



Report

2017



The University of Manchester

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An investigation into ESOL provisions for refugees and asylum seekers in Manchester

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Research Findings and Methods

The purpose of this project was to look at ESOL provisions in Manchester specifically for refugees and asylum seekers. We studied several pieces of relevant literature, first looking in general at the importance of learning a language to integrate into society, and the problems that people can face in doing so. We then looked into the legislation for ESOL plans on a government basis, and then specifically on a council basis in Manchester. It became apparent from our reading that it was more difficult for women to access ESOL courses, and so we chose to investigate this further in our research.

Based on what we discovered through our literature review we decided to look in more depth into each of these four aspects, with regards to our aims stated in the first part of the project. We contacted several organisations that offer language courses in Manchester, such as Able Manchester, Talk English, Excite English in Manchester, Refugee Women and the University of Manchester Language Centre. We discovered the Talk English campaign through the Manchester city council report “English for Speakers of Other Languages: ESOL and other Equality Funded Work” (2014), which outlined the positive impacts that learning English had on the community. We received a response from both Refugee Women and Talk English, but chose to pursue the latter to gain a wider perspective into the issues flagged up from the literature review.

We factored into this project the difficulty we would encounter in finding courses that only catered to refugees and asylum seekers, as we learnt from the literature it was hard enough for them to get access to these classes in the first place. We therefore decided to look more broadly at ESOL provisions for migrants in general, and from that we inquired further into the issues regarding refugees and asylum seekers in particular. In order to get some first-hand knowledge for the basis of this project we created a survey for the teachers of ESOL provisions, which enabled us to gain a basic understanding of how such classes operate. Two of the volunteers from Talk English invited us to one of their classes, to which both refugee and non-refugee students attended. From the questionnaires we created for the students, we were able to see the differing circumstances affecting those applying for ESOL courses, despite their status.

Findings

We primarily looked to carry out this project using qualitative research, by talking to a specific group of people, however from our questionnaires we have also gleaned some quantitative data in terms of the reasons for learning English as said by the students, and how to find out about them.

1. What range of classes does your organisation offer?

Talk English is a volunteer based organisation, which means the structure is less strict than other, more official classes. Therefore, we offer classes that are based around improving speech, such as informal sessions in cafes, activities such as group shopping trips, and stay and play classes, in which women can speak to each other whilst looking after their children.

2. How do you group your classes, in terms of levels and ability?

We offer classes to people with the lowest level abilities, which translates to an official 'Pre-entry' or 'Level 1', however we have students of all abilities in our classes, which helps some of the less able members to learn from other students.

3. How long are your classes?

1-2 hours, and they run for the usual academic year (September to June)

4. How many people, on average, are in each class?

It can vary completely, because we run on a volunteer basis, there is no obligation for the students to attend, so we may have 10 students one week and 40 the next.

5. How do you structure your classes? (e.g. is it a classroom structure or a more informal setting like a group learning to cook)

As we mentioned before, the classes range from talking sessions in cafes to shopping trips, to reading and writing activities in groups.

6. What is the average age of students in your classes?

Difficult to say, as we get such a range of students, but they will mostly always be 19+, as anyone younger will most likely be in school. The average age tends to be 30-40 years old.

7. Is there a noticeable difference in how many men and women are in your classes?

(If so, what do you think the reasons for this are?)

There tend to be more women, probably because they are less likely to be the primary breadwinner of the family.

We then stated that one of the purposes of this project was to briefly look into why it was more difficult for women to which they responded:

Sometimes it is the case that these women cannot always attend due to the fact that they have children to look after, which is why we have our classes mid-morning on a weekday, a time when children are likely to be in school/pre-school. However we have also seen that many of our female students are reluctant to leave their particular areas, for various reasons, which is why we hold classes around this area (**Fallowfield**)

8. How are your classes funded?

DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government), as part of the government's integration strategy. We are part of the Greenhey's Adult Learning Centre, Manchester, but run on an organisational level, so we get part funding through them as well, but we obviously still need volunteers to run our classes.

9. Do you have many refugee or asylum seeking students in your classes?

Yes. We don't have any application processes so we don't know exactly who is and who isn't, however it tends to be the case that if they are from Somalia, for example, they will have been a refugee, whether they have been granted official status or not.

10. Do you offer any classes specifically for refugees and asylum seekers who may not have the relevant documents to access other ESOL classes? (If yes, how successful are these classes for the refugees and asylum seekers, and are they popular? If no, do you know of any other classes available specifically for refugees and asylum seekers in Manchester?)
Not specifically, no questions asked.

