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# Action Language Evaluation 2015-2018 Summary Report

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**action**  
LANGUAGE

# Action Language: Impact Evaluation

Action Language provides free community-led Skills for Life English classes and employability courses to refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants unable to access mainstream education. Their classrooms are in Newcastle and Sunderland, with each class (2 hours) led by a qualified volunteer teacher supported by up to four volunteer teaching assistants. By creating a social learning environment, both in and out of the classroom, they give learners the knowledge, understanding and confidence to integrate, live independently and reach their potential. Action Language is part of Action Foundation, a Newcastle upon Tyne based charity working to empower refugees to overcome exclusion.

**208**  
volunteer  
teachers and  
teaching  
assistants  
over one  
year

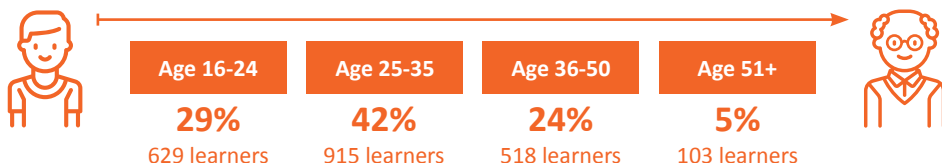
The information in this report is taken from a three year independent evaluation of free Skills for Life classes 2015-2018. Trapeze Consulting completed the evaluation in August 2018, including a longitudinal study of 90 learners over two and a half years and analysis of enrolment, class level and learner feedback. The full report can be downloaded at: [www.actionfoundation.org.uk/publications/](http://www.actionfoundation.org.uk/publications/)

## Learners

During the three academic years of 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18, there were 2,635 enrolments for free English classes by 2,185 people at Action Language. They enrolled around 800 people per year in Year 1 and Year 2, which in Year 3 increased by 31% to 1,039 people. They used waiting lists to manage the additional demand especially for Pre-entry and Entry 1 levels. Of the 2,185 people who enrolled, 924 people (42%) attended 10 or more classes of 2 hours usually twice a week. Most learners stay for up to one year with some staying for two or more years.

Learners are mainly male (58%); of all ages (over 18); with those aged 25-35 being the biggest group; and, from all over the world with large numbers from Africa (30%), Arab States (25%) and Europe (30%).

**2,185**  
learners  
enrolled  
2015-2018



Learners also have a wide range of immigration statuses with around half being asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers and refugees, and around a third EU citizens, from South Mediterranean, Eastern and Central/North Europe.



**51%**

**Asylum seekers, refugees, refused asylum seekers**  
(1,118 people)



**30%**

**EU citizens**  
(647 people)



**19%**

**Other**  
(420 people)



**Female Learners**  
(905 people)



**Male Learners**  
(1,275 people)

## Improving English Ability

**97%**  
of learners' English improved

Action Language English classes help learners improve their English ability in speaking, listening, writing and reading English, and are particularly helpful around speaking and listening to English. They consistently receive positive feedback from learners, with 97% telling them their English was a lot better or better after attending classes.

*"The first time I started learning English with Action Language I am like a blank person, can't see or hear everything. I'm afraid to communicate with other people, looking for Iranian guys to help me, but after one year I go in at Entry level and I start to communicate with other people, in the church, in the class, people around me. I don't forget any time with Action Language, they helped me with open arms and accepted me." Learner and refugee*

The longer learners learn English with Action Language, the more likely they are to improve their English. After learning English for one year, 25% of learners had gone up to another level, after two years it was 60% of learners, and after three years it was 72%.

**60%**  
of learners progressed to a new level after 2 years

# Improving Confidence and Independence

Trapeze Consulting’s evaluation found strong evidence that Action Language classes help learners, across all English levels, to improve their confidence in using English. In addition, there was a positive relationship between increases in confidence in using English and increased ability to access basic services, being more independent and have their needs met.

Action Language learners become more confident in their interactions with others to undertake day-to-day tasks such as shopping, visiting their GP, and travelling around the area. Learners find the teaching style – patient, understanding and committed – creates a relaxed, comfortable environment to practice English and increases their confidence. In addition to lessons, Action Language marketplace events are a fun and interactive approach to helping learners to find out about and use basic services.

**77%**  
of learners  
are more  
confident

*“Can go everywhere alone, feel proud of myself, good for self-esteem, feel better, can do anything.” Learner and EU citizen*

From our evaluation, we learnt a lack of English skills for many learners leads to lower self-esteem: how they feel about themselves living in England and interacting with English-speaking people. Action Language classes help reduce learners’ anxiety about such interactions.

