

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) policy for Wales

Audience	All bodies concerned with post-16 education and training in Wales.
Overview	This document is the Welsh Government's policy on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) which sets out the direction of travel for the delivery of ESOL provision in Wales.
Action required	None – for information only.
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Additional copies	This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills
Related documents	<i>Programme for Government</i> (Welsh Government, 2011); <i>Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives 2012-2016</i> (Welsh Government, 2012); <i>Delivering community learning for Wales</i> (Welsh Government, 2010); <i>Getting On Together – a Community Cohesion Strategy for Wales</i> (Welsh Government, 2009); <i>Refugee Inclusion Strategy</i> (Welsh Government, 2008).

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Ministerial foreword

The Programme for Government sets out our aim for education in Wales that helps everyone to reach their potential; reduces inequality; and improves economic and social well-being.

Wales is a vibrant nation built on the diversity of its people. Our communities bring together individuals from a host of different backgrounds with unique characteristics and experiences.

People come to live in Wales for a variety of reasons and they bring with them wide ranging experiences and skills. In order to ensure our people are able to fully engage within our society, and reach their full potential, we must enable them to access the services they need.

Not being able to communicate in the English language makes it extremely difficult for individuals to fully engage within both our economy and society. We cannot afford for those who migrate to Wales to not be able to participate fully in our communities. We want everyone who lives in Wales to feel a valued part of our society. Hence we must ensure that English language education is available to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable non-English speakers and to ensure that migrant workers can contribute productively to the Welsh economy.

I am really pleased that this approach is reflected within our ESOL Policy for Wales. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is an essential part of our adult learning provision, and for the first time, this policy provides a steer as to how we wish ESOL to be delivered by our providers.

This policy is being published during an exceptionally difficult economic period. Funding for adult education in Wales is increasingly limited, so we must ensure that the funding we have available is targeted at those in greatest need.

This policy recognises ESOL as an essential skill, with the same value as the provision of basic literacy and numeracy.

This approach is core to our beliefs that all citizens of Wales should have equal access to the services they need to help them contribute to our vibrant and modern country.



Ken Skates AM
Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology

ESOL policy for Wales

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in Wales will help equip our citizens with the English language skills they need to fulfil their potential, to function independently within society and to actively participate in the Welsh economy.

This is in line with the commitment within the *Programme for Government* Action Plan to “Help everyone reach their potential, reduce inequality, and improve economic and social well-being”.

Wales is an inclusive, multicultural and multi-faith country. The diversity of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers living in Wales adds to the rich culture of our society.

Individuals who migrate here bring with them a range of skills and abilities which can benefit both our communities and the economy. In order for these individuals to reach their full potential, we must ensure we provide them with the support they need to develop English language skills.

We recognise the important contribution ESOL makes to the people of Wales, and aim to strengthen the links between providers, stakeholders, and the broader sector. This policy statement positions ESOL firmly within the priorities of the Welsh Government, and sets the direction of travel for the delivery of ESOL in Wales.

This policy was initially developed to take forward and respond to the findings of the *Review of the Provision of English for speakers of other languages in Wales*, published in 2010. It also takes forward the recommendations from the Action Plan of the ESOL Advisory Group which was developed in response to a number of reviews and research into the delivery of ESOL in Wales.

To ensure the policy addresses the most current ESOL delivery needs, it was developed in close consultation with the ESOL Advisory Board and stakeholders across the ESOL Sector.

The vision for ESOL in Wales

We consider ESOL to be a basic skill and as such that it should have parity with Essential Skills.

We will continue to provide public funding to support the delivery of ESOL classes for all up to the level of functionality¹.

What is ESOL?

ESOL is provision for learners whose first language is not English or Welsh, and who have for various reasons come to live in the UK. There is a clear distinction between ESOL and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and EAL (English as an Additional Language).²

The benefits of ESOL

ESOL is essential for integration and enables learners to function independently, support greater community cohesion and advance onto further learning opportunities or work.