11. How successful would you say your classes are in terms of helping the students to integrate better into society?

We always look to make our classes topic-based, so we go to new places and interact with different people, there are no exams and therefore no commitment, which is better for our students, and based on their opinions of our classes we'd say they were pretty successful!

12. Are your classes in high demand, are there waiting lists? (If so how long would one expect to wait to get access to a class?)

Yes, there are always waiting lists, but we cannot say exactly given that we have about 40 different classes, and we don't need any application processes to get our students. We have about 150 volunteers in Manchester alone, which might indicate the demand for the classes.

13. What is the main reason that you see for your students to learn English?

Just to integrate better into daily life in their communities. A common reason is so that they can access a doctor. Also, this is a good first step to enrol onto an official course – we often see our students move on to courses at Greenheys. We have some students that have lived in Manchester for 30 years or more but have only recently enrolled onto our classes!

14. How do you promote your classes to best reach those who may not even speak a word of English?

In venues, for example the cafes we teach in, advertisements in newspapers, and most importantly word of mouth through our current students

After making contact with the people at Talk English, we set up a meeting with two representatives from the organisation to discuss the questions in our survey (see above for the full answers to the interview). Given that Talk English is a volunteer based organisation that does not require any application processes for the students, we were not able to look in detail at the difficulty refugees and asylum seekers faced in accessing other more official courses, however a few of the students we spoke to gave us an insight into these issues (into which we will delve later).

During our time at the Talk English session, our previous thoughts about the difficulty some of the participants might find in answering our questionnaires were confirmed. We therefore set up very informal conversations, much like the style of the class itself, in collecting the answers, which some also said contributed to their learning of English. Some of the participants completed the questionnaire themselves, however for the less fluent speakers of English we filled them out for them, which resulted in a variety of ways that Question 6 in particular was answered (see Appendix 1), but this will be addressed in the discussion.

The data below is based on the questionnaire results from the Talk English students we interviewed in order to gauge the ESOL provisions of Manchester. We asked a selection of questions (see Appendix 1) but decided to focus on quantifying the results for three of the questions found below. This was because they were most relevant to our investigation and provided the most interesting results for our discussion.

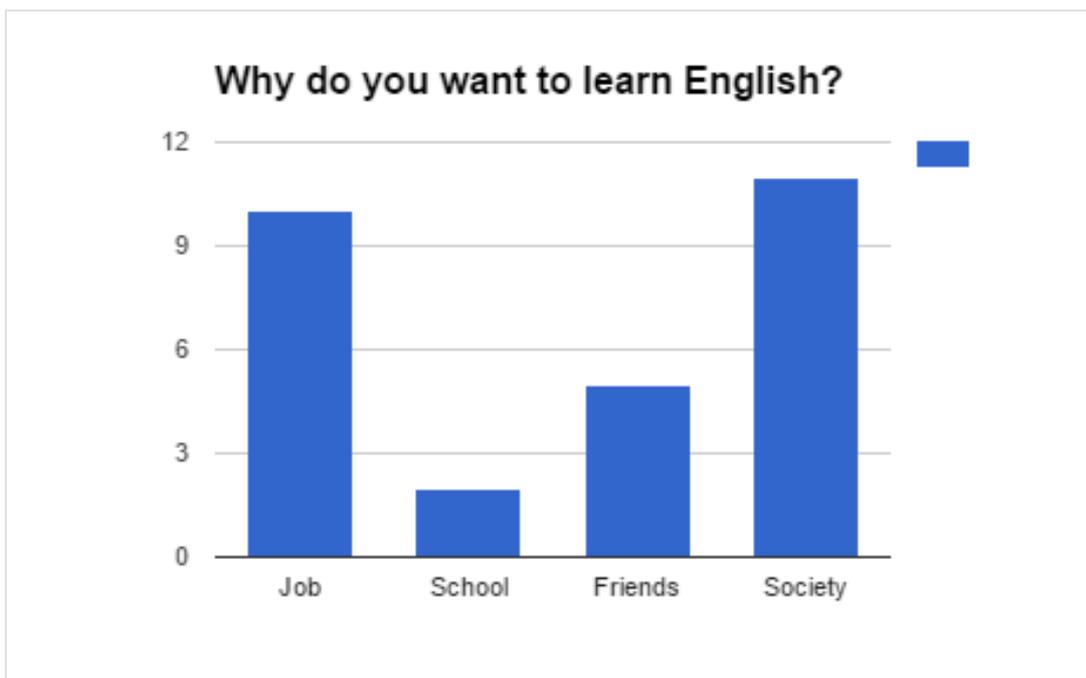


Figure 1 - Graph showing various reasons for learning English

Table of Ns:

Job	10
School	2
Friends	5
Society	11

We looked at the results of this question in order to understand the students' motivations for learning English, and why it is so important for them, so that we could gauge why ESOL provisions are so vital for the Manchester community. On some questionnaires students selected multiple options to answer this question, so this graph represents all of the answers chosen on each individual questionnaire.

