

Volunteers,
English language learners
and conversation clubs

English conversation practice toolkit





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Introduction

In a range of settings, volunteers play a valuable role in supporting adult English language learners. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) recognises this, but has also identified that the quality of volunteer-led support varies. There is a need for better guidance and resources to support the delivery of conversation clubs, and other informal volunteer-led activities, to enhance their benefit to participants' English language skills and social connections.

MHCLG commissioned Learning and Work Institute and Learning Unlimited to research and develop resources and guidance to support the delivery of conversation clubs and other volunteer-led language practice for adult English language learners. This toolkit is one part of the '*Volunteers, English language learners and conversation clubs*' set of resources.

Other resources in this set developed for volunteers are:

- **Conversation club resources:**
15 topic-based units for volunteers to use in English language conversation clubs.
- **Conversation club resources guidance:**
Supporting guidance on using the topic-based units.
- **A guide for volunteers:**
Guidance for people who are new to volunteering, supporting English language learners or running conversation clubs.
- **Supporting introductory videos.**

Additional resources developed for organisations and organisers are:

- **A guide for organisations**
- **Research report.**

This toolkit has been developed for volunteers who are planning to support English language learners. It includes a range of ideas, activities and resources which can be used, adapted or printed based on learning from successful conversation clubs across England. It is designed as a resource to dip into and can be used in conjunction with the Conversation club resources.

It is divided into three main parts:

- Useful activities and lists
- Speaking games and templates
- Conversation club record keeping

If you are new to volunteering, supporting English language learners or running conversation clubs, you may find it helpful to read '*Volunteers, English language learners and conversation clubs - A guide for volunteers*'. This guide also includes useful links and references for finding out more.
















All resources in the *Volunteers, English language learners and conversation clubs* set are free to download from: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/volunteers-english-language-learners-and-conversation-clubs>



Useful activities and lists

Part 1

This section contains icebreakers, warm up activities, games, ideas for topics and speaking prompts.

1a	Icebreakers	It is a good idea to use one or two icebreakers when people are meeting for the first time.
1b	Warm up activities	Warm up activities are good to use towards the beginning of a session to help people have fun and feel more relaxed, more comfortable with each other and more confident about joining in with conversations in the rest of the session.
1c	Speaking activities	Structured speaking activities can be helpful in building confidence for people who may not feel so confident about speaking freely in a group.
1d	Speaking prompts	This sheet includes prompts to help you encourage quiet people to speak, some people to speak less and sharing different perspectives on a topic.
1e	Topic cards	<p>It is usually best for topic suggestions to come directly from conversation club participants themselves to maximise interest, relevance and engagement. To help get the ball rolling, you can print off and use all or some of the topic cards. Participants can select or prioritise the topics they are most interested in talking about and/or add their own ideas on blank cards.</p> <p>You can find a lot more ideas and guidance for each card with an icon in <i>Volunteers, English language learners and conversation clubs - Conversation club resources</i>: https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/resource/volunteers-english-language-learners-and-conversation-clubs/</p> <div style="display: flex; flex-wrap: wrap; justify-content: space-around; text-align: center;"> <div style="width: 20%;"> Shopping</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Home</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Family and friends</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Culture and creativity</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Health</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Education and skills</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Nature and the environment</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Travel and transport</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Training and work</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Local history and landmarks</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Food and cooking</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Money</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Having fun!</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> What's new?</div> <div style="width: 20%;"> Technology</div> </div> <p>You can also jumble some or all of the topic cards, put them face down on the table, and participants take turns to pick one up and talk about the topic for the 'Just a minute' game (see 1c) .</p>
1f	Question words	Question words can be used in several ways to encourage participants to engage with each other, and find out more about each other's ideas, stories and contributions to a conversation.

1a Icebreakers

Alphabetical order	<p>This is a good activity to help people find out and remember each other's names. Ask participants to keep asking each other what their name is in order to stand in a line or circle in alphabetical order by first name. When finished, go round and everyone says their name. If necessary, participants can change places until all are in the correct order. If time allows, participants can ask each other a few questions and report back to the group, e.g. <i>This is She comes from She ...</i></p>
The name game	<p>This is another good activity to help people remember each other's names. Ask participants to stand in a circle, go round and say their name. Go round a second time, and everyone says each person's name aloud together. The third time use a ball. The person who starts, says their name and the name of the person they are going to throw the ball to, e.g. <i>Telis to Maria</i>. Maria then does the same as she throws it someone else, e.g. <i>Maria to Habiba</i>. Continue until everyone has thrown and caught the ball at least once.</p>
Find someone who ...	<p>Participants are given a simple card (see example). They need to ask each other questions and try to get a different name in each box. (Careful preparation is needed to try and make sure there is someone in the group who can say yes to each question).</p>