There are clear links between English-language disadvantage and social exclusion and deprivation.³ A recent study into poverty and ethnicity in Wales found that English language skills influence “access to services, people’s confidence, their ability to help their children to flourish in school and their social networks”.⁴

Most significantly, ESOL underpins equality of opportunities, and enriches the culture of our society.

The current situation

The provision of ESOL as an element of Lifelong Learning is the responsibility of the Welsh Government. However, the UK Government has responsibility for Immigration and Citizenship policy which impacts on the provision of ESOL in Wales.

ESOL contributes to the delivery of a number of key priorities set out in the Programme for Government, and to a range of specific Welsh Government policies

¹ Functionality is the ability to read, write and speak in English or Welsh, and to use mathematics, at a level necessary to function and progress both in work and society. This definition equates to a robust level 1 in literacy (including ESOL) and numeracy. (www.wales.gov.uk – Essential Skills in the Workplace))

² EFL is for international students and for learners who are in the UK temporarily to study; EAL is English language support for young people and is only available in schools.

³ Alexander, Edwards and Temple. 2004. p1

⁴ Holtom, Bottrill and Watkins. 2013. p23

including the Strategic Equality Plan, the Refugee Inclusion Strategy, and a Community Cohesion Strategy – *Getting on together for Wales*.

Requirements for Settlement to the UK

Since October 2013, all applicants for settlement and naturalisation to the UK are required to pass the Life in the UK Test and present an English language speaking and listening qualification at a minimum of B1 (Entry 3) level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, unless they are exempt. These settlement arrangements may increase demand for ESOL provision in Wales. Future demand may also be affected by the impending changes to the membership of the European Union.

The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act implemented a policy of dispersal across the UK and, as a result, there are currently four cluster areas in Wales: Cardiff, Newport, Wrexham and Swansea. Demand for ESOL is, as expected, greatest in these areas.

The current population and need for ESOL

In developing future policy it is useful to take into account the differences in the population and demographic of learners across the country.

In the Census returns for 2011, 72,080 adults living in Wales had neither English nor Welsh as their first language. This equates to approximately 3 per cent of the adult population. Of these 16,708 stated they could speak little or no English.⁵

In 2011/12, there were 7,490 learners undertaking ESOL learning aims at Further Education Institutions in Wales⁶. The majority of these learners were concentrated in the city areas of Cardiff, Newport, and Swansea in South Wales and Wrexham in North Wales. Almost a third of all learners (32%) were in Cardiff, and the vast majority of these were at Entry Level 3 or below.

⁵ ONS.gov.uk Census 2011

⁶ Data from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record

ESOL learners in Wales

The majority of learners take ESOL classes either to help them into further education and work; and/or to gain the language skills they need to help them to interact and function within society.

Learners come from a variety of backgrounds and often have had different experiences of 'formal' education before they entered the UK. Indeed, some may not have had any form of education in the past and have little or no literacy skills in their own language, resulting in a classroom of learners who have mixed levels of literacy skills. This often means that the rates of progress for ESOL learners are extremely varied. This was highlighted within Estyn's report on the impact of increased demand for ESOL in 2008⁷. The diversity of learner and learner experience which exists within a single ESOL class is vast.

The length of time needed to learn ESOL

There has long been a debate over how many hours it takes to learn English through ESOL. There is no such thing as an 'average' ESOL learner and so trying to set a guide on how long it might take for someone to learn the language is almost impossible.

Dr Philida Schellekens, a consultant and author on ESOL, conducted a review of relevant research in 2011, which established that it would take an average of 1,765 guided learning hours for "learners (including a proportion of learners with no literacy skills in the first language) to progress from pure beginner level to a point where they could undertake study of another subject or take on a job with routine communication requirements".⁸

As such, the following predictions can be made for the length of time it could take for a learner to reach Level 1:

- Full-time FE students (**450 guided learning hours** per year) would need almost **four years** of study
- Adult students who learn English **ten hours a week** over 30 weeks a year would need **five years and seven months** of study
- Adult students who learn English **four hours a week** over 30 weeks a year would need **14 and a half years** of study

ESOL learners with a prior history of learning are more likely to make steadier, and in some cases rapid, progress. By contrast, learners who are not literate or have poor literacy in their own language may take several years to show progress from one level to the next and need high levels of support.

