

# **BREAKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIERS**

**THE REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON  
ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES  
(ESOL)**

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## Executive Summary

Last year *A Fresh Start*, the report of the working group on adult basic skills chaired by Sir Claus Moser, recommended that further work should be undertaken on the needs of adults who do not speak English as their first language. A group of experts and practitioners in the area of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) was set up. This report is the result of their work.

The report addresses the needs of adults who, because it is not their first language, need to develop skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing in English. It is estimated that there are between a half and one million such adults. They are not a homogeneous or static group but a diverse and dynamic one which encompasses both long settled minority ethnic communities and groups of refugees who have arrived in this country more recently.

Potential learners range from those who may lack basic literacy and numeracy skills in their first language to those with a high level of education and qualifications in their home country, and from those who are not keen to re-enter formal education to those who are highly motivated to learn.

In all cases, their principal need is to improve their command of English. All the evidence suggests that lack of fluency in English is a very significant factor in poverty and under-achievement in many minority ethnic communities, and a major barrier to employment and workplace opportunities and further and higher education.

Current provision for this group of learners has many of the same limitations as provision for basic skills. It is of mixed quality and often not easily accessible. So many of the recommendations in *A Fresh Start* apply equally to ESOL provision and the general thrust of the Government's strategy on adult basic skills is appropriate to this group too.

Specifically ESOL learners, in common with other basic skills learners, require:

- a clear framework of standards;
- a national curriculum framework which identifies the skills to be learnt;
- sound assessment, with qualifications mapped against nationally agreed standards;
- high quality teaching, with teacher training programmes which recognise the specific requirements of ESOL learners;
- a range of learning opportunities including family programmes, multimedia, open and distance learning programmes;
- provision integrated with other programmes of learning and vocational training.

But ESOL provision and assessment must also take account of:

- the personal circumstances, educational backgrounds and specific needs of minority ethnic groups and refugees;
- the paramount importance for ESOL learners of mastering oracy (listening and speaking) to communicate in everyday life, in addition to literacy (reading and writing) skills;

- the needs of ESOL learners who are already highly literate and numerate in their own language;
- the fact that in any group of ESOL learners, each individual may have very different levels of skills in the different areas of literacy, oracy (and numeracy).

It is essential that the specific needs of this group of learners are not sidelined or seen as secondary to the needs of adults with poor basic skills. The issues identified in this report should be taken forward by the new Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit being set up in DfEE.

One of the first tasks will be to establish clearly the numbers of people nationally who might benefit from ESOL provision. This is essential to inform the work of the new Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

While recognising the hard work and dedication of ESOL teachers (and volunteers) we also believe it is important that everyone involved in teaching ESOL learners should be properly trained and qualified. They should also be offered a clear career pathway based on national standards.

We advocate specialist training in teaching ESOL both for those teaching ESOL as a discrete subject and for those who need to offer language support in other academic and vocational areas. Mainstream basic skills teachers should also be offered the opportunity to acquire ESOL teaching skills to support their current work in basic skills or their future career development.

The new funding and organisation arrangements for post-16 and adult provision offer an excellent opportunity for improved co-ordination and strengthening of ESOL provision. The Learning and Skills Council will be legally required to report on its progress on equal opportunities for gender, race and disability. Our Working Group wants to see the Learning and Skills Council set clear targets for ESOL provision both nationally and locally and provide an adequate, coherent and flexible funding regime which will permit it to meet those targets. The Adult Learning Inspectorate will need a coherent inspection process for ESOL to provide a sound basis for improving quality standards in the provision on offer.

What happens next? The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit will be up and running later this year when a new strategy for adult basic skills will be announced. This Group sees it as crucial to ensure that the needs of learners of ESOL are taken forward as part of that strategy through partnership working by all the key national organisations including professional ESOL bodies, the Basic Skills Agency (BSA), NIACE (the National Organisation for Adult Learning), the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

The aim must be to give ESOL education and training programmes and their teachers the recognition and support they need. Only in this way can we give ESOL learners the economic and social return on their investment in education from which we will all benefit.

In this context, the Working Group makes the following recommendations:

***Recommendation 1:***

All developments in the national adult basic skills strategy must address ESOL needs alongside but distinct from basic literacy and numeracy and this should be a specific responsibility of the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit.

***Recommendation 2:***

The research planned for 2001 to establish both national and local baselines for literacy and numeracy should establish equivalent baselines for ESOL needs, including language support.

***Recommendation 3:***

The Learning and Skills Council should:

- a)** set clear participation and achievement targets for ESOL nationally and locally in order to drive up the quality and effectiveness of provision; and
- b)** provide an adequate, coherent and flexible funding regime for ESOL provision which will permit it to meet those targets working with employers and education and training providers.

***Recommendation 4:***

The DfEE/LSC should look to an expansion of ESOL provision through colleges, Local Education Authorities and the voluntary and community sector - focusing on those areas with especially high demand or with specific refugee issues.

***Recommendation 5:***

The DfEE should commission the production and distribution of an information and support materials pack for the tutors and support workers of organisations providing ESOL to refugees.

***Recommendation 6: Standards***

- a)** The national standards for basic literacy should encompass ESOL standards up to Level 2 but there must be a distinct ESOL curriculum framework;
- b)** The review of the national basic skills standards framework planned for 2003/4 should consider the specific factors relevant to ESOL and involve consultation with experienced ESOL practitioners.

***Recommendation 7: Curriculum***

There should be an independent evaluation of the ESOL curriculum in practice to link in with the proposed review of the national basic skills standards framework in 2003/4

**Recommendation 8: Qualifications**

ESOL (and EFL) qualifications should be mapped against the national standards. These qualifications should allow flexibility in delivery, assessment and outcomes and should assess each of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) separately.

**Recommendation 9: Teacher Training**

**a)** DfEE should commission FENTO (the Further Education National Training Organisation), together with ESOL specialists and other relevant organisations, to develop teaching standards and an initial training and qualifications framework for new entrants to ESOL teaching;

**b)** Within the 'generic' training for all teachers, there should be a recognition that teaching should be inclusive; awareness of the needs of bilingual students, including the ability to work with students receiving language support, should be included;

**c)** The links between diploma level and masters courses should be explored, so that Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL) can be given on masters courses for relevant qualifications and/or experience at masters level;

**d)** DfEE should commission the development and delivery of a program of intensive training and support materials for ESOL teachers, based on the new curriculum. This training to be delivered to all ESOL teachers who work more than 6 hours per week by the end of 2001.