1b Warm up activities

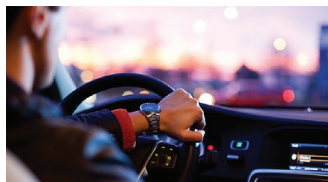
Alphabet lists	<p>Choose a common topic such as 'food' or 'countries'. As a group, participants try to get as far as they can through the alphabet making a list of foods that begin with each letter in alphabetical order, e.g. apple, bread, carrot, date, etc. It can help to have an alphabet chart handy.</p>
Charades	<p>Starting with the facilitator, participants take it in turns to mime something. It could be a hobby, a routine activity or a job, for example, or linked to the conversation topic for the session. The person who guesses the answer correctly does the next one (if they are happy to!), otherwise encourage someone else to, or do another one yourself.</p>
Count to 10	<p>The group tries to count from 1 to 10 in the correct order of numbers but with only one person at a time randomly calling out the next number. If two or more people call the next number at the same time, the group has to start again at 1. Repeat until you get to 10!</p>
Kim's game	<p>Put a selection of items on a table or tray. Adjust the number of items according to the level of the group. Everyone can call out the name of each item as it is placed down. Cover everything with a cloth. In pairs or small groups, participants try to remember every item. To help, you can tell them the total number of items then they can either count them off or, if they have literacy skills, make a list.</p>
Word association	<p>Go round the group. Each participant says a different word connected to the previous word, e.g. banana, yellow, sun, flower, garden, park You can make a note of any new words that come up and encourage participants to use their languages to help each other understand them, or use an app, if needed, after the game.</p>

Find someone who...

can knit



can drive



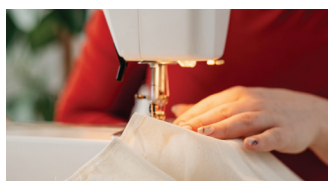
can speak three or more languages



can ride a bicycle



can make clothes



can play a musical instrument



Find someone who...

can knit



can drive



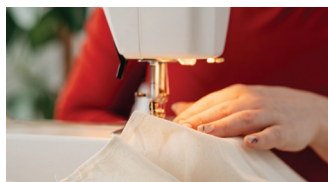
can speak three or more languages



can ride a bicycle



can make clothes






can play a musical instrument



Images 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 Unsplash.com

1c Speaking activities

Chain story	Elicit the first line of a story from the group, e.g. <i>One day a woman called ... went to ...</i> . Participants then take turns to add a new line to the story.
I went to the market ...	Participants take it in turns to add a shopping item and remember all the previous ones, e.g. <i>1. I went to the market and I bought a melon. 2. I went to the market and I bought a melon and some aubergines. 3. I went to the market and I bought a melon, some aubergines and etc.</i>
6 colours game	Choose 6 colours and 6 topics e.g. <i>flower, place, fruit</i> , etc. Write each topic on separate coloured cards or on a board or flip chart sheet. Gather and give out items in the 6 colours e.g. sweets, counters or pencils, enough for every participant to have one item. Reveal the topics for each colour and explain everyone has to say their favourite thing depending on the colour they have, e.g. red = favourite flower; yellow = place; pink = fruit; green = music; purple = TV programme; orange = food/dish.
Just a minute	Put a jumble of topic words or images face down on a table. Participants, in small groups or pairs, take turns to pick one up and talk about that topic for a minute (or less!).
Odd one out	Use a jumble of words or images. In pairs or small groups, participants decide which is the odd one out and say why.
Pelmanism (matching pairs)	<p>Print off or make pairs of cards based on words that participants want to practise. These can be (A) word + image or (B) image + image. In small groups, participants can shuffle 5 – 10 pairs (depending on their level of English), and turn them face down on the table (not touching). In turn, they turn two cards over (keeping them in exactly the same position on the table) and say the word aloud. If the cards match, they can take them. If not, they turn them back over in exactly the same place. Continue until all the cards have been matched. The winner is the person with the most pairs.</p> <p>(A)  Shoe (B)  </p> <p>image + word image + image</p> <p>N.B. If participants are new to reading in English, only use images.</p>
Show and tell	Invite participants to bring something in to talk about for a minute – either in pairs, small groups or as a whole group). It could be an object, a picture or a photo on their phone. Encourage the other participants to ask questions afterwards to find out more.
Show me a picture	Divide the group into pairs or small groups. Participants take it in turns to choose a picture from a picture pack or, if comfortable, an image on their phone. The partner or rest of the group then ask questions to find out as much as they can about the picture or why the person chose it. If time allows, participants can report back to the wider group what they found out about each other.
Something in common	Divide participants into pairs and explain that they have a few minutes to ask each other quick fire questions to see how many things they can find in common, e.g. number of brothers and sisters, where they live, where they come from, languages they speak, hobbies, likes, dislikes, phobias!
Two truths, one lie	Each person says three things about themselves: two must be true and one a lie. The rest of the group have to guess which one is the lie. Once the lie is discovered, participants can be encouraged to ask follow-up questions to learn more about the true statements.

