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## **Linguistic Challenges for Migrant Retail and Whole Sale Workers. Exploration Report United Kingdom**

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# 1 Introduction

Funded with the support of the European Commission within the Lifelong Learning Programme – Grundtvig, the project titled: ‘Meet the Need – Vocational Teaching Material Supporting the Integration of Migrants into the Labour Market’ (MTN) began in January 2011 and is due to run until December 2012. The project is coordinated by the Research Institute of the Red Cross, Austria, which leads a partnership of seven institutions and research companies from six Countries. They are: queraum kultur- und sozialforschung, Austria; mhtconsult, Denmark; Asociatia pentru Educatie si Dezvoltare Durabila, Romania; Anniesland Research Consultancy Limited, United Kingdom; Thüringer Volkshochschulverband e.V., Germany; Agenzia per lo Sviluppo Empolese Valdelsa, Italy; Die Wiener Volkshochschulen GmbH, Austria.

Language knowledge is one key competence for migrants’ vocational integration in the host country and therefore a lack of skills in the language of the migration country can be prejudicial to migrants’ opportunities to gain employment. Not only do migrants need general knowledge of the migration country’s language for daily life but, for integration into the workforce, they need to have knowledge of specific vocational language for the sector they wish to work in. Therefore, differentiated knowledge of terms, phrases, or codes of conduct required in working life would contribute to enhancing migrant’s labour market opportunities - at the same time bolstering migrants’ self-confidence by being endowed with specific vocationally needed knowledge. The project aims to develop a compendium of vocational specific teaching materials (that reflect a variety of sectors) – including already developed material – as well as a self-study website compendium for migrants to access. The compendium does not aim to be structured as course curricula; it is to be flexible in order for second language teachers to be able to incorporate the material into their general language classes.

There are four steps for the project. The first was the analysis of already existing language teaching material and the identification of quality criteria for teaching materials. The second step involved the interview stage. The country reports from Austria, Germany, Italy, Denmark and the UK are the culmination of the research phase of the project whereby three groups: migrants, second language teachers and employers, were interviewed in order to gauge their experiences, challenges, opinions and recommendations. Moreover, the two groups consisting of migrants and employers were divided into different employment sectors – with project partners being responsible for a specific sector. The third step will be the collation of vocational related vocabulary, phrases and codes. The final step will be the compilation of all material into the compendium (referred to above) through different types of media and methods of dissemination.

## 2 Rationale

With the appraisal of available courses and teaching material, and the exploration of migrant presence in the labour markets of the partner countries at the beginning of the project, the results have shown the need for more vocation specific language provision as important for the integration of migrants into the labour market. The aim of the appraisal stage was to

identify sectors for the project to focus on in order to develop vocational teaching material appropriate for lower-skilled workers in the field.

The results of the UK partner desk-top research on the labour market situation, migrant presence and sectors with future needs are detailed below.

According to the Office for National Statistics in their Annual Population Survey (APS), published on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2012 and covering the period July 2010 to July 2011, the estimated total number of migrants living in the UK was 16.9 million. These figures specifically relate to statistics for the overseas countries of birth. Of the 60 most common countries of birth representing the migrant population, the highest numbers of migrants were from India (694,000), Poland (587,000), Pakistan (442,000), Republic of Ireland (407,000) and Germany (295,000). The distribution of migrants was concentrated in mainly in the UK country of England. Employment levels by non UK country of birth covering the period October 2011 – December 2011 were 4.1 million out of a total of 29.2 million in employment. It should be noted that the total figure included those people who did not state their country of origin or nationality and cannot therefore be assumed to be precise.

According to Aviva Risk Solutions, migrants are employed in many sectors of UK industry. Traditionally, migrants have been employed in the following sectors:

- Hospitality and leisure
- Agriculture
- Construction
- Healthcare

This source also states that, “the growth of the European Community has increased the number of persons interested in working abroad and this, coupled with a lack of interest among British workers to undertake the more demanding or menial work, has resulted in rapid growth in the numbers of foreign workers in the UK.”

According to The Health and Safety Executive, migrants (and overseas workers) make up 6% of the construction workforce; over 50% of the agriculture and food processing workforce – specifically due to the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme whereby farmers are allowed to employ overseas workers at peak times, like harvest; approximately 37% of the workforce in the cleaning industry and a significant number in most of the 30 food and drink manufacturing sectors in the industry (which include meat and fish processing, dairies, bakeries, fruit and vegetable processing, confectionery manufacture, chilled and frozen products and drink manufacture.) Actually, according to Dr Cinzia Rienzo (October 2011) the 2010 Labour Force Survey showed a 34% share of migrants working in this sector. Other migrant employment shares in the 2010 survey given in Dr Rienzo’s report included 31.5% in the manufacture of wearing apparel; 26.6% in food and beverage activities; 26.1% in security and investigation activities; 24.1% in information service activities; 23.2% in accommodation; 19.5% in residential care activities. However, she highlighted that these figures did not include asylum-seekers; migrants in the country less than six months; migrants living in temporary accommodation (mobile homes, hotels and other communal establishments) or halls of residence (thereby potentially missing many overseas students known to be working legally in the UK). It goes without saying that the survey would not be likely to capture migrants working illegally. She stated the presence of overseas-born workers had increased most in relatively low-skilled sectors and occupations. She stated that before 2005 the number of female workers outnumbered male workers, but since then the gender distribution has been more equal.

According to the Migrant Advisory Committee (MAC) in its publication (2008) on skill shortages and hence future needs for the employment sector, in short, found that the sectors predominantly suffering skills shortages were: science/technology and engineering

occupations, particularly in the healthcare and electricity sectors, as well as a shortage of some education professionals, senior care workers, some fine arts occupations and skilled chefs. According to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2010) Skills for Jobs: Today and Tomorrow, health and Social work, retail, hotel and catering are likely to grow significantly in terms of jobs and “any existing skills shortages and gaps may be exacerbated by such future growth requirements“.

The sectors identified by the project partners for vocational language material development were:

1. Wholesale and retail
2. Accommodation
3. Food service activities
4. Care
5. Construction and welding.

The UK partner was given the task of carrying out research on the wholesale and retail sector in the UK and to conduct interviews with migrants, employers and language teachers. Apart from references to retail as a growing job sector, it was impossible to find detailed statistics on UK wholesale and retail sector in relation to migrant presence, through online research. The interviewing of retail employers was carried out in three boroughs in the north west of London, which is an area of high immigration – representative of London. The percentage of migrant staff across the five retail stores varied, with the highest representation of 70%. The interviewing of migrants took place in Gravesend, north Kent which still has a relatively high immigration. However, the percentage of migrant staff across the retail stores that these migrants worked at was, with the exception of one, significantly lower. The interviews were carried out by two individuals, Ruth Hawthorn, who is based in London and Sarah-Jane Pretty, who is based in Gravesend, Kent. Questionnaires for migrants, employers and teachers had been designed by the project partners as interview guides.

