

WHEN ESOL ISN'T ENOUGH: BUILDING SKILLS FOR WORK AND LIFE



This helped learners develop practical English for the workplace, build confidence in speaking and listening, and understand everyday working life in the UK. It also provided a bridge into Functional Skills English rather than expecting learners to move straight into formal assessment.

The focus was not only on language mechanics but on practical communication in real workplace situations.

Learners developed the confidence to speak to colleagues, understand instructions, and engage more fully in their roles. Understanding workplace norms and expectations helped learners feel more settled and able to engage fully.

Weston College and Yeo Valley

Weston College began working with Yeo Valley after the employer recruited a number of staff whose first language was not English.

Many of these learners were already employed within factory roles but were struggling with workplace communication, confidence and progression because of language barriers and unfamiliarity with working life in the UK.

Some learners were highly qualified in their home countries but had taken lower skilled roles to secure employment in the UK. Others were brand new to the UK and were struggling to adjust to different expectations around communication, workplace behaviour and everyday life.

While Functional Skills English was the longer term goal, many learners were not ready to access it at the point they joined the programme.

Debbie Sinclair, Lead Internal Quality Assurer at Weston College, explained: "They were working, they were committed, but the language barrier was huge. Some had never stepped foot in the UK before, and it was a big culture shock for them. Others were highly qualified in their own country but were doing lower skilled work just to get into employment."

To provide a more supportive starting point, Weston College introduced the Gateway Qualifications Living and Working in the UK qualification alongside ESOL support.

Debbie explains: "It was about developing their speaking and listening in a way that made sense for their jobs and helping them understand how things work here. Once that foundation is there, Functional Skills becomes much more achievable."

Delivery was shaped around the realities of factory work and shift patterns. Tutors worked flexibly, delivering sessions on site and at times that suited the employer, including evenings where required.

Sessions were kept short and focused, recognising that learners were fitting study around demanding work schedules.

Over time, learners progress from Living and Working in the UK to Functional Skills English. Some have since achieved Level 2, which would not have been realistic at the start of their learning journey.

This progression has opened up further opportunities within the workplace.

"We are seeing people now taking Level 2 Functional Skills English who would never have been able to access that before. That is a massive step for them." Said Debbie.

There have also been clear benefits for Yeo Valley. As learners' communication and confidence improved, some moved into more responsible or supervisory roles. This supported workforce development and allowed the employer to develop staff from within, rather than relying solely on external recruitment.

The relationship between Weston College and Yeo Valley has grown beyond this programme. The college now works with the employer on wider training needs, including leadership and management, reflecting a broader partnership approach built on trust and responsiveness.

Gateway Qualifications supports this kind of employer led delivery because qualifications can be shaped around learner starting points and workplace contexts. This allows provision to grow organically rather than forcing a one size fits all model.

“If I have an idea for a programme, I can go to Gateway Qualifications and say, this is who it is for, and this is what we want to achieve. They will work with me to shape it properly, so it works for our learners and our employers.”

Debbie Sinclair, Lead Internal Quality Assurer at Weston College

For Debbie, the lesson for other colleges is about starting points, progression and employer relationships.

“You have to look at where people are starting from, what progression looks like for them, and work with employers in a way that fits their reality. When you do that well, it benefits the learner, the employer and the college.”



Harrow College

Harrow College identified that to help learners progress into further study, employment and life in the UK, they need more than ESOL alone.

Spearheaded by Therese Lorphevre, Head of English, ESOL and Maths, Harrow College developed the Living and Working in the UK qualifications in partnership with Gateway Qualifications.

Now delivered nationally, these qualifications help learners understand the culture, expectations and norms of life in Britain. Available from Entry 1 to Level 1, content builds as learners progress.

Through delivery, learners are supported to:

- Explore culture, customs and society in the UK
- Develop CV writing and interview skills
- Access volunteering and real-world experiences
- Engage with employers and guest speakers

The programme supports learners to build confidence, integrate into British society, and progress into further study and employment.

Making Skills for Life meaningful

Support ESOL learners to build confidence, independence and progression – not just language skills.

Combine ESOL with a broader, wraparound curriculum that helps learners navigate life in the UK, develop in-demand skills and take meaningful steps into work.

- ESOL skills for life
- Living and Working in the UK
- Digital skills
- Employability skills
- Vocational tasters
- Progression pathways

Flexible delivery options to support changing local needs and funding priorities.

 gateway
qualifications

Find out how we can help meet
your learners' needs
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