1d Speaking prompts

Encouraging quiet people to speak:

- And you (name)?
- Do you?
- What do think about ...?
- Have you got a ...?
- Do you like ...?
- Have you ever ...?
- Can you tell us about ...?

Encouraging some people to speak less:

- Thank you (name). Let's find out what (name) thinks about
- Let's hear from anyone who hasn't spoken yet.
- Let's try using a 'talking stick' for a while. We can all say one thing about ... and then pass the stick on.

Different perspectives on a topic:

- Can you think of a different example ...?
- Do you personally have any experience of ...?
- What about your family and friends? Do they ...?
- What's ... like in your area?
- Can you describe ... in your area?
- What about ... and culture? Is there any music, writing, art and crafts you associate with ...?
- What about ... and the environment?
- Do you think ... is a political issue? Why? Why not?

Keeping the conversation going:

- What do you think?
- Have you got any experience of ... ?
- How does this compare to other places you know?
- In your experience, what's good about this?
- In your experience, what's bad about this?

Celebrities

Clothes

Cooking



Creativity



Culture



Dentists

Doctors

Education



English

Environment



Family



Festivals

Food



Friends



The future

Having fun!



Health



Hobbies

Home



Homelessness

Jobs

Local area

Local history



Landmarks



Money



Nature



News



Our languages

Politics

Safety

Shopping



Society

Special occasions

Special places

Technology



Training



Transport



Travel



Volunteering

Well-being

Work



Who?

Where?

When?

Why?

What?

How?

