

Feedback from Learner Focus groups

As part of the fieldwork evidence gathering for the WAES Strategic Review two learner focus groups were held. A summary of the key points raised is provided below:

1. Why Choose WAES as a learning provider?

- Heard about it from friends who were very happy, they have graduated now. It's flexible, have kids so the times are convenient, it fits in with their lifestyle.
- Other colleges don't always understand that there are family commitments for the learners. WAES has been very understanding and flexible.
- WAES is local and easy to get to. Again have child commitments so it works around those family commitments (school runs). Heard about WAES through resident leaflets with details on what they offer. Also check the website regularly and have taken flyers from the reception area. Live nearby again stumbled across the building (local resident, the outdoor branding drew them in). Want to find a better job but need to improve their English, other schools have higher fees.
- From a friend WAES has a better environment and has a more accessible cost than other places.
- Nicer location than the centre of London where venues are smaller.
- Teaching quality is similar but the building is nicer, better tables, facilities and other places charge more.
- It's the local college for them.
- Word of mouth from friends.
- Nicer environment than other colleges they've been to.
- There are lots of people there going through similar experiences to them.
- Found through an online search for courses.

2. What were your first impressions of WAES?

- Learning something new was good, like to learn and study.
- Having the opportunity to learn something new.
- Positive welcome to the class, introduced to everyone, get to know lots of people.
- People from other countries like this as it can be difficult in a new place.
- Learners feel challenged and stretched which keeps them interested.
- Lots of different backgrounds and histories get a chance to experience new cultures and faiths, very inclusive.
- Can talk about things they couldn't with other people.
- WAES was a friendly and welcoming environment didn't feel like a boring Council building.
- Staff are happy to help with questions and other course options
- They are understanding that learners may have childcare commitments and the courses are flexible enough with timings to accommodate this.
- The work environment is nice and friendly.
- Felt welcomed when they first went to WAES, wanted to come back the next week.
- WAES is approachable and welcoming.
- The centre is very clean and tidy.
- The people there are friendly and easy to get along with.
- Tutor was welcoming and had a good personality. Clearly cares about their subject.
- Learners feel that the arts and creative subjects are valued at WAES where as they are not in others.
- At WAES it feels like the learners are valued more for doing the course rather than for the output figures.
- Tutors good at inspiring learners and getting the most out of them.
- Good at welcoming new learners and WAES makes a good first impression.
- Appreciate the feedback boxes around the college.

3. What are your goals / thoughts about the future?

- Currently working as an Assistant Accountant, thinking about going to university after finishing the English course at WAES. Maybe have their own accounting business.
- Would plan to go to University in London. Through this course it will enable the learner to go to university in this country.
- Course is giving them the confidence to take the degree course especially as you need a good grip with reading and writing English. There is a lot of technical English in the subjects they're looking into so this learning is crucial to accessing future learning.
- Since starting in October their English has improved, has a degree in agriculture from their country. After studying English would like to pursue further higher level study. Look at a career and then find out which courses they need to do to achieve this. Looking at Agriculture and working with animals. Hard to find their field of work in London.
- Lots of the group looking at future learning to help them get into the field of work they want.

4. What are the good things about WAES? What makes it special?

- Feel that arts and creative subjects are valued at WAES whereas this is not felt in other places. WAES care about these subjects and it shows through the tutors teaching and the engagement from learners.
- After finishing at another college, they enquired about if it led to a job, but this turns the learners into numbers and stats. At WAES it seems like the learners are valued more for doing the course rather than for the output figures.
- Through the Projects learners had opportunities to sell what they made giving some further opportunities for the learners. Adds extra experiences for the learners.
- Have made loads of best friends whilst at WAES, formed new friendships both in and out of class.
- Had a very sociable time at WAES. Have had plenty of opportunities to get out on trips and visits.
- Friendships within the classes have led to some social meet-ups outside of the courses and learning times.
- Really enjoy coming to WAES for the social aspect. Nice to have discussions around the subject they all enjoy. Other learners are interested in what each other are doing.
- It's a chance to get away from other life issues.
- Feel happy and fulfilled doing the course even if they're not currently working, nice to have time to do something enjoyable.
- The higher-level learning has really helped develop the learner's art skills.

Case Studies: Impact on Learners' Lives

1. An ESOL learner who has Cancer was finding it difficult to understand what her consultant was saying to her, following surgery, she spoke English but only to an Entry 2 standard. She was referred to the Safeguarding team from her tutor, who was concerned about her vulnerability and emotional wellbeing as she had broken down in tears in the class on several times .Following a meeting with two Safeguarding Officers, we contacted the hospital and was advised that a translation service was available and support was available. The Hospital gave us contact details and instructions regarding immediate support available. This was immediately passed onto the learner, she now feels totally in control of her medical condition and is able to ask relevant questions regarding her treatment moving forward. The Safeguarding team are monitoring her progress.
2. A learner came into college one morning, with a suitcase and two very small children. She disclosed physical and emotional abuse and domestic abuse from her husband. This had been going on for a long time, but now she was studying and doing work placement as part of her course, she was finding self-confidence and the strength to do something about it. The safeguarding lead for Child Protection dealt with this case. She contacted Adult Social Care (WCC) who offered their immediate support, they worked with us over numerous hours, interviewed the learner, started looking into option

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available and rehoused the learner within the day. This collaboration with WCC ensured that both the learner and children were safe and free from verbal and physical aggression and abuse. The Safeguarding officer, supported the learner whilst she completed her course. The learner is now working for a major London hotel and is living safely with her Children and free from abuse.

3. The ESOL Plus Programme (with Childcare) delivers English classes to parents who due to childcare issues are unable to attend English for Speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes. This was a partnership between four local authority run Adult and Community Learning providers (ACL) and was delivered from November 2018 – March 2019. The aim of the project was to develop English language skills through the production of a memory book for their children.

One learner, a 29-yr old mother of an 8-month baby daughter was subjected to torture and mutilation under war conditions. She has scarring on her body and permanent damage to her right hand. Her journey to reach the United Kingdom involved travelling on her own by walking for approximately six months from Ethiopia to Sudan. She then walked through the Libyan Desert to eventually find work in a Libyan household for six months. After receiving no pay for her labour she decided to leave. She managed to get onto a boat with 575 other people on board. People died on the journey when the boat overturned in bad weather. She came very close to drowning and only survived by clinging to the side of an Italian Sea Rescue boat. Many others drowned. She journeyed on foot again from Italy to France where she spent one month in the refugee camp known as “The Jungle”. She eventually managed to get onto a train and finally arrived in the United Kingdom with almost nothing. Fortunately, she found refuge and support in the Cardinal Hume Centre in London. She spent a year there without receiving any state benefits. She also met her future husband in London and they married. She joined the programme as way of meeting others and improving her English to support her child and future children. Through the project not only did she improve her English but also gained a network of friends that went beyond the course and stopped her being socially isolated. She is now on main stream ESOL programmes and developing her English skills and interested in history and cultural studies for the future.