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**Focusing English
for Speakers of Other
Languages (ESOL) on
Community Cohesion**

January 2008

" Only an inclusive society that creates opportunities for all its people will be able to meet the global challenges of the 21st Century. We will build social integration and community cohesion by raising aspirations and broadening participation in learning and skills."

**The Rt Hon John Denham MP,
Secretary of State for the Department for Innovation,
Universities and Skills (2007)**

" English is both an important part of our shared heritage and a key access factor for new communities to the labour market and wider society. It binds us together as a single group in a way that a multiplicity of community languages cannot... We are therefore committed to the importance of English language training for all communities."

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion Report – Our Shared Future (2007)

" I am very pleased to endorse the Government's intention to place community cohesion at the heart of ESOL provision. I believe that English language skills are fundamental to integration and cohesion for all communities and help to create strong, positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within neighbourhoods. Your views too are very important and I urge you to get involved in the consultation."

Darra Singh, Chair of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007)

" Many people in our communities place enormous value on their learning to communicate in English. To them and their families it is the key to unlock economic success, participation in education and, above all, contribution to their neighbourhoods. In many places, English is the catalyst for cohesion and advancement. We know the demand is there and it is our duty to find the fairest way to promote access to high quality English language teaching for people making their lives in our communities. I welcome the opportunity to look forward to a fresh approach to this important question and to help shape a new way to promote inclusion and diversity."

" I warmly welcome the clarity in these proposals and endorse the intention and direction."

Ruth Silver, Lewisham College (2007)

" A welcome document – the drawing together of community cohesion and ESOL is timely and urgent."

" Having chaired some of the Race Equality Impact Assessment consultation meetings, I think the document sets out some of the major issues that need to be addressed."

Maggie Semple, The Experience Corps (2007)

Foreword



I believe good English language skills are critically important for life, work and social cohesion in this country. Darra Singh's recent report "Our Shared Future" on integration and cohesion published in June 2007 showed that the ability to communicate effectively is the most important issue facing integration and cohesion for both settled and new communities in Britain.

The Government is committed to fostering cohesion in all our communities and I am working with colleagues to ensure this happens. One of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)'s key contributions to this agenda is our funding and management of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision.

Our ESOL policy is a success: we have helped 2 million people improve their English language skills and take vital steps towards employment and social inclusion. Between 2001 and 2004 ESOL spending tripled, and is now just under £300m.

But even with this investment, there are still too many long-term residents committed to making a contribution to Britain who cannot engage with other people in their neighbourhoods – let alone play an active role in their communities – simply because their lack of English prevents it. This is having a negative impact on their life chances and limiting their ability to integrate. It is this group we wish to prioritise. But Government cannot do this on its own.

So this document sets out our aim that ESOL funding should be more specifically targeted to foster community cohesion and integration in our communities. This is a radical move and will need local, regional and national partners to work closely together. I look forward to receiving your views on how we can best do this.

John Denham
Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities & Skills
January 2008

Introduction

Providing ESOL has never been more complex. Ten countries have joined the European Union since 2004, providing significant streams of migrant labour. Britain continues to be a destination of choice for migrants as a result of our strong and stable economy and tradition of tolerance. These factors have had the net effect of increasing the demand for ESOL.

We have already implemented guidance which ensures ESOL funding is targeted towards the most disadvantaged groups. Funding changes were introduced in August 2007 to improve accessibility for the most vulnerable learners. These included £4.6m through the discretionary Learner Support Fund for spouses and low-paid workers, and an expectation that those who could afford to pay for ESOL would contribute up to 37.5% towards the cost of provision. We are monitoring the impact of these changes with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

However, we are still not convinced that enough of the hardest to reach are being attracted into ESOL provision. We believe local authorities and their partners are best placed to define the issues which are hampering community cohesion in their areas and design the solutions to the specific questions they face. Those who have made a long-term commitment to the UK, and suffer social exclusion and poverty, or are raising a family, will now be prioritised.

The number of short-term migrant workers is increasing and we recognise the importance of their being able to speak English. However, we believe those who benefit economically from migration should also bear some of the costs: it is essential then that employers train their workers to the required standard of English for safe and inclusive working.