## 3 Methods used

### 3.1 Description of the sample

#### 3.1.1 Overview of the sample

Method	Employers	m	f	Migrants	m	f	Teachers	m	f
Face to face interviews	5	4	1	5	0	5	4	1	3
Telephone interviews	0						0		
Focus group	0						0		
Online survey	0						4	1	3
others [please name]	0						0		
<b>TOTAL each group</b>									
<b>TOTAL all</b>	5	4	1	5	0	5	8	2	6

*Table 1: Overview of the sample*

#### 3.1.2 Interviews with employers

It was very difficult to get people to agree to give these interviews. Response to phone call approaches was very poor unless put through initially to the person able to give the interview. If other staff said they would phone back, they never did. Approaches by writing were ignored completely. Twelve companies were contacted and involved quite long-drawn-out negotiations with many, with weeks waiting for responses to letters or phone calls.

Managers in retail are working to particularly tight timeframes during their working days and have very little slack time indeed. They also seem to have particularly tightly defined tasks and never enough time for their HR role. One of the interviews was actually carried out in the store by the frozen food section, with customers and other staff asking the store manager being interviewed questions about where they could find products, etc. The ones who did agree to be interviewed were mostly young, energetic, apparently keen and ambitious and on a management track. The interviews had to be kept to the shortest time possible. The nature of this sector may be an additional issue to consider when thinking about in-house training.

The tactic of cold-calling (visiting shops to ask if they would agree to be interviewed) worked in some cases.

All five interviews took place in the workplace. Four of the interviewees were male; the fifth being female. Three of the interviewees were Store Managers. One had the title: Finance & Opportunities Section Manager and another was a Store Personnel Manager.

As mentioned above, there was a tight constraint on time and therefore the duration of the interviews averaged at about 30 minutes, with the longest duration of 40 minutes and the shortest duration of 20 minutes.

The explored sector of this report is the retail sector, but the official Sector name for the companies involved in this report is 'Wholesale & Retail Trade'. The organization types and main activities of the five employers interviewed are described below:

- Two large supermarkets selling food, clothes, household and garden goods, one part of a large national chain and the other a local concession of a larger chain
- One sports shoe retailer (part of large national chain) also selling other running clothes and some other sports equipment.
- One local department store (not part of a chain) selling household goods including electrical and furniture, with stores-within-the-store concessions to high street fashion and cosmetic branded stores.
- One smallish branch of a very large and famous national and international chain store.

In the case of one of the large supermarkets, the number of staff was between 50 and 500 of which the gender of staff was approximately equal, though in some sections of the store there may be more of one gender than the other. The interviewee could not give exact numbers, but said that most of the staff was from ethnic minorities and therefore had non English languages of origin; even if their English was advanced or fluent, they spoke their mother tongue at home. The interviewee was not able to specify the gender divide in terms of staff with non English languages of origin, but said it was approximately an equal percentage between males and females.

In the case of the other large supermarket, the number of staff was between 50 and 500 of which the gender divide of staff was approximately equal. About 70% of the staff did not have English as their language of origin. The interviewee noted that 31 different languages were spoken amongst the staff. The gender split was approximately equal in terms of non English languages of origin.

In the case of the sports retailer, the number of staff was between 10 and 49, of which 61% were male and therefore 39% were female. Nine members of staff had a language of origin that was not English, and spoke a different language at home. Of this group with a non English language of origin, 60% were male and therefore 40% were female. The interviewee was very specific about language, ensuring that these figures did not include those members of staff for whom English was the mother tongue even if they were of non-British ethnicity.

In the case of the department store, the number of staff was between 50 and 500 of which the gender of staff was 30% male and therefore 70% female. Those members of staff who did not have English as their language of origin constituted about 25% of the workforce. Interestingly enough the percentage division of gender belonging to this group was equal to the overall 30% and 70% gender split across the store. Ruth Hawthorn noted that, "the interviewee made a careful distinction between people who were of, say, SE Asian descent but British-born, for whom English was a first language – not included in this figure - and Eastern Europeans who might look more English but had no knowledge of the language before they came to this country. I'm not sure if other respondents made this distinction."

In the case of the small branch of the very large and famous national and international chain store, the number of staff was between 10 – 49 on average, but with up to 55 members of

staff to cover the run-up to Christmas. The number of female members of staff made up the highest percentage, at approximately 60%. Around 40% of the staff did not have English as their language of origin and the gender split in terms of this particular group was broadly equal.

### **3.1.3 Interviews with migrants**

Despite easy access to migrants through the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Department at the local college of further education, only one migrant student was interviewed. The main reason for this was that those students who did work tended to work in the service sector – mostly in restaurants or takeaways (fast food shops). With permission from the ESOL Department, a short presentation was made to a few of the classes about the project and the teachers had been asked to find out if anyone worked in retail and would be willing to be interviewed. The interviews that had been set up by the teachers were not suitable for the purposes of this particular exploration. Many students confused ‘takeaways’ with shops because they tended to refer to “the kebab shop” or the “chicken shop”. Another student knew a friend of his who might have been willing to be interviewed, and who worked in electrical retail. However, this lead unfortunately did not come to fruition. Eventually, help came from a migrant friend of who knew many people in the community and she was able to set up interviews, as well as being interviewed herself. She also acted as interpreter – where needed – as a few of the interviewees did not feel confident enough in their English.

All the interviews were conducted face-to-face, of which two took place at the homes of the migrants; one at the migrant’s workplace, one at the college and the final one in a café in town. For those willing, a Dictaphone was used in order to retain as much information as possible. As mentioned above, interpreting was used for three of the interviews – for those questions that they did not really understand. It should perhaps be noted that these migrants refused to accept any form of payment/allowance for their time. They just wanted to help. On average the interviews lasted for about an hour, with the exception of the interview with the ESOL student – which only lasted for 20 minutes because she had to go back to class.

Unfortunately, there is no male representation in the migrant interview section of this report. The interviewees’ countries of origin were Estonia, the Turkish region of Kurdistan, Lithuania and Albania. The mother tongues representative of this group were: Russian, Turkish, Zazaki (a Kurdish dialect), Lithuanian and Albanian. Other languages spoken by this group were: Russian, Turkish, German, Estonian and Kurdish. All spoke English ranging from pre-intermediate level to advanced level. The interviewees had been in the UK for a varying amount of time, ranging from 8 months to 12 years (two for 12 years, one for 10 years, one for 4 months and one for 8 months).