**e)** By 2005 all teachers on ESOL courses funded by the LSC should be appropriately trained and qualified

**Recommendation 10: Inspection**

Inspection arrangement being developed for the new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) should ensure that there is a coherent and consistent inspection process for ESOL provision and that inspectors have specific ESOL experience.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This report addresses the needs of learners who, because it is not their first language, need to develop skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing in English. These learners are currently included within the seven million people in this country who have difficulties with basic skills. However their primary learning need is not literacy or numeracy but English language skills.

1.2 *A Fresh Start*, the report of the working group on adult basic skills led by Sir Claus Moser, highlighted the need to address the issue of those learners whose first language is not English. The report recognised that they had related but quite distinct needs from those adults who are fluent English speakers but need to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills, and recommended that further specific consideration should be given to those needs.

1.3 As part of the Government's response to *A Fresh Start*, a working group was set up to consider and report on the particular needs of learners whose first language is not English. Terms of reference and membership of the working group are listed at Annex 1. The group met eight times between July 1999 and April 2000 with members consulting widely within their respective constituencies to ensure that this report reflects a wide representative cross-section of views.

1.4 One early issue the group needed to resolve was what this area of learning should be called. In schools the term used for English provision for those who do not speak it as a first language is 'English as an Additional Language' (EAL) and this was the term adopted by *A Fresh Start*. However the universally accepted term in post-16 education is 'English for speakers of other languages'. The group recognised that this difference in nomenclature could be confusing, particularly for learners. However it became apparent that the two terms were deeply embedded in their respective contexts and to attempt to change the position would both be very costly and could easily result in more confusion. Consequently we use the term 'English for speakers of other languages' (abbreviated to ESOL) throughout this report. The term ESOL is also widely used in most other English speaking countries.

## **PART1: The scale of need**

### **The range of potential ESOL learners**

2.1 Potential ESOL learners fall into four principal broad categories. Each of them brings a wealth of cultural experience and diversity to this country but this very diversity presents challenges to planning and offering appropriate learning provision. The categories are:

- settled communities, principally, although by no means exclusively, from the Asian sub-continent and Chinese from Hong Kong. Challenges include difficult-to-reach groups and problems with access to provision for new spouses (see section on funding). Some would-be students work long and irregular hours in, for instance, the restaurant trade and therefore cannot attend classes regularly;

### Case study 1

Z. from Bangladesh has lived in England for 7 years but never attended an English class. She has a little spoken English but cannot read and write any English. She has a 1 year old child and 2 children who attend primary schools but has very little contact with agencies such as the school and the health services because of her lack of English. She recently started to attend classes at the local adult education centre after encouragement from a Bangladeshi community worker.

### Case study 2

L is a Chinese person from Hong Kong. He is in his thirties and lives with his wife and two children in a city where there is a large Chinese population. He works in a the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant and has little opportunity to speak English at work. He works 6 days a week from late morning until 1 a.m. He wants to learn English to improve his employment prospects but can only attend classes on Sundays, his day off. He attends a class on Sunday mornings at the Chinese language school but is often tired and finds progress is slow.

- refugees, who subdivide into

- a) asylum seekers, most of whom are very keen to learn and for whom the chances of effective settlement would be greatly improved by being able to begin learning English but who are faced by, problems with settlement, difficulties understanding the system, housing problems, lack of money, immigration status as well as general culture shock and trauma from their experiences. In recent years the highest number of applications for asylum have been from persons from the former Yugoslavia and Sri Lanka.
- b) settled refugees with exceptional leave to remain (ELR) or full refugee status. They may have their status confirmed but many will have English language needs that must be met before they can gain equal access to education, training or work.

### Case study 3

A. is from Ethiopia. She came to England as a refugee with her four children. She didn't have any education in her country and as a result was not literate in her first language. She joined a part-time class with crèche provision but found she did not make a lot of progress. She was worried about her family in Ethiopia and found the reading and writing very difficult. When her youngest child was at school she joined an intensive course. She now speaks fluently and wants to start her own business but still needs a lot of support with literacy.



#### Case study 4

A. is a young Kosovan male asylum seeker. Because of the Serb closure of Albanian language schools when he was 9, he had only 4 years of primary education. He came to Britain to escape the militia who were combing the villages in his area for young men who might or might not be nationalists. He saw several of his friends killed in brutal ways during the searches. His family was targeted; his father arrested and disappeared. He smuggled himself on a lorry and came to South London, where a cousin had been for 4 months, in the summer of 1996 at the age of 16. He was placed in foster care and joined a beginner level ESOL course almost immediately.

He was unused to the discipline needed in a college, or the behaviour expected, and his level of education meant that learning a new language, written as well as spoken, was a difficult task for him. He was on report for disruptive behaviour twice but gradually, with the support of his foster parents, he started to respond and learn. He did a summer term in the beginner class, moved to elementary the next term, and then onto a vocational course in electronic engineering, with language support from an ESOL teacher. Passing the first year of his course with flying colours, he is now on the second year of his vocational studies and is often invited to talk to new arrivals from Kosovo about the need to study hard and not be disruptive. He has moved from foster-care into a small flat with a friend and has been granted exceptional leave to remain

see also case studies 7 and 8

- migrant workers, mostly from elsewhere in Europe. Some of these may be here as short term visitors principally to learn English and so pay for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) training, but many are here to work and settle for all or most of their life and thus need access to ESOL<sup>1</sup>;

#### Case study 5

M is from Spain where she had a job in the tourist industry. She came to England to learn English and work here. When she arrived she could speak very little English so she joined a beginners ESOL class and progressed to the highest level, where she passed the Pitman Intermediate ESOL examination and also Key Skills NVQ. During this time she became a volunteer English teacher and realised that she really enjoyed teaching adults. She has just completed a City and Guilds Course in teaching languages to adults and now works as a Spanish teacher.

