

Evaluation of the Café Connect Programme 2022-2023

Final Report

Dr Dan Range

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1. Introduction

This document provides an evaluation of the Café Connect programme and was commissioned by FaithAction with a dual remit. The first is a traditional summative evaluation which serves as a check that the Café Connect project has delivered as per the expectations of the funder.

The second aspect of the remit builds an understanding of the externalities of the Café Connect work around the impact of it on cohesion, particularly between recently arrived migrant groups and the local “host community”. This includes an exploration of cohesion and intergroup contact in relation to themes around belonging, group identity and prejudice-related attitudes towards difference and change.

1.1 Café Connect

Café Connect is a programme run by FaithAction which works to welcome British Nationals (Overseas), and their dependants, arriving in the UK from Hong Kong. The programme operates in London, the Midlands and Yorkshire & the Humber and is delivered locally by faith and community partners of FaithAction.

The programme was planned to comprise of weekly, 2-hour long sessions which bring together people from the whole of the local community, not just those from Hong Kong, for social activities, including tea and coffee, which creates opportunities and a space for people from different backgrounds to meet and develop new skills, knowledge and outlooks.

The main focus of the programme is on helping those from Hong Kong to practice conversational English skills, learn more about local services and facilities, find out about local and British history and to meet local people and make new friends. This aims to positively impact on their wellbeing and practical aspects of their settling in the UK. However, all those involved in the programme, regardless of background or time spent in the UK, should benefit from Café Connect through the creation of new social connections and, potential, positive benefits to local cohesion.

1.2 Evaluation Objectives

This evaluation has three clear objectives which were requested by FaithAction at inception. These are:

1. Evaluating the delivery of Café Connect against funded deliverables.
2. Capturing best practice and areas of learning to inform the delivery of future, similar, projects and programmes.
3. Developing an understanding of the value added by using faith and community assets in local areas.

2. Methodology

The research team has taken a mixed-methods approach to the evaluation, bringing together a range of data types in order to produce a breadth and depth of findings on the programme's progress and impact.

Evaluation and monitoring have been built into the Café Connect programme from inception, with FaithAction putting in place reporting requirements that satisfy funder monitoring and evaluation data collection. On top of quantitative reporting data, FaithAction have also given access to the evaluators to hubs to collect qualitative data firsthand.

Therefore, the evaluation team have used quantitative data provided by FaithAction so as to reduce a reporting burden and duplication of data and effort on the parts of the hubs. This has been supplemented with additional qualitative data from three main sources:

1. Semi-structured interviews with hub representatives (n=5);
2. Semi-structured interviews with FaithAction team members working directly on the programme (n=3).
3. In-depth site visits and observations with two projects, including focus groups with participants from one project (n=7).

The data collection focused on people's perceptions, personal experiences and their views of the outcomes of their involvement in the programme, aiming to complement the quantitative data which focuses on more comparable and measurable progress indicators. Collected solely by the evaluation team, the qualitative data also adds independence and rigour to the evaluation overall.

Data from across these methods has been synthesised, using analysis which allows themes to be drawn from the data. Findings are, where applicable, triangulated between datasets, meaning that quantitative data, observation data and interview/focus group data are brought together to support or discuss key points throughout.

The data collection process has prioritised the avoidance of detriment to participants and projects, working around the delivery of project. This does mean, however, that qualitative data collection relied on convenience sampling – involving those who were taking part in activities during fieldwork visits and prioritising sites which were available for visits – meaning that data collected is not chosen through random selection and may be less-than-fully representative of the whole population of programme beneficiaries. Despite these concerns, researchers found a good degree of saturation in the findings from the data, meaning that very similar themes and ideas were raised across focus groups and interviews, and, towards the end, no new themes were raised. This is not to say that the views and experiences of all individuals involved in Café Connect are represented in this limited dataset but that there can be a good degree of confidence in the validity of findings and broad themes in this report.

3. Programme Data and Analysis

This section of the report is split into two subsections. The first of these covers the demographic details around who attended the programme, where and how frequently whilst the second covers the participant perceptions of the outcomes of Café Connect. These include social networks, accessing services and English language confidence and competency.

3.1 Café Connect Demographic Data

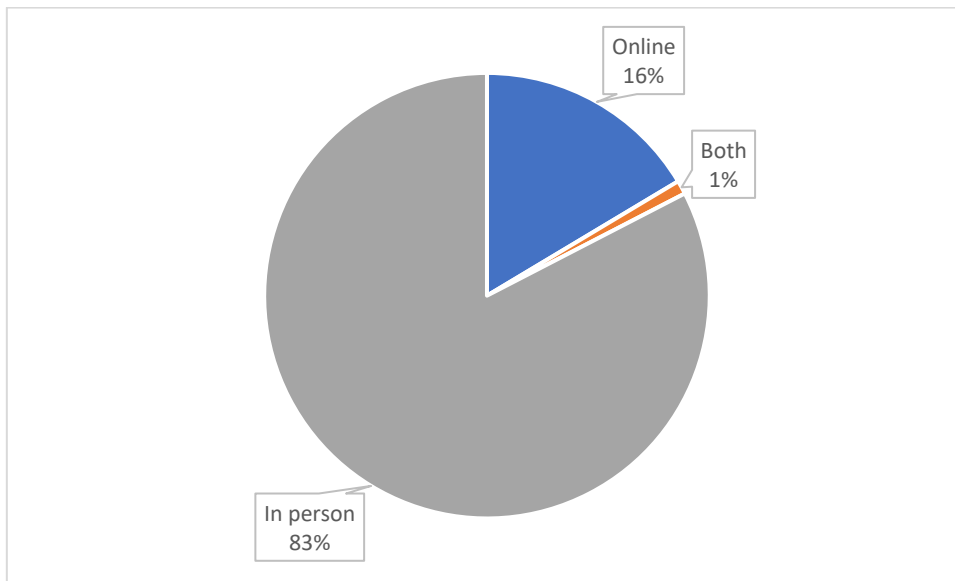
The Café Connect programme was not given overly prescriptive targets around participant engagement by DLUHC and this is partly a reflection of the joint uncertainty between FaithAction and DLUHC around participant need and where in the country participants would choose to locate. Working with BNOs arriving in the UK has been emergent throughout the duration of the Café Connect programme with the needs and autonomy of many participants being different from those of many other migrant groups which have come to the UK in recent times.

