



The role of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in helping to strengthen community cohesion

Open Agenda Event at St. George's House, Windsor Castle
12th –13th June 2008

Report

The purpose of this event was to build on responses to the recent consultation "**Focusing ESOL on Community Cohesion**" to consolidate thinking and agree how we can begin to put the proposals put forward into practice.

As with all Open Agenda reports, this report aims to reflect from an **independent** standpoint the main ideas and views put forward during the event, with the understanding that not everybody involved in the discussions may have endorsed *all* of the ideas included. Nor should they be viewed as a policy statement on behalf of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills or anyone else! Phrases that are italicised are direct quotes from the event, and a list of participants is included at the end of the report.

Context and focus

We recognised that it was important to set the focus of our discussions, the role of ESOL in helping to strengthen community cohesion, within the wider spectrum of measures in place or being developed. Our focus within this wider spectrum was specifically on those who have settled in England but *"are least likely to actively seek out ESOL provision"*. Given the high demand for classes, it is recognised that these people are most likely to lose out, and remain outside of mainstream society because of a lack of language skills.

Alongside and connected to this strand of the strategy, measures are or will be in place to ensure that entrants to the country and those in work also have the language competence needed for integration.

We acknowledged that there is bound to be a degree of overlap between measures given that our overall objective is to ensure that all speakers of other languages living and working here have an agreed level of language competence.

Objectives and measuring success

There was a strong view that the objectives of ESOL in strengthening community cohesion should be expressed in a way that *"directly relates to what individuals can achieve through the acquisition of language competence"*. For example, an objective would be having the language skills to use public services rather than the wider objective of, say, people from ethnic communities feeling that they have the same life chances as others in a local area.

We recognised that ESOL is just one element in approaches that strengthen community cohesion: *"it is an enabler"*. It follows, therefore, that the success of ESOL provision in this context should be measured by whether learners *"have the language skills to achieve a particular goal, not the achievement of the goal itself"*. In order to evaluate the success of the approach overall, other measures which help to indicate improved cohesion will need to sit along side the ESOL measure.

With this in mind, it was widely agreed that the effectiveness ESOL provision should continue to be measured through qualification achievement. Naturally, the qualifications individuals work towards achieving need to reflect *"both their starting point and a stepping stone towards achieving their personal goals"*, as well as removing barriers to integration.

Putting the policy developed through the consultation into practice

The ESOL consultation 'Focusing ESOL on Community Cohesion' was launched on 4th January and ran for 12 weeks. On behalf of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), The Central Office of Information (COI) carried out the consultation and drew up a report of the findings.

This event drew extensively on the ideas, recommendations and insights put forward by participants in the consultation, both through responding to the consultation document and through stakeholder events held by COI and the National Institute for Adult & Continuing Education (NIACE).

Our brief for the event was to take the ideas and issues raised during the consultation and design a plan to put them into practice in readiness for a phased roll out of this policy strand to begin in April next year.

On pages 3 – 4 of this report is a time plan detailing the actions it is felt need to take place from July 2008 to March 2009 to prepare for the phased roll out.

The report then continues with an outline description of the actions and the thinking behind them, together with a brief checklist of issues that need to be tackled in the coming weeks, under the broad headings:

- needs analysis and identifying the mix and balance of provision and services (pages 5 – 6);
- business planning, commissioning and funding (pages 6 – 7);
- roles and responsibilities, (pages 7 – 9);
- the wider spectrum and progression (pages 9 – 10), and
- communication (pages 10 – 11).

On behalf of DIUS and the COI we would like to thank all who participated in this event, and the wider consultation, for your ideas and insights. They are of immense value in moving this important strand of policy into practice.