- partners and spouses of students from all parts of the world who are settled for a number of

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<sup>1</sup> EFL is English teaching intended primarily for foreign students who wish to improve their English for recreational reasons or to improve their academic or career prospects in their home country. It is provided largely by private providers both in this country and abroad and when offered by the FE sector in the UK fees are charged. ESOL is English for those whose first language is not English but who live in this country and intend to spend some or all of their working life here. It is provided free of charge through FEFC funded and LEA institutions

years and need to participate in the local community but are prevented by family responsibilities or low income from following intensive EFL courses

#### Case study 6

B. is a 25 year old Iranian student in England with her husband who is a PhD student on a 5 year scholarship. She has 2 children who attend local schools and would like to learn English. She is not allowed to enrol for classes at the local adult education centre as places in their ESOL provision are restricted to permanent residents and she cannot afford to pay the fees for EFL provision at the FE college.

2.2 Within these groups the needs of learners will vary considerably depending upon their age, aspirations, educational background, language background and aptitude for learning languages. To illustrate -

a) Language background:

the learner may be

- a fluent speaker, reader and writer of a language(s) with a latin script;
- a fluent speaker, reader and writer of a language(s) with a different script;
- a fluent speaker of one (or more) other language(s) but not very confident at reading and writing in that language/those languages: or
- have very few or no reading and writing skills in any language.

b) Educational background:

- could be anywhere on a continuum from no formal education at all to higher education and professional training.

c) Work experience in their country of origin

- may range from none through a year or two of self-employment in street selling or help in family-run farming to a working lifetime of professional employment in medicine, teaching or the law.

d) Aspirations range across and are likely to include a mixture of

- learning English to help with everyday life
- aiming to progress through the UK system (e.g. NVQs, GNVQs, GCSEs or A levels), particularly the case for many young people;
- aiming for progress in the labour market through vocational training, re-qualification, updating of professional skills or higher education.

### **The scale of need**

3.1 One of the difficulties with estimating the number of potential ESOL learners is the lack of comprehensive, reliable data both on the numbers of people living in Britain whose first language is not English and how well they operate in English.

3.2 Research undertaken by the Institute of Education and MORI in 1995 for the Basic Skills

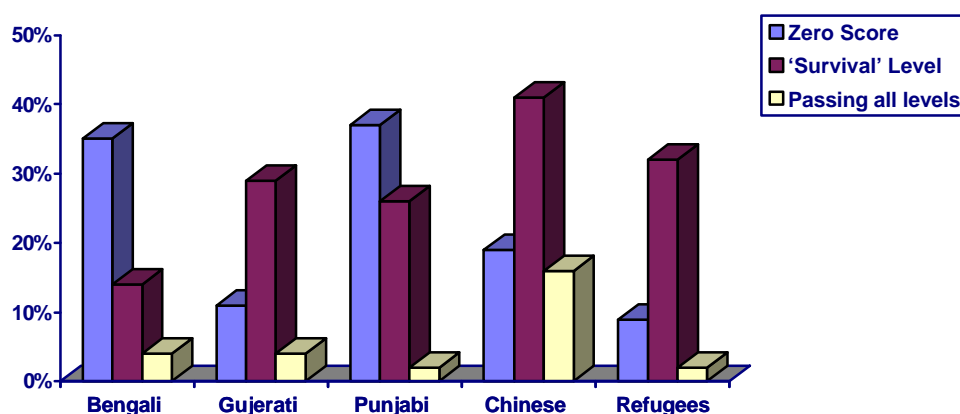
Agency's report *Lost Opportunities*<sup>2</sup> suggests that around 450,000 people living in the UK whose first language is not English have little command of the English Language. Estimates, extrapolated from the 1991 Census and Home Office figures, in a recent report on *English Language as a Barrier to Employment, Training and Education*<sup>3</sup> commissioned by DfEE, suggest the current figure could easily be three times this.

3.3 The figures for citizenship applications granted and asylum seekers give some idea of the flow of potential new learners. 54,000 people were granted British citizenship in 1998: nearly 45 per cent on the basis of residence, nearly 35 per cent (over 18,000 people) on the basis of marriage and around 20 per cent were minor children. While the numbers granted citizenship vary from one year to the next the proportions of people in each category have remained stable over the last few years.

3.4 The number of asylum seekers has increased considerably in the last few years. In 1998, the most recent year for which complete figures are available, applications for asylum rose by 13,500 to 46,000; the provisional figures for 1999 stand at nearly 72,000. Lower numbers are eventually granted residence: in 1998, 5,300 or 17 per cent of decisions considered resulted in individuals being granted refugee status and 3,900 or 12 per cent granted exceptional leave to remain.

3.5 The *Lost Opportunities* research also showed significant differences between different linguistic groups. The proportion who reached a 'survival' or higher level was roughly three times as high in some groups as in others (see Table 2). Overall about one in four fell into the lowest category meaning that they could not, for example, fill in their names and addresses, understand a simple notice, read their child's school timetable or use a calendar and a further 50 per cent had survival skills only.

**Table 1**



### The impact of lack of fluency in English

4.1 The social arguments for ensuring effective access to learning and high quality ESOL provision are very similar to those for adults with poor basic skills more generally. Lack of fluency in English is likely to affect individuals' ability to secure employment or advancement in the workplace, to gain benefit from further education, to access community and social services and to participate in community life. It may also limit their ability to be involved with and

<sup>2</sup> *Lost Opportunities: The Language Skills of Linguistic Minorities in England and Wales*. Carr-Hill, Passingham, Wolf and Kent, The Basic Skills Agency, 1996

<sup>3</sup> *English as a Second Language as a Barrier to Labour Market Entry*. Dr Philida Schellekens, DfEE (to be published)

support their own children's education.

4.2 The economic costs are also considerable. Unemployment is much higher than average amongst refugee groups and most settled immigrant communities. For example, in a survey by the Peabody Trust<sup>4</sup>, 68 per cent of asylum seekers and 47 per cent of those with refugee status or granted exceptional leave to remain were unemployed. The reasons for this are not straightforward but it is clear that lack of fluency in English is an important contributory factor across all groups. For many refugees and asylum seekers it is by far the greatest impediment to entering the job market or education and training. Failure to address these English language needs creates a drain on welfare and other public services like health and immigration, which have to spend time and money on finding solutions to communication problems, such as translation and interpreting services.

4.3 There is also a significant national waste of potential in failing to make the best use of people with professional qualifications and experience, for example in areas of skill shortage like the medical professions, who are cut off by from employment by their lack of fluency in English.