Regarding their educational background, everyone had accomplished their secondary education first stage. Due to home circumstances, one member of the group had studied at home in order to pass her secondary school examinations. She had not been able to continue her studies due to the need for her to go out to work in order to support the family. However, after arriving in the UK she had achieved vocational qualifications in Child Development, as this was the area that she wanted to go into. Another interviewee had had



vocational training in the workplace: Health & Safety and Food & Hygiene. Another member of the group had attended a higher technical and vocational college (in her home country) whereby she learned how to milk cows, look after animals, garden, cook, knit and generally learn how to become a housewife. For this three-year course she received a diploma.

With regard to their current positions in the UK, two of the interviewees worked at a baker's shop; one worked at an off-licence, one worked in a convenience store with an off-licence, and one worked in a shop selling mainly shoes, but also clothing. With the possible exception of one of the interviewees – who sold ice-cream – none of the group had had retail experience before coming to the UK. The length of time in this profession ranged from two months to six years. All the interviewees started as shop assistants, with one progressing to assistant manager of the bakery they worked at and another progressing to being trusted to run the off-licence on their own for certain periods of time.

### **3.1.4 Interviews with teachers**

The most challenging task for the UK Country Report was finding ten teachers to interview or to complete an online questionnaire. There was a very poor response and in the end, only eight interviews were secured. However, between them there was a broad range of experience. Six of the interviewees were females of which three worked in the local college of further education; one worked in an adult education centre; one worked in prisons and one worked in a community 'drop-in' centre that taught asylum seekers and refugees. One of the males worked the same college of further education as the group of three females aforementioned. The other male worked at a local authority community education centre in London.

Access to four of the interviewees was easy because they were colleagues at the ESOL department of the local college of further education. Three of them were interviewed face-to-face at the college, using the Dictaphone to retain as much information as possible. The average duration of these interviews was thirty minutes. The fourth colleague was away on the days of interview and he therefore completed the online questionnaire. Two of the three female teachers worked on a sessional basis and both had gained their full teaching qualification whilst working at the college. The less experienced of the two of them had been teaching for three years at the college, whilst her counterpart had about four years experience. The third female teacher had about seventeen years experience (full time since 2004) in total – not only at the college but also in language schools. The male teacher had thirteen years experience at the college but had also taught English as a Foreign Language in China. With regard to teaching specific vocation related courses only one of this group had done this (Business Studies) and although the male member of the group had ticked 'yes' to this (and the following question about materials), he did not give any further information. Two of the members of the group stated that they had experience of using specific vocation related materials in terms of 'preparation for work' – one of them specifying their use of materials for composing a curriculum vitae (CV); for methods of application for jobs, and general work vocabulary and skills.

Despite attempts by telephone and email to contact other colleges of further education in London and Glasgow, there was no response. Additionally, as requested by the local adult

education centre, full details about ARC Ltd, the project (using the MTN flyer), its requirements and the questionnaire were emailed, access to their ESOL teachers was not allowed “for the time being, due to restructuring”. The head of department, did however, fill in an online questionnaire as she also taught ESOL, but it would have been useful to have been given access to the other teachers in her department. (This was not her decision, but that of her manager.) She had over fifteen years experience in teaching ESOL in an adult education setting. In response to the question whether she had experience with specific vocation related teaching material, she stated that she taught Citizenship topics, but did not specify what the vocational nature of these topics were. She stated teaching ESOL as experience with a specific vocation related language course, but again did not specify the vocational elements of the ESOL course. A similar situation occurred with a forum internet site whereby the person in control of the forum never replied.

A face-to-face interview was arranged with an ESOL teacher through the social network website, Facebook, as he was a peer during a PGCE in Further Training & Education with the specialism of TESOL (Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages). The interview took place in London at a café and overall the interview took about an hour. The interviewee had nine years experience as a second language teacher; some of that time spent abroad (Japan, for example) and then at a local authority community education centre. He had experience of teaching specific vocation related language courses, which were: Health & Social Care and Work Skills; the latter he was teaching at the time. He did not have experience of specific vocation related teaching material and tended to use materials on the BBC and BBC Skillswise internet sites.

The final two interviews that were secured were via the online questionnaire; one being the friend of a colleague on another project, and the other being a friend in Glasgow. The former of these two had had experience of teaching ESOL in prisons as well, and the latter taught ESOL to individuals and classes as a volunteer working with asylum seekers and refugees. The interviewee, who had taught in prisons, but not exclusively, had over thirty years experience of second language teaching. She did not have experience of specific vocation related teaching material apart from embedded material within the ESOL Skills for Life curriculum. Regarding her experience of teaching a specific vocation related language course, she referred to prison education courses, but did not elaborate. The final interviewee, who taught on a voluntary basis, had eight years experience of teaching as a second language trainer. She taught at a ‘drop in’ centre which catered for refugees and asylum seekers. She stated that she did not have any experience of specific vocation related teaching material or specific vocation related language courses.

## 4 Results workforce

### 4.1 Recruitment process

It must be noted here that the locality of the employers interviewed differs from the locality of the migrants interviewed and that therefore, there was no relationship between these interviewees as employer and employee.

The two large supermarkets tended to advertise their job vacancies in store, in the window, for example, and if not successful, one would place the advertisement with the local job centre whereas the other would use a recruitment agency instead.

The latter also stated that often staff would be recruited by word of mouth – through friends or friends of friends. At interview stage, the candidates would be seen by the relevant section head and if they were successful – experience not rated as essential – they would meet the store manager who would give them tasks such as shelf-filling, expecting them to acquire higher skills such as working on the tills and checking compliance with regulations about freezer temperatures. Administrative staff such as those dealing with cash or accounts would normally be recruited internally – after proving their trustworthiness and potential. English language ability would be assessed, but on an informal level whereby a second, informal interview would take place to see how well the interviewee understood and responded.

The former referred to the grading of application forms from 1 to 10 and calling all candidates who had reached a grade 10 in for interview. If there was no success there, then they would interview the grade 9 candidates and so forth. Language skills would be assessed as an important part of the interview stage. Good working English in speaking, listening, reading and writing was important, but this did not necessarily exclude candidates with limited English from obtaining work as they could work on the night-shift. Those candidates with English ability slightly below the required standard could be accepted if they were clearly motivated and going to learn quickly. However, the employer stated that due to legal and safety requirements he was responsible for, if the candidate's level of language was 'not reasonable' then he would abandon the interview. The store personnel manager stated reading and writing skills as necessary when he spoke of induction due to a certain amount of required written assessment.

