



Rural Refugee Network  
[www.ruralrefugeenetwork.org](http://www.ruralrefugeenetwork.org)

Registered Charity No 1165796

## AN EVALUATION OF THE RURAL REFUGEE NETWORK'S ESOL SUPPORT FOR UKRANIAN REFUGEES

August 2022



“The limits of my language means the limits of my world.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein

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## Executive Summary

The Rural Refugee Network (RRN) provided a pilot programme of ESOL English classes for Ukrainian refugees based in East Hampshire, with the support of East Hampshire District Council, from June – August 2022. An evaluation of the programme has found that:

- Students feel their English has improved across all skills during the 8-week programme, especially their listening skills. There is a strong need for further provision, especially at beginner level
- Students are planning to register at further education college in September but are nervous about access and transport and would like the RRN English classes to continue.
- The classes have not only provided targeted English tuition but have created a supportive community

This research has identified a number of factors which will be important in planning future support.

### Recommendations for RRN and the Local Authority

- The programme should continue and be offered to new learners
- Classes should continue to be based in an easily-accessible, central location
- The classes should offer pre-beginner to beginner level (up to A2); those at intermediate level need different support now
- Individual learner copies of the textbook should be considered if funding allows
- This highly-qualified group of refugees needs tailored support to explain how they can access employment that makes the most of their skills

### Recommendations for Further Education (FE) Providers

- FE providers should actively encourage Ukrainian refugees to register for ESOL classes and should consider supporting them with logistics or ensuring they are aware of support available
- FE providers should consider meeting the increased demand for IELTS coaching and exam entry

These classes have proved incredibly popular, and the evaluation feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Participants reported rapid progress, a positive experience and unexpected benefits such as networking and access to the RRN's employment expertise. One focus group participant summed up the impact:

“For me to speak English, means to write better, to speak better, to read better, to find a good job and to be safe. And help Ukraine”

## 1. Introduction

The Ukrainian conflict has generated the worst refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War<sup>1</sup>. Many Ukrainian refugees have been welcomed and hosted by communities in East Hampshire and Havant, where the Rural Refugee Network (RRN) has been supporting refugees since 2015. In May 2022, RRN identified a need in the community for ESOL provision for newly arrived Ukrainian refugees unable to access language classes at further education colleges. RRN's expertise and experience delivering language lessons as part of its package of support enabling refugees to settle in the East Hampshire and Havant communities gave it the capability to respond rapidly to fill this gap. With funding and support from East Hampshire District Council, the charity designed a bespoke programme led by qualified ESOL teachers with vast experience of working with refugees.

The bespoke eight-week programme ran from 15th June until 8th August. Students, who are being hosted in Horndean, South Harting, Petersfield, Liss, East Meon, Clanfield and Rowlands Castle, attended an hour and a half class twice a week. Students were assessed (this was not formal) and assigned to either a beginner or an intermediate class, both of which ran at capacity, with between 15 and 20 students in each class each week. The programme followed the English for Everyone course, a structured programme for adults to learn English as a second language, which starts at beginner level and works up to advanced English, using clear visual teaching methods that are reinforced through exercises and examples. Additional employment and education advice and training was also provided, and students are being encouraged to register at Havant and South Downs College for ESOL classes in the new academic year from September.

## 2. The Evaluation Research

This evaluation looked at several aspects of the provision:

- The outcomes for students
- Lessons to be learned about how the programme was organised
- What students need next and suggestions for future provision

It did this through a qualitative multi-methods research design which heard from both students and teachers (further details are provided in the appendices of this report). It was led by Katherine Lawrence, an RRN trustee and experienced evaluator and language teacher. The research comprised:

1. A student questionnaire, which was explained to both the beginner and intermediate classes by the RNN CEO, with a translator on hand as students completed it
2. Focus group discussions led by Katherine Lawrence
3. Questions for the teachers about how the programme was planned and executed