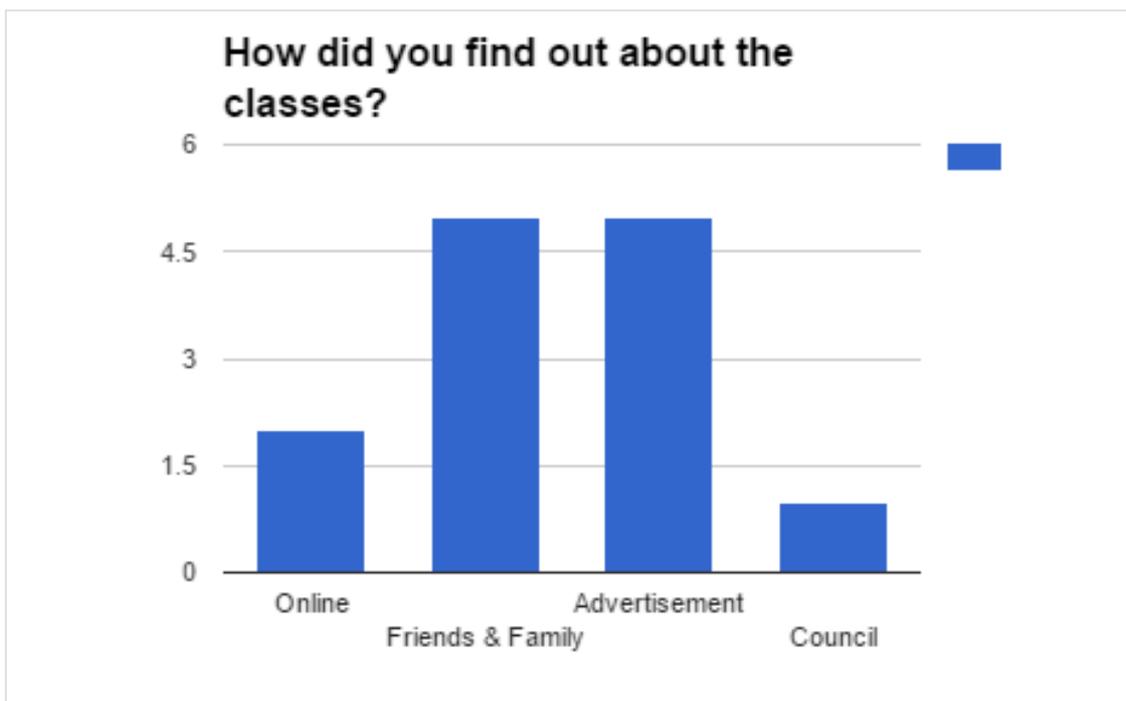


Figure 2 - Graph showing various ways students found out about the Talk English classes

Table of Ns:

Online	2
Friends & Family	5
Advertisement	5
Council	1

Again, some students selected multiple choices to answer this question. The reason for quantifying the results for this question was to see how much the council are supporting and promoting ESOL provisions, or whether people have to rely on other methods to find out about the relevant classes that are provided.