Kryisia & Jo Hudek

Open Agenda

26th June 2008

PROPOSED ACTIONS AND TIMELINE FOR PHASED IMPLEMENTATION OF ESOL COMMUNITY COHESION POLICY STRAND

TIMELINE	NEEDS ANALYSIS & IDENTIFYING MIX & BALANCE OF PROVISION & SERVICES	BUSINESS PLANNING, COMMISSIONING & FUNDING	COMMUNICATION
July 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Articulation of the objectives of ESOL in helping to strengthen community cohesion ▪ Initial revision of the 'matrix' completed (prototype1) ▪ Identification of partners and local areas to trial the revised matrix 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Government Departments identify funds that will be allocated directly to this policy strand, and funds that should be aligned to inform business planning processes at local and regional level ▪ LSC provides 'position' analysis at local and regional levels ▪ Business planning template provided to Local Authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) ▪ Strategic DIUS overview developed indicating budget allocation ▪ LSPs agree membership of group that will take responsibility for this policy strand (under the LSP's umbrella). Members tasked with carrying out needs analysis to identify priority groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key messages re: priorities and approach communicated to Local Authorities (clarifying their role and the desired outcomes from funding) and how funding will be allocated to support the planned approach for ESOL in strengthening community cohesion ▪ Statement from DIUS outlining proposed approach with regard to the role of ESOL in helping to strengthen community cohesion shared at the NATECLA conference on 11 – 13 July 2008
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of revised matrix by the national ESOL forum (prototype 2) ▪ Late August: briefing for those who will be involved in the trial 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Launch of review of good practice and resources with regard to the 'matrix approach' and types of provision effective in strengthening community cohesion. 1st cycle to be completed and disseminated by March 2009 ▪ Clarify how funding may be allocated to encourage stronger employer engagement, and how this strand of ESOL policy dovetails with strengthening community cohesion

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TIMELINE	NEEDS ANALYSIS & IDENTIFYING MIX & BALANCE OF PROVISION & SERVICES	BUSINESS PLANNING, COMMISSIONING & FUNDING	COMMUNICATION
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Begin trials of the 'matrix' in local areas ▪ Test out with focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LSP ESOL Planning Groups identify priority groups and types and quantity of provision needed and commence drawing up business plan ▪ Feed in the LSC's analysis to LSP discussions. Ensure this strand of policy is situated as part of Local Area Agreements and local Economic Development and Community Cohesion strategies (not in a separate silo). ▪ Encourage 'phase 1' local areas to use 'the matrix' as a planning tool ▪ With the assistance of GOs, RDAs and LSC, ESOL Planning Groups explore how they can direct or influence the spend of Working Neighbourhood Funds and other funding pots to align and support ESOL to strengthen community cohesion ▪ Business planning processes commences for all local partners involved in phase 1 of implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consultation of providers (and their employees) re: the planned approach to ESOL provision to strengthen community cohesion and for those in work. 1st cycle to be completed and disseminated by January 2009
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of focus group feedback 		
November		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LSC Grant letter and Pre-Budget Statement affirms local approach ▪ LSC National Statement of Priorities affirms approach ▪ LSC procurement process agreed and communicated 	
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collate and analyse results of trials and evaluate with focus group feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LSC Regional Commissioning Plans published ▪ Local Authority Business Plans, target setting and budgets agreed 	
January 2009		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commence business planning of all partners for 2nd phase of roll out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Detailed discussions with providers regarding their role, meeting demand and planning services
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prototype 3 of the matrix developed (drawing on findings of trials and focus groups) and launch planned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contracts in place for all providers involved in the 1st phase roll out 	

Needs analysis and identifying the mix and balance of provision and services

From the outset, it will be important to differentiate between demand for ESOL provision and those who have greatest need. The two are not the same and, because of the increased demand for ESOL, *"those with a real need for provision are often not even in the queue"*.

Evidence of need should be gathered at local level. There was strong support that a group *"under the umbrella of a Local Strategic Partnership"* and led by the Local Authority¹ should take responsibility for this task.

While there was some confidence that Local Authorities already gather much of the evidence that will be required to determine priorities, it was also recognised that, in the first year at least, they will need some leeway to 'fine tune' the data that they collect and ensure that it is fully fit for purpose. It was argued that this will mean that for the first phase of the roll out planned for the spring next year, the evidence submitted *"should be accepted as best endeavour"*. In subsequent years, the consensus was that the evidence should be *"relevant, robust and stand up to close scrutiny"*.