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. The programme's success

#### **What students feel they have learnt**

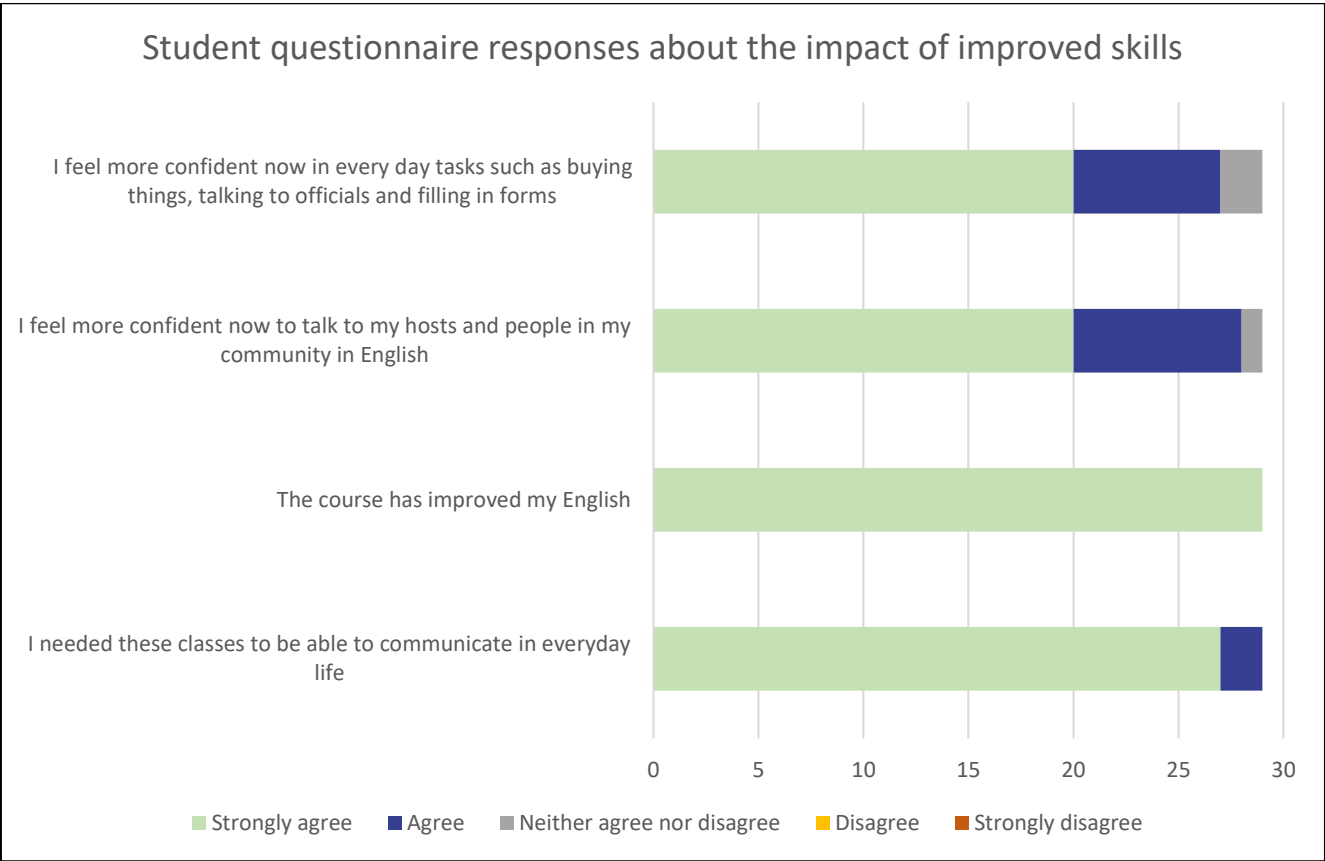
Students rated their English as having improved across all skills during the 8-week programme, especially their listening skills. One focus group participant summed up the change:

"I have never been learning English with teachers, only by myself and my host told me I have a big jump with my level of English very quickly"

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Government, 2022: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/ukraine-refugee-support>

Students were asked to judge the impact of improving their English. The results demonstrate strong agreement that the classes have delivered what they set out to do, in making students more confident in their daily interactions in English:



The responses echo the focus group discussions, where participants talked about improved confidence. “This class very improved my English and I speak more and I understand more things.” One focus group participant explained that:

