



Rural Refugee Network
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AN EVALUATION OF THE RURAL REFUGEE NETWORK'S ESOL PROGRAMME FOR AFGHAN PARTICIPANTS (October 2025 to June 2026)



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INTRODUCTION

The Rural Refugee Network (RRN) has supported refugees and people seeking asylum in Hampshire since 2016 through a range of community-based services, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision. RRN's ESOL programme aims to help learners develop practical English language skills, increase confidence and independence, and participate more fully in everyday life in the UK.

For Afghan refugees and their families, learning English is an important part of settling into a new community. The ability to communicate with healthcare providers, schools, employers, local services and members of the wider community can reduce barriers to independence and help people feel more connected to their local area. The Afghan ESOL programme evaluated in this report ran from October 2025 to June 2026 in Havant and supported 12 learners. The programme was designed particularly to meet the needs of pre-beginner learners, including participants with little or no previous formal education and, in some cases, limited literacy in their first language.

Classes were delivered once a week for two hours and combined classroom-based ESOL with practical activities and supported visits into the local community. Teaching focused on developing confidence in speaking and understanding English, alongside the gradual development of reading and writing skills through phonics, repetition and everyday vocabulary. Topics included shopping, health, travel, directions, personal information and asking for help.

The programme also provided opportunities for learners to practise English outside the classroom. Community visits and activities enabled participants to use their developing language skills in real-life situations, while also helping them become more familiar with local services, transport and community services.

An important progression outcome was that four of the 12 learners secured employment during the ESOL programme. While the evaluation cannot establish that employment was directly caused by participation in the ESOL programme, this outcome demonstrates the wider context in which learners were developing their English, confidence and independence.

This evaluation explores participants' experiences of the programme and considers its impact on language development, confidence, independence and community connection. It draws primarily on five anonymous learner feedback surveys completed at the end of the programme, alongside information from the teacher's end-of-programme report and evidence from programme activities.

The small number of completed learner surveys means that the findings should be understood as an indication of participants' experiences rather than as a statistical representation of all 12 learners. Nevertheless, the responses identify several consistent themes. Learners reported improvements in their ability to communicate in English and greater confidence in everyday activities such as shopping, travelling and attending medical appointments.

Participants also valued the welcoming and supportive classroom environment, the relationship they developed with their teacher, and opportunities to practise English through community activities. For some learners, activities such as supported train travel represented significant steps towards greater independence.

The evaluation also identifies areas for future development. Learners expressed a strong desire to continue learning English and highlighted the value of further speaking practice, additional classroom resources and more opportunities to learn through community visits and activities.

Overall, the findings indicate that the programme supported learners not only to develop practical English language skills, but also to become more confident and independent and to engage more fully with their local community.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-schemes-funding-instructions-2026-to-2027/funding-instruction-for-local-authorities-in-the-support-of-the-afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme-and-afghan-relocation-and-assistance-policy-acces?utm_source=

https://www.unhcr.org/uk/unhcr-recommendations-uk-government?utm_source=

<https://www.unesco.org/en/fieldoffice/kabul/expertise/education/literacy-learning-possibilities>



METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This evaluation is based primarily on five anonymous learner feedback surveys completed by participants who attended the Rural Refugee Network's Afghan ESOL programme between October 2025 and June 2026.

The programme supported 12 Afghan learners in total. Five learners completed the end-of-programme survey. Four learners secured employment during the ESOL programme and were therefore unable to complete the end-of-programme survey. The remaining learners were not represented in the survey responses. The findings should therefore be understood as providing an insight into the experiences of participating learners rather than as a statistical representation of the whole cohort.

The learner survey was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative feedback. It included closed questions using rating scales, as well as open-ended questions which gave learners an opportunity to describe their experiences, achievements and suggestions in their own words.

To support meaningful participation, learners completed the questionnaires themselves and were able to respond in their own language where necessary. Responses were subsequently translated into English for the purposes of analysis and reporting. This approach was intended to reduce the impact of English language ability on the evaluation itself and allow learners to express their views more fully.