What we felt must be avoided is reliance on anecdotal examples: what is required is *"intelligence that is credible and can be supported by data collected locally"*.

The intelligence drawn from this data needs to provide information about:

- groups experiencing barriers to integration due to lack of English language competence;
- the personal goals of members of these groups;
- broad characteristics of members of groups, including cultural issues.

Once this intelligence has been gathered, the idea would be that the group sitting under the umbrella of the Local Strategic Partnership would cross reference it with information gathered for Local and Multi Area Agreements, and Community Cohesion and Economic Development strategies to prioritise groups. These groups would be amongst those that *"Agencies and providers have found hardest to reach"*.

The next stage in the process would be to design the mix and balance of provision and services to meet the needs of the groups prioritised. For this we drew on a matrix approach that is being used to develop employability pathways in the London Region². There was widely shared agreement that the matrix could be adapted to shape ESOL provision and services that will help to remove barriers to integration.

An important point was raised about the importance of exploring how integration can be achieved through the learning process by teaching speakers of English and speakers of other languages together. An example given was of a group of English speakers and those with poor language skills learning about cooking techniques together. The speakers of other languages gained an ESOL qualification, and all learners gained a food hygiene qualification. Moreover, *"it brought together people who lived in the same neighbourhood but didn't mix"*.

¹ There needs to be some flexibility to ensure that geographical areas are meaningful for this purpose. Some Local Authority areas are extensive in size, and may benefit from being divided to determine local need. Other Local Authority areas, particular metropolitan ones, can be very small geographically, and may provided more meaningful needs analysis if clustered together. Both Local and Multi Area Agreements could be very helpful in determining optimum size of area and in informing analysis and identifying priority groups.

² The matrix has been developed by JHConsulting. For further information visit the JHConsulting website at www.jhconsulting.org.uk

ISSUES TO BE TACKLED OVER THE COMING WEEKS

- *Identify and advise Local Authorities of sources of data and intelligence that will be viewed as credible evidence for prioritising groups and planning. Agree a 'proxy' evidence base for use in Year 1 for phased introduction.*
- *Identify and consider how best to commission a range of support for Local Authorities that will struggle to implement this policy strand.*
- *Identify methods and resources that will stimulate demand for ESOL provision from priority groups.*
- *Agree methodology to ensure that plans for ESOL provision to strengthen community cohesion take into account and link with:*
 - *Department for Work & Pensions plans for integrating employment and skills;*
 - *Joint commissioning trials between Jobcentre Plus and the Learning & Skills Council in selected areas;*
 - *The establishment of employment and skills continuum in specific areas by not viewing people without work and people in work as two separate groups;*
 - *Local Economic Development and Community Cohesion plans, Local and Multi-Area Agreements.*
- *Work through how the different strands of ESOL provision (Path to Citizenship, ESOL for work) sit alongside and connect with each other at a local level, and identify and iron out any adverse impact that one strand may have on another.*

Business Planning, Commissioning & Funding

Effective business planning and funding will require clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountability at national, regional and local levels. *"The process will also require openness and trust"* to ensure that funding is responsive to need, and avoid the system becoming overly bureaucratic.

There was strong support for the following approach.

First, DIUS with other Government Departments should agree *"what the national cake consists of, how it is put together"*, and what targets are attached to the funding. Following this there should be a transparent process for allocating the funds. The favoured approach was for Local Strategic Partnerships (led by Local Authorities) to prioritise need and estimated volumes, within agreed terms of reference.

The Learning & Skills Council, and later the Skills Funding Agency, would *"allocate indicative funds, first by region and then by local area"*, with flexibility for adjustment where needed. These indicative funds would be set for a 3 year cycle, *"ideally in line with the Comprehensive Spending Review"*. At both regional and local levels, account would be taken of other sources of funding that can be aligned with, or added to, regional and local pots. This would be the *"first step towards joint commissioning"*, thereby cutting down on the workload of providers in applying for funding from different pots held by different Agencies.