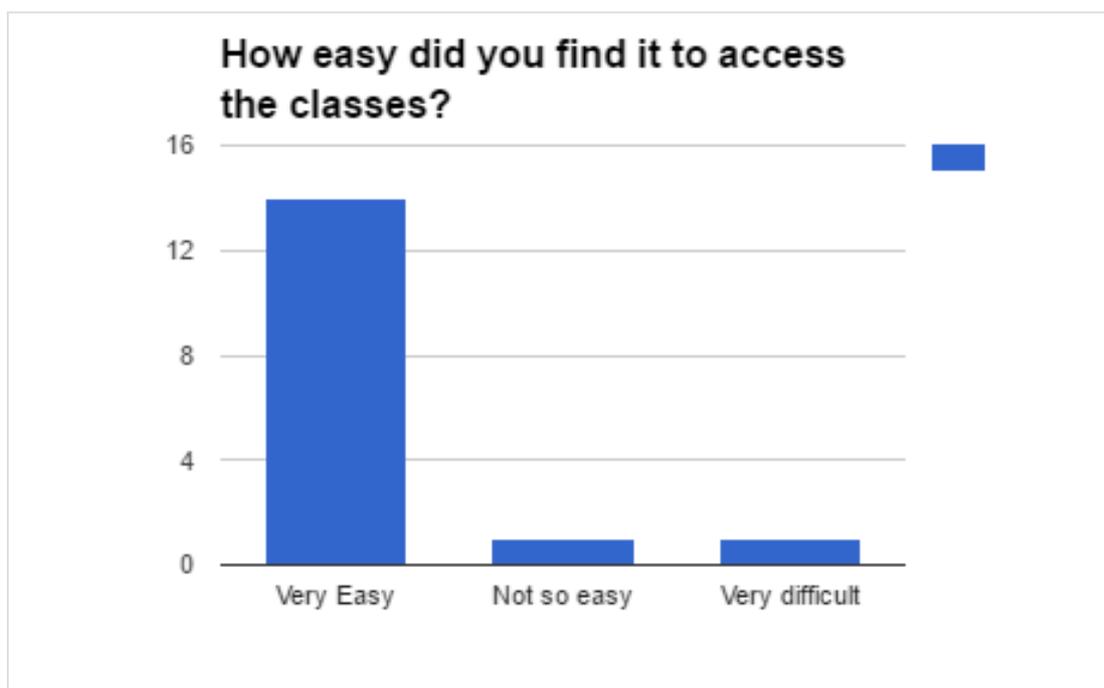


Figure 3 - Graph showing how easy students find Talk English classes

Table of Ns:

Very Easy	14
Not so easy	1
Very difficult	1

Discussion

The results from this survey have confirmed what was said in the literature review regarding the reasons that migrants want to, or need to learn English; to feel more a part of the community, to go to the doctors, to get a job. Although we did not look directly into the stigma attached to migrants and their apparent lack of language fluency that was addressed in the literature review, we can see that there is a strong desire of migrants, whether they are refugees or not, to learn English. Later on we will discuss some of our findings that refute the stereotype of migrants being 'too lazy' to learn English. From Ingrid Piller's book reviewed in the literature, it is said that, on average, a student will require 480 hours of language instruction to be able to speak adequately (Piller, 2016, 47). From our interview with Kate and Sam, we learned that, as a volunteer based organisation, they were only able to provide one 1.5 hour class a week for their students in an academic year - that totals around 60 hours a year of informal language instruction, for those that are able to attend every class. It is evident that this is not nearly enough, and despite the fact that Talk English clearly have more demand than supply, it seems that the local council are unable to provide refugees and asylum seekers with sufficient access to language courses.

The very fact that there is need for an organisation based on the willingness of volunteers perhaps suggests something about the lack of ESOL courses available in Manchester, not just for refugees and asylum seekers, but for anybody wanting to learn English as a foreign language. This also indicates that there are several

difficulties in applying for such courses, one of which may be due to a student's refugee status, which will be explained later, another reason being that Talk English do not require any application processes. The class we attended to carry out the questionnaires was one of the weekly 1.5 hour sessions, in which there were about 20 students. From the information given by Kate and Sam, there are several waiting lists for each class, for which, in total, there are over 150 volunteers. This gives us an insight to the size of this organisation, which receives only the basic funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) as part of Greenheys Adult Learning Centre of Manchester (GALC). From this we can see that there is clearly not enough funding and too much demand for these courses.

Despite the fact that we chose to look at ESOL provisions in general through Talk English over the Women Refugees Organisation, it seems that the hindrances women in particular face in accessing ESOL provisions is a recurring problem. Through our interview, which attests the information we studied in the literature review, we discovered the principle reasons that female migrants have difficulties in learning English: firstly, they cannot always attend classes because they have to look after their children; secondly they often do not want to leave their immediate areas, perhaps due to self-confidence or safety issues. However, interestingly, they reported that there tend to be more women in their classes than men. This, they said, is because they choose to hold their classes at a time that suits most women, when their children would be at school or pre-school, and in the areas closest to where most of their students live. This suggests the council needs to look further into more funding for organisations like Talk English, whereby there are no application processes to go through, and which reach out to the many overlooked migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who are in need of learning English.

