers in relation to writing and reading (data from six of the eight projects) and for just under half in relation to speaking and listening (data from seven projects).

    - At least 20% of the mothers, for whom we had accreditation data, had made at least one level of progress in writing, reading, speaking and listening (though mothers may not, individually, have made progress in all four).

    - A further two-thirds of the mothers, for whom we had accreditation data, had made at least one sub-level of progress over the same period, except in writing, where just over half of the mothers made measurable progress.

13. Lessons by skilled ESOL tutors working in liaison with schools and children's centres were central to the success of the programme. Where lessons were **contextualised** and drew on everyday activities in the home, the school and the community, they **supported parental understanding of the place of education in UK life as well as increasing the skill levels of mothers** who took part. Mothers also found support through a range of complementary strategies; the range of information with which they were provided about education, about their children's schools and about their local communities **increased their confidence in liaising with the school**.

14. There was also **evidence of integration** into the school that went beyond immediate or ESOL related activities with **parents becoming more active in the wider education process**. These included: mothers showing growing confidence in making basic contact with the school; an increase in mothers' attendance at parents' evenings or homework clubs; an increase in mothers' volunteering both in the classroom and in the projects; and wider community-level engagement, with some mothers going beyond providing peer-to-peer support in the classroom to apply for training to become teaching assistants themselves.

15. Drawing on the outcome evidence available to the evaluation, and given the time over which the projects operated **it is not possible** to state *definitively* that any one management model was better than any other, whether school-led, social enterprise-led or local

authority-led. Each of these three operational models included at least one project that had successfully met its targets, appeared to have been run economically and had led to positive attainment and integration outcomes for mothers. Even so, it is possible to identify some key messages for future projects of this sort and these are summarised below.

Recommendations and lessons learned

16.   A number of points emerged during the evaluation that relate to the successful implementation of the projects; we have identified two specific recommendations for the implementation of projects funded under the European Social Fund (ESF):

- Those projects without any ESF experience often struggled to ensure that they had all the mechanisms in place to collect, collate and report their project spend (and other) details for submission to the GLA. Issues relating to paperwork are not uncommon in funding streams (and are certainly not limited to the ESF). Rather than restrict future bidders for ESF funded projects to those with ESF experience (one possible option that would ensure such operational/logistic issues are overcome), there should be consideration of how to provide **more detailed guidance and/or training** (tailored where necessary to reflect the circumstances of the GLA programme) **for any new providers seeking future funding under ESF through the GLA**.

- Greater **initial market testing** could have helped to identify some of the potential challenges *prior* to the start of delivery. For this programme, this included identifying the size of the potential cohort, and exploring the ease of obtaining evidence for eligibility, prior to setting targets for the programme and within projects. A number of project leads said they had found it difficult to identify exactly how many eligible mothers were in their catchment area. Since initial targets were set against the anticipated cohort size, activities that would have enabled the size of the eligible cohort to be established accurately at the outset would have better informed the development of achievable targets and an understanding of maternal profiles.

Recommendations related to the establishment of ESOL projects

17.   As highlighted above, the various projects all demonstrated a level of success in recruiting and retaining mothers, improving their skills and enhancing their integration in schools. Emerging from these projects, there are a number of recommendations related to the establishment of projects linked to ESOL provision and/or to parental engagement strategies.

- As recognised by the projects, the needs of mothers varied widely, both in terms of their previous English language experience and in terms of their levels of prior education. Few projects, however, were in a position to run separate classes for mothers at different levels, or with different levels of educational experience. In funding any future ESOL-related projects, it would be helpful if the GLA could, through the bidding process, **establish how projects would build in appropriate differentiation strategies** to ensure that all mothers were supported to progress.

- While there is some evidence from mothers, from children and from project workers that mothers became more engaged in their child's or children's school over the period of the project, there was no contractual requirement on the partner schools (other than those responsible for running projects) to collect data on the level of individual maternal engagement prior to the project, nor to collect systematic data on involvement during the project. This type of data (on parental engagement) is not routinely collected by schools, and can be time-consuming and challenging to compile. **More detailed consideration of such data collection requirements at the outset of the funded intervention is important**, so that delivery partners would know, at the outset, what data they would need to obtain from other stakeholders. This would enable them to factor both costs and time into their budgets and ensure they had the strategies in place to collect, collate and report their data.

- There are lessons to be learned about **participant recruitment and engagement**. Projects with experience in this area, and with developed links in the target community (whether through adult education providers or through running similar projects in the past) were more successful than others in getting to their target numbers quickly. For projects moving from a 'standing start' or a low base (with little or no experience in similar projects), skills in recruiting participants took time to build up. This familiarisation and trial phase needs to be incorporated into the planning process, allowing sufficient time for the identification of strategies that are effective with the target cohort.

About the evaluation: aims and methodology

18. The research aims and objectives set out for the evaluation were grouped around three key themes:

- an **exploration of the current evidence** examining the impact of mothers' English proficiency on engagement with their children's' education. This was informed by an initial literature review that focused on three main questions around what previous research told us about parental involvement with children's education and development, the building blocks that supported parents'/carers' involvement in their children's education and the role that local language (in this case English) play in integrating parents into the education

- an **assessment of the impact** of improving project recipients' English proficiency and/or involvement in school life on their ability to support their children's learning in school, which drew on assessment data collected and collated by the projects and was informed by visits to projects, observations of lessons and mothers' engagement sessions and interviews with participating mothers and the **impact of such support** on their children's educational performance and well-being

- an assessment of which **delivery model**, or aspect of a model, is most effective. This drew together all of the available data but because of the nature of the funded programme, and the phased commissioning of projects, it was not possible to develop a suitable counterfactual for the study. This meant that there were a

number of programme level challenges associated with assessing and attributing impact (including the wide age-range of the children whose mothers were involved in the programme).

19.   The fieldwork took place in two distinct phases. Phase One included pilot visits in September and October 2014, to the four projects that were underway at that stage, interviewing project leads and other relevant staff, as well as observing project activities (using a bespoke observation tool). Phase Two included visits in February and March 2015 to all eight projects (four newly commissioned projects and four original projects). The visits included interviews with course trainers and other practitioners, interviews and focus groups with teachers, observations of activities and group discussions were undertaken with a sample of mothers and, where possible, with a sample of children of participating mothers.