The store manager of the sport shoe shop stated that they tended to receive between ten and twelve applications via curriculum vitae (CV) for vacancies each day so there was never a need to advertise except in the run-up to Christmas or during the summer holiday period, when they would put a notice in the window for extra staff. The CVs would be checked for employment history, quickness of availability to start work; criminal records and whether eligible to work in the UK. Those candidates successful at this stage would then be interviewed (by the store manager or assistant manager), with the interview questions set by head office. The manager stated that these questions were quite straightforward and so were a "reasonable test of a basic level of comprehension". It was not a requirement for the

candidates' English to be perfect, but a good level of understanding was essential as part of "crucial" customer service duties. Additionally, due to e-learning forming part of the company's induction week, the manager stated that high levels of reading and writing skills were required. However, he stated that he would go through the course with them at the computers to ensure understanding, after initially letting them have a go.

The store manager of the department store stated that they received about twenty CVs a day and so there was never really a need to advertise, and if they did, it would be on the shop notice board. If successfully passing a maths and an English comprehension test, the candidates would be interviewed by the Human Resources (HR) manager. If the candidate did not have the reading and writing skills to pass the test and demonstrate adequate speaking and listening skills at interview then they would not be employed. The store manager did not specify what level of English language competency was acceptable.

The Finance and Opportunities section manager of the smallish branch of the well-known national and international retailer stated that they only advertised their vacancies on their website; consequently, quite advanced computer skills as well as reading and writing skills were required to get past this stage, unless the candidate knew someone with these skills. At interview stage, the candidate would have five minutes to study an information pack about a particular situation to deal with and then accordingly, perform a role play where they play the part of a member of staff with a customer. Then they would have to write down how well they thought they did. If they were successful, they would get an interview with the HR manager. Of all the recruitment processes, this was the most challenging on all four language skills of speaking and listening, reading and writing as well as memory and courteous behaviour in a stressful situation.

In comparison, the migrants that were interviewed did not have to go through the strict, formal kind of recruitment processes of the employers detailed in the two paragraphs above. Four of the migrants interviewed found jobs through word of mouth from friends who either worked there, knew the employer or, in the case of one person, had visited the shop to buy something and been asked by the employer if they knew anyone who would like to apply for the job. The fifth migrant's situation was completely different because she found her job through family connections. She started by helping out in the shop and subsequently her brother employed her. There was no interview process because she was part of the family.

The four other migrants were interviewed, but this was not preceded by any written form of application - neither application form nor CV. Only one of them had to go through the formal process of filling in an application form and this was after the interview, in order to check for a criminal record as she would be dealing with money. It should be mentioned that four of the five employers of the migrants concerned were small, independent retail businesses.

Beyond being shown around the workplace, not one of the migrants I interviewed went through a formal process of induction. Therefore they did not receive any health and safety or food and hygiene training and nor did they receive extensive product training – they were all expected to learn on the job.

## **4.2 Operations and language competences**

### **4.2.1 (Daily) Operations**

The responses of the migrants and the employers to the question regarding the typical situations that employees have to deal with in their daily work were largely symmetrical. Both groups referred to duties such as cleaning and getting the shop floor ready; preparing products; dealing with stock - ensuring stocks were replenished, shelf-filling, dealing with deliveries; serving customers face-to-face and dealing with enquiries, and in some cases banking and locking up.

However, communicating over the phone was a situation that four of the migrants had to deal with, but which none of the employers listed. One employer highlighted the importance of being able to read staffing timetables and another referred to the need for staff to conduct customer surveys at the till. These situations were not mentioned by any of the migrants – probably due to the small size of their companies with very few staff.

Where the answers differed significantly, related to training. This was listed by two of the employers: one referring to health and safety at induction and refreshed from time to time; the other referring to e-learning and on the job practical training. None of the migrants had received health and safety training or e-learning on the job. With reference to their practical on the job training, they felt the impetus was on them to train themselves – specifically where it came to product knowledge. They depended on the goodwill and support of their employers and colleagues, which they did not all get.

Additionally, three of the employers referred to interaction between staff as a typical situation. Two noted that the employee would have to understand instructions and converse with their manager whilst the other stated the need for general communication between colleagues. Only one of the migrants mentioned this as a typical situation, but the others did refer to their communication with colleagues later. It should be noted, that the migrant who worked for the family business would not have communication issues with the other staff as they all spoke the same language.

#### 4.2.2 Language competences needed in daily operations

Operation	Language Requests	S	L	W	R
Communication with colleagues	Being able to understand what is required of them and respond to requests. Being able to deal with situations when something goes wrong.	X	X		
Cleaning and tidying up before opening and at closing	Being able to read and understand the labels of cleaning solutions in order to use the correct product for the correct task, e.g. washing-up liquid for washing-up dishes. Being able to understand instructions verbal and written for safely shutting up the shop, e.g. working the blinds.		X		X
Dealing with customers: serving and dealing with enquiries	Being able to understand and respond clearly to the customers – their accents and colloquial language – including those customers whose mother tongue is not English, and who may not speak it well. Being able to ask customers for personal information when carrying out surveys for the company and note it down. Being able to respond to requests about products, such as giving directions for the customers to locate them; to help them with choosing items such as clothes and schools; giving product information and selling the customer items behind the counter. Being able to exchange pleasantries, such as greetings and goodbyes and deal with complaints and challenging behaviour in an appropriate way. Product knowledge is essential, including being able to read product labels when helping customers.	X	X	X	X
Dealing with customers: Till work and handling cash	Asking for and taking payments from customers including giving change. Being able to ask how the customer would like to pay and how they would like the items to be packed. Being able to understand English currency and being able to use the correct terminology when cash handling. Being able to use computerized tills – reading products and prices on screen, for example; writing information on receipts when errors	X	X	X	X

	are made, and cashing up at the end of the day. Being able to communicate with staff at the bank when doing the banking.				
Adhering to health & safety plus other legal requirements	Being able to understand what is required of them in these matters, such as what measures to take relating to fire risk; being able to respond to questions relating to these issues	X	X		X
Ordering stock	Being able to communicate clearly over the phone and face-to-face and understand what is being said. Being able to read and write down the names of products that need to be ordered.	X	X	X	X
Dealing with stock deliveries	Being able to check the paperwork, read the labels and communicate with the delivery person. Being able to check the delivery note and products tally as well as check the delivery note against the order.	X	X		X
Dealing with stock - other	Being able to read expiry dates when checking stock (in fridges & on shelves), and to write down number of out-of-date items as well as a list of expiry dates. Being able to read orders from customers in order to pack items up for collection; being able to read store signs when product replenishing (remerchandising), quality control and dealing with reductions. Getting to know all the product lines and what each product is for – one store has 14,000 lines – in order to place products on the correct shelves/in the correct areas when replenishing or returning products to shelves/cabinets.			X	X
Undergoing training	Being able to read questions, understand and respond to verbal and written questions and write down answers.	X	X	X	X
Composing reports	Being able to write a report about what happened during the day, for example, if the employer is not there and needs to know about monies received or any problems/incidents.			X	
Communicating over the phone	Being able to order stocks from the cash and carry; being able to understand what the other person is saying without the aid of body language; being able to take orders from customers and respond to any	X	X	X	

	enquiries. Also, being able to write down what they want to order.				
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Table 2: Language competence needed in challenging situations in work

### 4.2.3 Challenging situations and dealing with them

According to one of the migrants, it was “like being deaf and blind” when she first started working at the shop. This is a sentiment that the other migrants could identify with.