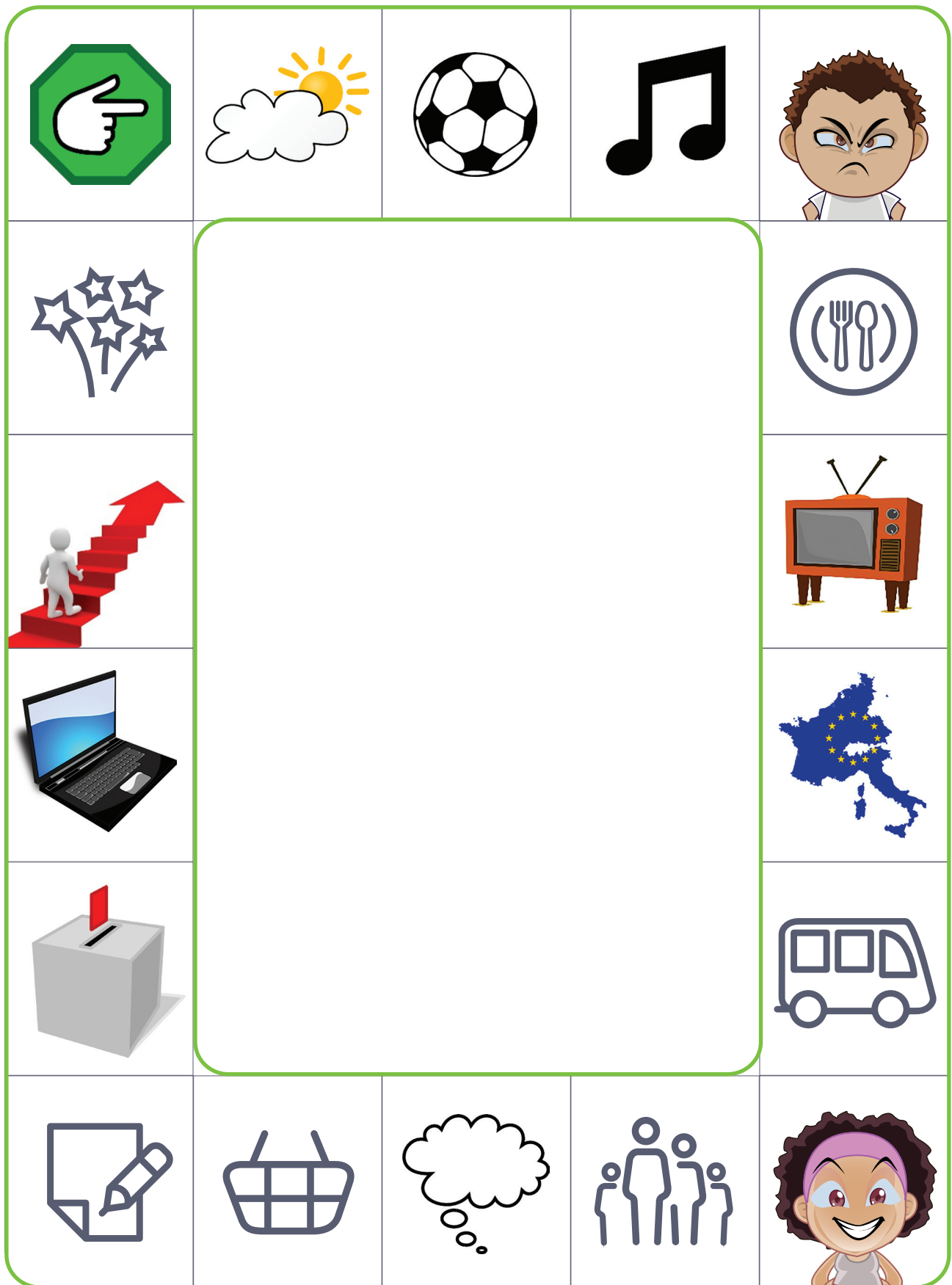
Activity templates

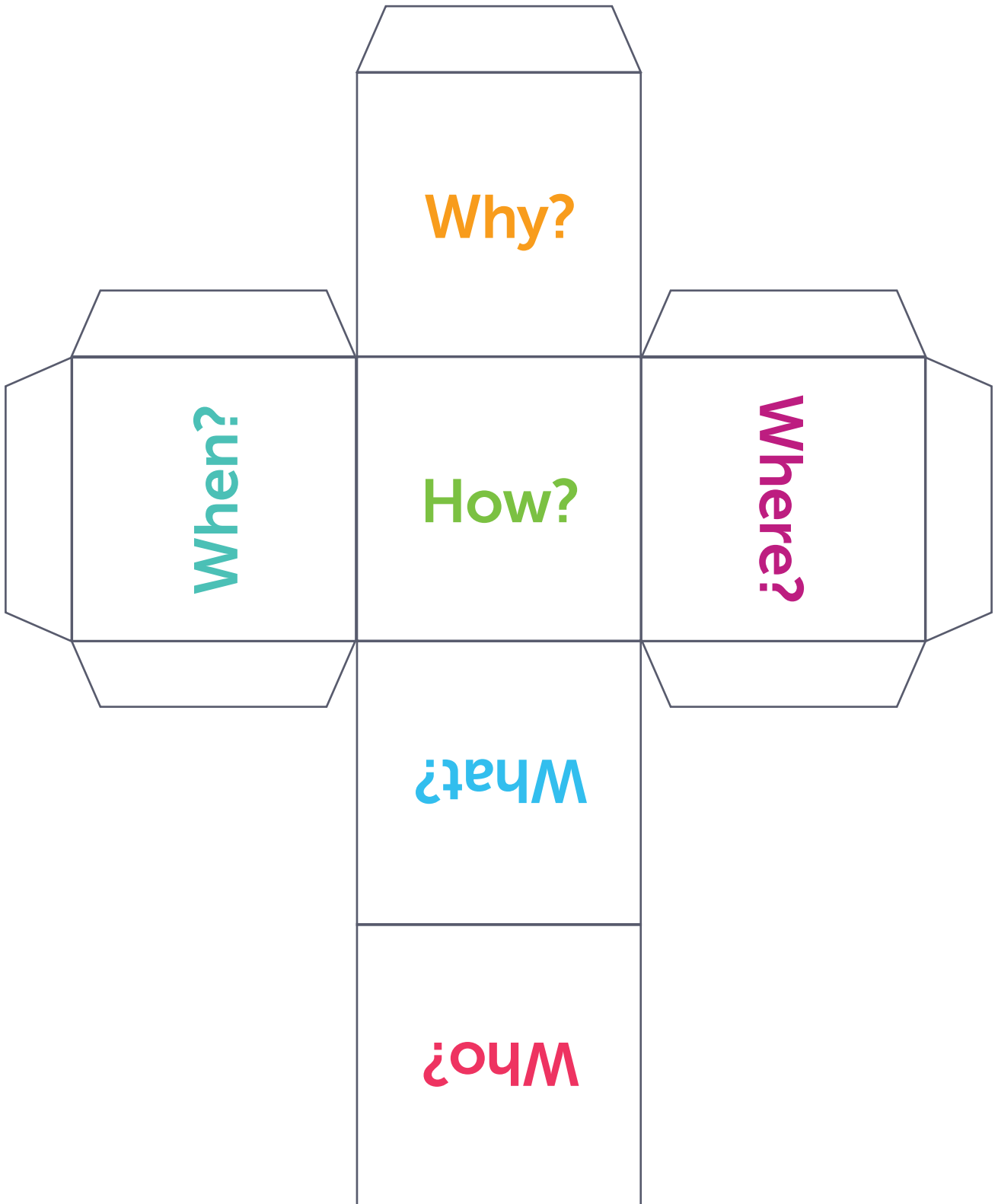
Part 2

It's good to vary your resources and activities to help maintain interest in your conversation club. This section contains some different templates which you can use or adapt:

2a	Board game	You and the participants can make very simple board games. Use a range of images which reflect topics of interest to the group. Players take turns to throw a dice, move their counter and briefly speak about the topic of the square they land on.
2b	Question cube	Cut out, fold and stick sides together. Participants take it in turns to roll the cube and ask each other a question.
2c	Matching pairs/ pelmanism	<p>Use the pairs of cards (or create your own) for important words that participants would like to revise or practise, either matching the same images or matching an image + word (see 1c for instructions on how to play).</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>(A)</p>  <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 10px; display: inline-block;">Shoe</div> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>(B)</p>  </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 5px;"> image + word image + image </div>
2d	Personal perspectives	<p>It can be interesting and fun to explore topics from different perspectives. See <i>Volunteers, English language learners and conversation clubs - Conversation club resources</i> https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/volunteers-english-language-learners-and-conversation-clubs for mind maps for 15 different topics with ideas for approaching each topic from a range of perspectives.</p>
2e	Encouraging participation	<p>It can be helpful to stick speech bubbles with useful prompts around the room, especially key words or phrases that participants need help remembering and practising.</p> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;">  </div>
2f	Word flower or pizza	<p>Participants choose a topic and write this inside a circle on a sheet of paper. They can either draw petals (or pizza slices) or print or cut out the shapes on coloured paper. Participants write important words that they associate with the topic on each petal and stick them around the flower's centre or into a pizza shape.</p> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;">  </div> <p>As shapes are added, participants can discuss each person's contribution in more detail. This process helps to identify priority areas for further discussion. Remember to display the flowers/pizzas!</p>
2g	Culture wheel	<p>You can use the culture wheel as the basis for small group conversations on each heading at the conversation club. Participants can draw or write in the spaces at home.</p> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;">  </div>
2h	Conversation spinner	<p>This is another way to get some conversations going in a fun way. Participants can make a spinner with different images, key words, topics or questions in each segment that are of interest to them. They can spin a pencil on top of the circle and then ask someone a question or make a statement on the topic the pencil is pointing to.</p> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;">  </div>

2a Board game





2c Matching pairs - Things I need (image pairs)













2c Matching pairs - Things I need (words to match to images)

shoes

water

toilet

shower

towel

clothes

**something
to eat**

nappies

medicine

inhaler

soap

toothbrush

phone

computer

wifi

doctor

dentist

**someone
to talk to**

Personal

Social

Cultural

Political

Environmental

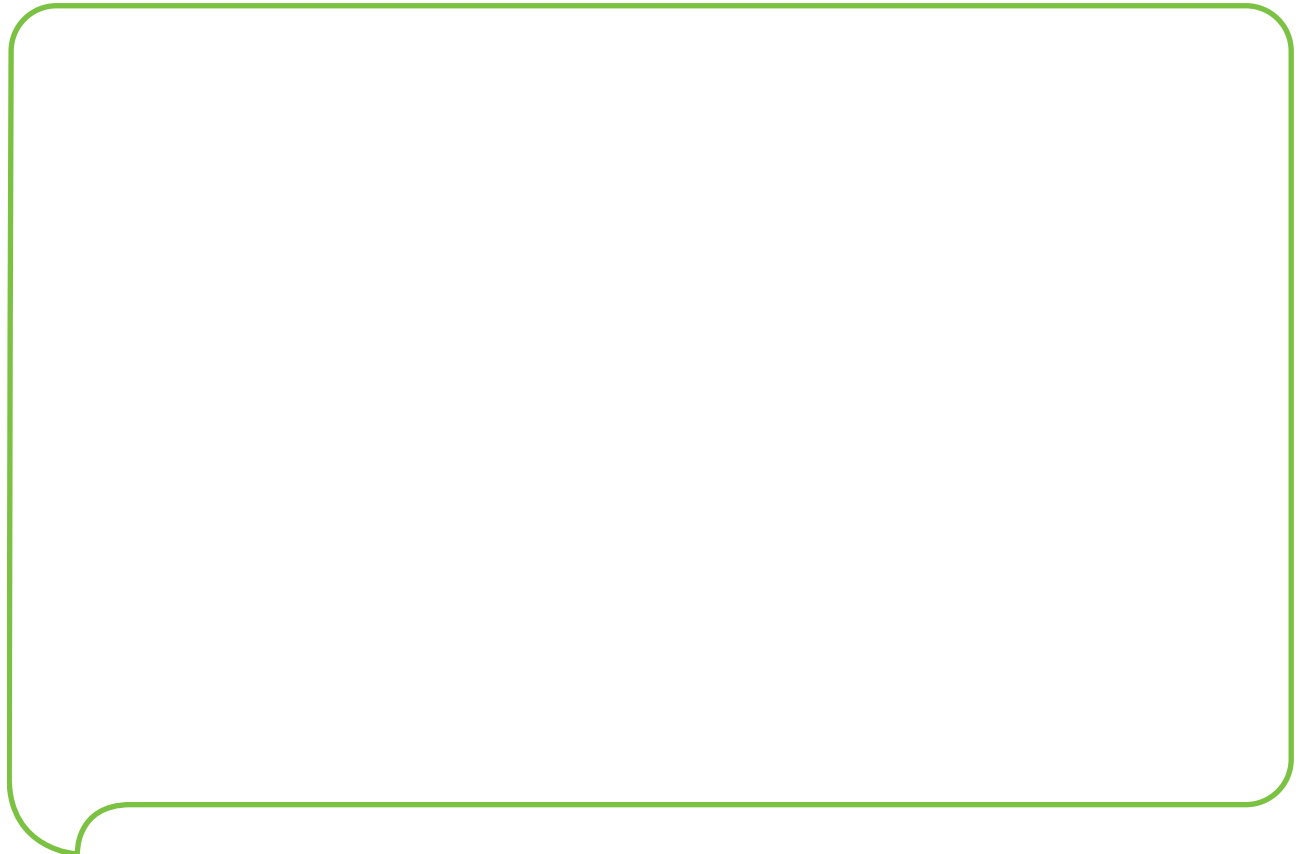
What do you think ...?