Also at regional level, Regional Development Agencies and Government Offices could play a key role in helping Local Authorities identify priority groups (highlighted through Multi and Local Area Agreements and Regional Economic Strategy and Implementation Plans), and identify other funding streams that they are responsible for that can be aligned to complement or flow directly into the ESOL for strengthening cohesion pot.

Local Authorities would draw down funding from the Learning & Skills Council by providing *"evidence of need and volumes of priority groups"*, together with a plan of the mix of provision and services that they propose to use to meet need. The indicative budget allocated to a local area would be reviewed in the light of the evidence presented.

There was a view that Local Authorities should be *"rewarded for performance that exceeds expectations"*. This was met with a mixed response. While some supported the idea, others felt that it would not be an effective strategy for raising the performance of Local Authorities that were doing less well.

At local level the Local Authorities, with the support of their Local Strategic Partnerships, would publish a commissioning plan of the provision and services that they wish to purchase. Wherever possible this commissioning plan would draw on other sources of funding and develop into a joint or multi-commissioning document. The type of provision and services required will have been identified through 'the matrix' planning tool.

Some favoured the idea of *"price incentives to motivate providers"* to target priority groups. Providers could be paid a higher rate for delivering ESOL to a member of a priority group than the rate for other ESOL learners. On balance, to minimise bureaucracy, we supported the idea of *"a standard national funding rate per learner"* for ESOL for community cohesion, rather than local variations. That said it was felt that services not included in the existing rate, such as outreach, should be included in a funding formula.

This does not mean that organisations delivering provision should *"automatically take on the role of outreach"*. Often, voluntary and community sector organisations that are closest to the individuals in priority groups will be most effective in carrying out this role. These organisations should be encouraged and funded to work in partnership with accredited providers.

ISSUES TO BE TACKLED OVER THE COMING WEEKS

- *Draft a 'standard' commissioning plan that can be customised by Local Authorities with their Local Strategic Partnerships to articulate the objectives of ESOL for Community Cohesion and the type of provision and services providers will invited to deliver*
- *Agree how tight/flexible the contracts for ESOL for strengthening community cohesion should be.*
- *Explore further if Skill Accounts should be introduced to learners from priority groups as a way of encouraging progression and tracking progress.*

Roles and Responsibilities

As has already been mentioned, it is strongly recommended that the approach to planning and delivery of this strand of ESOL should be bottom up. Outlined below are the roles and responsibilities it was felt should be taken on to create a business planning and delivery infrastructure that is responsive to needs prioritised by local areas.

Organisation

Roles and Responsibilities

Voluntary and Community Sector Groups

Provide Local Authorities with profiles and volumes of priority groups for whom a lack of language skills creates a barrier to integration. Ensure that the personal goals of members of the groups, cultural sensitivities, and most effective approaches to acquiring language competence for integration are communicated to Local Authorities