One talked of a sense of panic because she could not understand what customers were asking and she couldn’t “get the right words”. Understanding the Thames Gateway (Estuary) accent, along with the slang and non-standard English, compounded their problems in understanding the customers. An example given was a conversation where the customer had asked for “eight soft rolls” at the baker’s shop. However, due to the tendency in this area for the ‘t’ to be dropped, the migrant involved mistook this request for “egg soft rolls”. Additionally, in an area of different migrant communities there would be the additional challenge of dealing with some customers with very poor English who did not share the same languages as the migrants in question. This was the case of the migrant from Albania, who had to serve many non-English speaking customers from Asia. (She said that in the end she managed to “pick up Punjabi and other Asian languages!”.) Having the confidence to speak was a problem at the beginning for all the migrants (some of whom had come to the UK with stronger English reading and writing skills). For two of them specifically, this was aggravated by challenging behaviour on the part of customers not only from the local secondary school (who would be aggressive, swear and use street language) but also some locals with a lack of manners and, according to the migrants, tolerance for people from ethnic minorities. In fact, one of the migrants had been quite confident in speaking before she started working in the shop, but lost her confidence because people would make fun of her English.

Furthermore they all had problems with specific vocabulary, such as learning the names of products due to a lack of training beforehand. Also, many of the products would have been unknown to them due to their different cultural background. For instance, one migrant stated that it took her a while to grasp what a Chelsea bun (a currant cake) or a Belgium bun (a sweet dough pastry with sultanas, icing and a glace cherry on top) was. Another had problems with the names of all the different types of alcohol and cigarettes. Words relating to amounts were difficult, such as “a couple” and “a dozen”. As referred to above, the Albanian migrant had special difficulties on top of learning specific English vocabulary because she worked in a convenience store run by Asians catering for the Asian community, and many of the customers could not speak English. This meant that she had to learn the Asian names of certain products.

Four of the migrants had to communicate with customers placing orders and stock delivery people over the telephone, and they found this very difficult at first.

Two of the migrants referred to difficulties relating to reading and writing down product names when doing the stock orders and one of them referred to her difficulty in using a computerized till. She found it difficult to read the words on the screen (linked to lack of product knowledge)



to remember what the buttons did and, in fact, managed to ring up £10,000 instead of £10.00. Writing down the mistake using appropriate language on the receipt was difficult for her.

The migrants dealt with these linguistic challenges by watching their colleagues; copying what they did; if possible asking for their help – which was not always given, either due to being too busy themselves (in the case of the baker's shop) or being “unfriendly” (in the case of the convenience store). One migrant would ask customers to repeat what they had said. They all studied the product lists to get to know the products. The word they used unanimously was ‘practice’. They practised speaking as much as possible to customers and English speaking staff. One migrant stated that she would listen to the interaction between customers in order to speak more natural English. The migrant who had lost her confidence and subsequently regained it, stated that one should not be afraid and one should “jump in”. One stated that it was her own responsibility to succeed.

All the migrants interviewed attended ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes to help them improve their language skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing. Some of the migrants did not think they had particularly difficulty where it came to reading and writing whilst others found this difficult.

In comparison to the experience of the migrants, the sports shoe shop manager stated that there were no linguistic barriers or problems because people without the adequate skills would have been weeded out during the interview process. This was the case for the smallish branch of the large national and international retailer, which had an even stricter interview process and a month-long induction period. The interviewee in question said that the levels of English were high and that there was a very good support system. The managers of the large supermarkets said the same thing regarding the interview process. The manager of the department store stated that there were no real problems and that help was given relating to product knowledge. She did say that employees were expected to deal with linguistic problems themselves, but there did not tend to be any. It was highlighted by the two supermarkets who sold food that any problems were not specifically lingual but to do with a lack of knowledge about English culture particularly when it came to different vegetables and how they were cooked. One example was a member of staff who kept putting the Yorkshire puddings next to the ice cream.

### **4.3 Supportive activities**

The employers tended to state that they did not have any problems (see above also regarding challenges) and support for them was not really necessary. It should be noted that due to high unemployment levels at this time and the choice of a large number of motivated applicants with good English language skills, they would not really find themselves faced with great problems of dealing with staff with language barriers that inhibited them from performing their roles adequately.

The employers estimated the following as supportive for migrants with occurring linguistic challenges:

- The willingness of other staff to help – one employer specified during their three-month probation period. There was an assumption that this would be the case.
- The provision of more affordable (ESOL) classes
- More language training courses in the community
- Better local provision for improving poor English language skills to a point where they could meet recruitment criteria
- Manager's support – one employer for instance mentioned helping staff correct their English mistakes in written reports

Only one of the employers considered positively the possibility of in-house vocational language training alongside product training, but said this would have to take place after work hours. One employer's position on the matter was that in-house language training was not needed because if they were "keen" they would improve "automatically".

As far as the migrants were concerned, they estimated that what would be supportive for them in dealing with occurring linguistic challenges and/or barriers would be:

- More opportunities to practise their spoken English with local people and to enjoy more of a social life with English people, e.g. to make friends with them
- Small classroom settings where individual language needs, such as vocational language could be better addressed
- Organized outings outside the classroom where they could practise "outside in the real world"
- Access to a specialist vocational English course
- Training and support from the employer
- Attending an ESOL course for language purposes and access to a Sales Assistant mainstream course
- Own hard work, determination and drive to progress

Responses from the migrants to the question of who should provide the support mostly targeted the government, either at national level or at local authority level, through the provision of language classes, at college for example. Two thought that the employers should provide this kind of support through in-house training.

#### **4.4 Value and use of different language of employees**

One employer used the different languages spoken by his staff to deal with customers whose English was poor. He stated that there were a lot of Somalis and Turkish people living in the area. Another employer stated the same, adding that was helpful if two members spoke the same language (implying that one could help the other with English if their English was weaker). Yet another employer talked about using members of staff with stronger English skills to act as interpreters over disputes between staff on the night-shift. Another employer stated that she used her staff's different languages "all the time" and in fact staff would be radioed to come and help a customer with poor English who spoke their language. She also added that they would be called upon to interpret where shoplifters had been caught and spoke no English. Another example given by another employer was where the section

manager of fresh produce who spoke Portuguese (Being German/Brazilian) interpreted for another manager who was trying to give instructions to a Brazilian cleaner with poor English skills.