Have you got any experience of ...?

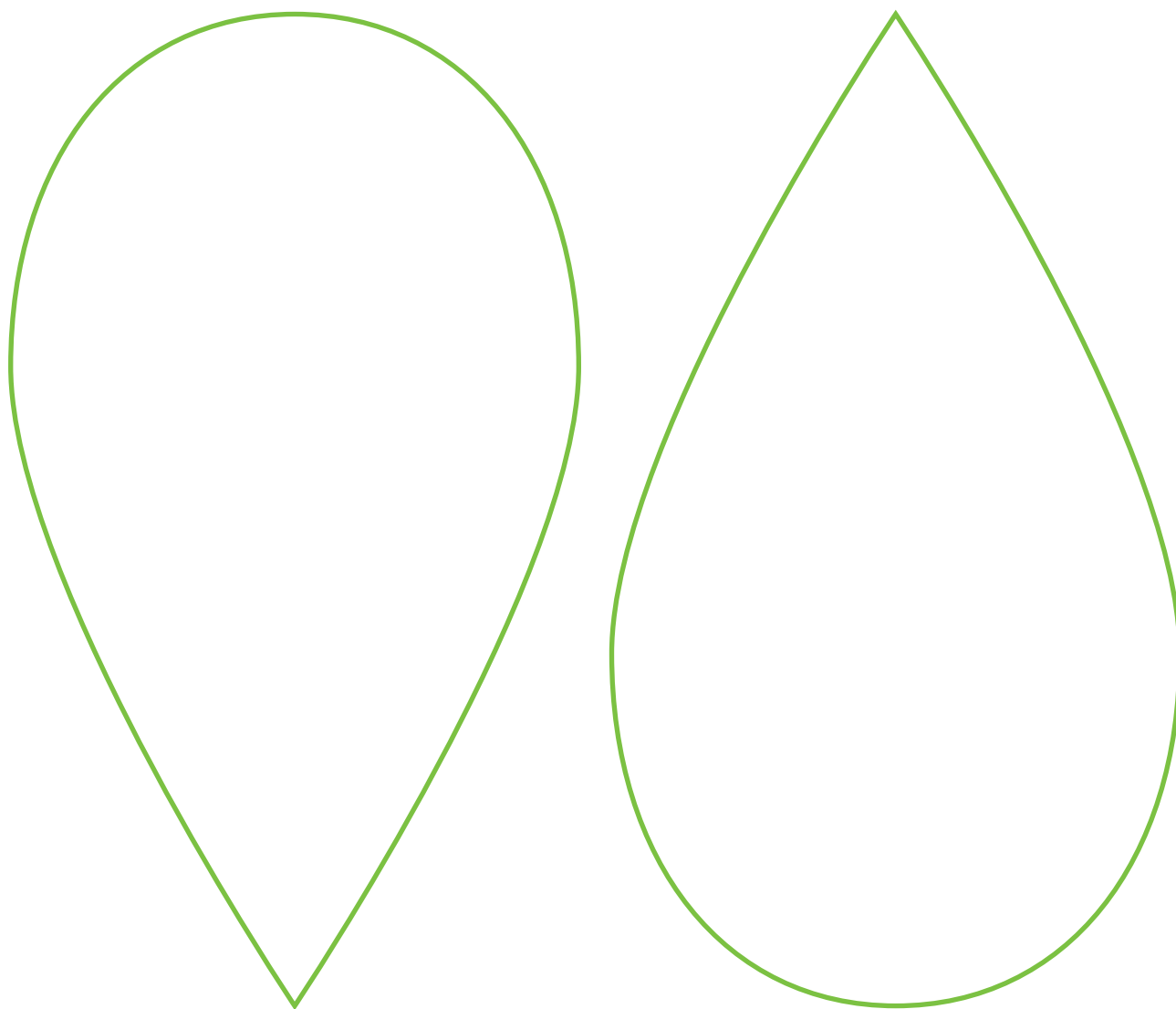
**In your
experience,
what's bad
about this?**