Originally, FaithAction proposed each Café Connect hub would have capacity to engage with “up to 80 families per hub to give a total of 240 per region” (FaithAction interviewee). However, the only data available at this time to guide the location of new arrivals was a survey completed in Hong Kong prior to decisions being made about actual destinations. This meant the areas people actually arrived were often different and it was hard to predict the scale of the community in any area, which resulted in much less uniformity of engagement, hence the pragmatic value of an “up to” target which could flex with the need. DLUHC standardised the data capture across projects to count individuals, this became the focus of the data. Following this, individuals, and not families, were made the target of the programme.

This meant that there were no firm targets which the programme had to deliver against. The adoption of an almost pilot-like nature approach to this work by DLUHC is to be commended given the uncertainties around working with and engaging BNOs en masse in the UK for the first time.

Overall, the programme worked with 1,200 recorded participants. The true total of engagements is likely to be higher than this, as though most participants will have registered, there is also likely to be many one-off or more incidental interactions between the hubs and would-be participants (or those with very low need) not recorded. Figure 1 below shows that the majority of these engagements took place in person with a minority taking place online or in a hybrid approach:

Figure 1: Medium of Participant Engagement

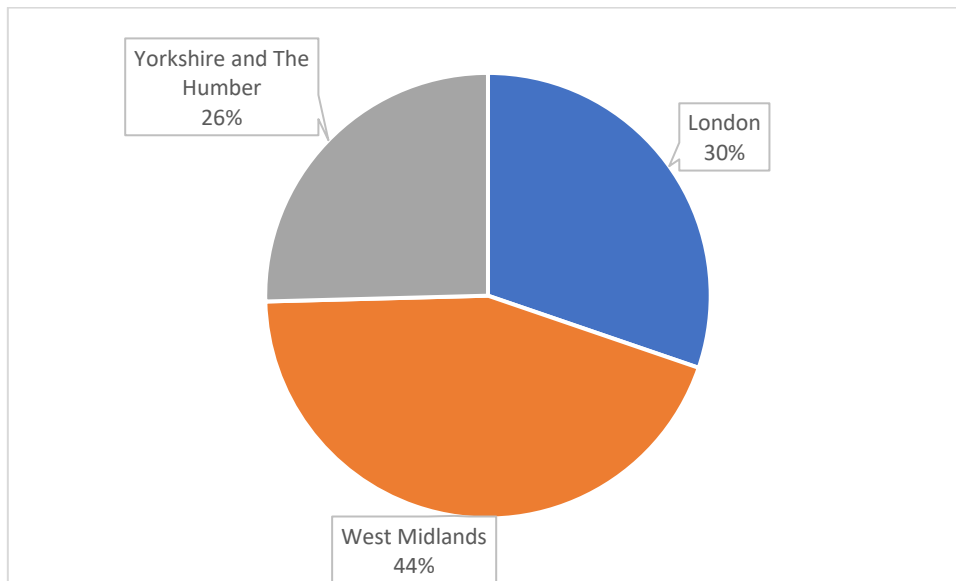


The engagements all took place with BNOs living in the 3 target regions of London, the West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber with the bulk of these taking place in the West Midlands. This can be seen below in Figure 2.

Due to the nature of BNO migration to the UK and the general level of autonomy, financial or otherwise, held by BNOs arriving, there are no accurate records of where BNOs have settled, though the 3 regions focussed on in the programme do, anecdotally and through data that is available, appear to be hotspots. In all 3 regions the hubs were able to work with previously engaged BNO and Chinese communities or identify emergent areas of need as first steps in engaging participants. Following this there was, across the board, a good volume of word-of-mouth referrals in all regions.

It is clear, from the quantitative data and interviews with hubs, that there are new populations of BNOs in all 3 regions and that many of those who have recently arrived in the UK do require and want help in settling and in building social networks (with other BNOs and the “host populations”). There is a clear need for programmes such as Café Connect to work with this cohort at this time in the UK.

