**WM Migration Network Opportunities Thematic Meeting**

**16th September 2025 (10:30-11:30)**

**Chair: Steve Bayliss (Refugee and Migrant Centre)**

**Introductions**

* Steve Bayliss welcomed all to the meeting, both online and in person.

**Briefing and Policy Paper**

* Briefing paper completion represents significant collaborative achievement condensing extensive subgroup discussions into actionable two-page policy document
  + Alternative ESOL apprenticeship model emerged as primary recommendation from lengthy positive discussions
  + Graphical format design planned for enhanced policy presentation and stakeholder engagement
  + Amendment process initiated following feedback from Pauline Desch and children's services highlighting critical gaps
  + Final approval process scheduled with circulation to all members before policy submission
* Regional provision challenges highlighted through Birmingham Adult Education Service insights
  + Demand significantly exceeds supply across West Midlands region creating substantial waiting lists
  + Quality inconsistencies and affecting learner outcomes
  + Funding limitations constraining expansion of quality ESOL opportunities
  + Policy uncertainty surrounding promised changes to work-focused provision with unknown implementation timeline

**Employer Engagement Challenges**

* Two-year engagement failure demonstrating systematic resistance from mainstream employers despite multiple strategic approaches
  + Recent employers survery conducted in partnership with DWP only resulted in 30 responses.
  + A deterioration in employment market are affecting employer attitudes
  + Employment opportunity limitations restricting career advancement pathways for ESOL learners
  + Small organisation dependency: Opportunities concentrated in community-specific businesses rather than mainstream employers
  + Sector concentration in retail shops, hospitality, and warehousing with limited progression prospects
  + Entrepreneurial skills development needed for accessing better employment opportunities
  + UK work experience barrier creating impossible catch-22 situation for new arrivals seeking employment

**Alternative Pathway Development & Success Models**

* SB highlighted recent success with a project in Wolverhampton with the National Trust.
* Breaking Barriers resources providing immediate practical support for higher-level learners.12-week General Professional English courses delivered online through national school partnerships. Flexible scheduling accommodating various learner availability across different time zones

**Academic Collaboration & Research Integration**

* JH offered to support the network through a forthcoming event with the University of Birmingham. This is planned to take place at The Exchange building in central Birmingham and feature three talk sections and interactive elements. There will be a Cultural celebration component highlighting multicultural contributions to regional economy

**Policy Advocacy & Systemic Change Requirements**

* TC offered to take issues raised to a forthcoming session with WMCA Employment and Skills portfolio holder. Recent discussions have suggested receptivity to innovative funding proposals.
* SB highlighted ongoing Comunication breakdown concerns regarding lack of communications on promised language acquisition plan changes creating sector-wide frustration**.**
* TC highlighted the potential use of **BVSC volunteering brokerage** offering immediate pathway development opportunities.

**Next meeting – Tuesday 4th November at 10:30. This will again be in a hybrid format – online and at RMC Birmingham.**