The evaluation considered evidence across four main areas:

1. **English language development:** including speaking, understanding, reading and writing.
2. **Confidence and independence:** including learners' ability to manage everyday activities and use local services.
3. **Wellbeing and community connection:** including learners' sense of belonging, confidence and opportunities to participate in their local community.
4. **Programme experience and future development:** including learners' views of the teaching, classroom environment, community activities and suggestions for future ESOL provision.

The learner survey findings were considered alongside the teacher's end-of-programme report and evidence from activities and community visits. This provided a broader picture of the programme and helped to identify outcomes that extended beyond the classroom.

The evaluation sought to answer the following research questions:

- How did the ESOL programme support participants' English language development?
- In what ways did the programme contribute to participants' confidence and independence?
- How did community activities and the learning environment contribute to participants' experiences?
- Which aspects of the programme did learners value most?
- What suggestions did participants make for future ESOL provision?

Limitations

The evaluation has several limitations. The learner feedback is based on five completed surveys from a cohort of 12 learners, so the findings cannot be considered statistically representative of all programme participants.

The timing of employment outcomes also means that the four learners who secured employment before completing the programme were unable to contribute to the end-of-programme survey. Their experiences are therefore not reflected in the learner questionnaire findings.

Despite these limitations, the consistency of the five responses together with the teacher's observations and evidence from programme activities, provides useful qualitative evidence about the strengths and impact of the programme.



LEARNER AIMS AND THE IMPACT OF RRN'S PROVISION FOR AFGHAN LEARNERS

Learner aims

Feedback from the five completed learner surveys shows that participants joined the ESOL programme for a range of practical, personal and social reasons.

The most common aim was to improve their ability to communicate in English in everyday situations. Learners wanted to be able to shop, travel, attend medical appointments, communicate with local services and manage everyday tasks with greater confidence. Several participants also wanted to understand life in the UK more fully and become more independent.

For some learners, improving their English was connected to future employment and volunteering opportunities. Others valued the opportunity to meet people, practise English with other learners and feel more connected to their local community. Some participants reported having limited access to other English classes, making the RRN programme an important opportunity to develop their language skills.

Reported impact

The feedback indicates that the programme supported learners to develop practical English skills and in using those skills in everyday life.

Participants described being more comfortable communicating in English and more able to manage activities independently. Examples included:

- making and attending medical appointments;
- using buses and trains;
- shopping independently;
- asking for information and directions;
- communicating with local services;
- understanding information when travelling.

The programme also supported learners to develop literacy skills. One learner described the progress they had made during the programme:

“At first I couldn’t even write my name but now I can. I have learned many things.”

This demonstrates the significance of relatively small but important steps in literacy and language development for learners who may have had limited opportunities for formal education.

Progression and employment

An important outcome during the programme was that four of the 12 learners secured employment during the ESOL programme. These learners were therefore unable to complete the end-of-programme learner survey.

The evaluation cannot establish that participation in the ESOL programme directly resulted in these employment outcomes. However, the employment progression is an important indicator of the wider context in which learners were developing their English language skills, confidence and independence.

The programme also supported progression into further learning and other opportunities. The teacher's end-of-programme report records that all learners progressed into college classes, volunteering or further ESOL provision.

Overall impact

Taken together, the learner feedback and wider programme evidence suggest that the ESOL programme supported learners in moving from a position of limited English and confidence towards greater independence in everyday life.

The practical focus of the programme was particularly important. Learners were not only learning English in the classroom; they were developing language that they could immediately use to communicate, travel, access services and participate in their local community.

The findings therefore suggest that the value of the programme extended beyond language acquisition. It contributed to learners' confidence, independence, social connection and ability to participate more fully in life in the UK.



Language Skills

Developing practical English was a central aim of the programme. The learner feedback indicates that participants made progress across speaking, understanding, reading and writing, alongside increased confidence in using English in everyday situations.