#### Case study 7

P. was a doctor in practice in Republic of Congo who is now living in one of the outer London boroughs. She arrived in the UK in 1998, with her two children and wants to improve both her general and medical English and re-qualify so she can continue her profession. Her attempts to do so are hampered by a lack of finance. She needs to pay, from her income ( 90% income support) for travel to the only FE college in London which provides the specific course she needs and then about £100 for the exam fees of both the English exam and the medical test administered by the BMA. She may then need to take a 6 month clinical attachment for which she would not be paid, but during which she would lose her income support. If she can manage to go through this process, she will then be a UK qualified doctor, able to practise in this country.

#### Case study 8

S was a civil engineer in Bosnia in her late twenties. She wanted to take up her profession again in Britain. Her English language skills were quite good, but she needed to get her degree accepted and some updating of her training. She joined a course for engineers/scientists/ computer experts at an college which had a link to a university anxious to recruit high-flyers to fill spare places in the science / engineering courses. She studied high level English -with some reference to the technical subjects which the students were interested in. The course included work on sorting out equivalencies for her qualifications and preparation of a portfolio to list all the projects she had been involved in, with reports from ex-colleagues, many now also in the UK. She also found, with encouragement, some work experience in her field of expertise and a reference from her manager there was added to the folder. This portfolio was shown to the university staff who immediately offered her a place on an M Eng. Course and charitable funding was sought to pay the course fees. She completed the masters successfully and was able to gain employment in her field.

4.4 For the Government's policy of dispersal to be successful in dealing with refugees,

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<sup>4</sup> *The Employment and Training of Refugees*. Peabody Trust, 1999

effective settlement will be essential. If refugees do not learn sufficient English to be able to participate fully in everyday life and find employment, they will find it even harder to settle in areas where there are fewer members of their own communities.

## **PART 2: Access and provision**

### **Current Provision**

5.1 Although it may not be definitive, the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) collects information from about 500 organisations managing ESOL programmes each year, which probably represents the bulk of ESOL provision in England. During 1997-98 just over 95,000 people were reported to be attending ESOL programmes. FE colleges and Local Education Authority (LEA) adult education were the main providers, with respectively just under two thirds and just under one third of all enrolments. Table 2 shows the BSA breakdown by organisation type for 1997-98.

**Table 2**

#### **ENGLAND:**

|                              |        |
|------------------------------|--------|
| FE Sector College            | 56,415 |
| Training Organisation        | 1,628  |
| LEA                          | 28,033 |
| Voluntary Organisation       | 497    |
| Employer                     | 60     |
| Prisons ( <i>estimated</i> ) | 5,000  |
| Other                        | 3,966  |
| TOTAL                        | 95,599 |

Figures for all providers are not available for 1998-99 but Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) figures for 1998-99 show that FEFC funded providers' enrolments have increased by 20 per cent to over 74,000.

5.2 The majority of people are still in courses where the primary purpose is to learn ESOL, although the introduction of the additional support mechanism in FEFC funding has clearly helped improve the language support position. In 1996-97 around one in five ESOL students was getting language support on mainstream courses whereas information from the Individual Student Records from FE Colleges for 1998-99 show that 37 per cent were learning ESOL as part of a broader programme. It is to be hoped that this trend will continue under the Learning and Skills Council.

5.3 In many places, particularly inner city areas, there is insufficient provision and this has led to long waiting lists. Some localities have had to deal with unexpected surges in numbers of recently arrived refugees and this has reduced the availability of provision for local long-established minority ethnic communities.

5.4 Much important outreach work is carried out by Local Education Authorities and by voluntary sector and community organisations. This area of work is crucial in reaching those individuals and groups who are likely to resist more traditional provision. However, coverage is very patchy and the quality of teaching very variable, due primarily to the lack of any coherent and permanent funding system which recognises the support functions that are necessary for

effective delivery.

5.5 There is little provision in the workplace and language support is only just starting to feature in mainstream Government programmes such as Training for Work and New Deal. The report<sup>5</sup> of research into the extent to which lack of fluency in English acts as a barrier to employment has not yet been finalised but we expect it to recommend, broadly, that there is scope for a greater proportion of ESOL to be work-focused in order to broaden its appeal to a wider group of unemployed people and particularly men (who are under-represented currently). The recommendations of the report together with the results of pilots undertaken in 1999 with the Refugee Council should inform thinking on how to better package vocational language support to meet the needs of unemployed ESOL learners.

5.6 Support for students has an important impact on learning outcomes. BSA research into progression and drop out in ESOL programmes<sup>6</sup> indicated that about one in four students dropped out in any one year for a range of reasons, including change of accommodation, childcare and dissatisfaction with the lack of progress they were making on the course.

5.7 Lack of progress may often be linked to the quality of courses on offer. The FEFC Inspectorate issued a Report on Basic Education 1998-99 including ESOL provision which found that *“the standard of much of the provision in this area is a cause for concern when compared with the standards in other programme areas”*. Inspection grades awarded to colleges' basic education provision between 1994 and 1997 were consistently lower than for other provision and there has been little sign of improvement.

5.8 The BSA survey also revealed the inadequacy of advice and guidance with large numbers of students dropping out or transferred to other classes in the first few weeks of joining a programme because they were in an inappropriate class.

## **Barriers to access and learning**

### **Access**

6.1 The obstacles cited by potential ESOL students as preventing them from participating in learning are similar to those mentioned by other adult non-learners. These include insufficient time as a result of family or work commitments, inadequate information, poor advice and guidance, the potential cost of study, a lack of suitable flexible provision locally, inadequate transport or lack of affordable childcare.

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<sup>5</sup> Dr Philida Schellekens *op cit*

<sup>6</sup> *Where Next? Drop Out and Progression from ESOL*. Kambouri, Toutounji and Francis, The Basic Skills Agency, 1966.

### Case study 9

K. was not able to complete an ESOL course at a college in South London as she lives in Westminster and found the cost of travel too great a burden. The course at this college was ideal for her, as she wished to train as a nurse and was aiming to progress to the ESOL for Nurses course. She had gained basic ESOL skills and, with help from her adviser from St Mungo's Community Housing Association, had been successful in finding a placement with a hospital. The college was unable to find financial support to meet the travel costs and she could not take up the course.

6.2 ESOL learners are then often further hampered because of ineffective assessment and support and by the lack of a consistent approach across the country. In some areas there is little tutor expertise in rigorous ESOL assessment and few suitably robust and reliable ESOL diagnostic tests. Inadequate pre-course advice and guidance results from insufficient knowledge about the range of opportunities available and lack of understanding of the equivalence between overseas and British qualifications. This is in sharp contrast with some other European countries, such as France, where there are well developed and fully funded qualification recognition services.