**In your
experience,
what's good
about this?**

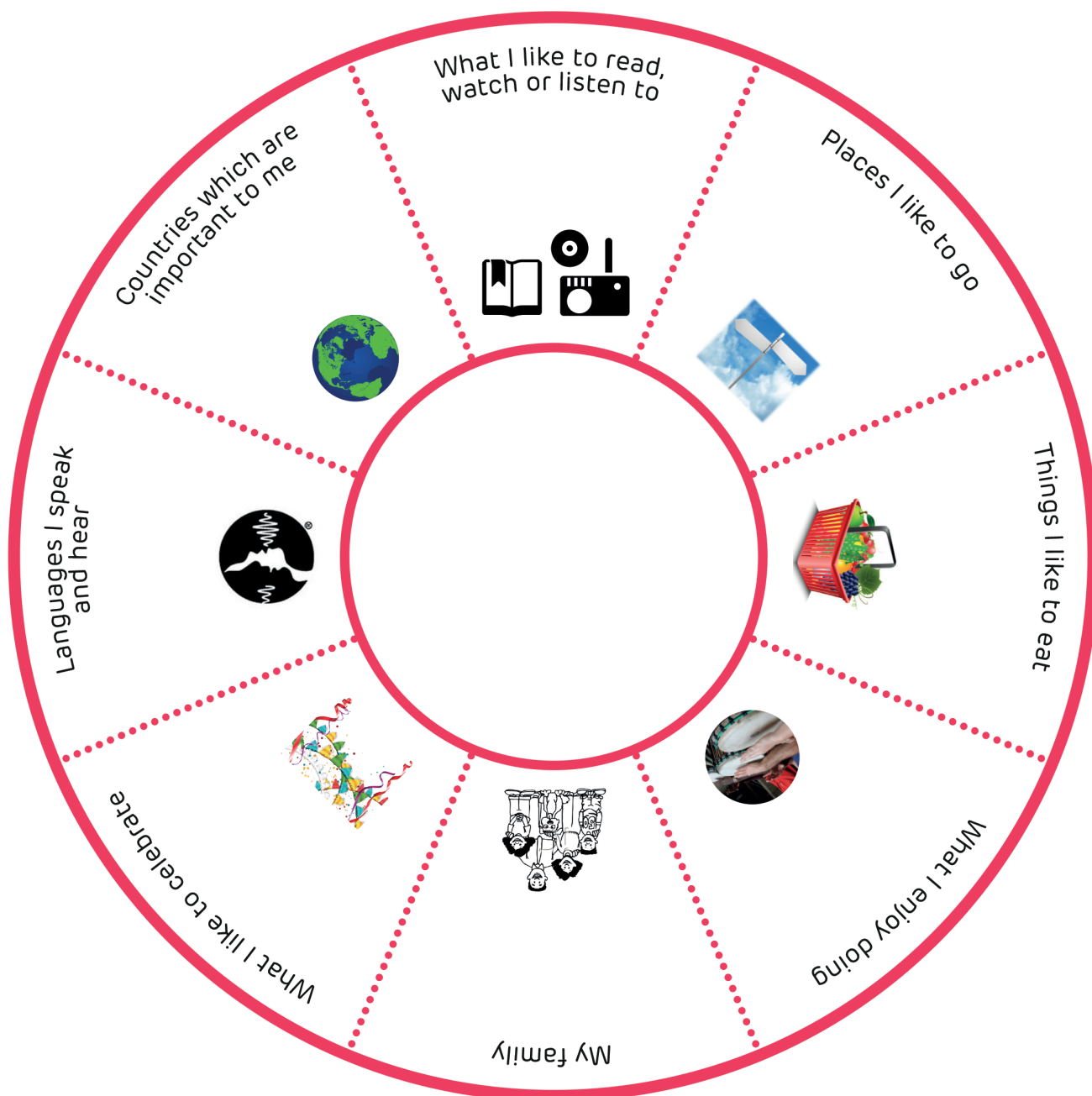
How does this compare to other places you know?