The programme was designed for pre-beginner learners, including participants with limited or no previous formal education. For some learners, therefore, progress involved developing very basic but highly significant skills, such as recognising letters and sounds, writing personal information and understanding simple spoken English.

Speaking and understanding

Learners particularly valued the opportunity to practise speaking and listening. Teaching used repetition, everyday vocabulary and practical activities to help learners develop language that they could use immediately outside the classroom.

Participants reported increased confidence in communicating in everyday situations. This included speaking with people in shops and local services, asking for information, making appointments and communicating when travelling.

The practical focus of the programme was important because learners were able to apply language learned in class to situations they encountered in their daily lives. This helped reinforce new vocabulary and gave learners opportunities to practise speaking in a supportive environment.

Reading and writing

The programme also introduced and developed reading and writing skills through phonics, repetition and simple everyday vocabulary.

For learners with limited previous formal education, progress in literacy could represent a particularly significant achievement. One learner highlighted the importance of continuing to develop these skills: "In the future it is important for me to learn more reading and writing English."

This reflects the importance learners placed on continuing to develop reading and writing skills alongside spoken English.

Confidence using English

The learner feedback suggests that language development was closely connected to increased confidence. As learners developed their ability to understand and communicate in English, they became more willing to use English outside the classroom.

Learners described being able to undertake everyday activities with greater independence, including shopping, travelling on public transport, attending medical appointments and communicating with local services.

This practical application of English was an important feature of the programme. The aim was not simply to develop classroom-based language skills, but to help learners use English to navigate everyday life in the UK.

Teacher assessment

The teacher's end-of-programme report supports the learner feedback and identifies progress in learners' ability to understand and communicate basic needs and to read and write simple English.

The teaching covered speaking, listening, reading, writing and phonics, with a strong emphasis on everyday language. Topics included shopping, health, travel, directions, personal details and asking for help.

Overall finding

Overall, the evidence suggests that the programme helped learners develop practical English language skills and increased their confidence in using those skills in everyday situations.

For this group of learners, progress should be understood not only in terms of formal language attainment but also through the practical changes reported by participants: being able to communicate with others, access services, travel more independently and manage everyday activities with greater confidence.



Wellbeing, Confidence and Community

The ESOL programme had an impact beyond the development of English language skills. Feedback from the five learners who completed the evaluation indicates that participants experienced increased confidence, greater independence in everyday activities and a stronger sense of connection to their local community.

Confidence and independence

Learners described becoming more confident in situations that had previously been difficult or intimidating. This included shopping, using public transport, attending medical appointments and communicating with local services.

One learner explained:

“I can take a bus ticket, make a doctor appointment, and go shopping, now I feel good.”

These examples demonstrate the practical value of the programme. Developing basic English enabled learners to undertake everyday activities with greater independence and reduced their reliance on others for routine tasks.

“Before I was scared to leave my home, now I know how to get the bus and this is the first I got the train. I feel more confident travelling with my friends.”

For learners who had previously felt unable or reluctant to travel independently, being able to use public transport represented an important step towards greater independence and participation in community life.

Belonging and community connection

The programme also provided learners with an opportunity to meet other people, develop relationships and participate in activities within their local community.

The classroom environment was repeatedly identified as an important part of this experience. Learners described the teacher as patient, supportive and encouraging. This created an environment where learners felt comfortable asking questions, practising English and making mistakes without fear of embarrassment.

All five respondents strongly agreed with the statement "I feel I belong." This is a significant finding, particularly given the wider aims of the programme to reduce isolation and support refugees to become more connected to their local communities.

The feedback suggests that the sense of belonging developed through a combination of factors: learning alongside other people, receiving consistent encouragement from the teacher, developing confidence in English and having opportunities to participate in activities outside the classroom.

Learning beyond the classroom

Community visits and practical activities were an important element of the programme. They provided opportunities for learners to apply language learned in class in real-life situations and to become more familiar with their local area.

During the visit to Staunton Country Park, learners practised asking for directions, ordering food and drinks and communicating with the guide. The kitchen garden and orchard also provided opportunities to discuss fruit, vegetables and farming, including comparisons with learners' experiences in Afghanistan.