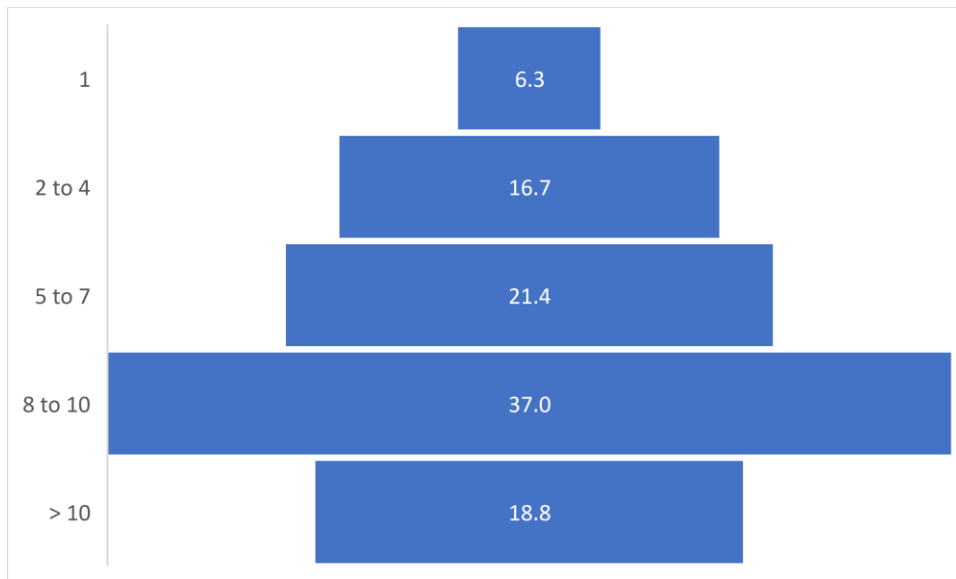
Figure 2: Participant Engagement by Region



There was no set target as to how many sessions of Café Connect a participant needed to attend for the programme to have been deemed to have successfully engaged them and there was a widespread in the number of sessions attended per participant. This can be seen below in Figure 3. The data used here is drawn from a representative sample of 201 participants on the programme.

It is worthy of note that some hubs were still running, and plan to beyond the life of the programme, and so the average number of sessions attended will likely continue to rise over time. Nevertheless, with over 50% of participants at this stage having attended at least 8 sessions, it is clear that the Café Connect model has provided a forum for BNOs in the UK to meet with people from their own, and other, backgrounds on a consistent and regular basis. Observations at hubs corroborate that a significant number of participants view attending Café Connect and the venues in which the programme run as a regular part of their life in the UK.

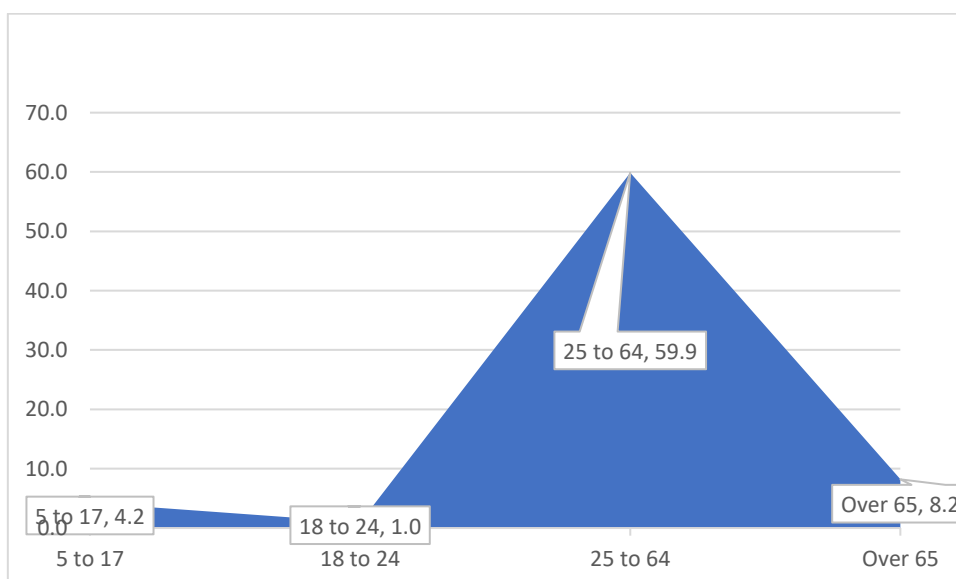
Figure 3: Participants by Sessions Attended, %



Lastly in this section, Figure 4 below shows the age of participants from Year 1 and Year 2 of Café Connect. The data used in this graph is rounded into broad age groups as data was not recorded systematically across all hubs and some participants are counted twice if they were involved in both years.

With the 25 to 64 age band covering a wider range of ages than the others in the dataset, it was always likely that the bulk of participants would fall into this category. That there are participants represented in the other age bands is important to note though, particularly in the case of the 8.2% of participants who are aged 65+ and therefore less likely to be engaged in the labour market or to have school aged children- both traditional methods of new migrants meeting people in their wider areas. 26.7% of participants either preferred not to give their age or they did not have it recorded.

Figure 4: Participants by Age, %



3.2 Programme Deliverables

At different stages of the programme Café Connect participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire. These questionnaires took place during weeks 5 and 10 of Year 1 and again in Year 2 and so give a good spread of responses from across the duration of the work. The results of these are presented below in Table 1 as Year 1 and Year 2 results, however, because of the nature of the programme and the questionnaires being completed by different participants at different times, there should be no expectation of a year-on-year progression.

The key finding from this data is that the vast majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had been positively impacted by the programme. This is a consistent finding across all of the indicator statements in both years and is indicative of real success. Additionally, there were at least 643 responses to each of the indicator statements and this is suggestive of a reliable and robust dataset.

Although the word itself is not used/mentioned, several of the indicator statements relate to participant perceptions of cohesion or behaviours that are likely to positively impact on cohesion. These include participants feeling more connected to their community (92% in Year 1 and 96% in Year 2) and participants having more friends from different backgrounds (77% in Year 1 and 82% in Year 2). These are very important predictors of the ability of an individual being able to feel that they are a part of their local area and to get along well with others who are different to them and, thus, a very positive outcome for the programme. That participants have more friends from different backgrounds suggests a sustainability of impact here beyond the life of Café Connect too.