6.3 Long waiting lists often result in large classes which may not allow for sufficient student interaction and oral practice or which include too wide a range of language levels. Many students want to learn quickly for substantial numbers of hours a week but this intensive provision is not always available. In rural and other areas where there are few ESOL learners there is often either a complete lack of suitable provision or a tendency to put ESOL learners and basic skills learners in the same class, even though their needs are very different.

6.4 Moreover, for refugee ESOL learners, these barriers are all too often compounded by cultural dislocation, emotional distress and trauma at being resettled in a strange country. Lack of money prevents some from travelling to classes. Learning environments can feel hostile or patronising with a culturally insensitive curriculum. Some students may experience racism - an experience all too often shared by those who have been settled here longer term.

### Case study 10

M is from Somalia and lives in an inner city area. He enrolled for English classes but his attendance was irregular. His family suffered a campaign of racist attacks when he was first housed in the area. People used to spit at him and his children in the street and rubbish and excrement was pushed through his letter box. Next his 8 year old son was pushed in the path of a car which fortunately stopped before it hit him. His house was fire bombed, and his wife suffered a miscarriage as a result of falling down stairs as the family escaped from the burning house. After this he was rehoused in a different area of the city.

6.5 One other important aspect of access demands consideration: the role that employers can and in some cases do play in helping inform potential learners about ESOL classes, in organising provision themselves and operating a flexible approach to working time to enable learners to improve their language skills. Very few employers provide ESOL programmes themselves but a number of large service employers, for example, do employ individuals with

poor standards of English. More should be done locally and nationally in partnership with employers to help develop good practice.

### **Organisation of learning.**

6.6 Once on courses, ESOL students are likely to experience a range of special problems peculiar to their needs and very different from those of fluent English speakers who are improving their basic skills.

6.7 It is very common for ESOL classes to consist of mixed ability groups and include individuals with very different ranges of skills in oracy, writing and numeracy and, because of their different educational backgrounds, different abilities in study skills. Some students will have poor basic skills in their own language. Some may be unfamiliar with the Latin script. Many will be used to a very different pronunciation system and thus not be able to associate sounds and symbols. Many others may be used to different grammatical conventions. All will face the barrier of the phonetically irregular spelling system of English and some may need to retrain themselves to write in a different direction.

#### **Case study 11**

Y is from a rural area in Pakistan. He attended school for only 2 years and is not literate in his first language. He enrolled for English classes at his local further education college but seemed to be making little progress in comparison to his peers who were all European migrant workers who were literate in their first language. The course tutors had little experience of teaching students with Y's educational background and were concerned about his slow progress. They decided this was because he had learning difficulties and referred him for a learning support assessment. At this point he left the course

6.8 Equally, different experiences and needs in relation to numeracy should not be overlooked. Some learners may be highly numerate but need to learn English mathematical terms and conventions. Others may be used to doing computation in quite a different way or simply have basic numeracy needs. Others may have good mathematical skills but be hampered by the complexity of the language surrounding assessment tasks and tests.

6.9 There are cultural differences too which may be encountered as barriers. Students may be used to a more formal approach than is generally used in post-16 education in this country. They are also likely to encounter cultural barriers to understanding in texts that are designed with native learners in mind - for example, a GNVQ student was asked to assess an advertising poster for a new hot breakfast cereal which boasted that it was very popular in Scotland. Because she was not familiar with porridge and its connections with Scotland, she was unable to complete the task.

6.10 This means the curriculum and the methodology for teaching basic literacy and numeracy needs to be different from that for fluent English speakers. This is considered in more depth in Section 10.

6.11 Other hindrances to effective ESOL provision include too few bilingual tutors, too few supported bridges, such as access courses, into mainstream provision and insufficient language support within that provision.



### Case study 12

E. arrived from Ethiopia at a South London college in September 1998 and was placed in an Entry Level 1 ESOL 16-19 group. Six months into her course she moved up to an Entry Level 2/3. N., arriving from Bangladesh, moved up over a similar period from Entry Level 2/3 to Level. 1 Both students were studying an Entry Key Skills ESOL/Basic Skills 16-19 curriculum with vocational tasters that included Business Administration.

Both students were accepted onto NVQ Level 2 Business Administration. After 3 weeks N. chose to return to a Basic Skills 16-19 group saying that her main difficulty was understanding the English used in the Business assignments. N. is interested in the NVQ 1 Business Administration with attached NVQ in English language being piloted September 2000 to facilitate progression.

E. has been struggling, since the jump to level 2 was considerable and the language demands of Business English are particularly high. However she has remained on the NVQ Business Administration by attending a 16-19 Basic Skills class for extra support during sessions which do not clash with her timetable.

### **Funding and the structure of provision**

6.12 The current FEFC funding system has been designed to offer considerable flexibility and incentives in the delivery of ESOL, including automatic fee remission, double entry units for shorter courses, higher cost weighting for the on-programme element, a widening participation factor uplift and a mechanism whereby providers can claim for the costs of putting in place a range of additional support which will enable ESOL learners to succeed.

6.13 However, the extent to which these incentives are utilised and applied in practice by individual providers seems variable and some front-line practitioners clearly feel that the regimes under which they operate can create anomalies or difficulties for learners:

- eligibility for funding for learners who are not EU or EEA nationals is based on nationality and residence status as defined by the Home Office. This means that some categories of students, for example new spouses, may have to wait until they receive settled status for acceptance as a home student and valuable learning time can be lost;
- although the FEFC clearly recognises the additional resources needed for this area of work and reflects this in funding incentives, some practitioners still feel that there is inadequate allowance within the tariff system for the high costs of outreach work, curriculum development, and bilingual assessment which are all needed if ESOL provision is to be effective;
- for administrative reasons or because they perceive them as more cost effective than short courses, a number of FEFC funded providers still tend to run courses from September to July. These have a significantly higher risk of drop out than shorter courses due to re-settlement of refugees or benefit, housing or medical problems;
- capping of FEFC funding allocations has sometimes meant there has been no access to additional funding mid-year to meet new demands and sudden increases in refugee populations;

- the full value of the higher cost weighting factor (CWF C) within FEFC funding systems sometimes may not be passed on within the institution directly to the budget for ESOL provision;
- colleges have sometimes failed to recognise that, since 1998, students eligible for ESOL support but who are taking EFL qualifications because this best suits their learning needs remain eligible for support;
- there are still misapprehensions about the funding system, for example that external accreditation is essential. This sometimes seems to encourage providers to offer qualifications which are less appropriate but score a higher unit value.