“These lessons improved my English very much and I can communicate with my hosts, I can go shopping, I am more comfortable with my life now”

As these students’ priority is securing employment commensurate with what they had been able to contribute to society in Ukraine, this confidence in English is a vital foundation. Students were grateful for the information about employment and mentioned how they had valued building some job-related vocabulary:

“Now I can have meetings with managers and I can speak about my job since this course”

“I learned some words that I need for a job, I hope in the nearest time I will have a job”

Several students were keen to point out the value in explicit, tailored instruction:

“When I talk with English people they just say ‘Oh your English is amazing’ and they don’t correct me. I needed a teacher correcting me, very helpful”

**How the classes have made learners feel**

Learners described a friendly atmosphere and spoke of feeling 'comfortable', 'supported' and 'happy'.

"In class I feel very happy, very good atmosphere in the class"

"In this class I feel myself very supported and welcomed"

What came through very clearly was that the teachers had created a safe space where everyone felt able to relax, contribute and learn. Students also said that they value sense of belonging and highlighted the benefits of the network the classes have created, the joy of learning with others who know and understand them:

"We are comfortable coming here and we understand each other and know our teachers and can communicate and good for us to study and learn in this class together"

Research suggests that activities with others from the same background and life experience creates a 'sense of safety'<sup>2</sup>. As one student put it, "because we feel good with each other, we help each other".

Every questionnaire respondent strongly agreed that they felt welcomed and focus group discussions underlined how welcoming the programme was. Two respondents had joined the classes mid-way through the 8-week course, one having just arrived in the UK, and both said how welcome they felt:

"I didn't start from beginning, I just came in the middle but I involved easily in the group and everything was good and I didn't feel discomfort because I wasn't here at the beginning"

### **What it has meant to learners**

One learner summed up their transformation:

"When I came here I was nervous about speaking, now I feel more free about speaking English with people"

The value of being able to connect and integrate in the community through improved English skills came up repeatedly:

"Now I can buy not only chicken at the supermarket I can talk with the shop owner and also talk with British friends, the barbecue"

Students value not only the practical skills but also the impact that has on their sense of belonging and hope for the future:

"To improve my English means to find a good job and to find a belonged part of English society"

"To improve English means to speak, understand and communicate to different people, to communicate to English friends, to integrate into British society, to understand the culture"

### **What has been particularly good about this programme**

Students commented that "the lessons were held at high professional level" and felt that the teachers understood them and differentiated tasks helpfully. They mentioned well-planned lessons and the large amount of homework which the teachers set and marked each week. Students wanted to express their gratitude for the amount of work both teachers put in for them:

"She has given me my tasks for homework, answered my questions, checked my homework and gave me reports and feedbacks"

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<sup>2</sup> Robson and McCartan (2015) *Real World Research* p301

Many students wanted to record their general praise for their teacher, such as

“It improve our English skills because our teacher was very good”

“Amazing teacher from God”

“I like her way of teaching, she is easy to understand and she makes a comfortable place for all of us. She is very understandable, the way she speaks with us, I want to say thank you for this”