As with cohesion, the word integration is also not mentioned in the indicator statements, but a number of the statements do directly relate to outcomes likely to positively impact on the ability of the participant to become a full part of local and national life. In particular participants having a greater understanding of UK history, culture and systems (94% in Year 1 and 93% in Year 2) is a very strong soft indicator which is backed up by consistent patterns of participants feeling more confident in speaking English (85% in Year 1 and 86% in Year 2) and feeling that their English has improved (75% in Year 1 and 77% in Year 2). The confidence and ability to speak English is closely linked to positive integration outcomes, and other life outcomes, in the UK and these measures are, again, suggestive of longer-term impacts beyond the life of the programme.

Also suggestive of longer-term impact for the programme is that around two thirds of each cohort have used or registered with a new service or facility in their community. Examples of these include a GP, community group, job centre or pharmacy. This demonstrates that participants are gaining an increased confidence and ability to live independently in the UK.

Table 1: Café Connect Indicator Statements, Year 1 and Year 2

Indicator Statement	Overall percentage of participants that Agree or Strongly Agree, Year 1	Overall percentage of participants that Agree or Strongly Agree, Year 2
I feel more connected to my community	92%	96%
I have more friends	93%	91%
I have more friends from different backgrounds (ethnicity, religion, education, age)	77%	82%
I have used (or registered with) a new service or facility in my community e.g. doctor, community group, job centre, pharmacy etc	65%	79%
I am more comfortable talking to people from different backgrounds	92%	94%
I feel lonely less often	81%	82%
I am more confident speaking English	85%	86%
My English has improved	75%	77%
I have a greater understanding of UK history, culture and systems	94%	93%

In the participant questionnaires there were also 3 free text response questions in which the participants could give their own feedback. This is additional to the indicator statements detailed above in Table 1 and allows for a more inductive approach to understanding what the participants enjoyed from the programme, would do differently as a result of it and would like to see the programme doing in the future. The data from these, alongside analysis, is presented in 3 word clouds below. These word clouds are made up of the most popular words used by a representative sample of 201 participants in responding to the respective free text questions and include all instances of words that were used 5 or more times. It is key to note too that the size of the word in the cloud is indicative of the frequency of its usage. So, in Figure 5 the word English has been used more frequently by participants than the word meeting.

When asked what they have enjoyed and found the most useful in the Café Connect sessions, participants were almost unanimously able to link their perceptions here to the key outcomes of the programme. There was a real interest and enjoyment from participants about learning about the UK in very real and practical terms. All participants had an awareness of the UK before moving to it, but value the lived experience and practical, related learning around local history, culture and traditions. Similarly, participants generally had English language skills, especially around reading and writing, before arriving in the UK but valued the opportunity to speak to others in English and to listen to native speakers in a non-judgemental environment.

Much of the enjoyment derived by participants comes from the face-to-face element of the programme and that it brings people (a very commonly used word here) together to talk, meet, speak, learn and understand.

Figure 5: What participants enjoyed most and found the most useful (166 responses)



Figure 6 below shows participant response to what it is that they now do differently as a result of being involved on the Café Connect programme. Whilst there are a wide range of responses here across a broad series of topics, the most important and clear response is that participants are doing “more”. They are meeting more people, speaking more English, being more confident and doing more in the UK.

Figure 6: What participants now do differently as a result of Café Connect (126 responses)



Finally, and linked to Figure 6 above, is participant responses as to what the programme could improve on or differently. Here there were very few criticisms of what the programme has delivered with participants instead asking for “more” of the same and similar in the future. English language skills and confidence building is a particular focus area here as, again, is meeting more new people and building local social networks. Learning softer, and what is often seen as being tacit information, about UK life was very important to participants too and something that they would like to see more of in the future.

Figure 7: What the programme could improve or do differently (121 responses)



4. Café Connect Extended Case Study

This section of the report is a single, in-depth case study of Café Connect work at one location in the West Midlands. The very wide-ranging remit of the programme, and the equally different participant need, makes this more detailed approach preferable to a series of more superficial case studies which, by their nature, could not hope to showcase the depth and linkages of the interventions.

Café Connect at The Church, West Midlands

This case study outlines the work of the committee and congregation of a church in the West Midlands committed to running support and networking sessions for new arrivals from Hong Kong. The venue and organising body are referred to throughout the case study as The Church in order to protect anonymity. Data comes from a range of interviews with those attending, including beneficiaries, Church organisers and representatives of local agencies (e.g. local authority staff members) as well as observations of sessions in the Church.

As with all case study research, the aim is not to present fully generalisable, context-free claims about their programme as a whole – research on migrant integration shows that context matters a great deal. Instead, the case study aims to capture the practices, strengths and limitations of the Café Connect approach as it applies in this specific, West Midlands context. It aligns with the overall evaluation approach which is ‘realist’ in nature: based on the idea that programmes don’t ‘work’ or ‘not work’, they work differently for different groups in different contexts and at different times. The case study presents thematic analysis in a narrative style.

Aligning with this approach, it is important to note that the sessions provided by the Church were borne out of the church leader’s awareness of and interest in the protests in Hong Kong and in experiences of racism and exclusion in the leader’s own migrant journey in the UK and that some provision for Hong Kongers already ran through the church before Café Connect. The sessions gained immediate traction with local Hong Kongers, reaching more than 60 people in their first session. FaithAction’s support through Café Connect came after the project had begun, working alongside project leaders to add valuable structure, materials, training and encouragement as well as funding to ensure there are appropriate provisions and space for the team to continue – with this support, the project has gone from strength to strength. At the time of writing, the sessions attract between 60 and 100 people each week without formal advertising, providing the diverse range of activities and support set out below. It has grown to be a well-established local point of integration support, contact between communities and unique engagement opportunity for local agencies such as police, local councils and charities. The data collected during the evaluation shows how the Church’s vision for impact and position in the local area have enabled a trusted, well-attended service which works in myriad ways towards its overarching aim of ‘belonging’ for new arrivals and established community members alike.