### **Developing a strategy for learners of English for speakers of other languages**

7.1 Clearly there are a range of problems which need to be tackled if we are to ensure that individuals with ESOL needs can benefit fully from the Government's policies on access and wider participation in learning set out in a range of recent publications such as *Learning to Succeed* and the Learning and Skills Council Prospectus and Funding Consultation documents.

7.2 The Government's response to meeting the needs of learners who speak English as a Second Language will be one clear test of the effectiveness of its commitment to widening participation. An inclusive approach to ESOL entails creating more learning opportunities which more closely reflect the needs of learners. This demands a delivery system which is flexible enough to offer timely and local learning opportunities to ESOL learners when and where they are most motivated.

7.3 Although ESOL learners have many needs distinct from those of basic literacy and numeracy learners - and those needs should be specifically addressed - there are many issues common to both. We therefore judge that it will be to the advantage of ESOL learners if provision for them is developed as part of the Government's wider strategy to improve adult basic skills. The Department's new Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit should have responsibility for leading the strategy on ESOL in partnership with other key players. The group suggests that at least one member of the new Unit should have specific responsibility for championing ESOL and taking forward the ESOL agenda.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

**All developments in the national adult basic skills strategy must address ESOL needs alongside but distinct from basic literacy and numeracy and this should be a specific responsibility of the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit .**

7.4 Any strategy to improve ESOL will need to :

- offer high quality information, advice and guidance;
- offer effective arrangements for assessment of the very diverse needs of these

- learners;
- provide a greater range of learning opportunities to reflect the wide diversity of needs, including language support for those on mainstream courses, and to stimulate learning in the workplace;
  - be supported by a flexible funding regime which enables FE, LEAs and others to be responsive to need;
  - ensure programmes on offer are of high quality;
  - ensure higher levels of achievement and attainment by learners
  - gather more robust baseline data and monitor improvements continuously.

7.5 This last point is particularly important in the early days of developing a strategy. In this report we have only been able to use estimates of the numbers of people whose first language is not English and who might benefit from further education and training. The DfEE Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit should ensure that research to establish benchmarks for basic skills also includes equivalent baselines for ESOL, including language support. Over time, the use of the (FEFC) Individualised Student Record in a wider range of provision should enable more accurate records of all students undertaking learning.

**Recommendation 2:**

**The research planned for 2001 to establish both national and local baselines for literacy and numeracy should also establish equivalent baselines for ESOL needs, including language support.**

7.6 One particular area on which we hope the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit will make progress is the development of workplace programmes in partnership with the national training organisations and, once it is established, through the Learning and Skills Council. The Department already has in place a strategy which involves a number of developments, including:

- building public sector workplace capacity for basic skills;
- developing and promoting models of basic skills programmes in small and medium sized companies;
- supporting the Workplace Basic Skills Training Network, the BSA and others in delivering basic skills education in the workplace; and
- working with trade unions and the TUC to develop union-based projects and promote good practice.

We think it essential that they ‘mainstream’ the needs of ESOL learners into this strategy and consider what further specific initiatives may be appropriate for employers and learners alike.

7.7 Fundamental to the implementation of an effective strategy is the way in which learning is organised at local level and the way in which it is funded both locally and nationally. We see an excellent opportunity through the new post 16 arrangements under the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to rationalise funding and set national guidelines whilst allowing maximum responsiveness to local needs.

7.8 One specific issue to be addressed is Local Education Authority (LEA) provision. Much of their work has been underpinned by the Adult Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant which is currently limited to a minority of LEAs. Protection needs to be secured under the Learning and Skills Council for those providers who have been able to draw on these resources to support

the quality of their provision and additional funding should be allocated to extend this type of support to all LEAs who have significant ESOL needs to meet.

7.9 The LSC should set targets in its first year to ensure that local learning provision is effective at reaching those with ESOL needs - for example, by building on the *Learning Age* target to educate 500,000 individuals a year in basic skills by 2002. We would wish to see clear evidence in its annual report on equal opportunities that specific action is being taken by the LSC and local LSCs to ensure that the needs of learners with ESOL are being met alongside those of basic skills learners; and that local LSC staff have the expertise and background to work with partners to develop and plan ESOL provision in a way which is sensitive to other cultures.

**Recommendation 3:**

**The Learning and Skills Council should -**

- a) set clear participation and achievement targets for ESOL nationally and locally in order to drive up the quality and effectiveness of provision; and**
- b) provide an adequate, coherent and flexible funding regime for ESOL provision which will permit it to meet those targets across their work with employers and education and training providers.**

7.10 In the short term there is a clear need for additional ESOL provision and support, especially in those areas where demand clearly exceeds supply and in those places where significant numbers of refugees are being settled for the first time. The DfEE should provide funding for the FEFC and LEA's to further develop outreach work and for an expansion of voluntary sector community based provision, building on current good practise and the experience gained from projects such as the Adult and Community Learning Fund and the recent FEFC non-schedule 2 initiative. It should also commission the development of an information and support materials pack for organisations providing ESOL for refugees.

**Recommendation 4**

**The DfEE/LSC should look to an expansion of ESOL provision through colleges, Local Education Authorities and the voluntary and community sector - focusing on those areas with especially high demand or with specific refugee issues.**

**Recommendation 5**

**The DfEE should commission the production and distribution of an information and support materials pack for the tutors and support workers of organisations providing ESOL to refugees.**

**PART THREE: Quality and quality assurance**

## **Introduction**

8.1 As has already been indicated there are a number of problems with the quality and consistency of ESOL provision and delivery. We need to be certain that an infrastructure to ensure high quality and relevant provision is being developed for the Learning and Skills Council. To help this process, officers appointed by the LSC and local LSCs to oversee basic skills should all be aware of the particular needs of ESOL students and should include officers who are ESOL specialists. It will also be crucial for the LSC to ensure that its new power to promote effective information, advice and guidance is implemented in a way which supports the needs of ESOL learners.

8.2 This section of the report looks at the key elements in the infrastructure which supports ESOL learners.

## **Standards**

9.1 A fundamental issue is to establish clear and consistent standards which apply to every part of the learning process - from initial assessment to progression to further and higher education.