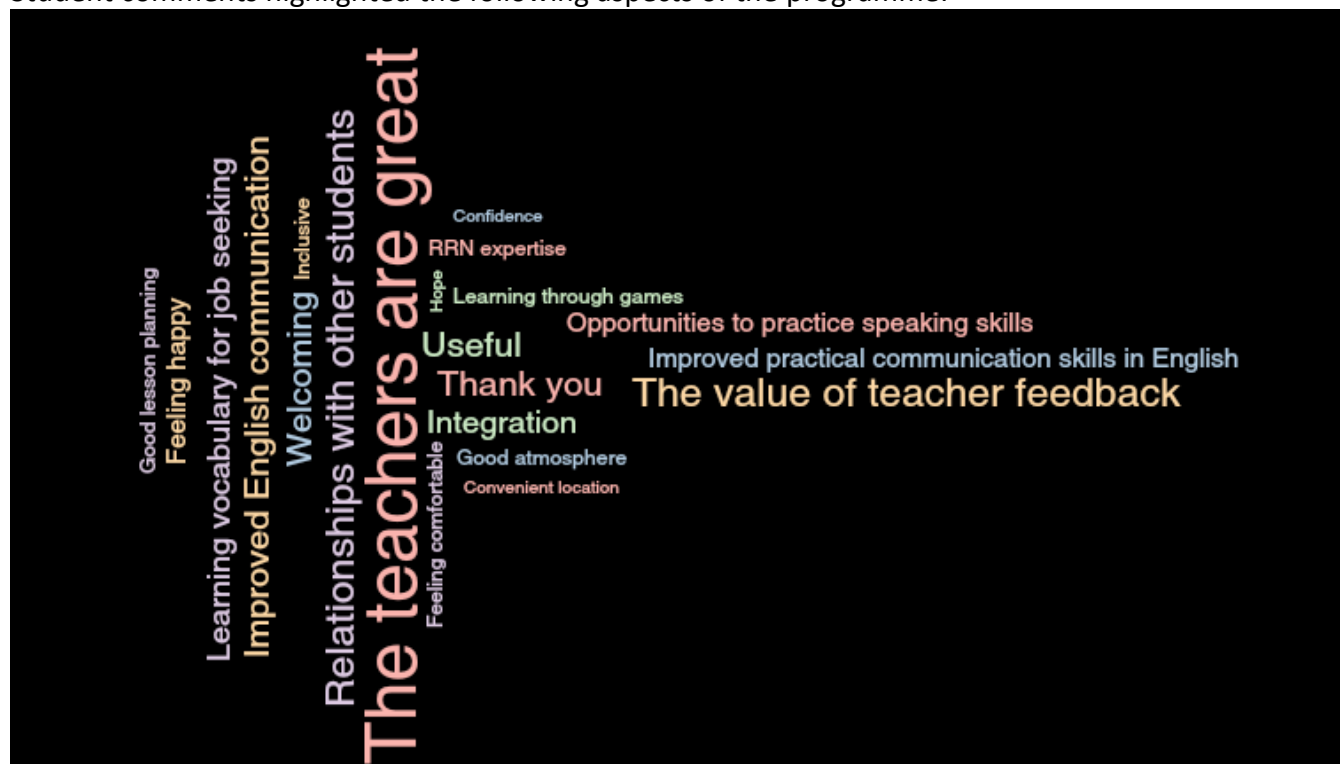
The teachers themselves feel that they “work really well together and enjoy working as a team” and pointed out how their approach was underpinned by access to the Rural Refugee Network’s wider expertise and networks:

“The back up of RRN and [RRN CEO] was great, particularly when it came to the employment session with [RRN employment expert] and the learner evaluation sessions. Having [Ukrainian interpreter] to translate was essential for the beginners”