Organisation	Roles and Responsibilities
Local Authorities	<p>Consult with voluntary and community sector groups and providers closest to the priority groups to gain a comprehensive picture of ESOL groups, why they should be prioritised, their personal goals and any cultural issues that will shape how ESOL provision should be delivered</p> <p>Link ESOL to strengthen community cohesion plans with local Economic Development and Cohesion strategies, Local and Multi Area Agreements</p> <p>Recommend the geographical areas ESOL to strengthen community cohesion plans should be based upon. If larger than Local Authority boundaries, work with adjoining Authorities to carry out needs analysis and prioritise groups</p> <p>Advise Local Strategic Partnerships and the local and regional arms of the Learning & Skills Council on intelligence and data that can be gathered (in year 1 and subsequent years) as evidence to support prioritisation of specific groups</p>
Local Strategic Partnerships	<p>Agree composition and terms of reference of 'needs analysis and priority recommendation group for ESOL for community cohesion' that will sit under the umbrella of the Local Strategic Partnership</p> <p>Ensure the group formed has the resources and support to work to an agreed business planning timetable</p> <p>Under the umbrella of the Local Strategic Partnership, produce a local commissioning plan to be approved by the Learning & Skills Council, including additional funding streams where desirable (to join up support and minimise bureaucracy for providers). Publish the commissioning plan, inviting providers and voluntary and community organisations to deliver the provision and services identified in the plan.</p>
Learning & Skills Council	<p>Consult with Regional Development Agencies and Government Offices regarding cross cutting plans such as the Regional Economic Strategy, Multi and Local Area Agreements, and those funding pots that need to be aligned, such as Migrant Funding.</p> <p>Agree regional and local indicative allocation of funds drawing on available data and intelligence of priority groups and volumes</p> <p>Approve local commissioning plans, and consider adjustment of funds in the light of evidence of local priority groups, their needs for integration and the provision and services planned to meet those needs.</p> <p>Audit funds through outcome qualifications and, perhaps, using Skill Accounts</p>
Regional Development Agencies	<p>Identify where local ESOL for Community Cohesion plans could be strengthened through other regional funding pots</p> <p>Ensure that ESOL for Community Cohesion plans complement other elements within and strengthen the Regional Economic Strategy</p>

Organisation	Roles and Responsibilities
Government Offices	<p>As with Regional Development Agencies, identify where local ESOL for Community Cohesion plans could be strengthened through other regional funding pots</p> <p>Ensure that ESOL for Community Cohesion plans complement other policy strands and initiatives under the umbrella of Government Offices, especially those focusing on speakers of other languages</p>
Government Departments led by DIUS	<p>Agree flexibilities re: contracting for ESOL for community cohesion with the LSC</p> <p>Ensure that the roll out of ESOL for Community Cohesion dovetails with the implementation of policies in place and emerging from other Government Departments to avoid confusion, duplication or undesired effects, especially at a local level</p> <p>Encourage joint commissioning where advised by local and regional levels of its desirability in optimising impact and reducing bureaucracy</p> <p>Provide strong leadership in managing the changes to ESOL provision that implementation of this policy strand will necessitate</p>

ISSUES TO BE TACKLED OVER THE COMING WEEKS

→ *These roles, responsibilities and accountabilities need to be agreed and firmed up.*

The wider spectrum and progression

While our discussions focused on settled groups of speakers of other languages that require ESOL provision in order to integrate fully with their wider communities, it was inevitable that we touched on other groups for whom language competence is of key importance.

One large group is migrant workers, some of whom we acknowledged will settle permanently. There was a strong view that employers who recruit migrant workers "*have a responsibility*" to ensure that they have the language skills "*to carry out their jobs safely and understand civic and social codes of behaviour*".

The idea of including ESOL provision in the policy development of Right to Request Time Off for Training was supported by all. Many felt that more should be asked of employers, including the funding of ESOL provision.

It was strongly recommended that "*the public sector should lead by example*". It was proposed that all speakers of other languages working in any part of the public sector should receive ESOL provision: both contextualised to reflect the work that they are engaged in, and to enable integration outside of the workplace. Without strong leadership from the public sector, it was felt that it "*will be even more of an uphill struggle*" to convince *some* employers of their responsibilities.

Another idea put forward would be for employers who do provide ESOL provision to be "*publicly recognised for their exemplary practice*". This could prove very attractive to employers, especially those that are "*actively seeking to build their brand*". This public recognition could help them become an 'employer of choice', and could give them a real competitive edge in an industry sector that employs large numbers of speakers of other languages.

As well as migrant workers, we felt that there should be clear progression routes for the members of the priority groups we were focusing on. Once they have acquired sufficient language skills for integration, many of them may wish to progress into work. This could require the further development of their language skills.

