

London Learner Survey 2024/25

Topical briefing note: ESOL learners August 2026

Insights
SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

This note is a topical briefing accompanying the overall report on the London Learner Survey (LLS) for the 2024/25 academic year. It focuses specifically on the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) participation and outcomes of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners. More information on the London Learner Survey can be accessed via the [London Datastore](#).

Summary

Background information:

- According to the 2021 Census, 22 per cent of Londoners do not have English as their main language, compared to 9 per cent across all of England.
- Among Londoners whose main language is not English, 350,000 reported not speaking English well or not at all, highlighting the continued importance of ESOL provision in supporting residents to access employment, further learning, and opportunities to participate fully in London's economy and society.
- ESOL learners accounted for 24 per cent of GLA-funded ASF learners in 2024/25.
- Compared with ASF learners overall, ESOL learners were more likely to be female, aged 24-49, from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background, and unemployed or inactive before learning.

Outcomes:

- ESOL learners were somewhat less likely to experience economic benefits than ASF learners overall, but still showed substantial progression:
 - Around 19,000 ESOL learners (39 per cent) achieved a positive economic outcome (vs 44 per cent overall).
 - Around 4,700 learners (16 per cent) moved into employment (vs 23 per cent overall).
 - Over 30,000 learners (63 per cent) progressed into further learning at any level, broadly in line with the overall rate.
- Social outcomes were very strong, with 97 per cent of ESOL learners reporting a positive social outcome, above the overall average of 95 per cent:
 - Around 48,000 learners experienced improvements in their social outcomes.
 - 85 per cent met new people, while 91 per cent reported increased confidence and 81 per cent reported improved wellbeing due to their course.

1 Background information

1.1 English language proficiency in London

English language proficiency in London reflects the capital's diverse population and provides important context for ESOL provision. According to [Census 2021 data](#), London has the lowest percentage of people who have English as their main language among English regions (78 per cent, 6.7 million), well below the England average of 91 per cent.

However, levels of English language proficiency in London are broadly similar to the national picture. Not all of those whose main language isn't English will have English language needs. Among those in London whose main language is not English, 46 per cent report speaking English very well and 35 per cent well. However, around 300,000 Londoners who do not have English as their main language do not speak English well (17 per cent) and another approximately 50,000 do not speak English at all (3 per cent).

There is also considerable variation within London. For example, the share of residents with English as their main language ranges from 92 per cent in Bromley to 65 per cent in Newham. Proficiency levels also differ: in the City of London, 93 per cent of those whose main language is not English report speaking English well or very well, compared with 72 per cent in Enfield. The [ESOL Planning Map](#), published by the GLA, gives an even more granular overview of ESOL need and provision across London.

The figures above highlight the continued need for ESOL provision in London. By improving English proficiency, ESOL learning can help remove barriers to employment, improve access to services and support social integration, while enabling individuals to participate more fully in and contribute to London's economy and society.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

ESOL courses are for residents looking to learn English. The curriculum is designed to help individuals whose first language is not English develop their English language skills. These programs are essential for enabling learners to communicate effectively in English-speaking environments, whether for everyday interactions, further learning or entering the workplace. ESOL learners study three units to achieve their ESOL qualifications: reading, speaking and listening, and writing, and the courses are tailored to accommodate varying levels of proficiency. Adult education providers in London are able to fund ESOL courses through their Adult Skills Core or Tailored Learning allocation.

1.2 ASF participation of ESOL learners in 2024/25

In the academic year 2024/25, there were 55,680¹ GLA-funded ASF ESOL learners in London which makes up 24 per cent of all ASF learners.² London ESOL learners were taking 123,330 enrolments with 90 per cent of them being Adult Skills Core aims and 10 per cent Tailored Learning aims. ESOL aims make up 37 per cent of all Adult Skills Core aims in London in 2024/25.

Compared to the average across all ASF, most ESOL learners were completing Entry Level aims (76 per cent vs 35 per cent across all ASF learners).