How did it start?

The Church Leader followed the protests in Hong Kong as the situation unfolded in 2019 and 2020 and became aware of the number of British Nationals Overseas settling in the local area partly as a result of the situation. The Church Leader, themselves a migrant, was driven in part by their own experiences of racism and challenges with integration into UK life:

‘When I came to this country I never had the opportunity to meet with others from my country – to share what you missed, how you miss the smell of a tree in your country, and so on.’
(Church Leader)

The Church then worked with two counterparts at a nearby Chinese Church to understand what services would be of use to new arrivals from Hong Kong. It was clear that, first and foremost, an opportunity for new arrivals to meet others from Hong Kong would be of great interest and that other services might usefully follow. As a result, a Coffee Morning was offered at the Church at the beginning of 2022. Recruitment was primarily achieved through WhatsApp messaging, leading to a very successful first session:

'In 20 mins we had 22 people. We had to move rooms to get a bigger room. We had to use our main hall. We got 62 people on the first session – I wasn't expecting so many people at once. There was no programme – it was just for networking together. Then I thought 'I need a programme' (Church Leader)

Following the initial session, speakers were invited to talk about culture in the UK and about migrant journeys and, with the addition of FaithAction's support, the project developed a weekly programme.

Observed Session

After attendees had spent some time networking, exchanging small talk and being served refreshments, the session began. The initial part was a plenary-style session with two speakers, one in English and one translating to Cantonese consecutively. The first part focused on the invention of the postage stamp and involved a practical, interactive activity, an informative talk and a role play acted out by willing attendees. Following this, the 80+ attendees sat around a large number of tables, each one focused on a specific activity. These included structured activities and discussion on the Royal Mail and Post Office services and English language support, as well as a knitting table, English language learning tables, support and advice tables, and a wide range of other activities varying in formality. Towards the end of the discussions and activities, feedback forms were provided, and people assembled in plenary for the concluding session on upcoming events and important information. The session lasted around two hours in total.

The Role of FaithAction's Café Connect

FaithAction, starting their Café Connect programme, heard about the work of the Church and offered help and support. What is clear in the data is that the funding offered is important to the beneficiary churches but, in this case at least, the programme, structure and training offered are equally if not more valuable: for this Church, Café Connect is far from a standalone funding offer.

'[FaithAction] offered funding but not only that they offered a programme and I can't tell you how thankful I was for that.' (Church Leader)

Support with due care for autonomy

It is very clear in the data that the Church's project is not considered 'Café Connect' itself, rather it is a project supported through, lifted and made more impactful by Café Connect's approach. This point was made by multiple interviewees: the support offered by FaithAction is critical, but the overall vision and passion was already in situ. As a result, respecting the autonomy of the programme was crucial in developing the partnership between FaithAction and the Church, a partnership which has seemingly resulted in a good balance between guidance and autonomy.

'FaithAction are fantastic. They are very welcoming and helpful. 'We are here to assist and walk with you'. They give us a bit of money which is very, very helpful. I can say much of the money that we have spent is from FA. So, we are not struggling anymore. It guarantees the project happens.'

Besides the funding and general encouragement and guidance from FaithAction, there are two tangible elements of support which stand out in the data: the programme and the training.

Session Content Support

The support provided from FaithAction to the Church includes a range of session plans and associated materials which cover a range of topics related to issues of integration, cohesion, language and culture in the UK. Before Café Connect's involvement, the Church's organisers ran sessions based on their own experience and interests and did not have a structure or overarching plan of what would be covered – most sessions were planned more opportunistically, involving the knowledge of an organiser or current affairs. The Café Connect session plans offered a wider set of topics to cover which have been, by all accounts, extremely well received by those meeting at the Church. For the organisers, it has meant that their focus could switch to the logistics of organising or providing support for individuals rather than spending much more time finding materials and planning sessions. It is crucial to note, though, that whilst the session plans have been used in most sessions, they are often adapted or swapped around. The organisers very much value the flexibility in picking and choosing according to local needs, skills and interests, allowing a balance of proactive and reactive support.

Café Connect Training

Two volunteers from the organising committee attended training sessions with FaithAction on the Café Connect programme. The training was found to be extremely useful and covered skills and ideas that were new or novel for the Church organisers.

'It was fantastic – it was great. [Trainer] who was leading the session was a very warm person. You go to training session and sometimes people make you feel like you know nothing. [Trainer] said we are here to train each other. She's going to share what we all know.' (Organiser)

'What did we learn? How to break the ice – meeting people for the first time. How to help people relax. Not about telling what we want them to do but to take them as colleagues.' (Organiser)

As demonstrated in the quotes above, for those attending the training from the Church, humility was an important theme. The training was found to be valuable partly because it recognised that there were skilled, experienced people in the room who could learn from each other, rather than a more didactic, distanced training approach. There is clear evidence that skills for facilitating dialogue, listening and more practical concerns around how to support integration were effectively learned in this method for organisers from this Church and appear to have translated into practice, as explored later in the study.

Ambitions and Impact

What is clear from this case study's dataset is that there is no one single aim and that the project is based around supporting a diverse set of audiences who attend for many different reasons. Over time, the project has allowed the heterogenous nature of the local Hong Kong community come to come to the fore and inform how the sessions are run.