9.2 The Government is committed to the establishment of nationally agreed basic skills standards. Our working group gave very careful consideration to the question of whether there should be separate standards for ESOL. There are arguments on both sides. Having separate standards would allow more precise descriptions of language skills, allow more relevance to language learning and skills and more easily provide a base for a specialist ESOL curriculum. But against that, there has been an unfortunate historic tendency to equate separate ESOL provision with low status and value and there is a danger that separate standards might perpetuate this marginalisation. It is important that ESOL learners are perceived as working to and reaching the same standards as other learners. The view of the majority of members of the group is therefore that the national standards for basic skills, which provide a clear benchmark for proficiency in literacy at Entry level, level 1 and level 2, should also apply to ESOL learners. However, this conclusion comes with important caveats.

9.3 We sought to influence the design of the basic skills standards, through input during their development and during consultation, in order to address some of the main needs for ESOL learners. A key issue is the need to recognise that listening and speaking are distinct skills and that learners of English develop proficiency in these receptive and productive skills at often very different rates. We also feel that, for ESOL learners, oracy (listening and speaking) and literacy (reading and writing) should be given equal weight.

9.4 These issues have partly been addressed in the final version of the standards: they have been amended to include distinct speaking and listening descriptors and it has been made clear that 'literacy' encompasses oral communication. But because of the need to ensure consistency and coherence with other frameworks, such as the National Curriculum and key skills, it was not possible to reflect all the concerns of this group in the finalised national standards framework. We therefore feel that it is critical that the particular needs of ESOL learners are reflected by the development and recognition of an ESOL curriculum separate from that developed for literacy.

9.5 In addition, the standards for basic skills only cover entry level, level 1 and level 2, whereas, as we report earlier, some ESOL learners need to develop their competence in English language to level 3 and beyond in order to gain access to higher education or to

practise their profession in this country. We believe that more thought needs to be given both to ways of accelerating these learners' progress at basic levels and providing them with clear routes for progression to higher levels.

9.6 It will be important to keep the standards under review and pay particular attention to the impact they are having on the delivery of ESOL in practice. We also believe that ESOL teachers will need specific guidance on how to use the standards in relation to diagnostic assessment of their students' needs and in relation to end of course assessment.

#### **Recommendation 6: Standards**

**a) The national standards for basic literacy should encompass ESOL standards up to Level 2 but there must be a distinct ESOL curriculum**

**b) The review of the national basic skills standards framework, planned for 2003/4, should consider the distinct factors relevant to ESOL and involve consultation with experienced ESOL practitioners.**

#### **Curriculum**

10.1 As noted earlier, learners of English for speakers of other languages are a particularly diverse group who will have different aptitudes in their general level of education, their language skills and their motivation and a wide range of cultural backgrounds that may differ significantly from those of most learners of basic literacy. This has significant implications for the curriculum and teaching methods.

10.2 The London Language and Literacy Unit has developed an ESOL curriculum which has now been published for consultation. This curriculum addresses each of the four skills of listening/speaking and reading/writing and:

- includes specific references to the learning requirements of those who do not speak English as their first language;
- recognises that ESOL learners bring a wealth of cultural, linguistic and educational experience which should be fully utilised in the course of teaching and learning;
- recognises that ESOL learners bring with them a particularly wide range of different learning styles, which need to be taken into account;
- recognises that many learners also bring an in-depth experience of other literacies;
- recognises the learner's first language as a positive basis for acquisition of English, which can be 'scaffolded' on to existing language and literacy skills;
- takes into account theoretical and practical strategies for second language acquisition;
- takes into account that time required for learners to acquire a whole new spoken and written language.

10.3 The draft basic skills curriculum emphasises the importance of accurate diagnostic assessment leading to the development of learning plans, a detailed skills based scheme of work with relevant but transferable contexts for learning and regular opportunities for formal assessment. ESOL approaches to curriculum planning must follow a similar broad outline.

10.4 We recommend that all ESOL courses should be based on a group learning plan, syllabus and scheme of work and should include individual diagnostic, formative and summative assessment. Class sizes may make it very difficult to manage individual learning plans but we believe that these should be compiled wherever possible.

### **Recommendation 7: Curriculum**

There should be an independent evaluation of the ESOL curriculum in practice, linked in with the proposed review of the national basic skills standards framework in 2003/4

### **Accreditation**

11.1 As with mainstream basic skills, the plethora of existing qualifications for ESOL is confusing for learners, teachers, employers and 'gatekeepers' in FE and HE. This problem was highlighted in the recent FEFC Inspectorate report *Numeracy, Literacy and ESOL: Evaluation of Entry and Level 1 Awards*.

11.2 The aims of qualifications were summed up in *A Fresh Start* as providing a goal for learners, feedback to teachers and evidence for employers and funders on standards and effectiveness of provision. Qualifications should have credibility, marketability, ease of access and provide an incentive to learners. In response to this the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is developing new National Literacy and Numeracy Tests at Levels 1 and 2. The clear intention is that these tests will have currency with employers and others.

11.3 ESOL students should have the same opportunities as fluent English speakers to gain a qualification which is easily accessible and will open doors to employment and other opportunities. It is crucial that the national test framework being developed by the QCA recognises the specific learning and contextual issues for ESOL students and does not create new barriers for them.

11.4. In developing the test framework and the national bank of test items for the National Literacy and Numeracy Tests, QCA should have regard to:

- the need to test oracy as in addition to literacy skills;
- how second language speakers acquire the same level of language competence as those with English as their first language;
- how to ensure that those who do not share the majority culture are not put at a disadvantage;
- how to ensure that stages of achievement below and between test levels can be recognised. Without this there is a very real danger of the tests proving too difficult and very demotivating for some learners.

11.6 Although the national literacy tests should be appropriate for many ESOL learners, they are unlikely to meet the needs of all. The new LSC funding methodology needs to be sufficiently flexible to cover a variety of learning goals. There will need to be a range of awards and qualifications suitable for ESOL learners that recognise achievement below Level 1 and that match goals and aspirations beyond level 2. For some learners, particularly those at an early stage in the learning process, external accreditation may not be appropriate. Opportunities for non-external accreditation, based on the achievement of learning goals drawn from the new national standards, should be retained.

