

# **Supporting migrants in low-paid, low-skilled employment in London to improve their English**

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## Research

Commissioned by Greater London Authority, 2013

Investigate English language learning experience of migrants in low-paid work in London

Identify **barriers and enablers** to inform **new approaches** to support

Talk to migrants with **low-level or no English** in **low-paid, low-skilled jobs**

Migrant = non-UK-born resident

Low skill = EQF L3 or below

Low pay = ?

*UK median = £13 (€16, \$20)/hr, UK Nat Min = £6.50 (€8.15, \$10)/hr*

*London Living Wage = £8.55 (€10.70, \$13.50)/hr*

2014 data - 21% of UK workforce in low paid jobs, unchanged for 20 years

*Resolution Foundation (2015), Low Pay Britain 2015. resolutionfoundation.org*

## Drivers for research

‘Huge unmet demand’ for English language learning in London

- Participation in English language learning provision = 60 000 (2012)
- Need estimated at 300 000 to >600 000 (+ constant new arrivals)

Migrants in low-paid work = **important ...**

- 500 000+ migrants in low-paid work in London
- Migrants in low-paid work **more likely to stay** in UK than high-paid migrants
- Migrants with limited English clustered in low-paid work
- Language skills linked to full-time work, participation in vocational learning, utilisation of existing higher level skills
- Migrants in low-skilled jobs + better language skills = **added value** for migrants, employers and economy

**...but hard-to-reach group**

- **‘Disproportionately disadvantaged’** by funding arrangements, long work hours
- **Unlikely to attend classes**

## Approach

Semi-structured qualitative interviews with 60 migrants

- 50 interviewees in low-paid, low-skilled jobs
  - 15 fully interpreted, two part-interpreted
- 10 interviewees in jobs requiring intermediate level skills

Recruited via employers, trade unions, migrant support organisations

Interviews explored migrants' skill levels, experience of learning English, views on meaningful support

Desk research: practice related to linguistic integration of adult migrants, including workplace language development programmes

## Informants

50 migrants (19 male, 31 female) in low- paid, low-skilled jobs

- Care work, cleaning, hospitality, retail, construction, etc.
- 23 countries
- 20 first languages
- 30 % of interviews fully interpreted

10 migrants (3 male, 7 female) in intermediate-skilled jobs

- Admin, community work, HR & training, reception
- Seven countries

**Age:** from 17 to 65

**Resident in England:** from 3 months to 40 years

**All phases of migration** from 1950/60s to now within sample

55% in **full-time** work, 45% **part-time**      **Qualifications:** from zero to post-graduate

70% intending to **live permanently in UK**, 30% unsure

**English:** mostly CEFR level A1 to B1

**Median wage** = £6.50/hour

*Note:* London Living Wage = £8.55 (€10.70)/hr

Nat Min Wage = £6.50 (€8.15)/hr

## Areas of investigation

1. Why don't migrants in low-skilled jobs access provision?
2. What barriers to language learning do they identify?
3. What support do they want?
4. What support do they need?
5. What support is practical?

## Why don't migrants in low-skilled jobs access provision?

### Dynamics

Migrant arrives → seeks work, seeks friends (support network)

→ Work = *job suitable for person with limited English = low-paid, low-skilled = long hours + problems of low income*

→ Friends = *people who speak migrant's language(s)*

Migrant starts English course → finds job, friends → stops course

*No time, energy, money, etc + no need: is working, has friends*

Result = **low-pay, limited-English trap**

→ Limited exposure to English at work, at home

→ Study in **non-working hours** difficult, unattractive

## What barriers do migrants identify?

### Barriers to learning

- Limited **contact** with English-speakers
- Lack of confidence to **interact** in English
- Not knowing how to find **suitable language tuition**
- No **time, money** for tuition
- No **learning support** at or outside work
- No effective **personal learning strategies**
- No **motivation** to persist with language learning

**Addressing barrier = enabler**



## What support do migrants want?

[*Note: all informants wanted to improve their English*]

**Guidance** to help them learn effectively, efficiently

**Motivation** to help them **persist** with learning

**Opportunity to extend** their exposure to + use of English

**Personalised feedback**

### **Requirements**

Accessibility (location + time + cost), relevance to own learning needs

Access to learning when 'mentally fresh'

### **Preferences**

Structured, teacher-led learning (familiarity, feedback, motivation)

Speaking + listening, pronunciation (lower levels)

Writing + pronunciation (higher levels)

## Key findings

[Note: all (50+10) felt their English limited them & wanted to improve it]

Q. Where do you **use** English most?

**A. At work** [*no matter how narrow the job*]

Q. Where would it be **most convenient** for you to study English?

**A. At work**

Q. Do you use the **internet** on a daily basis in your personal life?

**A. Yes**

## What support do migrants need?

- **Encouragement** and **support** to learn English
- **Exposure** to authentic English, spoken & written
- **Opportunity to interact** in English, spoken & written
- Help to **understand the form** of the English language
- Help to develop **effective personal learning strategies**
- Rewards that encourage **persistence**

**In other words – exactly what every other language learner needs**

## Observations

Formal language teaching system lacks **capacity** to meet demand/need

Language acquisition is about **learning**, not teaching

Language is learned through communication

Workplace offers **structured opportunities to communicate** linked to role & task + **support** (management, supervision, team)

Support for workplace communication = **support for learning**

**Communication** is a key issue in the low-paid workplace (basic skills)

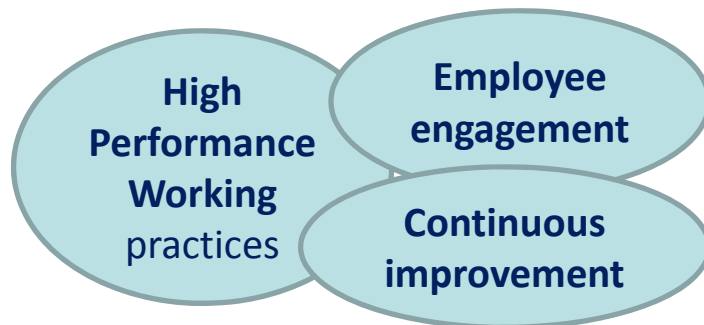
**Support** useful to **all present**: migrant/non-migrant, manager/worker

Indicative approaches: **workplace learning**    **self-directed learning**

# Implications

Focus **support** on

**Workplace as  
collective learning  
space**



**Self-directed  
learning for  
individuals &  
groups**

## What might that look like in practice?

**Internet-enabled scaffolding programme** to support learning

**Help for employers** to support communication in a way that enables language development at work (without expensive classes)

- Guided learning materials, coaching & mentoring, work organisation, supervisory feedback, peer learning groups etc

**Help for staff** to form **self-directed study groups**

- Curricula, resources for self-directed learning programmes

**Help for individuals** to develop **effective learning strategies**

- Apps etc to help personalise and support learning

**Incentives for learners & employers** to engage & persist in learning

- Reward schemes

**Expert support and facilitation** from **workplace learning service**

- New role for learning providers – or an old one resuscitated?

## **Reference**

www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/communities/migrants-and-refugees/english-language-training-why-it-important

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## **Language for Work network**

European learning network for professionals

Find out more at <http://languageforwork.ecml.at/>

Supported by European Centre for Modern Languages