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## Students transform station through community gardening project



Harrow College students have helped to brighten up Northwood Hills Underground Station as part of an ongoing community project.

Students from the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Department planted flowers in pots at the station to create a brighter, greener and more welcoming environment for local residents and commuters.

Introduced by former HRUC staff member Ameeta Jethwa, the project not only provides gardening experience for the students, but also creates opportunities for them to practise English in real-life situations, develop employability skills, improve wellbeing, and build meaningful connections with others.

As many of the learners are new to the UK, the project has helped them to develop a sense of belonging in their local community.

Several local schools have also been involved with the project, including Pinner Wood School and Harlyn Primary School.

Therese Lorphevre, Head of School for ESOL, English and Maths, said: "For ESOL refugees, gardening provides a therapeutic space that fosters belonging and supports recovery from the trauma of displacement."

Andra Metsaluik, ESOL Course Leader, said: "One of the most rewarding aspects of this project is seeing students build friendships and a true sense of belonging within the college community. These experiences show how learning extends far beyond the classroom, supporting language development, teamwork, confidence, mental wellbeing, and employability skills, while also making a meaningful contribution to the local community.

"It has been inspiring to witness the enthusiasm, commitment, and pride students have shown, and it is a powerful reminder of how vital these kinds of projects are in nurturing both skills and wellbeing, as well as a sense of purpose and connection."

The station project forms part of Harrow College's wider ESOL sustainability programme, which includes the development of raised beds at the college. Students prepared the growing areas, filled beds with compost, sowed seeds, and planted a variety of vegetables, herbs, flowers, and berry plants.

They will continue to maintain the gardens throughout the summer and harvest the produce. Through this hands-on learning experiences, students develop a deeper understanding of how small actions can have a positive impact on the community and the environment.

Mahnaz Bazrafkan, ESOL Course Team Leader and Young Foundation Course Leader, said: "The students have taken real ownership of the project. From preparing the beds to planting and maintaining the gardens, they have worked incredibly hard and supported one another throughout. It has been wonderful to see their confidence grow as they create something that benefits both the college and the wider community."

Students taking part in the initiative have enjoyed the opportunity to make friends, improve their English, spend time outdoors, and contribute to a project that will be enjoyed by others.

One student said: "When I came to college, I was shy. This project helped me feel more confident and part of the college."

Another said: "I feel proud when I see the plants growing. It is nice to create something beautiful."

**Note to editors:** Following a merger in 2023, HRUC (Harrow, Richmond and Uxbridge Colleges) has rapidly evolved into a thriving educational hub with three colleges and a strong apprenticeship provision.

The diverse and aspiring college group now serves nearly 15,000 learners across west and south London, offering a range of courses, including A-Levels vocational programmes, T-Levels, and apprenticeships. The College group also proudly supports over 850 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), providing tailored programmes and internships to help them thrive.