Often in faith and community-led programmes, the aims centre around a readily identifiable need and prescribed set of outcomes. For instance, the evaluators have researched Church-based projects addressing unemployment which have clear indicators around CVs being developed, advice provided, job applications supported, jobs attained, etc. For this Church, there is a palpable focus on support, advice, friendship and problem-solving but not solely or even mostly to meet any pre-determined framework. The church leaders' ambition appears to recognise the emergent needs of individuals both connected to and beyond their status as

newly arrived migrants. As a result, the sessions aim to meet a wide range of needs, including those set out below.

English Language Proficiency, Confidence and ‘Comfort’

The organisers have seen a regular group of attendees seeking to practice and build confidence in their English, estimated at more than a third of attendees with this focus each week. Mostly, these are people who have a basic level of English proficiency but are seeking a comfortable space to practice and learn with others at a similar level: a less pressured, more reassuring environment than exists in general day-to-day life in the UK.

‘We want to help our friends to be comfortable with the English language. Not to teach them English lessons but to be comfortable. So they are better prepared when they go to lessons or to speak to people’ (Organiser)

‘I asked some of the Hong Kongers if they wanted to go to the Cantonese speaking church but they said no because they want to integrate. One said that Cantonese is my language but English will be the language of my future.’ (Church Leader)

During the session there was dedicated table space for people to gather around and practice speaking English. The handout materials for this connected well to the overall theme of the day (the postage stamp, Royal Mail and the Post Office). There is no focus in these elements of the session on technical language progression, although it was assumed by the organisers that the set up facilitated this. Instead, this was an informal gathering with jovial discussion around a topic, using prompt cards and pictures to aid people’s comprehension. People supported each other implicitly, through applause, prompting and encouragement. It may be seen as a weakness of the programme that technical progress is not focused on or attempted but there would be a clear opportunity cost in introducing this – formality and progression found in structured ESOL provision have given way to welcome, connection and comfort.

Practical Integration

A clear and tangible element of the observed session was the coverage of basic skills for integration, both related to the theme of the day and more general support. Through conversations with attendees, a range of examples came to light of how people had learned about policing matters, where to get specialist advice on legal, education, welfare or health issues, and so on. One person had not known how to register with or access local NHS services so previously came to the session for sign-posting support and was now enrolled with a GP and dentist. Another shared that an attendee whose child required special educational support had received support to navigate relevant system and gain access to support to which they are entitled. Similar stories were shared related to legal support and local authority services.

‘Even though our system is quite similar, there are things they need to know. GP appointments and so on.’ (Organiser)

‘One lady who has the dispute with the garage. We didn’t help much but we sent her to the insurance company to sort it out. Whereas in Hong Kong it would be a police matter.’ (Organiser)

A key commonality is that many attendees had attempted to access support or services related to these issues but lack understanding of how local and national systems work, where they can access systems or what support they are entitled to. This relates to the idea of ‘systems literacy’: the knowledge or lack thereof of complex systems which underpin services such as education or health which differ in each local area and country by country, affecting a person’s ability to access. In each case, the sessions provided the opportunity for

attendees to seek out knowledge from fellow Hong Kongers or from those born in the UK, enhance their systems literacy and ultimately resolve these practical issues.

Crucially within this theme, a clear success of the sessions can be seen in the number of local agencies attending in person. During the session observations, representatives of the local authority community engagement team attended in order to engage with and understand the needs of this community. Their view was that this was an ideal, unique point of access for this community and, whilst the sessions run in local authority offices often reached a good number of people, the church had been very successful in building deeper relationships and in different ways to the local authority. In previous sessions, speakers from the police, housing and benefits had attended to provide direct support, showing that the sessions are a trusted means of bringing together the local Hong Kong community and local statutory, community and voluntary services.

Cultural Awareness

A big focus for the Church and of Café Connect generally is on enhancing attendees' understanding of UK culture and traditions in order to aid integration. The Church is not aiming to cover an exhaustive list of practices and norms but uses the session plans and ideas from Café Connect to shape their sessions. In previous sessions, the Church has covered elements of UK geography, events in the UK calendar such as Guy Fawkes Night and UK cuisine and inventions. In a recent survey of attendees conducted by the Church, responses showed that learning about UK culture and history was one of the most enjoyable parts of the sessions and connected well to advice on how to live in the UK generally.

It is important to note that often cultural awareness raising parts of the sessions are themed towards understanding the UK but do so with clear reference wherever possible to equivalent or relevant practices in Hong Kong. In the observed session, the plenary portion at the start covered the invention of the postage stamp system in a town near to where the Church is located. The primary focus of this part was on understanding where the concept came from and an element of UK history. As soon as table discussions started, though, facilitators were keen encourage attendees to share experiences of the postage and mail system in Hong Kong and allow comparisons to be drawn. As explored below, this builds the basis for much greater humility in the way cultural learning takes place, seemingly alleviating some of the negative effects of power asymmetry in which one group is familiar with the topic and the other is not: following the ethos of the training, facilitators were far from didactic in their approach.

Cohesion and Dialogue

Social mixing and building relationships between groups is at the core of Café Connect but, in practice for this Church, it is pursued and achieved in subtle ways. The sessions are attended primarily by recently arrived migrants and largely facilitated by members of established communities (mostly but not solely white, British residents). This means that the opportunity to come into contact with people from other groups is not an explicit focus and may seem at first look quite minimal. As introduced above, contact between the groups unavoidably involves power asymmetry. In the observed sessions, though, the facilitators made significant efforts to acknowledge and prioritise the experiences of Hong Kongers in discussions and to move to a position in which Hong Kongers were leading the discussion.