2f Word flower

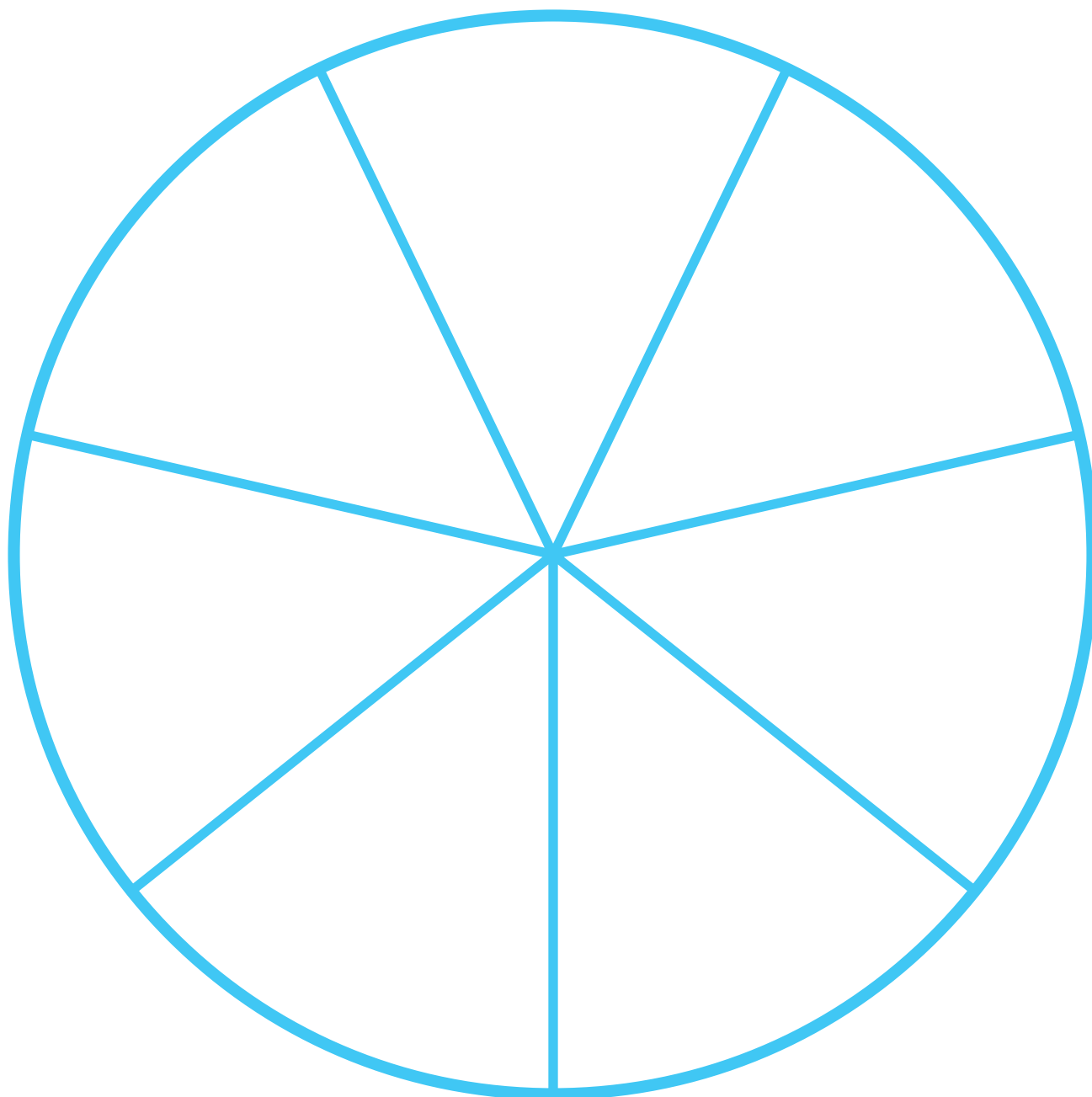


2g Culture wheel



Cultural wheel based on a Campaign for Learning activity (Family Skills project toolkit)

2h Conversation spinner



Conversation club record keeping

Part 3

3a Conversation Club plan

Date/time/duration	
Volunteers	
Focus/theme/topic	
Anything to follow up from last session?	
Stages, notes and resources	
Welcome/sign-in	
Opening chat/circle time Introductions, chatting, anything to follow up from previous session?	
Getting started	
Conversation 1	
Conversation 2	
Closing chat/circle time Summarise and feedback. Ideas for next session	
Reflections	
Anything to follow up for next time?	

Stages, notes and resources

Welcome/sign-in

Opening chat/circle time

Introductions, chatting, anything to follow up from previous session?

Getting started

Conversation 1

Conversation 2

Closing chat/circle time

Summarise and feedback. Ideas for next session

Reflections

Anything to follow up for next time?

3b Signing in sheets

Venue

Date

Time

Name	Last name	Signature




3c Conversation club feedback sheet

Volunteer(s)

Venue

Your name
(optional)

Tick  your answer

	 Agree	 Not sure	 Disagree
My speaking and listening in English are improving.			
I feel more confident.			
I like the topics we talk about.			
I learn new things.			
The activities are good.			
The volunteer(s) help(s) me a lot.			
The space is nice.			
People are friendly.			

What do you like best?

What would make the conversation club better?

Is there anything else to tell us?

You can use the back of this sheet to add more!
Thank you for your feedback!

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For any queries please contact
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Published June 2020

 **LEARNING AND
WORK INSTITUTE**

 **Learning
Unlimited**

Commissioned by



**Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government**

Created by Giant Arc Design
www.giantarc.co.uk