In the literature review we established that the government offers free ESOL courses for resettled refugees during their first year (Summers 2016). Upon attending the ESOL class provided by Talk English, it was evident that this is not case in the results we found. In order to be eligible for ESOL courses at GALC, a questionnaire had to be filled out which aimed to ascertain, among other things, how long the student had been living in the United Kingdom, as well as their status. Teachers of the Talk English class explained that pupils who are refugees were not eligible for the free classes provided by GALC, as they do not meet the criteria, though they will be eligible for other classes. According to them this has happened on many occasions over the past few years.

To put these findings into perspective, it is essential to know that GALC is run by the Manchester City Council. One member of the class provided by Talk English had been accepted to the free courses at GALC and, upon arrival, was turned away as she no longer met the criteria, despite having been on a waiting list for some time. In the literature review NATECLA (the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults) proposed that 80% of ESOL course providers have waiting lists.

Figure 2 shows that only one individual was notified about the ESOL classes provided by Talk English through the council, out of the 17 participants who filled out the questionnaire. Although our sample size may be deemed as relatively small, based on our other qualitative data, it shows that the council is not a common source of knowledge for refugees and asylum seekers about the classes available to them, despite their obligations regarding the Integration Strategy. All the other pupils in the Talk English class found out about the classes from family and friends, advertisement by Talk English, or online, the majority of whom found out through friends and family. It seems that the students themselves are more involved in the promotion of these classes than the council is, or should be. This, in turn, makes it more difficult for refugees and asylum seekers to be educated on what courses they are eligible for.

The data gleaned from our questionnaires show how some pupils attending the Talk English class have been living in the UK for over 30 years without prior language instruction. One particular participant, a refugee from Somalia, had been living in the UK for 15 years, but had only been learning English for 1 year. Although the council may be doing more in terms of providing ESOL provisions for refugees and asylum seekers, there is still not enough support in place to be able to cope with the demand, especially given the expected numbers of refugees and asylum seekers coming to the UK at this time. In addition, and as previously mentioned, the fact that there is need for a volunteer based organisation like Talk English, clearly shows how the council are unable to provide sufficient access to learning English through formal ESOL provisions in Manchester to those various refugees and asylum seekers. The general consensus across all our findings is that learning English is a key part of integration into communities.

Although we chose to pursue Talk English over Women Refugees at the beginning, in order to look at ESOL provisions in Manchester in general, we did also come across some findings about women in particular, which echoed what we had studied in the literature review. While we do accept that we cannot form solid conclusions about female refugees alone, based on our small qualitative study, it is interesting to look at some of the answers given by some of the female refugee participants with a view to highlighting not only the problems they face with regards to gaining access to ESOL provisions, but to see the social motivations behind the desire to learn English for all migrants.

The literature we read regarding ESOL provisions for women clearly highlighted how women found it particularly difficult to access classes, as they are often too busy taking care of children and their education, in order to aid their children's integration into society. This notion indeed rang true in the results that we gathered from our survey. We asked people what their main motivations were for choosing to learn English through an ESOL class. Many of the women who had children stated that one of the main reasons they attended these ESOL classes was to help their children with homework, or so that they could take their children to the doctors if they so needed. Other responses included issues such as making friends, helping with acquiring a job, and maintaining a professional working relationship with others. In addition to this, from what was previously mentioned in the section on the interview we carried out with Kate and Sam, it seems that women more than men have issues with leaving their immediate areas to attend a language course. This may be due factors such as the safety they feel in venturing outside of a well-known area, perhaps down to self-confidence issues, or from what one of our female participants said, that there is not enough time to travel too far outside of her house due to the fact that she has too many responsibilities inside her home (i.e. being a housewife).

On the whole, considering both male and female responses, 71% of the participants stated aiding their children's educational needs as one of the main reasons to learn English. This, of course, emphasises a clear motivation for both men and women to be able to interact in their children's school world in their roles as parents, with one woman stating she wanted to understand what teachers were saying at parents' evening. Ultimately, it was clear that the participants had a priority to aid their children's integration into society before their own, which may be the reason that some of the participants took so long in looking for English language courses despite the many years they'd already been living in the country. The fact that people have such positive motivations for wanting to learn English, in getting a job and integrating into society shows how important ESOL provisions are in Manchester. This is also backed up by the "Language for Resilience" report (2016), which also affirms the importance of learning English, highlighting the need for improvement of ESOL provisions.

Often, their circumstances mean it is necessary for refugees and asylum seekers to access counselling for loss and trauma, as well as education and training. If they are being turned away from these opportunities, it makes it obvious they are not getting the support they need in Manchester, and the council must work harder to improve provisions. Although our questionnaire results show that the classes are very easy to access for Talk English (Figure 3), this reflects only the people who are currently in the classes, and waiting lists alongside the fact that many people are being turned away shows that the classes are not as easy to access overall compared to what is needed.