The Travel with Confidence activities with South Western Railway provided another practical opportunity to develop independence. Learners practised buying tickets, reading information boards, using help points and understanding announcements before travelling by train to Portsmouth.

For some participants, this was their first experience of travelling by train. The activity therefore supported both language development and a significant increase in confidence in using public transport.

The Petersfield visit provided a further opportunity for learners to practise travelling by train and engaging with their local community. Eight Afghan women took part in the visit, which included visiting the local market, museum and art gallery.

Overall finding

The evidence suggests that the programme's impact extended beyond the classroom. Learning English gave participants greater confidence to communicate with others and manage everyday situations, while the supportive learning environment and community activities helped learners feel more comfortable participating in their local area.

The combination of language learning, supportive relationships and practical experience appears to have been particularly important in helping learners develop confidence, independence and a stronger sense of belonging.



Structure and process

The programme was delivered as a weekly two-hour ESOL session in central Havant, combining classroom-based language learning with practical activities and community visits. The structure was designed to meet the needs of pre-beginner learners, including participants with limited previous formal education and, in some cases, limited literacy.

A practical approach to ESOL

The programme placed a strong emphasis on practical English for everyday life rather than relying solely on traditional classroom-based language learning. Lessons covered situations that learners were likely to encounter, including shopping, health, travel, directions, personal information and asking for help.

This approach enabled learners to practise language that had an immediate relevance to their daily lives.

Repetition, speaking practice, phonics and practical exercises were used to reinforce new vocabulary and support learners at different stages of development.

The learner feedback suggests that this practical approach was effective. Participants described being able to use English in everyday situations and reported increased confidence in communicating with others and accessing local services.

Supportive teaching and the learning environment

The relationship between the teacher and learners was consistently identified as a strength of the programme.

Learners described the teacher as patient, supportive and encouraging. They valued having difficult topics explained and revisited when necessary and felt comfortable asking questions and practising their English.

For learners with limited previous experience of formal education, creating a safe and welcoming learning environment was particularly important. The feedback suggests that learners felt able to participate without fear of making mistakes, which supported their willingness to speak and practise English.

Several learners also expressed a wish to continue learning with the same teacher. This indicates the importance of continuity and the positive relationship developed during the programme.

Learning outside the classroom

Community activities were integrated into the programme rather than treated simply as additional social activities. They provided opportunities for learners to put classroom learning into practice in real-life situations.

Learners used English while travelling, asking for directions, ordering food and drinks, reading information, visiting local facilities and communicating with members of the wider community.

The Travel with Confidence activities were particularly valuable in developing practical independence. Learners practised buying tickets, reading information boards, using help points and understanding announcements before travelling by train.

Other visits, including Staunton Country Park, Petersfield, local museums and the library, provided different contexts in which learners could practise vocabulary and communication skills.

Partnership working

The programme benefited from collaboration with local organisations and community partners. These partnerships enabled learners to access experiences and expertise that complemented classroom teaching. South Western Railway's Travel with Confidence programme provided supported travel learning, while activities with organisations such as Itchen College, local libraries and museums created further opportunities for learners to develop language skills and become more familiar with their local community.

Two Saints and IRC (International Rescue Committee) also played an important role in identifying and referring families to the programme and supporting learners to access the course.

Overall assessment of the programme structure

The evidence suggests that the structure and delivery of the programme were well suited to the needs of the learners. The combination of regular classroom teaching, repetition, practical language, supportive teaching and opportunities to practise English in real-life settings created a learning environment in which participants could develop both language skills and confidence.

The findings also suggest that continuity and accessibility are important considerations for future provision.

Learners expressed a strong desire to continue learning, while transport and access to suitable learning resources were identified as areas that could be further developed.

Overall, the programme demonstrates the value of a practical, supportive and community-based approach to ESOL, particularly for learners who are at pre-beginner level or who have had limited previous opportunities for formal education.