As far as the migrants were concerned, two of them spoke the same language as their employer, which made their communications easier, but whilst one of them only had English colleagues and no Kurdish or Turkish customers the other had a few Turkish customers and Cash & Carry staff (when ordering stock). Two of the migrants had no opportunity at all to speak their languages (the Albanian and the Estonian) whereas the Lithuanian had ten regular customers to converse with in her mother tongue.

## **4.5 Experience with language courses**

### **4.5.1 Experiences of employers**

When asked if they funded any English courses, in-house or elsewhere, the employers unanimously replied that that they did not and, moreover, there was no need to. However, the store manager of one of the large supermarkets did contradict himself (see section 4.3 also) later during the interview by saying that he would “love” to provide an in-house language course alongside product training – in the evenings as the staff would be needed during the day.

### **4.5.2 Experiences of migrants**

All the migrants had attended ESOL classes, of which only one was still attending – three at the local adult education centre, one at the local college and one at both institutions (starting with the local adult education centre). Due to difficult domestic circumstances, one of the migrants was unable to concentrate in her lessons and consequently attended for less than a year. Another only stayed for 6 months as she could not relate to her teacher (a big generation gap) and other members of the class kept talking in their own language and disrupted the lessons. She said that the course had not helped her at all. Two found that the ESOL provision at the adult education centre of only one day a week was not adequate for their learning needs, although two had attended three times a week. (This was probably because they attended before the cuts in ESOL provision at the adult education centre.) One of the migrants working at the baker’s shop would have liked to have been taught the names of different pastries and cakes and general English food. (Actually these are taught at the college but at A1 level and she had started at a higher level.) Other complaints were about class sizes and levels; lack of options to go outside the classroom to practise in the “real world”, and according to one migrant the course was too expensive for her.

On a positive note, what was helpful for the migrants’ jobs was the speaking and listening practice, such as greetings and expressions used when helping customers in a shop, e.g. ‘It’s over there’, ‘Can I help you?’, ‘What would you like?’ and basic vocabulary like, ‘shop assistant’ and ‘till’. One of the migrants who had attended the college of further education stated that the course had “definitely” helped her – with grammar, English manners, pronunciation, speaking in sentences, unit work on ‘looking for work’ and job types.

Recommendations that the migrants made in relation to what would be helpful for people to prepare themselves for the workplace and activities that would be helpful included:

- Class visits to different kinds of shops where the students would be able to observe how staff worked in these environments and to practise vocation related language
- Specialised training for different sectors in the classroom – not just general ESOL provision, and this could be at evening classes
- Full-time courses including social activities to help students integrate and gain confidence

#### **4.6 Success stories and suggestions**

An employer referred to a Spanish member of staff who was able to do well with the help of a Spanish-speaking manager as her spoken English was poor, but her understanding was very good. She was a success because she was very hardworking, polite and friendly. Another employer referred to a 'long-standing' employee (who had been in the company for thirty years) who had been promoted to management level after having developed his knowledge base. Another employer referred to the promotion of a migrant to 'Fish Manager' and attributed this success to the "good company training schemes" and good supervisors. The manager of the department store referred to two successes – one who had started in despatch; was now replenishing stock and would probably progress further, and another who had started as a Saturday sales assistant and was now on the trainee management scheme. The interviewee attributed the success of these employees to their own hard work and energy as well as their friendly personalities. She referred to one in particular's "work to succeed" ethos that he had been brought up with from childhood. The final employer referred to a member of staff who had worked her way up on the shop floor to become the manager of the diary section and in the end left to study and then practice accounting. She had come back to work for this employer as his accountant. The employer attributed her success to his and others' constant support and coaching.

The migrants were very modest about their successes, but they had all progressed in terms of language acquisition and their work roles and increased responsibilities. The migrant who worked at the off-licence was now trusted to run the shop by herself for a few hours and felt quite confident. During the interview she took a telephone call and spoke very confidently in English (although she was very modest about her ability). She stated that her success was due to the support she received from her relatives and her practising. One of the migrants working at the bakery was able to help a new recruit with better English skills than her settle into the job and calm her down. She attributed her growing confidence in English mainly to her conversations with her little nephew. The other migrant working at the bakery progressed to become the assistant manager and attributed her success to daily routine and her ability to adapt and meet the challenges of the job. The migrant still attending the college referred to her increased product knowledge as a success and attributed this to her ESOL course and the support she received from her manager. The migrant who worked in the convenience store felt more confident and after a while realized that she was independent and able to

provide for her children on her own. She attributed her success to practising and speaking English to her children, other parents at the children's school and her English friends.

The suggestions as to what would have been useful for the migrants when they first started focused on product knowledge and more training. They recommended attending language classes – general English classes at first, according to one interviewee. One recommendation was not to be shy and to go out into the community and practise; not just to speak English in the classroom and to listen and learn to understand different accents and different ways of speaking.

## **5 Results language teaching**

### **5.1 Challenges in teaching and learning vocation related language**

The results of the interviews with second language teachers highlight the following challenges they face when teaching English for specific/occupational purposes:

- Finding teaching materials that are helpful for people working or wanting to work in a specific occupation. One of the teachers referred to a lack of proper specific vocation related teaching materials. Another teacher referred to the difficulty of getting up-to-date versions of how curriculum vitae (CVs) should be presented. Another teacher referred to a “wealth of information on the internet – applications, CV's and expanding vocabulary – personality, and that sort of thing”, but all on a generic level. Yet another teacher highlighted the difficulty in finding materials suitable for pre-entry adult students with “zero English” and illiterate in their language of origin.
- Specific related language courses as “a loose framework” and not a proper curriculum. This was highlighted by the teacher who had experience in teaching specific vocation related language courses.
- Teaching students who may: lack confidence, have poor skills levels and have cultural differences in the work environment. As an example of the latter point, one teacher referred to the differences from country to country in “how the system works” and the need to adapt to the UK's system and rules. It should be mentioned here that in relation to the poor skills levels highlighted by one of the teacher, another teacher stated that in order to access vocational training, students need to be at E3 level or above so he did not believe there would be so many problems. However, he did not specify if these vocational courses were mainstream or specifically for second language learners. Another teacher identified the particular challenge of getting students to understand slang, non-standard English and local grammar constructions, which would help their integration, for example, in the local workplace.