Focusing ESOL on community cohesion is not just a matter for the DIUS. This challenge requires a coherent approach across Government to deliver real improvements. Key areas in which we are playing our role include:

- Working with the Home Office on reforming the UK citizenship process. The new points-based system will ensure skilled migrants from outside the EU have an appropriate level of English proficiency before they arrive in the UK. Further work is under way to consult on reviewing marriage visas and the requirements for these visa applicants to demonstrate competency in English before they arrive.
- Working with the Department for Communities and Local Government to hold two joint citizens' juries on ESOL. These juries in London and Hull provided useful input from the general public and the findings will influence our thinking when considering the outcomes of this consultation.

- The work of the British Council, together with the Department for International Development's work on improving education standards and raising literacy levels in developing countries, may also contribute.
- Working across Government, and with the Cabinet Office in particular, to maximise the very valuable contribution that the voluntary and community sector can make to the community cohesion process. This includes the engagement of faith communities, online provision and volunteering linked to citizenship. Much good practice exists to build upon.
- Making sure that a broadening of the ESOL agenda does not compromise the real improvements in quality standards that have been made over the past five years.

Definition of Community Cohesion

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion defines an integrated and cohesive community as one where:

- There is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for a neighbourhood, city, region or country;
- There is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place – people know what everyone expects of them, and what they can expect in turn;
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment;
- There is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly in arbitrating between different interests and for their role and justifications to be subject to public scrutiny;
- There is a strong recognition of the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place, with a focus on what they have in common; and
- There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within neighbourhoods.

The acquisition of the English language is key to achieving these outcomes.

Recent Changes to ESOL Funding

Demand for ESOL has exceeded all the expectations laid out in the Skills for Life strategy in 2001. ESOL enrolments tripled between 2001 and 2005. Government funding increased at a similar rate and has now stabilised but even with the extra investment, provision has been unable to meet demand, leading to long waiting lists. The most disadvantaged learners, often those long settled in the UK, face the biggest barriers to access.

In October 2006, the then Department for Education and Skills announced that from 2007/08 ESOL learning would no longer attract automatic fee remission. This was to support learning for the people who need it most. We believe that those who benefit from the migration process, such as employers and/or better-paid migrant workers, should meet their fair share of the costs.

Those being asked to pay towards their ESOL provision will pay up to a maximum of 37.5% increasing each year up to 50% by 2010. Government continues to support the estimated 50% of learners eligible for full fee remission and financial help has been made available for hard to reach groups, particularly spouses and low-paid workers, through £4.6m for 2007/08 through the discretionary Learner Support Fund. DIUS and the LSC will monitor the impact of this additional funding to decide the extent of support that might be needed in future. Future funding for ESOL, including changes resulting from our consultation proposals, will come through the LSC at levels comparable to the present, but with increases for inflation.

Employers

The recent eligibility changes will help reprioritise provision towards the poorest but they do not go far enough. We will do more to secure contributions from employers, particularly those who recruit directly from overseas. We know that migrants, and particularly skilled migrants, bring important economic advantages to England. But we also know many only stay for a limited period before returning home, or perhaps migrating to another country. We have to prioritise mainstream funding on the poorest who are committed to remain here but for whom English language is a significant barrier to getting or keeping work.

In September 2007, DIUS announced a new range of ESOL for Work qualifications. These offer shorter, more work-related English programmes of the type sought by employers. The qualifications were designed to increase flexibility and choice for employers, agencies and learners. They are currently available at Entry Level 3 and Level 1. More information can be found at: www.dius.gov.uk/press/16-10-07.html.

Working with all our partners, but especially the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and Sector Skills Councils, DIUS is seeking to engage employers in ESOL to promote the benefits and encourage financial and in-kind contributions. Employers who have invested in, or facilitated, ESOL for their staff, are starting to see meaningful returns: reduced turnover, improved communications and productivity, team-building, morale, health and safety compliance and customer service.

There are significant challenges to removing barriers to engagement for employers, especially for small and medium enterprises. DIUS has commissioned targeted research to help identify further options for engagement. One is to use online learning to cater for the language requirements across various sectors and industries. This could eventually be particularly useful for employers who recruit overseas.

Focusing ESOL on Community Cohesion

The Proposition

To foster community cohesion a new partnership approach to planning is necessary which targets English language provision at local need. We need a 'whole community approach' in which ESOL needs are considered as part of wider local planning arrangements such as Local Area Agreements and City Strategies.

Drawing on available evidence of low community cohesion, local authorities and their partners will determine how ESOL funding allocations are best aligned against community need and national priorities. As now, the LSC will remain accountable for managing ESOL spend. The innovation would be LSC spending decisions being taken with reference to these local plans/priorities.