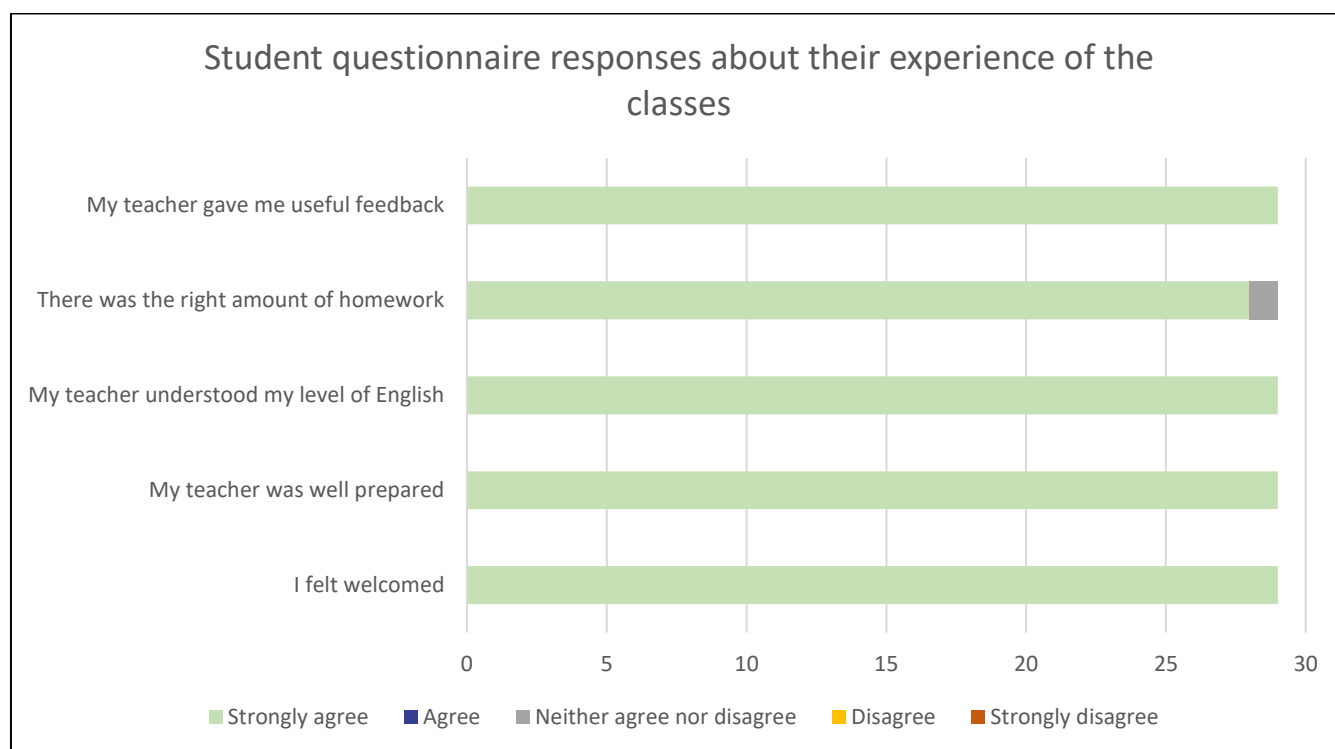
The teachers’ dedication seems to have set the tone for the classes and was well matched to the students’ high motivation to learn and progress quickly. One of the teachers said that the best thing about the classes was:

“The learners themselves. Full of enthusiasm and so keen to learn, really appreciative of all that was set up for them, super positive and hardworking”

Student comments highlighted the following aspects of the programme:



Student responses were strongly positive when asked to judge their agreement with a series of statements about the approach taken in the classes. Students strongly agreed that the teachers were well-prepared, gave them valuable feedback and understood their current level and the right amount of homework to set:



The high amount of targeted speaking practice was valued:

“Gave the opportunity to speak a lot (as I need) in the different tasks and games”

### 3.2. The challenges

The Rural Refugee Network faced three main challenges in organising this programme at very short notice to meet an immediate need:

1. **The unexpected level of demand:** Student feedback confirms that the teachers ensured this did not impact on the classes, but it necessitated more planning, photocopying and marking for them than had been anticipated.
2. **Fluctuating student numbers:** In addition to rising overall numbers, some students were unable to attend regularly as job interviews or visiting the job centre had to take priority. Once the school term finished, several older teen children joined their parents. Learning together was cited by students as a significant benefit but again, it impacted on the teachers’ planning.
3. **Students’ wide range of English levels:** The initial assessment revealed that some students knew very little English, if any, whereas some were at the top end of intermediate (B2) level. The teachers’ expertise meant that they were able to accommodate this range within just the two classes, but it made it challenging to optimise each student’s learning.

In addition, there was a logistical issue around transport and access which impacted on consistent attendance. While students expressed a strong wish for the classes to continue in Petersfield, even that was sometimes a problem for some to access. A teacher explained that “many learners with hosts in rural locations with no access to car or bus had to rely on community support for transport”.

### 3.3. Things to bear in mind for future ESOL classes

Students generally liked the balance of language skills and different activities, from grammar exercises to interactive games. While some would prefer more explicit grammar instruction, as listening and speaking is something they can practice themselves, others specifically asked for more conversation activities.

The more advanced intermediate students suggested that it would be helpful for language practice to be structured around themes they need to learn about. This might be vocabulary on a theme such as employment, or information they need to understand, such as cultural traditions. One focus group participant explained:

“We need more thematical lessons on education system, business language and system, medical system, accountancy or IT-specific vocabulary for understanding in our own profession”

One learner pointed out that, especially for those aiming to pass exams, quality audio equipment and listening practice will be important. The intermediate students also expressed a wish for some longer, more intensive focused sessions, or day-long workshops.