The results of the interviews with second language teachers highlight the following vocation related language challenges that they see migrants face:

- Writing: One teacher referred to difficulties in grasping the conventions and styles of writing CVs along with a tendency for a lack of computer skills as well as handwritten composition difficulties. Two other teachers referred to difficulties in register – formal and non-formal; getting used to formal vocabulary when writing formal letters of application, for example. Using a wide range of vocabulary when applying for positions; not just using the same basic constructs, was highlighted by one of these teachers as a challenge.
- Listening and speaking: Grasping colloquial language that would be used in the workplace was referred to as a challenge by one teacher, who added that Indians who had perhaps been taught English in India through traditional methods might find it difficult to adjust to the colloquial language of the area. In conjunction with this, another teacher specified the challenge for students to understand slang, non-standard English and local grammar constructions – English outside the classroom. Another teacher referred to the lack of opportunity for migrants to speak to native speakers and exacerbated by a tendency for migrants to mix with other migrants often in a non-English speaking environment.
- Vocabulary: With reference to the points made about vocabulary in the sections above about writing challenges and listening and speaking challenges the teachers concerned were also referring to spoken vocabulary and register as a challenge. With reference to the last point made in the section highlighting listening and speaking challenges, it could be ascertained that the consequence of a lack of opportunity for students to speak to native English speakers would be detrimental to their development of vocabulary. Another teacher referred to the challenge of knowing specific technical vocabulary that may be needed for a specific occupation.
- Literacy and numeracy: Only one teacher highlighted these particular challenges that students may face.
- Personal circumstances: One teacher referred to the difficulty for migrants who were working to attend English lessons on a regular basis. Another teacher highlighted the challenge of learning English as a whole in order to settle, live and work in the UK. Two teachers referred to cultural differences as challenges for students.

## 5.2 Concrete material related aspects

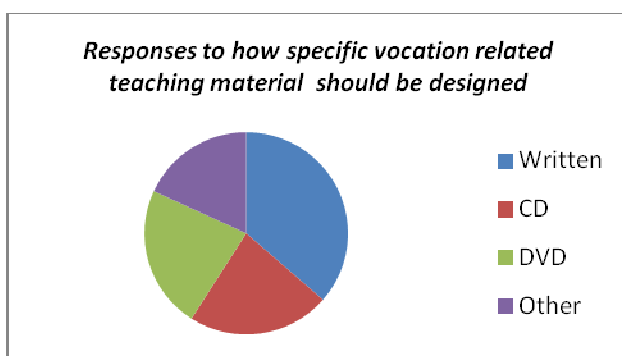


Fig 1.

As Figure 1 reflects, the most popular design for specific vocation related teaching material should be, in the opinion of the interviewed teachers, in written form. They were asked in which format the written material should be presented: pdf file or Word file. There were eight positive responses to Word file format, whereas only three teachers thought pdf file format would be useful. This is due to the Word file format being adaptable. As one teacher wrote, "It's good to be able to adapt materials for specific needs." Another teacher highlighted the importance of all written material to be digitized so that it could be easily stored.

The design of materials through the use of DVD and CD shared equal popularity, with five positive responses each. One teacher highlighted the fact that the use of CDs might not be useful for visual learners, but would be for auditory learners. Another teacher thought DVDs were a "bit too passive" compared to another's point of view that they were useful as a nice change from the normal routine of a lesson.

There were four responses to the question of other possible designs. These were:

1. The internet site, YouTube
2. Realia
3. Online videos and comprehension tests to engage the students and check for understanding (on an individual level)
4. Pictures showing types of jobs and things people do in their occupations

With reference to teaching methods that the specific vocation related teaching material should relate to, many of the ideas came from teaching activities the interviewees already used in their general ESOL classes:

- Question and answer sessions (Q&A)
- The use of flashcards and pictures
- Setting up a mixture of grouping from pairs to small groups within the classroom, but ensuring that each individual does the learning
- Role plays of real situations and conversations
- Games and quizzes
- Audio and visual activities using the internet, DVDs, CDs and worksheets
- Gap fill exercises
- Reading and writing exercises

- Tests and weekly reviews to check for learning

Other suggestions that teachers came up with were:

- Demonstrations by professionals in the field, who “know what they are talking about” and have a more specialist knowledge about an occupation than a language teacher. Additionally or alternatively presentations by former ESOL students who had successfully entered the workforce
- The setting up of a language lab style class activity

Two of the teachers highlighted the importance of having teaching materials for a wide range of learning activities. To quote, in summary, the teacher who had had over thirty years of experience and had worked in the prisons:

“I think the materials should be as flexible as possible as learning styles differ and so do teaching styles. Also immigrants learning English will go on to require it in the whole range of contexts from work to study and we should be encouraging as wide a learning experience as possible which requires a wide range of methods.”

Seven of the teachers interviewed thought that specific vocation related language materials should be developed for use with classes of all ability levels from A1 to B1. One of these teachers referred to this necessity because at elementary level a student might need language to work as a kitchen assistant and at a higher level a student might need language to work as a chef, for example. In comparison, another teacher omitted A1 levels. However, they did not comment on their reason for this. One teacher stated that at most colleges the language ability of students needed to be at least at Entry 3 level ( B1) to access vocational training (although he did not specify if this referred to vocational training specifically for language learners). The same teacher felt strongly that all students should be given the same tasks to do in order to see what vocational level they could achieve.

The responses to the question of the situation in which they might see themselves using specific vocation related language materials varied according to their present position and in some cases according to how they viewed the future of ESOL both as a possibility and a desire.

Two of the teachers thought that they could use the material in their college setting as part of the general ESOL course. One of them pointed out that this would be up to a point – dependent on the level of student interest and the numbers of students who might be interested in the same vocation. Another of the college teachers – herself a migrant – said that she would use the materials she taught to her students to find a job herself. She thought she would use such materials if she were given the opportunity to teach something like ESOL for Work at the Learning Shop in the nearby large retail shopping centre, Bluewater. The volunteer teacher stated that she would use the materials in her classes – particularly in her one-to-one sessions. One of the teachers felt that ESOL was segregationist and that there was not actually a specific need for ESOL; instead learners could be enrolled on professional classes with ESOL support. Another of the college teachers felt that with the way things were



going relating to funding, there might be increasing pressure for language learners to work for other qualifications – vocational and work skills – as well as general ESOL. In this way, she said, she would be using such materials if ESOL were to be embedded within vocational qualifications such as Catering and Child Care, for example.

### **5.3 Availability of teaching material**

With the exception of one teacher, all the interviewees searched for material from a variety of sources. The teacher aforementioned stated that he searched for his material exclusively online and referred to Skills Workshop as a useful source for him. The rest of the teachers also stated that they searched for online materials on language learning websites such as Talent and Busy Teacher. One of the teachers stated that she looked at hundreds of websites and a couple mentioned the use of websites linked to teaching books. Other sources available were text books – also with accompanying CDs, and resource books; Skills for Life and Citizenship government publications; free samples of teaching material normally for sale; resources in their organization’s libraries, and “everywhere” according to one of the teachers.