Figure /Survey charts

The class helped improve my

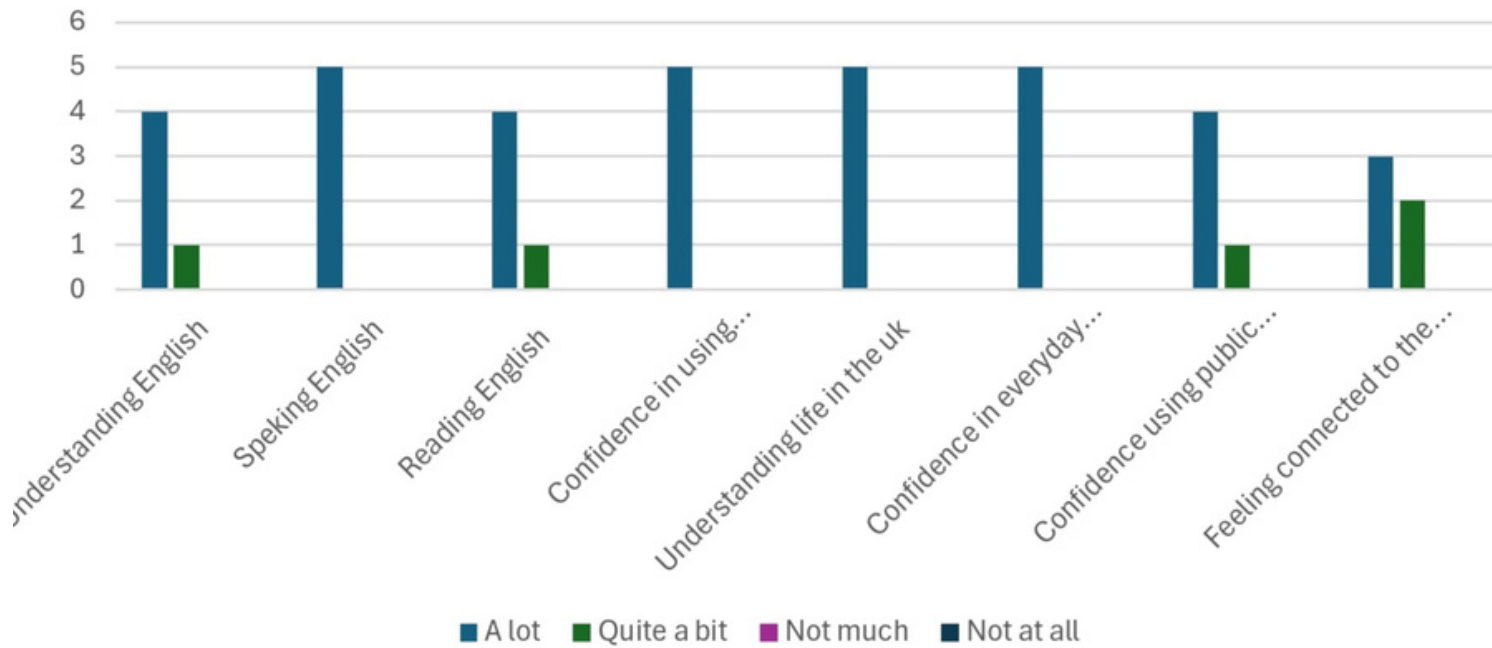


Figure 1

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

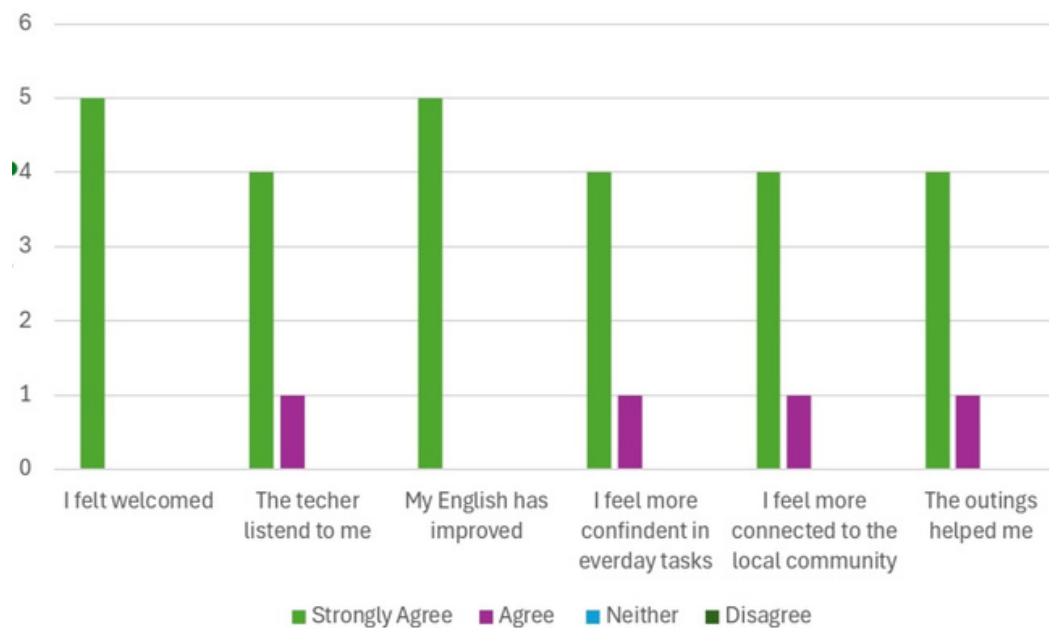


Figure 2



Conclusion

The evaluation indicates that the Rural Refugee Network's Afghan ESOL programme provided significant benefits for the learners who participated. Although the learner feedback is based on five completed surveys from a cohort of 12, the consistency of the responses, together with the teacher's observations and evidence from programme activities, provides a clear picture of the value learners placed on the programme.

The programme supported learners to develop practical English language skills, particularly in speaking and understanding, while also developing reading, writing and phonics skills. Learners reported that they were increasingly able to use English in everyday situations, including shopping, making medical appointments, using public transport and communicating with local services.

The impact extended beyond language development. Learners described increased confidence and independence and greater willingness to participate in activities outside the home. The community-based elements of the programme were particularly valuable in helping learners apply their English in real-life situations.

The finding that all five survey respondents strongly agreed that they felt they belonged is particularly significant. It suggests that the programme contributed not only to language learning but also to learners' sense of connection and participation within their local community.

The relationship between the learners and their teacher was another consistent strength. Participants described the teaching as patient, supportive and encouraging and valued the opportunity to learn in an environment where they felt comfortable practising English and making mistakes.