Suggestions were tempered with a concern that any future classes should retain the friendly approach so valued in this short programme. Running the classes one after another with a half hour break had helped the teachers to coordinate and allowed them to cover for each other if needed. In addition, providing refreshments in the break between the two classes helped with group cohesion and gave an opportunity for questions and following up on discussions. Future programmes will need to take into consideration the fact that this arrangement relied on a suitable venue and the goodwill of the teachers in providing their time and refreshments.

The teachers very much appreciated that the funding providing them with the DK English for Everyone textbooks as it helped them plan a logical, structured course taking account of the wide ability range. Students pointed out that in future, each having access to the textbook itself rather than only photocopies of relevant extracts, would help them to plan and track their learning.

### 3.4. What learners need now

This pilot was intended to bridge the summer gap before students could attend a further education college in the new academic year. While attendance at an accredited ESOL or relevant course will be vital, students in both groups indicated a strong desire for these courses to continue, in Petersfield:

“I need continue English course in Petersfield because it is very far to go to Havant or Alton. If English course can continue it will be very good”

“I need to continue my studies. I have no other possibility to study English”

The results indicate a marked difference between the beginner class and the intermediate class in terms of what they feel they need next.

#### **What beginner students need next**

The beginners overwhelmingly expressed a need for more of the same. While they felt that this pilot had made a difference, many of them had arrived in the UK with little to no English and therefore the supportive, clear instruction in basic English is what they need to continue with. They were keen to stress the importance

of the location they can easily access and the supportive network established here which they do not want to lose.

### **What intermediate students need next**

Intermediate students expressed a need for more tailored instruction, not only in higher-level English, but also in the cultural and logistical knowledge they will need in order to secure IELTS qualifications and suitable employment. Their key future need is in respect to employability.

“I think I need some courses to help me adapt to work, I need to get a certificate of my English level”

The focus groups explored the need for support in all the steps in securing employment, from looking for adverts, writing CVs, having interviews and talking to people in business language. Some mentioned the need for support in navigating an unfamiliar system:

“Some of us ran businesses. People want to make a small business here if they had a small business in Ukraine, but need to understand what we can do to start a business here”

Several participants cited difficulty securing well-paid work commensurate with their professional qualifications as their main barrier to successful integration and independence. Some pointed out that Ukraine has very high rates of Higher Education. UNESCO put rates of degree-level education in 2014 in the country at 83%, 89% for women.<sup>3</sup> A focus group participant explained:

“A lot of people have higher education in Ukraine. Many people are highly qualified and have degrees but they can’t find proper work here. They want to rent an apartment and support their families. But if they don’t speak English, if they can’t pass IELTS...”

Students have appreciated the programme’s impact and the short extra employment advice session, but highlight a gap from this to the qualifications they will need in the job market. Not only would their qualifications need to be translated from Ukrainian, but IELTS is the key step they need and they are not aware of suitable classes at that level.

“This course is enough to integrate in UK, but not enough to work as a doctor and pass difficult exams”

“Our diplomas not useful here, not certified, so the first step is IELTS English exam, we must improve our English to another level to get such a certificate. It’s a big hurdle for us. It’s the language and also the exam”

Students have been signposted to local colleges which offer the IELTS test but spoke of a need for training to pass these exams:

“College we can take a test, but we need to know how to pass, how to learn for the test, it’s a year programme, it’s a problem”

## **4. Recommendations**

This research has identified a number of factors which will be important in planning future support.