Regarding the stereotype of being 'too lazy' to learn English that many migrants seem to face, it is interesting to note that, from the question we asked our participants about how many languages they spoke, 7 out of the 17 participants said they spoke 1 or more languages other than their native tongue and (partially, for some) English, 4 of whom said they could speak 2. It seems that it is not just the fact that many migrants, refugees or not, face difficulty in accessing ESOL provisions, but that they also face unjustified judgments from the general public. It thus becomes apparent that not only should the council address the growing demand for such provisions, but that certain measures must be put in place to educate the public on the importance of integrating all migrants into society, such as promoting multiculturalism, however this is a separate issue.

In terms of feedback from the actual students of the Talk English classes, we asked them both how helpful they found these classes, and how much they enjoyed them. As mentioned earlier, Question 6 was answered in a variety of ways, not all regarding the scale from 1-10, which is the reason this information is not presented as a graph. However, nearly all of the answers to the question (about how helpful the students found these classes) were positive, with the exception of one participant who said the only criticism was that there were not enough of the classes provided. In answer to Question 7 (about how much they enjoyed their classes) 14 of the 17 participants chose option A, 'I love them', mentioning things like the teachers and volunteers being very kind and helpful, the friendly and welcoming atmosphere from the other students, and the productiveness of the classes being held in different places with regards to learning new vocabulary. Only 3 of the participants chose option B, 'Yes, but I find them quite difficult'. Because there are no application processes for Talk English, they are not able to categorise their students on level of ability, which means that for some people it may be helpful to learn English through their 'more able' peers, but for others it is more difficult. One woman voiced that "after this class you forget everything for a week until you learn it again in the next one", showing how crucial it is for those looking to learn English to have more contact hours with the language in order to improve. It was clear by the end of the interviews that all participants in the class had a strong desire to learn at a more frequent rate.

Recently, the Skills Funding Agency revealed that funding for ESOL provisions would be cut, affecting 47 colleges and 16,000 learners (Evans, 2015), and according to the Casey Review (Burke, 2016), funding for ESOL provisions had been cut by 50% between 2008 and 2015. This has had detrimental effects on social integration, and results in lower wages and higher unemployment among migrants living in the UK.

We have seen that it is predominantly the council's responsibility to address the issue of ESOL provisions in Manchester for migrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, through the obligation of the DCLG's Integration Strategy, however there is clearly a lack of support not only for organisations like Talk English (of which there seems to be only one in Manchester), but for the migrants themselves in accessing and finding out about such provisions. Manchester City council spoke about the need to improve ESOL provisions (Manchester City Council 2014), however this would suggest that there is yet more to be done, with the

council itself needed to spread the word about these classes, and further support the community members who want to gain access to the classes. By looking at the reasons behind wanting to learn English, both from our literature review and our sociolinguistic study, it seems that we must emphasise the importance of integrating into society for the benefit of everyone, and destroy the stigma that migrants face in doing so, whether they are a refugee or asylum seeker or not. We therefore conclude that from speaking to students of ESOL classes themselves, our study only echoes what many teachers of ESOL have been saying for years: that there is a need for more organisations like Talk English, that require no application process, that provide more classes at varying times of day, that are structured on ability, and that reach out to every single person wanting to learn English, given the government's proposals to provide free ESOL courses to migrants. All this evidence confirms that it is not just refugees and asylum seekers that are not being taken seriously in terms of ESOL provisions, but all migrants living in the UK.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Copy of Questionnaire given to students of a Talk English class

1. How long have you lived in England?

2. How long have you been learning English?

3. What other languages do you speak? (including your native language)

4. Why do you want to learn English?

To get a job here

To go to school here

To make friends in the neighbourhood

To feel more a part of the society

Other (please state)

5. How did you find out about this class?

Online

Friends / Family

Advertisement in a shop / community centre / newspaper

Through the Council

Other (please state)

6. How helpful do you find these classes? (On a scale of 1 – 10)

7. Do you enjoy your classes?

I love them

Yes, but I find them quite difficult

I don't do it for the enjoyment, I am purely here to learn

Not really, they could be better

Not at all

8. How long do you spend in class per week?

9. How easy are these classes to access?

Very easy, I had no trouble

Not so easy, I had to do a lot of research

Very difficult

10. What do you think would make these classes better?

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