We have already discussed the policy intentions of this proposition with key stakeholders and the independent ESOL Advisory Forum. There was strong support for the overall aims of the consultation. We now want to engage much more widely with citizens and stakeholders in order to confirm that the general direction of travel is correct and to discern how best to achieve it.

The consultation period will run for twelve weeks from 4 January 2008

"Next Steps"

We expect the full changes resulting from the consultation on this proposition will take place in the 2009/10 financial year. We will be publishing a next steps document outlining the findings from the consultation and policy proposals in summer 2008. Any resulting changes would be assessed for equality impact.

Consultation Response Form

This form is NOT interactive. If you wish to respond electronically please use the online or offline response facility available on the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' ESOL consultation website: www.esolconsultation.org.uk. The website will go live on the date of the launch and the online response facility will be available shortly afterwards. The closing date for the consultation is Friday 4 April 2008.

Setting a National Framework

It is important that we have a locally-driven approach to identifying and meeting ESOL needs to support community cohesion. We want to ensure that priority learners are able to access ESOL provision and so we need to set an overall national framework. We acknowledge that there may be a particular tension in this local/national relationship and that is something that we will want to explore in this consultation.

The overall priority is to focus funding where it will have the greatest impact on community cohesion. It is important that ESOL funds are prioritised for those individuals and communities where lack of English is likely to contribute to a weakening of community cohesion. Many factors influence community cohesion, and by suggesting priority groups we do not imply that those concerned should be held responsible for any local cohesion problems. We also recognise the difficulties of setting national priorities when the whole point of our strategy is to enable local authorities and communities to identify and respond to local needs. We have, however, identified an indicative national list of those groups of long-term residents who are most likely to suffer significant disadvantage because of their lack of English. Evidence taken from our Race Equality Impact Assessment findings and the labour market performance of immigrants in the UK suggest, for example, that a high priority group should be excluded women without English as a first language, particularly those from unwaged families who have school age children. There is empirical evidence to suggest that if such parents can develop sufficient language skills they in turn can support the learning of their children, thereby improving their prospects. The indicative list also includes other groups likely to face significant disadvantage and who may be regarded as hard to reach.

Our indicative national priorities for ESOL would therefore include:

- Legal residents who might reasonably be expected to be in the country for the foreseeable future;
- Excluded women or those who are at risk of being excluded, particularly those who are parents with children under 16 years;

- Parents or carers within families at risk of multiple or complex problems;
- Those who are identified in local areas as raising particular issues for community cohesion;
- Those having no or low levels of literacy in their own language;
- Those who have not had any secondary education;
- Refugees; and
- Asylum seekers who are still in the country beyond 6 months awaiting a decision on their status or cannot return home.

This list is not in order of priority and would be for use by local partners and the LSC in developing ESOL spending plans.

We welcome views on whether these are the right priorities and how they might best be used to support local planning arrangements for ESOL.

Developing National Priorities

We want to create a national list of priorities to help prioritise ESOL funding which can be clearly interpreted by those in local areas to develop their local plan of English language need and access Government funds. We want to ensure we have identified all the vulnerable groups for whom ESOL is crucial in helping them integrate into communities.

Question 1

- a) We have proposed an indicative list of national priorities. Are there any other groups we should consider for inclusion in this list and, if so, how high a priority do you consider them to be?
- b) How would local plans demonstrate that those identified in the plan are in the nationally specified priority groups and, if not, why they are considered a local priority?
- c) What evidence should be collected to ensure that the priority groups are reached?
- d) How would local authorities apply the national list of priorities in their area and how well do you think these priorities would meet local cohesion needs?
- e) How far have local authorities already assessed the priority of English language needs being met in local areas to meet the objective of community cohesion?

Setting ESOL priorities, planning and funding

We are looking for views on how ESOL priorities could reflect indicative national priorities but with local areas taking responsibility for targeting funding, in response to local community cohesion needs. We see several elements to this, including, critically, the need for a locally determined plan of English language needs. Local authorities and their partners will determine how ESOL funding allocations are best aligned against community need and the national priorities. As now, the LSC will remain accountable for managing ESOL spend.