ISSUES TO BE TACKLED OVER THE COMING WEEKS

- *Explore with the newly established UK Commission for Employment & Skills what its role could be in developing access to ESOL in work, and seek its views on the ideas put forward.*
- *Explore and identify progression paths for members of priority groups who, having acquired enough language competence for integration, wish to move into work. Skill Accounts may be of value in helping to facilitate this.*

Communication

First class communication of the purpose of the strategy, how it is going to be phased in and where it sits amongst the other policy strands for ESOL provision is vital to "*win over the hearts and minds of ESOL staff and the organisations they work for*". There was some concern that the sector is already experiencing "*change fatigue*", and care will need to be taken to assure staff that their skills and dedication are highly valued.

Prioritising access to state-funded ESOL will always be difficult. However, most would endorse a policy that gives precedence to those most in need, rather than to those who are at the front of the queue. What will be important is that this message reaches all who are going to experience the changes this will bring.

There was support for the idea of establishing a "*strong independent body*" to provide a focus for ESOL and act as a conduit for consultation and communication on all ESOL related issues. One attraction of this approach would be the independence of such a body. Its role could include finding ways forward that are accepted by a wide range of different stakeholders, each holding a strong and, sometimes, different view. Some felt that the ESOL Advisory Forum already takes on this role, while others remained unconvinced that it is sufficiently independent or representative of all stakeholders.

Whatever the future of establishing a strong independent body might be, there was consensus that a "*communication strategy needs to be drawn up urgently*" to ensure that the key players in implementing the policy can carry out their roles effectively. This is particularly pressing given the short lead in time available, before the first phase of implementation begins.

ISSUES TO BE TACKLED OVER THE COMING WEEKS

- *The Department of Innovation, Universities & Skills to draw up an internal communication strategy for all the key stakeholders directly involved in preparing for implementation. At the same time, a wider communication strategy needs to be drawn up (or commissioned) and implemented to inform providers, their staff, voluntary and community sector organisations, etc. of the changes that will be taking place and the thinking behind them.*
- *As part of this strategy, DIUS will prepare a statement for the NATECLA conference on 11 – 13 July 2008, outlining the purpose of ESOL for community cohesion, how it fits within the wider spectrum of ESOL provision, and plans for implementation.*

- *The idea of establishing an independent body for ESOL should be considered further by key stakeholders. As a first step, those wishing to pursue the idea may wish to contact other participants in the event to gauge interest in exploring it further.*
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Participants

John Denham, MP	Secretary of State, Dept. of Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS)
Bill Rammell, MP	Minister of State, Dept. of Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS)
Wayne Batho	Private Secretary to Bill Rammell, MP
Matthew Booth	Head of Partnerships, London Borough of Ealing
Gillian Beasley	Chief Executive, Peterborough City Council
Jill Mortimer	Lead Analyst Horizon Scanning, Analysis and Research, Local Government Association
Maggie Semple, OBE	Chief Executive, The Experience Corps (TEC)
Ted Cattle	Executive Chair, Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo)
Liz Smith, OBE	Director, Unionlearn with the TUC
Dan Taubman	National Official, Colleges Department, University & Colleges Union (UCU)
Patrick Wintour	Chair, Advisory Board of Naturalisation & Integration (ABNI)
Alison Harvey	General Secretary, Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
Karen Riley	Director of Skills for Employment, Learning & Skills Council (LSC)
David Hughes	Director, London Region, Learning & Skills Council (LSC)
Peter Lavender	Deputy Director, National Institute of Adult & Continuing Education (NIACE)
Chris Taylor	Development Officer, Literacy, Language & Numeracy Team, National Institute of Adult & Continuing Education (NIACE)
Catherine Maloney	Head of School, ESOL, Lewisham College
Chris James	Director of Research & Development, Asset Skills
Mat Chapman	Skills for Life Manager, First UK Bus
Brian Parry	Head of Public Engagement, Central Office of Information (COI)
Rebecca Morris	Consultant, Central Office of Information (COI)
Laura Stuart	Skills Provision Team Leader, Skills Directorate, Dept. for Work & Pensions (DWP)
Stephen Hillier	Director, Adult Skills Directorate, Department for Innovation Universities & Skills (DIUS)
John Landeryou	Director of Learning, Quality and Systems Directorate, Department for Innovation Universities & Skills (DIUS)
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