Among ESOL learners participating in the ASF programmes in 2024/25:

- 74 per cent were female (compared to 69 per cent across all ASF learners);
- 71 per cent were 24-49-years-old (compared to 54 per cent across all ASF learners)
- 77 per cent were from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background³ (compared to 62 per cent across all ASF learners);
- 51 per cent were not in paid employment and looking for work (unemployed) before the learning (compared to 42 per cent across all ASF learners);
- 22 per cent were not in paid employment and not looking for work (inactive) before the learning (compared to 20 per cent across all ASF learners)
- 9 per cent consider themselves to have an LLDD and/or a health problem (compared to 16 per cent across all ASF learners).

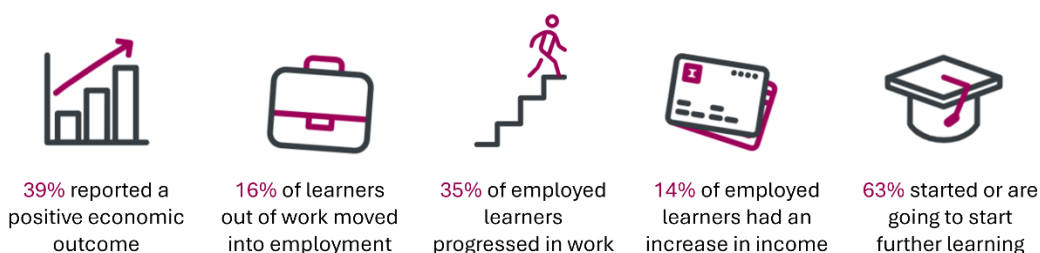
2 Economic outcomes

2.1 Overall economic outcomes for ESOL learners

This section outlines the changes in ESOL learners' economic outcomes, including changes in economic activity, progression in work, and progression into further learning and compares them to the changes among ASF learners overall.⁴

Figure 1: Headline economic outcomes for ESOL learners

Economic Outcomes



¹ Please note that not all learning aims fulfilled the survey eligibility criteria. Hence, participation numbers reported in this section might differ from totals discussed in the LLS findings section.

² GLA, ASF: academic year 2024/25 (August-July). The figures presented in this report include continuing learners, and those funded under FCFJ.

³ This includes Mixed, Asian, Black and Other Ethnic Group learners. The ILR does not capture data on nationality.

⁴ All outcomes are from the GLA's London Learner Survey, 2024/25

Following their course, three quarters of ESOL learners (75 per cent) were either in employment or had started, or were about to start, further learning, slightly below the overall rate of around four in five learners (79 per cent).

ESOL learners were less likely to achieve a positive economic outcome⁵ than ASF learners overall, with around two in five (39 per cent) doing so compared with 44 per cent across all learners. In absolute terms, this represents around 19,000 ESOL learners achieving a positive economic outcome. The difference in economic outcome rates partly reflects the nature of ESOL provision, which is often focused on entry-level language skills and provides an initial step towards wider integration and participation for learners who may face language barriers and start further from the labour market.

The share of ESOL learners moving into employment was lower than for learners overall (16 per cent compared with 23 per cent), equivalent to around 4,700 learners. Nevertheless, employment was an important motivation for participation among ESOL learners, with 43 per cent reporting that they took the course to get a job they wanted, similar to the proportion across all ASF learners (41 per cent). Other employment-related outcomes were closer to the overall cohort, with similar rates of progression within work for those in employment (35 per cent vs 38 per cent) and similar shares reporting income increases (14 per cent vs 16 per cent). However, ESOL learners were less likely to be in employment before starting learning than ASF learners overall (26 per cent vs 34 per cent), meaning a smaller proportion were in a position to achieve within-work progression outcomes.⁶

Participation in further learning was broadly in line with the overall average as well, at 63 per cent compared with 64 per cent, representing over 30,000 ESOL learners continuing their learning. Progression to further study was also a common motivation for participation, with more than a quarter of ESOL learners reporting that they took the course for this reason. Of those who continued learning, 37 per cent progressed to a higher level, similar to the 39 per cent seen across all ASF learners. ESOL learners were, however, more likely to continue at the same level as their previous learning aim (38 per cent compared with 20 per cent), while ASF learners overall were more likely to move into learning that did not lead to a qualification (2 per cent vs 17 per cent).