11.7 Specific ESOL awards and qualifications must test the four skills (speaking/listening, reading/writing) separately. It is important that each skill can be tested at different levels to allow for differential progress across the four skills. Progression between these awards and qualifications at different levels will need to be defined in terms of language development, such as grammar, examples of language use, fluency and accuracy, not just by can-do statements.

11.8 As with literacy and numeracy awards, all ESOL and EFL awards should be mapped to the national standards in order to provide a transparent national qualifications framework. All qualifications should be transferable across institutions to enable students to progress to further training, such as GCSE English, vocational training, academic study or employment.

#### **Recommendation 8: Qualifications**

**ESOL (and EFL) qualifications should be mapped against the national standards. These qualifications should allow flexibility in delivery, assessment and outcomes and should assess each of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) separately.**

### **Quality Assurance**

#### **ESOL Teacher training**

12.1 ESOL students need to develop many language skills including pronunciation, speaking, listening, learning new vocabulary and understanding and using the grammar and syntax. Some may also need to develop their basic literacy and study skills alongside their language development. However many of the assumptions on which basic skills teaching is based are not true of ESOL. Basic skills students often have histories of failure at school and of non-promotion at work, or exclusion from the workforce because of their literacy/numeracy problems. ESOL students, particularly those from refugee groups, may have high level academic and professional skills but these have been acquired using another language. These students may need to orient themselves to the world of work in the UK but fundamentally need only to improve their language skills, and perhaps, update their professional skills. Younger learners will need sympathetic careers advice and counselling, as they may have no idea of the range of job opportunities in a western market economy.

12.2 To reflect these different needs, ESOL teacher training needs to be different from basic skills teacher training. Teachers working with ESOL students need to use a combination of



English Language Teaching (ELT) and basic skills teaching and there are often close links with the teaching of EFL and Modern Languages.

12.3 The new FENTO standards in teacher training call for two separate strands of training. The first relates *how to teach* skills (learning styles, classroom management, syllabus design etc): the teaching standards for all subjects. It will include for all teachers an awareness of basic literacy, numeracy and ESOL issues and a degree of expertise in dealing with them. The second strand relates to specific curriculum knowledge. Qualifications incorporating both strands of training would be available at initial, certificate and diploma levels.

12.4 Most new further and adult education staff will come with the specialised expertise in their subject area (secretarial skills, lip-reading, navigation, car maintenance etc.). However new ESOL teachers will generally require training in specialised language teaching techniques. This would include:

- linguistics;
- pronunciation and intonation;
- English grammar (e.g. subject verb agreement, verb tenses used in conditional sentences, collocations);
- theory and practice of teaching literacy skills;
- cultural /racial awareness.

12.5 There is a very well-developed teaching methodology relevant to this area which includes teaching all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and draws upon specifically developed ESOL materials. This teaching methodology also encompasses those ESOL teachers may need to develop higher level skills in the theory of language to cope with the wide academic range of ESOL learners.

12.6 Current ESOL teachers will need immediate training on the new standards and curriculum and, in the longer term, a programme of in service training to ensure that they have the skills they need and are familiar with the latest good practice in teaching. This training should draw on the experience of ESOL teaching practice in other countries and relevant lessons learnt from the teaching of EAL in schools.

12.7 In addition, there is a need to train teachers in language support techniques, including the analysis of subject-based language requirements and team-teaching strategies.

12.8 The view of this group is that there must be a clear career pathway, with a specialist curriculum for training in teaching ESOL, developed in parallel with the work FENTO are undertaking for new entrants to basic skills and special learning difficulties and disabilities teaching and in collaboration with ESOL and ELT specialists. It needs to include training for both discrete ESOL classes and for language support in academic and vocational areas. This would be in addition to the 'generic' teaching standards for FE being developed by FENTO. Discussion of all these issues should be initiated by FENTO and include the other relevant training organisations, particularly PAULO, the National Training Organisation which is responsible for those who work in community based education and training organisations, and ENTO for trainers in the workplace

12.9 This should offer a career progression route for new entrants to the profession including:

- initial or volunteer training (the latter for those who do not want to become teachers in their own right);
- in-service training at Certificate level. This would be the usual level of qualification on appointment, or within a specified time after appointment;
- diploma level training for those wishing to deepen their understanding of the profession or apply for promoted posts.

Where training is located in University Education Departments, it will need to draw on expertise within the profession in FE and AE.

12.10 In addition, the links between diploma level course and masters courses should be explored, so that Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL) can be given on masters courses for relevant previous achievement.

### **Recommendation 9: Teacher Training**

**a) DfEE should commission FENTO, together with ESOL specialists, to develop additional teaching standards and an initial training and qualifications framework for new entrants to ESOL teaching.**

**b) Within the 'generic' training for all teachers, there should be a recognition that teaching should be inclusive; awareness of the needs of bilingual students, including the ability to work with language support students, should be included.**

**c) The links between diploma level course and masters courses should be explored, so that Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL) can be given on masters courses for relevant qualifications and/or experience at masters level.**

**d) DfEE should commission the development and delivery of a programme of intensive training and support materials for ESOL teachers, based on the new curriculum. This training should be delivered to all ESOL teachers who work more than 6 hours per week by the end of 2001.**

**e) By 2005 all teachers on ESOL courses funded by the LSC should be appropriately trained and qualified.**

## **Inspection**

13.1 ESOL is managed differently by different post-16 providers. It has strong links with EFL and with Adult Basic Skills but is distinct from both. In some colleges, it is run as part of a Basic Skills section, whereas in others it is delivered as part of Humanities, usually alongside EFL and other language teaching. Language support for bi-lingual students is also organized in different ways by different providers. They are not necessarily consistent with the structures for delivering basic skills or dyslexia support.

13.2 It is very important that all inspections of areas which include ESOL should be conducted by staff with experience in language teaching, not merely in basic skills teaching, so that the factors listed in the teacher training section above can be taken into account. Inspectors should also have knowledge of how immigration law, the effects of displacement and different cultural traditions can affect retention and achievement.

### **Recommendation 10: Inspection**

**Inspection arrangement being developed for the new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) should ensure that there is a coherent and consistent inspection process for ESOL provision and that inspectors have specific ESOL experience.**

## Working Group On English for Speakers of Other Languages

### Terms of Reference:

To consider, through consultation and research, the particular basic skills needs of adults who do not speak English as their first language and to make proposals as to how those needs can best be met as an integral strand of the national adult basic skills strategy

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