### **4.1. For RRN and the local authority**

- The programme should continue and be offered to new learners
- Classes should continue to be based in an easily-accessible, central location

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCO enrollment data by country 2014: <https://uis.unesco.org/country/UA>

- The classes should offer pre-beginner to beginner level (up to A2); those at intermediate level need different support now
- Individual learner copies of the textbook should be considered if funding allows
- This highly-qualified group of refugees needs tailored support to explain how they can access employment that makes the most of their skills

#### 4.2. For Further Education (FE) providers

- FE providers should actively encourage Ukrainian refugees to register for ESOL classes and should consider supporting them with logistics or ensuring they are aware of support available
- FE providers should consider meeting the increased demand for IELTS coaching and exam entry

### 5. Conclusion

These classes have proved incredibly popular, and the evaluation feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Participants reported rapid progress, a positive experience and unexpected benefits such as networking and access to the RRN's employment expertise. One focus group participant summed up the impact:

“For me to speak English, means to write better, to speak better, to read better, to find a good job and to be safe. And help Ukraine”

There is a strong will and need to continue, particularly for beginner students. As learners start to find employment, albeit not necessarily at the level they are qualified for in Ukraine, they will struggle to access classes far from their homes and continued classes in central Petersfield will be even more important. Some students in the intermediate class now need more focused instruction and wider employment advice than this programme can offer, but they were keen to point out that more people will arrive in the area and continued provision will be important for some time.

Participants in both focus groups were keen to record their thanks to the teachers, Rural Refugee Network and funder and so this report ends with a few typical quotes:

“Thank you very much we really appreciate everything”

“We are very grateful”

“Thank you for all support for Ukrainian people”

## Acknowledgements

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the students for giving their time and energy to this evaluation.

The Rural Refugee Network is grateful to its community for supporting this initiative, in particular to St Laurence's church for the venue, the students' hosts for their support, such as helping with homework or driving students into Petersfield and to East Hampshire District Council and Petersfield Town Council for supporting and promoting the programme.

And of course, huge thanks are due to the RRN's two ESOL teachers who responded quickly to the need with dedication and professionalism.

## Appendices

### Appendix A Methodology

The research comprised:

1. A student questionnaire, which was introduced and explained to both the beginner and intermediate classes by the RNN CEO during a class on 1<sup>st</sup> August. A translator was on hand to support the beginner students as they completed the questionnaire.
2. Focus group discussions during the final intermediate class on 8<sup>th</sup> August, facilitated by Katherine Lawrence and supported by a translator.
3. Questions for the teachers about how the programme was planned and executed

The dataset comprised:

- Two group transcripts (15 participants altogether)
- 29 questionnaire responses
- Teacher feedback responses

Questionnaire respondents' judgements on Likert scales were analysed in Excel. For the spoken and written responses to open questions, the research used Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis<sup>4</sup> which involves the following six steps:

1. Familiarisation: responses were read, re-read and annotated
2. Coding: succinct labels, codes, capturing units of meaning were linked to excerpts
3. Generating initial themes: the codes were collated into broader ideas
4. Developing and reviewing themes: these ideas, or themes, were reviewed against the coded dataset, checking the fit to the research question, the literature and the aims of the study
5. Refining, defining and naming themes: each theme was developed to clarify the scope and focus and given an appropriate name
6. Writing up

The qualitative data analysis software package, [Dedoose](#), was used to analyse the dataset from step 2 onwards.

### Appendix B Learner questionnaire (beginner and intermediate groups)

Demographic question (language level)

Which language skills have improved?

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking
- Listening
- Pronunciation

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<sup>4</sup> Braun, V. and Clarke, V. *Doing Reflexive Thematic Analysis* <https://www.thematicanalysis.net/doing-reflexive-ta/>

To what extent to you agree (5-point Likert-type rating scale):

- I needed these classes to be able to communicate in everyday life
- I felt welcomed
- My teacher was well prepared
- My teacher understood my level of English
- There was the right amount of homework
- My teacher gave me useful feedback
- The course improved my English
- I feel more confident now to talk to my hosts and people in my community in English
- I feel more confident now in everyday tasks:
  - buying things
  - talking to officials
  - filling in application forms
- I need more help with my English

What did the teacher do that helped you to learn well?

What do you feel you need next to help you improve your English?

#### **Appendix C Learner focus group questions (intermediate group)**

How did you feel in the classes?

What does being good at English mean to you?

What was the best thing about these classes?

What else do you need? If we could provide these classes again, is there anything we could do differently?

Page Break

#### **Appendix D Process questions for teachers**

What was your understanding of the need, having done the initial assessments?

Were there logistical challenges?

What support did you need?

What was great about these classes?

What would these classes look like in an ideal world?