The Cafe Connect materials played a central role in easing the discussion here, too. For example, the discussion started with an interactive game involved guessing whether or not facts about the Royal Mail were correct or not. The interaction and the types of facts meant that this was something that everyone around the table could participate actively in, building a common ground between participants and acting as an icebreaker. Conversation notably flowed much more after that activity. Following that, people exchanged amusing stories of

sending and receiving mail and, following the theme of humility, of idiosyncrasies of both UK and Hong Kong systems. One extract from the fieldnotes noted that:

'It feels like the English facilitators are leading the session but in an inclusive manner that helps people to open up and share.' (Observation Fieldnotes)

This data is quite speculative at this stage and there are clear limitations to what conclusions can be drawn. However, this approach to dialogue seen throughout the session would appear to hold great promise for building links between the groups present and allowing people to feel safe enough to ask questions and share their own life experiences. Whilst some of the focus of the session was on knowledge and awareness of cultures, the ethos observed was centred almost entirely around humble exchange which is an important precursor to building relationships between groups.

Friendship and Networking

The term 'Networking' comes up repeatedly in the data, referring to the opportunity for Hong Kongers to meet other newly arrived members of their community with the aim of building social capital and spending time with people with common experiences and backgrounds. In the observed sessions, it was very clear that lots of attendees wanted to spend time talking to each other in their first language, with lots of introductions made between people. It is widely regarded in the study of migrant and refugee integration that this type of familiar social support provided early in the resettling process can help with issues of anxiety and help people to gain 'control and independence' (UNHCR). Whilst mixing between groups over time seems desirable from a community cohesion perspective, migration is invariably fraught with uncertainty – building a network of contacts and friends who have been through similar experiences is often critical for reducing the vulnerability that comes with moving one's life and family to another part of the world.

Vulnerability and Contribution

Vulnerability was not a stark theme in the data, particularly in comparison to other migrant integration and cohesion programmes which focus on groups experiencing more acute levels of need (Range and Fisher 2017, 2019, 2020). In interviews with local authority representatives, comparisons were made with other migrant groups, including from Ukraine and Afghanistan, leading participants to generalise that the Hong Kong community in the local area is more financially stable than other groups, with more owning their own properties.

'The conversation is less about what services are on offer and more about what they can contribute to the local areas. The stability allows for this.' - (who said this quote?)

There is no hard data in this study to support these claims but it was certainly a commonly held view held by Hong Kong and UK participants alike. Despite the assumed financial stability, one element of vulnerability which was clear in the data pertaining to this church, however, was related to discrimination and racism.

'One of the Hong Kongers came to me to say she was in tears all day. She went to the doctors and two ladies sat next to her saying 'why are they coming here? The NHS is under enough pressure. Why are they coming here?''. (Church Leader)

Interviews with the organisers showed that a number of disclosures were being made by attendees about experiences of anti-migrant sentiment and hate and, importantly, that victims had chosen to share these with organisers and come to sessions as a means of support. This indicates a concerning level of discrimination in the local area and a high degree of trust in the organisers and the Church.

Faith Engagement

Although they are held in the main hall of a Church, the sessions are not focused on faith and religion per se.

'This is not a church service – it's going to be for everybody, with faith, without faith. The church is not for ones with faith – just come as you are.' (Church Leader).

The initial project was established through a connection between 2 churches and many of the initial participants came, reportedly, from the congregation of the local Chinese church. It is estimated, however, that more than half of the attendees do not attend religious services regularly. In interviews with Hong Kongers and organisers, it was stressed that Christianity had a positive, passive role in attracting people to the programme.

'It's held in a church but there aren't that many that are religious here. They trust us because it's in a church and Christians have a long heritage of being seen a generous and trustworthy in Hong Kong.' (Organiser)

'In the Second World War in Hong Kong, the Churches would give out to a powdered food and that's given the Christian Church a very good name in Hong Kong. They are kind people.' (Hong Konger Attendee)

'Christian values are against injustice and we can't find justice in Hong Kong. You used to be able to find justice in Hong Kong. Majority of people are leaving because there is no justice there and it's against their religious values.' (Hong Konger Attendee)

Faith and Christianity in particular are important if implicit aspects for attendees, representing kindness, trust and, in the last case, justice. Many people attend as a result of their direct Christian practice and many others appear to have much more subtle connections with the Church and Church community. One aspect to bring out in more detailed research would be how people's identity and feelings towards faith relate to their attending here instead of other, secular services. The data gathered through this process, however, shows clear indications that there are positive relationships between the faith-based nature of delivery and trust in the session organisers and institution.

Tangible Institutional Impact

Finally, one less expected set of outcomes surfaced during the observations and interviews which relate to the institution rather than explicitly for the attendees. In setting the project up and gaining support from Café Connect, the church leader developed a governance approach to the sessions which is entirely new to the church. The quote below outlines more of how the project was established.

'I went to church council – I said I'm thinking of having a committee to deal with this. We need a team. We needed a permanent volunteer – I approached a Hong Konger who has been here longer than the others. The committee has grown from there and is composed of three white British Church members and 4 Hong Kongers.'

As shown in the description, the project is led by a committee representing host and newly arrived groups, set up to ensure collaboration and representation between representatives of those communities. This appears highly positive for modelling an approach to cohesion and, ultimately to humility and power-sharing. Flowing from this, there have been a number of changes in the practice of the Church, beyond the sessions. The congregation composition has changes, with a large number of Hong Kongers attending on a weekly basis. As a result, the church leader has led bold changes, often in the face of some opposition.