*“I do most of my jobs myself - enrolling in the college, going to GP, shopping and paying bills, I do this myself. Before never understand when listen, now very good... can understand.” Learner and refugee/asylum seeker*

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## Volunteering and Making A Difference

From the evaluation, we found that learners volunteer in their local communities, which helps them to practice their English, be with other people, develop broader social networks, and make friends. Around a quarter (29%) of learners volunteer – a

similar volunteering rate (27%) for the general population in England as reported in the 2015-16 Community Life survey, with refugees and asylum seekers the most likely to volunteer. The benefits from volunteering and participating in their communities to learners include making friends, improving wellbeing, feeling valued and useful, reducing isolation and practicing English.

**29%**  
of learners  
volunteer

*“Every two weeks volunteer at a charity. [We] cook together and share with other people, English people, on a Saturday and take son with me. He is happy as he is like me, he likes to see people be happy. I talk into a microphone say what the dish is called and ‘thank you for coming’. Started two months [ago]. It’s hard for me sometimes, I am sick, but when I see the people happy, I forget my health and I am happy [too].” Learner and asylum seeker*

Action Language helps learners find out about local services and activities, which also helps them to participate more in their communities. The learners in the two-year longitudinal study said they attended local events, firework displays, Christmas events, children’s parties, and around a third regularly attended church, which was a strong support in their lives. They also provide opportunities for learners and former learners to volunteer with them as teachers and teaching assistants.

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## After Action Language: Work and Study

Most learners – 85% – felt the classes they attended helped them have a better chance of getting work, more education or succeeding in life. From interviewing learners, Trapeze Consulting heard good success stories of learners progressing with Action Language, moving on to college to study English and Maths, going on to study other vocational subjects and maintaining and securing job opportunities. The learners in employment interviewed by Trapeze Consulting shared that they were not employed in jobs they aspired to hold, or had trained or studied for, and instead held lower skilled and lower paid roles. So whilst employment brings many benefits, it does mean that learners have less time to study English, which can further limit their future employment.

**85%**  
of learners  
say they  
have a  
better  
chance  
of getting  
work, more  
education  
and  
succeeding  
in life

*“Action Language is very helpful...I got the chance to improve a lot my English language and to meet new people and friends. Thanks to Action Language and ESOL for Work course, I got my job in the UK, I really feel much more confident.”  
Learner*

All learners from levels Entry 3 and above can attend Action Language’s free ESOL for Work course to prepare them for working in the UK. The evaluation found that those who attended an ESOL for Work course reported that it helped them to obtain and change jobs, understanding job-related paperwork and helping them understand their rights and responsibilities at work. However because of their immigration status, not all learners (including asylum seekers) are able to work in the UK.

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## Amanuel’s Story

Amanuel, an Eritrean national in his 30s, came to the UK seeking asylum in 2015, and was moved to Newcastle soon after arriving. Amanuel spoke a little English but found the local accent hard to understand. He wanted to learn English to integrate and to continue his education (he’d been at college when he fled Eritrea). The people he lived with brought him to Action Language where he started in the Level 2 class, and later took the ESOL for Work course. He loved the classes and liked how the teacher ran the lessons. He was a very diligent student, completing the homework given him and taking every opportunity to speak English in and out of class.

Outside of class, he was soon helping his housemates to go to the GP, opticians and dentists by interpreting for them and spending much of the weekend at church. After six months living in the UK he became eligible for a place at the local FE college for ESOL and therefore left Action Language as a student in July 2016.

His application to remain in the UK was accepted and he then volunteered with Action Language one day a week as a teaching assistant. He also continued helping out at his church and helping other Eritrean and Sudanese people to adapt to life in England. Having successfully passed his exams at college he applied and was accepted to study accountancy. He felt the classes at Action Language provided a firm foundation for continuing learning English at college.

# Learning and Conclusions

**40**  
classes  
per week  
in 2018

Overwhelmingly learners told us their experience of learning English at Action Language was positive. They liked the format and structure of classes and found the teachers to be patient, understanding and committed. The style of teaching increased learners' confidence and created a relaxed and comfortable environment in which to practice English, and learners could see improvements after each class. Most gained new friendships with fellow learners.

Action Language is effective in helping learners to improve their English ability in speaking, listening, writing and reading English. This helps learners to become more confident English users; better able to access basic services and have their needs met, becoming more confident in their interactions with others to undertake day-to-day tasks such as shopping and the doctors, and in travelling around the area. In addition, lack of English skills for many learners related to lack of self-esteem; how they felt about themselves living in England and interacting with English speaking people. Action Language classes help reduce learners' anxiety about such interactions.

This, in turn, helped learners improve their wellbeing, especially those who had to flee their country of origin due to conflict; many of whom are far away from their families and friends and perhaps are experiencing poor mental and physical health. Action Language helps them connect with fellow learners, teachers and other staff, opportunities to learn English and to give by volunteering with Action Language.

The ESOL for Work course delivers tangible benefits in applying for jobs and understanding job-related paperwork.

The organisation helps learners participate in the community by providing information on volunteering opportunities and providing opportunities for learners and former learners to volunteer with Action Language itself as teachers and teaching assistants.

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