2.2 Economic outcomes for ESOL learners broken down by learner demographic

Male ESOL learners were more likely than female ESOL learners to achieve positive economic outcomes (44 per cent vs 37 per cent), and this gap was wider than among ASF learners overall. Around 21 per cent of male learners and 14 per cent of female learners moved into employment. However, female ESOL learners performed similarly to men on indicators related to progression in work, unlike the overall ASF cohort where men tended to have higher rates of in-work progression. For example, 15 per cent of female ESOL learners reported increased income, identical to the rate

⁵ A positive economic outcome includes entering employment, moving to a permanent job, earning higher pay, progressing to higher-level (NVQ) training, or moving from inactivity into looking for work.

⁶ The data on employment before starting the learning aim is based on GLA ASF participation for the academic year 2024/25 (August-July).

for female ASF learners overall, while the rate for male ESOL learners (14 per cent) was notably lower than for male ASF learners overall (21 per cent).

Black learners had the highest share of positive economic outcomes among ESOL learners (44 per cent), despite having a relatively low share of learners moving into employment (13 per cent). This suggests that positive economic outcomes among Black ESOL learners were driven more by progression within work, moving into higher-level training or moving from inactivity to looking for work rather than by entry into employment. In contrast, White ESOL learners were more likely to move into employment (22 per cent), despite having lower overall rates of positive economic outcomes (40 per cent). This differs from the overall ASF cohort, where Black and White learners had very similar rates of moving into employment (26 per cent and 27 per cent respectively). Learners of Mixed ethnic background had the lowest share of positive economic outcomes among ESOL learners (34 per cent), unlike the overall ASF cohort where White learners had the lowest rate (41 per cent).⁷ However, differences by ethnicity compared to the overall ASF population may reflect the type of provision being studied.

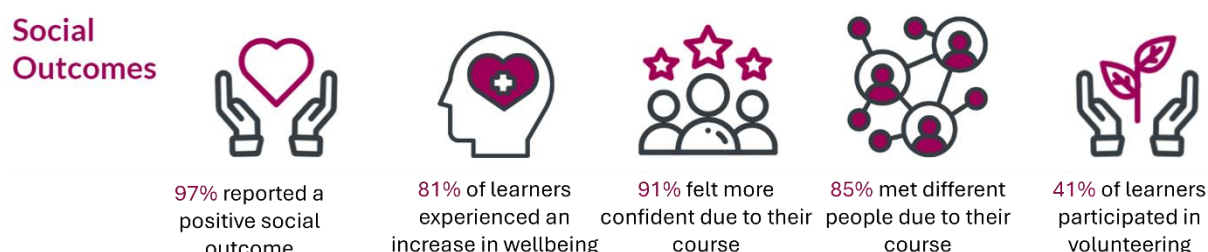
Among ESOL learners, those with a reported health condition, disability or learning difficulty (LLDD) were slightly more likely to achieve positive economic outcomes than learners without an LLDD (42 per cent vs 39 per cent). This contrasts with the overall ASF cohort, where learners with an LLDD had lower rates of positive economic outcomes than non-LLDD learners (40 per cent vs 44 per cent). However, ESOL learners with an LLDD were less likely to move into employment than those without an LLDD (12 per cent vs 16 per cent), in line with the overall ASF pattern (15 per cent vs 25 per cent), although the gap between ESOL and overall ASF learners was much larger for non-LLDD learners.

3 Social outcomes

3.1 Overall social outcomes for ESOL learners

This section outlines the changes in ESOL learners' social outcomes, including changes in their wellbeing, confidence, as well as meeting new people and taking up volunteering, and compares them to the changes among all ASF learners.

Figure 2: Headline social outcomes for ESOL learners



⁷ Sample sizes were too small to allow robust analysis of progression in work indicators broken down by ethnicity, and did not allow for reporting on movement into employment among learners of Mixed ethnicity.