'From the 8th of May, we are going to have the Bible read in two languages – Cantonese and English. It was a bit of a shock for them. I made the decision. The Church Council said we haven't agreed how long are we going to do it. I didn't think I needed to report it to the Church Council because someone said 'we'll do as much as we can' so I thought well this is within that. We need to do as much as we can to welcome our Cantonese speaking friends.'
(Church Leader)

'When that was announced, the congregation clapped their hands. They were very happy.'
(Church Leader)

This represents a significant change in the way the Church works, resulting in part from the success of the sessions and the ambition of the committee leading them to extend the welcome across church practice. The sessions have helped cement a shift that may have otherwise been challenged or not accepted by the Church Council. This is not something which can be expected at every Church but, aligning with the realist approach of the evaluation, it is clear that the passion and experience of the church leader, the composition of the project committee and the Café Connect approach to delivery have together supported a notable shift towards inclusion for this Church.

5. Value added by the Faith and Community Sector

A distinctive aspect of Café Connect is that it works with a cohort of participants who are new to the UK but have rights and, often, educational and financial backgrounds that are different to most other large sized migrant groups. At first glance there may not be an apparent logic to a faith-based charity running a cohesion programme to engage these participants. However, understanding this logic and then why it appears to provide highly positive results is central to evaluating Café Connect. This was not a major focus area of this piece of research but is a distinct enough offering to warrant further analysis and potentially to promote best practice in future similar works.

Findings in this section are split into two thematic areas which were emergent during the research. These are the value added by the faith and community sector involvement in practical terms and the value added by the faith and community sector with regards to their values and cultural behaviours.

Beginning at the very practical level, there was real value added to the Café Connect programme in using places of worship and faith centres as hubs for this work because a number of BNOs and people from China and Hong Kong who have been established in the UK for a number of years were already using them. This aided greatly in getting the programme up and running quickly from a standing start and gave routes into an emergent, and in some cases, fairly nebulous population in the UK that would not have been possible through more secular means.

It is also the case, as with other migrant groups coming to the UK, that new BNO arrivals seek out a local place of worship early on in their life in the UK, and often well before any formal engagement with other, statutory local providers such as the NHS. This means that the programme, by working through places of worship, was able to reach BNOs very early into their life in the UK and to help to positively shape their experiences.

It is also the case that, on a very practical level, many of the places of worship and community assets which Café Connect worked with are established in or near the areas in

which BNOs have chosen to live. The distribution of BNOs across the UK, as far as is known, does not appear to be randomly or evenly distributed and there appears to be clustering in areas with established Chinese or Hong Kong expat populations. This means that, for BNOs arriving in the UK and following this pattern of settlement, that the faith and community centres are in their local area and near where they live. It is an observational finding from visits to hubs and interviews with those working at them that most participants do not travel far to engage with the programme and so this local presence may be vital in securing initial engagement.

Here the practical factors around the value added by working with faith and community assets overlaps very clearly with the values and cultural behaviours of, and associated with, these spaces. The hubs are trusted by participants who attend the programme, in part because of the word-of-mouth referrals of other BNOs, but, especially with regard to faith centres and places of worship, because of the values associated with faith by the participants.

The hubs are seen as being inclusive and welcoming spaces for those who are of faith backgrounds and for those who are not, and they also serve the important purpose of bringing people who are different together. In a church setting for those of the Christian faith, Christianity, and not country of birth or time spent in the UK, becomes the superordinate identity. This means that people from BNO backgrounds were able to effectively meet and engage with people from other backgrounds, including those from “host communities”, on a level footing. This equality in status is vital to positive intergroup contact and is unlikely to be replicable on a large scale outside of faith settings.

The observational data collected in this evaluation, alongside interview and focus group data drawn from those running and participating in Café Connect strongly suggests that the value added by running the programme through existing community and faith assets that are local to participants was key in the success of the work.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This evaluation finds that the Café Connect programme has been successful in engaging with the emergent BNO population in the UK and that the support and learning provided to participants has been consistent with the aims of the work and aspiration of the funder. This engagement and work with BNOs has taken place across three different regions but has shown consistent attainment in working with people of different ages, needs and aspirations within the cohort.

The main outcomes of the Café Connect programme are that participants:

- feel more confident and able to speak English.
- have made more friends and contacts in the UK, both with other BNOs and with people from other backgrounds.
- have accessed local services and provisions for the first time and have learned more about the local history and cultures, as well as that of the wider UK.

These integration and cohesion related outcomes all appear to have sustainable and long-lasting impact as they have changed both the attitudes and the behaviours of the participants.

The success of the programme in running through established faith and community-based hubs all demonstrates that this model works well. By using trusted and local assets, the programme was able to engage quickly and effectively with an emergent population and to see results in encouraging social mixing between people who are different to one another. This brings a multitude of benefits to both BNOs and wider populations and is a model which could be adopted in other areas or in working with other migrant groups.

Based on these findings, this report recommends that:

1. FaithAction proactively look to secure funding to continue to work with BNO populations in the UK. There is a clear demand for, and appreciation, of this work and tangible benefits have been achieved for participants.
2. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) continue to work with and involve the BNO populations in cohesion and integration related programmes.
3. Where possible hubs are encouraged to continue working with participants and supporting ongoing engagements. This will enable the word-of-mouth referrals which currently take place to continue and ensure no drop off.
4. Further research take place into the use of existing faith and community-based assets in engagement programmes like Café Connect.