This handbook is for both libraries delivering ESOL learning who would like to develop their English language provision, and for those libraries wishing to introduce a pre-entry ESOL offer. It discusses the challenges for libraries delivering pre-entry ESOL support, and some of the ways that these challenges can be overcome.

In 2013 Good Things Foundation launched the English My Way community ESOL programme. Since then 128 community organisations across the UK have used expert-created online content to help 13,500 learners to improve their English language skills.

The Department for Culture Media and Sport’s Libraries Deliver report sets out a vision for 21st century libraries’ contribution to improved communities, including ‘helping everyone achieve their full potential’ and ‘stronger, more resilient communities’¹. We believe ESOL provision could be a key part of achieving this vision.

Our own research² revealed that despite many libraries supporting those for whom English is a second language, only three library groups have delivered the English My Way programme so far, despite making up 57% of the Online Centres Network.

To understand this disparity, and to test the feasibility of using English My Way in a library setting, Good Things Foundation ran a research pilot between January and March 2017, with five libraries in areas of highest ESOL need³.

This handbook reflects the learning of these libraries, addresses some of the common barriers to delivering ESOL learning in a library setting, and brings together possible solutions.

Find out more about the libraries that helped us develop this handbook in the Pilot Summary of Centre Participation.

³. Identified by DCLG from 2011 census data as places with the greatest population of non-English speakers.
**Library resources**

- **Staff changes and reductions** in many libraries have resulted in staff who previously focussed on ESOL having to concentrate more on core library services, with little or no time to deliver regular ESOL classes. Decisions at a senior level mean some libraries are de-prioritising ESOL as part of their learning provision.

- Some libraries reported a **pressure to deliver learning within a short time frame**, with some restricted to offering learning in six week blocks.

- Successfully promoting and embedding new services (such as ESOL support) requires **well-informed and fully engaged front-line staff**. As librarians become less customer-facing, it can take more time to get buy in from front-line staff and volunteers for new services.

- **Not all libraries have staff with teaching qualifications**, experience of teaching ESOL or who speak the local community language. Along with an unfamiliarity with learning content such as English My Way, this can all lead to a lack of confidence in delivering ESOL support.

**Local partnership**

- Some libraries have been reluctant to work with external providers with whom it takes extra work to build the trust of library users and learners.

- **Existing local provision**: There are often other local learning providers, such as colleges, who are delivering ESOL. Some libraries are reluctant to put themselves in direct competition with these organisations, not having the confidence to identify as learning providers themselves.

- **Understanding local need**: It can be hard to identify the level of local demand for ESOL, particularly at a pre-entry level and it can be easy to assume this demand is met by other providers.

- Additionally, the third sector at large has seen large scale budget cuts, meaning many community partners who libraries have managed to work with to deliver ESOL are no longer in operation.

**Infrastructure**

- Older technology means public libraries can find it hard to access video resources on the library floor and some don’t have a private space like a classroom or learning centre.

- Some libraries haven’t delivered learning in the past, so don’t have the experience or ability to collect and store learners’ personal information, making monitoring progress and following up with learners difficult.

- Finding the right volunteers to deliver ESOL in a library can be hard - they need to be flexible and have the right sort of approach to supporting others.

**Community ESOL Handbook**

Our **Community ESOL Handbook** outlines other common challenges faced by those delivering English My Way, and provides tips and resources for delivering pre-entry ESOL.
Libraries and English My Way

Developed by Good Things Foundation in partnership with BBC Learning English and the British Council, English My Way is a pre-entry level ESOL learning programme, providing a wealth of online teaching resources.

The 96-hour programme focuses on supporting adults with no or low levels of English to better integrate with their local communities.

Libraries involved in the research pilot say they benefitted from their introduction to English My Way in the following ways:

**Upskilling:** The pilot led to conversations between library staff and volunteers about how to use new resources in different ways. They were able to move from informal ESOL support (e.g., conversation classes) to more structured ESOL tuition, aided by tutor resources.

**Ready-made online teaching resources and videos** cut down staff preparation time and offer more scope to use not only staff, but volunteers to deliver classes.

**Flexibility:** As English My Way is delivered in discrete, thematic modules, libraries could pick the most relevant topics, dipping in and out or using them as part of a structured course.

**Relevant learning content:** One library said: “The Using the Library Module will build learner’s confidence so they can access the full range of services libraries provide. And the Technology in Our Lives section will help learners with ESOL needs in IT learning sessions.”

**Widening reach:** Having an ESOL offer gave the libraries the ability to promote all their services to a wider range of people in the community.

**Partnership development:** Offering English My Way helped libraries reach out to partners who support people with ESOL already. Partners were impressed with the site as a free resource and how it helps manage classes and assessments. Libraries were also able to encourage partners’ beneficiaries to join the library.

**Learner management:** English My Way’s resources for recording and tracking learner progress were very popular. Libraries also saw the potential to use these resources to simplify their own existing learner admin procedures.

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**Top tips for delivering community ESOL**

**Engagement**

1. Engage people you’re already supporting as library customers, e.g. through work clubs.

2. Clearly identify the ESOL need in your community beforehand and focus your efforts targeting particular demographic groups with the help of partners. Libraries are already known as safe places in the community - build on this to encourage library users to engage in learning opportunities with others.

3. Build around an existing social group and/or offer support to existing clubs or groups that use the library. For example, Leeds Library have worked with a Romanian women’s group.
4. Engage people through things they want to do and use social interaction as a hook. Notice when library customers ask how to contact relatives overseas and consider bringing people with similar interests together to improve their English.

5. Try and get referrals from local colleges or adult education providers - they often have long waiting lists, don’t provide pre-entry learning or see high levels of drop-off from particular communities. Many people are much more comfortable in less formal learning environments.

6. Utilise current staff and volunteers who have relationships with particular communities or consider new outreach workers to reach into the community.

7. Use the online learning element of English My Way to engage with people at home, or who can’t or won’t come in to library regularly.

8. Find a way to reach and engage with people in their own language. English My Way marketing is available in multiple languages. Try recruiting volunteers who speak community languages who can convince prospective learners of the benefits of English My Way.

Things to consider before you deliver:

English My Way isn’t an immediate solution for dealing with library customers whose first language isn’t English. It’s a flexible learning programme for improving the language skills and confidence of people in your communities, helping them integrate with society and better access services. These tips can help you get the best out of the resources.

Staff Training: English My Way is best delivered by a member of staff with an ESOL teaching or general teaching qualification (supported by volunteers). Consider training to ensure staff have confidence delivering basic ESOL. English My Way has lots of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) resources for tutors and volunteers.

Use volunteers to support sessions but consider training and management. Encourage learners with improved English to support future sessions. Use volunteers who speak the community language, making sure to recruit volunteers with the level of patience required. Also consider local volunteer centres, word of mouth and retired teachers as a recruitment method.

Partner with a local ESOL provider, such as a local Online Centres Network member, who could deliver lessons within the library. Although you’re not delivering it, ESOL provision available at your library will still be valuable for many in your community.

Be flexible: Don’t be put off by the 24 week programme of learning. Try picking and choosing the topics or resources most suited to your learners. If you can’t deliver for 24 weeks, use the programme as a flexible resource, encouraging tutors towards a relaxed style of learning.

Technology: Make the most of Wifi and mobile devices to make learning engaging & varied.

Delivering ESOL toolkit

Featuring session plans, professional development materials and learner marketing in multiple languages, the Online Centres Network website has a wealth of resources to support your delivery of ESOL.