The programme also took place within a wider context of learner progression. Four of the 12 learners secured employment before completing the programme, while some learners progressed into college, volunteering or further ESOL opportunities. The evaluation cannot establish a direct causal link between participation in the ESOL programme and these progression outcomes, but they demonstrate the wider context in which learners were developing their English, confidence and independence.

Community activities and partnership working added significant value to the classroom-based learning. Activities involving South Western Railway, Itchen College, libraries, museums and other community organisations enabled learners to practise English while becoming more familiar with their local area and the services available to them.

Overall, the findings support the continuation of a practical, community-based ESOL approach for Afghan learners. The evidence suggests that combining accessible language teaching with supportive relationships, practical learning and opportunities to use English in real-life settings can contribute to improved communication, confidence, independence and community connection.

Future provision should build on these strengths while providing opportunities for learners to continue developing their English and progressing into further education, volunteering, employment and wider community participation.



Recommendations

The findings of this evaluation indicate that the Afghan ESOL programme provided valuable support to learners in developing English language skills, confidence, independence and community connection. The following recommendations are intended to build on the strengths of the programme and respond to the needs identified through learner feedback.

1. Continue the Afghan ESOL provision

Continue to provide accessible ESOL classes for Afghan learners, particularly those at pre-beginner level or with limited previous formal education. The evaluation indicates that there remains a strong need for supportive, accessible English language provision.