Social outcomes were high for ESOL learners, with 97 per cent of learners reporting a positive social outcome⁸, above the overall average of 95 per cent. These outcomes highlight the wider benefits of learning beyond economic progression.

The higher share of positive social outcomes was mainly driven by increases in social integration, with 85 per cent of ESOL learners having met new and different people compared to 79 per cent overall. The shares of ESOL learners reporting an increase in wellbeing (81 per cent) and confidence (91 per cent) due to their course were similar to the overall shares. ESOL learners were less likely to go on to volunteer, with 41 per cent doing so compared to 48 per cent across all learners. Although meeting new people and increasing confidence were cited as motivations to participate in the course by some ESOL learners (27 and 41 per cent respectively), the benefits were experienced by a much larger share of the cohort.

3.2 Social outcomes for ESOL learners broken down by learner demographic

The share of positive social outcomes was the same for male and female ESOL learners (97 per cent). This contrasts with the overall ASF cohort, where women had higher shares across all social outcome indicators. Female ESOL learners were more likely to report improved wellbeing and confidence, while more male ESOL learners reported to have met new people. There was also a notable difference in volunteering outcomes, with 44 per cent of male ESOL learners volunteering following their learning compared with 39 per cent of female ESOL learners.

The share of ESOL learners achieving positive social outcomes was high across all ethnic groups, reaching 100 per cent among learners of Mixed ethnic background. Compared with ASF learners overall, ESOL learners generally had higher rates of positive social outcomes, particularly among White learners and learners of Mixed ethnic background (both around 4 percentage points higher). ESOL learners of Mixed ethnic background reported the highest levels of improved wellbeing among ethnic groups. Compared to the overall ASF cohort, ESOL participants had higher rates of meeting new people, especially among White ESOL learners (89 per cent compared with 76 per cent overall). In contrast, volunteering rates were generally lower among ESOL learners, particularly for White ESOL learners (43 per cent vs 53 per cent overall).

The share of positive social outcomes was the same for ESOL learners with and without a reported health condition, disability or learning difficulty (LLDD) (97 per cent). ESOL learners with an LLDD had higher rates of positive social outcomes than LLDD learners across the overall ASF cohort (97 per cent compared with 93 per cent), while rates for non-LLDD learners were very similar between ESOL and ASF learners overall. However, ESOL learners with an LLDD were less likely to report meeting new people than non-LLDD learners (81 per cent vs 86 per cent), although their rate remained well above that of LLDD learners across the overall ASF cohort (73 per cent).

⁸ A positive social outcome includes positive impacts on wellbeing, increased confidence, or meeting new and different people through participation in the course.

4 Conclusion

According to the 2021 Census, there were 350,000 Londoners whose main language was not English and who reported not speaking English well or not at all. This highlights the important role of ESOL provision in supporting both economic participation and social integration in London.

The 55,680 ESOL learners funded through the Adult Skills Fund in London in 2024/25 represent a significant share of provision, accounting for 24 per cent of all ASF learners. ESOL learners were more likely to be female, from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and unemployed or inactive before learning compared to the average ASF learner.

While ESOL learners were less likely than the overall ASF cohort to move directly into employment after learning (16 per cent compared with 23 per cent), they performed similarly on progression within work and participation in further learning. This translates into substantial progression, with around 19,000 ESOL learners achieving a positive economic outcome. This is consistent with the initial, skills-building role of ESOL provision, which supports learners to develop English language proficiency as a step towards economic participation, social integration and further opportunities.

The share of ESOL learners experiencing positive social outcomes was very high, with strong improvements in confidence, wellbeing and social connection. These findings highlight the important role of ESOL in supporting integration and participation in society.

Overall, ESOL provision plays a critical role in supporting learners to not only move closer to employment, but also improving their quality of life and social integration.

For more information, please contact Dr Anja Garbely, Insights Team, Skills and Employment Unit

Greater London Authority, 169 Union Street, London SE1 0LL

E-mail: anja.garbely@london.gov.uk

Copyright © Greater London Authority, 2026