We currently have an opportunity to improve the coherence of local planning. Local Area Agreements are the plans that deliver the strategic vision set out in local Sustainable Community Strategies and are monitored by the Local Strategic Partnerships. The White Paper, "Strong and Prosperous Communities", announced that a single set of outcome-based indicators covering important national priorities would be published by the Department for Communities and Local Government this year. Local Area Agreements have targets and priorities that are agreed between central government, the local authority and its partners. ESOL needs could be reflected within the skills and/or the community cohesion components of the wider indicator set.

Nine regional Learning and Skills Council offices currently oversee the work of local partnership teams. The local, bottom-up plans developed by local partnership teams would be aggregated to form a commissioning plan at regional level. In this way, the commissioning of ESOL provision can be integrated within the mainstream LSC funding allocations.

Question 2

a) Is the proposition outlined, building on existing arrangements, appropriate for commissioning ESOL to support community cohesion?

b) How will this be done most effectively? For example:

- How do we build on the work to identify and engage the hardest to reach that is already being undertaken locally by the LSC and their local authority and other community-based partners?

- How can we better link providers to existing planning arrangements and priorities so that they can better target their resources to develop their communities' engagement in ESOL and other learning?

- Are there new partners who should be involved in this process and what would be needed to engage them?

c) How could the effectiveness of the proposed arrangements in supporting community cohesion be measured?

Question 3

Given the role for local authorities and the variety of funding sources other than the LSC, how might local planning processes influence the setting of priorities and the allocation of funds in a way that complements the mainstream system for allocating FE funds?

Outreach provision and the voluntary and community sector

We want to explore in this document how we can ensure the learners identified in our list of priorities are encouraged to take up ESOL provision. Partly this is about creating places for these people by setting a national list of priorities but also addressing why certain groups have not participated in ESOL provision in the past. The voluntary and community sector provides a good deal of ESOL outreach provision in our communities, engaging many of our hardest to reach learners through community-led and neighbourhood-based programmes. To achieve positive community cohesion outcomes through focused ESOL provision, we believe it is absolutely crucial to develop a more coherent and better supported system of outreach and that we must find ways of encouraging the public, private and voluntary and community sector to collaborate more effectively.

Question 4

a) How can existing outreach work be strengthened to support focusing ESOL on community cohesion?

b) How can volunteers and the voluntary and community sector be better involved in supporting this outreach work and ESOL provision in general, and what support will they need to do this?

Quality and training

We recognise there will be a need to ensure quality in ESOL provision. We will ensure Initial Teacher Training and professional development for teachers and supporters of learning includes content relating to community cohesion.

Question 5

What programmes/resources are currently available to support professional development for teachers and others involved in improving ESOL delivery to help the community cohesion agenda, and what else might be needed?

Employer engagement

We are engaging employers in a wide range of ESOL initiatives through our developing strategy and we want to gain your views on what more we can do to promote the benefits to employers of investing in their employees who have ESOL needs.

Question 6

What would incentivise employers to support their employees who have ESOL needs?

Question 7

It would be particularly helpful if local authority respondents could say how the indicative list of priority groups would be applied in their areas, and which other groups they would propose to make priorities in drawing up a local strategy based on the need for community cohesion.

Question 8

Any other comments or suggestions not previously covered?

The information you provide in your response will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations, which allow public access to information held by the Department. This does not necessarily mean your response can be made available to the public as there are exemptions relating to information provided in confidence and information to which the Data Protection Act 1998 applies. You may request confidentiality by ticking the box provided, but you should note that neither this, nor an automatically generated email confidentiality statement, will necessarily exclude the public right of access.

Please tick here if you want us to keep your response confidential ☐

Name:

Organisation (if applicable):

Address:

If you work with people with English language needs, which best describes the organisation you work in? Please tick.

Local authority ☐

School, further or higher education organisation ☐

Voluntary and community sector organisation ☐

Private sector provider of English language training ☐

Responding as a private individual ☐

Other, please state _____

If you have a query relating to the consultation process or policy content of the consultation, you can contact the DIUS switchboard on 07800 010336 or email esolconsultation@dius.gsi.gov.uk

We very much value your input. Please send your completed consultation form to the ESOL Consultation Team:

By email to esolconsultation@dius.gsi.gov.uk

By post to ESOL Consultation, Skills for Employability, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 4th Floor, Kingsgate House, 66–74 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6SW.

The closing date for the consultation will be Friday 4 April.

Your views will help the Government shape future policy on ESOL provision so that it can make a lasting contribution towards building cohesive communities in this country.

To find out more about the work of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and to download this document, visit:

www.dius.gov.uk

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