According to the findings of the interviews, the source considered to be the most effective in disseminating the Compendium would be the internet. As one teacher stated, “There’s the ESOL Forum, the Excellence Gateway – get it publicized. It’s got to be on the internet where ESOL teachers go to.” One teacher added that A4 sized books would be effective also. Another teacher declared that she did not think any one source would be the most effective in disseminating the Compendium but many, such as books and leaflets left at job centres, community centres and libraries, etc.

### **5.4 Practical teaching experience and suggestions**

One experience of successful practice related to a teamwork task that formed part of the Personal & Social Development (PSD) unit: Working as Part of a Group. This was essential for work life as the members of each team had to work together in order to achieve a particular task. What worked well here was that the students learned to take turns; to listen to others; to evaluate each other, as well as taking note of what makes good teamwork; giving presentations; working to deadlines, and everyone having a part to play. What did not work so well was when someone was absent, which affected the ethos of their group because somebody would have to cover for them. Some tasks were not done so well due to less preparation time, and where some groups did not use technology, such as PowerPoint, which meant that their presentations were not as good as others.

Another experience of successful practice related to work on personality through games and quizzes on vocabulary building, which the teacher believed really helped the students when they came to the activities in the Skills for Life course module on Looking for Work. It was helpful because the students could look at job advertisements and through greater knowledge of relevant vocabulary which they could relate to themselves, they could identify

vacancies suitable for them accordingly and talk about how they were suitable for those jobs, using appropriate language. The same teacher also used three CVs created by the same person in three stages, starting with the poorest version first. She asked the students to look at it and see what improvements could be made. They thought it was “pretty good” until they were shown the average version and they realized how much better it was and how it had been improved. This activity was repeated another time with the students being shown the good version. As a result, the students’ own CV’s vastly improved, according to the teacher. In both these cases, she could not think of anything that worked less well and could not think of any other situation that had not worked less well.

Another teacher referred to role play situations where one person would play the part of a character being interviewed for a job – and not themselves, and another would play the part of the interviewer. Each student would play both roles and there was also an opportunity to be the observer. The teacher found that the students could think in “an uncluttered way” about strengths and weaknesses, and what the job required. She stated that role play was a very good introduction to simulated interviews as the students could be more objective about their own positions and were able to “emphasise more with the role of the interviewer”. It was the teacher’s opinion that if the language preparation for a session was not adequate and there were no mini-activities to practise the target language, then the productive activities would never go well.

Briefer comments made by the other teachers in the interview referred to examples of successful practice such as: getting students to bring into class for discussion points that they did not understand; job related role plays – answering the phone, booking a flight and taking a hotel booking; the use of interactive, graded materials – covering all the skills of speaking and listening, reading and writing – catering for each student’s varying abilities as well as being relevant to their lifestyles and reflecting the real community; the focus on CV writing as a workshop activity, with the use of templates for the students to fill in; getting students to write letters using the appropriate format and register – an activity that helped students pass their exams and find jobs, according to the teacher concerned. Regarding what went less well there were references to: spelling and remembering vocational vocabulary; too much content on a page (worksheet, for example); lack of knowledge on the part of the students about how to use information technology – as well as a tendency for them to forget their passwords “even after a year!”; the vocabulary in material taken from newspapers without adaption could be too difficult, even if helpful for advanced learners.

Materials that the teachers found to be successful were: Skills for Life units related to work; websites for language teachers and students (including interactive activities); Language textbooks such as ‘Headway’, ‘Reward’ and ‘Grammar in Use’; a business role play book called ‘Basic Business Role Plays’. A few of the teachers did not answer this question but referred to the question about where they found their materials, stating that the information they had given then applied to this question about successful materials.

When asked for suggestions or any additional comments at the end of the interview, one teacher stated that it would be good to have new materials related to work and to encourage an exchange of information between students about their work experiences and how they got

their jobs. Another teacher suggested opening up the curriculum a bit more and having professional classes rather than ESOL specific classes. Another teacher emphasized the importance of using a variety of techniques to stimulate students with a low attention span (the case at her college) – some of whom, she stated, could not deal with the routine of learning. Another of the college teachers advised that the materials to be developed by this project should be well advertised; easily accessible; relevant to and engaging for students of all levels and should cater for different learning styles. Furthermore, the materials should include general work skills such as interview techniques, teamwork and communication skills as well as vocation specific content. Finally, it would be fitting to quote the words of the teacher whose language teaching has spanned over thirty years and which reflect the ethos of all the teachers I interviewed:

*“I do believe very strongly that the most important thing we can offer are confidence and the ability to perform effectively in English. While work specific language is very important our teaching of it mustn’t be at the expense of the basics. Any materials developed for whatever purpose, should be interesting, fun and within the capability level.”*

## 6 Summary

The results of the research phase of the project in relation to the UK partner's findings on the retail sector, from the angle of both employers' experiences of migrant employees and migrants' experience of working in the sector, point to a need for migrants to develop vocational language skills in order to gain employment in the sector and to progress in their occupations.

On the whole, the opinions of the migrant group and the employer group were synonymous in relation to the need for the migrants to work hard and learn on the job. However, the employers tended to think that this was a given whereas the migrants felt that they would have benefited from support structures beyond their own determination to succeed. All but one employer felt there was no need for them to give in-house English language training to their migrant workers. The recruitment processes tended to weed out applicants who did not have the required English language skills, and those with poor English skills were taken on initially to do tasks that did not require much communication. In an economic climate of high unemployment such as the UK is facing at present, the employers can pick and choose easily from a large community of migrants with very good English language skills. This highlights the importance of being able to access language for work skills prior to employment, including preparation for interviews, composing CVs, filling in application forms and getting to know the terminology used in the job they are applying for, such expressions specific not only to the wholesale and retail trade but for the specific type of shop they wish to work in and the names of the products. The employers, however, were sensitive to the challenges that migrants may face in their daily tasks and their identification of these challenges tended to match those that the migrants identified, although there were a few discrepancies. Both the employers and the migrants stated that they were interested in finding out how the project progressed and seeing the final products.

The teachers who were interviewed tended to teach general ESOL classes although these did contain elements of vocation related material covering different aspects of looking for work. Many of their suggestions derived from their own practices in general teaching which could be adapted for specific vocation language training and the use of the internet for the dissemination of the project was greatly favoured. They were all interested in being informed of the project's progress and, situation permitting, making use of the language teaching vocational materials that the project would produce.

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