2. Maintain the practical focus of teaching

Continue to prioritise English that learners can use in everyday life. Topics such as health, shopping, travel, directions, personal information and accessing local services should remain central to the programme.

3. Provide continued opportunities for speaking and listening

Learners particularly valued opportunities to practise speaking. Future programmes should continue to provide regular opportunities for conversation, repetition and supported speaking practice, alongside reading, writing and phonics.

4. Continue community-based learning

Maintain and, where possible, increase opportunities for learners to practise English outside the classroom. Community visits should continue to be used as an extension of classroom learning, with activities planned around specific language and independence outcomes.

5. Develop opportunities for progression

Continue to support learners to progress into further ESOL, college courses, volunteering and employment. Where appropriate, learners should be supported to identify their next step before completing the programme.

The fact that four of the 12 learners secured employment before completing the programme also highlights the importance of ensuring that ESOL provision can accommodate learners whose circumstances change as they move into work.

6. Continue partnership working

Maintain and develop relationships with local organisations that can provide opportunities for learning and community participation. Partnerships with organisations such as South Western Railway, Itchen College, libraries, museums and community organisations added significant value to the programme.

7. Improve access to learning

Explore ways of reducing barriers to attendance, particularly for learners who live further from the class venue. Transport support should be considered where funding allows.

Additional visual learning resources, including a projector and suitable classroom materials, should also be considered to support learners with limited literacy and previous formal education.

8. Maintain continuity and a supportive learning environment

The relationship between the teacher and learners was consistently identified as a strength. Future provision should, where possible, maintain continuity of teaching and the welcoming, patient and supportive approach valued by participants.

9. Continue gathering learner feedback

End-of-programme feedback should continue to be collected from learners. Providing the opportunity to complete questionnaires in learners' preferred languages should remain an important part of the evaluation process.



APPENDIX 1: LEARNER SURVEY

Afghan participants | Summer 2026

This survey should take about 30 minutes to complete.

1. I have read and understood the above information and agree to participate.

YES ☐

2. What is your age group?

18-30	
31-50	
51+	

3. What is your gender ?

Please write your answer_____

4. When did you join the class?

Please write the date_____

5. Have you attended an ESOL class before?

Yes	
No	

6. Why did you want to attend the classes? Please select all that apply.

Please tick all the reasons that apply to you. If you tick more than one reason, please rank your top three reasons in order of importance:

1 = Most important

2 = Second most important

3 = Third most important



A	B
To communicate in everyday situations (shopping, travel, appointments, etc.)	
To get a job, volunteer or improve my opportunities for work	
To make friends and meet new people	
Because I could not access other English classes	
To understand life, services and systems in the UK	
To help my children (for example, school communication or homework)	
Other (please explain)	

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7. Was there anything about the way the classes were organised that made it easier or harder for you to attend?

Please write your answer below.

--



8. How much did this class help you improve the following?
 Please mark one box in each row.

	Not of all	Not much	Quite a bit	A lot	
Understanding English					
Speaking English					
Reading English					
Confidence in using English					
Understanding life in the UK					
Confidence in everyday activities					
Confidence using public transport					
Ifeel more connected to the local community					

9. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 Please mark one box in each row.



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree No	Disagree	Strong Disagree
I feel welcome					
The teacher listened to me					
My English has improved					
I feel more connected to the local community					
The outings helped me learn about life in the UK					
I feel more confident using local services					

10. How helpful were the community outings and visits?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Quite a lot
- ☐ A lot



11. What did you learn from the outings or community activities?
Please write your answer below.

12. What did the teacher do that helped you learn well? Please give examples if you can.
Please write your answer below.



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

Please write your answer below.

14. What changes would improve your experience of the classes?

Please write your answer below.

15. Would you recommend the class to others?

Yes	
No	
Not sure	

Thank you for completing this form. You can do so anonymously but if you would like to provide your contact details, please add your name and email address here. Please note that it will not be possible to withdraw anonymous surveys once they have been submitted. Your details will not be retained once the project report is complete and they will not be shared with anyone else.