It is important to take this into account when determining provision and measuring performance.

⁷ Estyn, 2008, p10

⁸ Schellekens. 2011

The Welsh Language

Learning ESOL in Wales can provide learners with a greater challenge. Recognising and understanding Welsh place names and signs can be difficult, especially when English is 'alien' as well. Providers need to be conscious of this and help learners to understand the differences. Being a bilingual society provides a richness that can make learning English all the more interesting, and providers are encouraged to integrate the Welsh language into their ESOL classes where possible.

ESOL for further education and work

It is important for every citizen of Wales to have the opportunity to fully contribute to our society and economy. If the only barrier preventing an individual from competing for work at the level and within the field appropriate to their skills base is their English Language deficiency, then it is judicious and reasonable for us to help them to gain those skills.

Many immigrants enter the UK with technical and vocational skills, but their lack of English Language proficiency means they are not positioned to compete fairly in the work place. There is a general acceptance that an individual would need a minimum ESOL Entry Level 2 ability in Speaking & Listening to gain any form of employment. However, information collated from the People 1st Sector Skills Council indicates that even for the most basic level of work within the hospitality industry, English language skills at Level 1 would be required.

Latest statistics, highlight that the majority of ESOL learners in Wales are significantly below this level (76 per cent of learners are at Entry Level 3 or below⁹).

We want to enable people in Wales to gain the ESOL skills they require in order to utilise their existing vocational and academic skills. This will maximise the economic benefits of immigration.

Employers

In order for many ESOL learners to continue to progress after they have found employment, there is a need for them to continue their ESOL training within the workplace. We believe that employers have a responsibility to contribute towards ESOL provision where it is applicable for their staff. They will invariably derive a benefit from improving their staff skills. ESOL can be delivered on the employer's premises, and courses can be adapted to reflect the relevant area of work.

ESOL to function independently in society

English language is an essential tool for integration and community cohesion. It helps people to participate independently in our society, to contribute to the local economy, and to play an active positive role in Welsh communities all of which underpin and support current Welsh Government policies.

⁹ Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) data 2011/12

For a number of ESOL learners, learning English is not about entering the workplace, but about being able to engage more generally within society.

This includes being able to:

- Communicate effectively with schools and support their children in education;
- Access health, welfare, housing services etc.; and
- Participate in their communities and the wider society.

Individuals and communities who cannot communicate effectively in English have an impact not only on the communities and individuals themselves, but on society and services as a whole.

Not having the ability to speak English can have a severely damaging impact on an individual's ability to fully integrate into UK society. It can lead to social isolation, and could make the individual more vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination. They are also far more likely to be reliant on welfare support as their migration has often fractured their social networks¹⁰. Whilst ESOL provision may not in itself reduce this reliance on welfare support, it would contribute to enabling that individual to interact within society as independently as possible.

Interpretation and Translation

There can be a significant cost incurred by individuals who are not able to communicate in English, not least in translation and interpretation services. According to the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS), the average cost of translation and interpretation services in the public sector in Wales is approximately £3 million a year. Whilst ESOL could never eradicate these costs, improving the English language skills of our citizens could reduce the demand for these services.

The costs for informal support, whilst harder to quantify, can be equally damaging. According to a recent study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, many individuals rely on other family members with “better English language skills, often sons or daughters”¹¹ to act as interpreters for them. This can have a detrimental physical and psychological impact, particularly on those called upon to interpret in complex and often very ‘adult’ situations, especially within health and the law. Recognising the potentially damaging impact of this, the UK Department for Health stated in a National Service Framework for Children in 2003, that at no time should a child be “expected to act as sole interpreter for another family member or patient.”¹² This was an issue also raised by the Centre for Maternal and Child Enquiries who stated that “it is not appropriate for a child to translate intimate details of his or her mother and unfair on both the woman and child.”¹³

In a 2004 study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, all of the people interviewed had used family and friends (when available) as interpreters.¹⁴ There was anxiety

¹⁰ Holtom, Bottrill, and Watkins. 2013. p30

¹¹ Holtom, Bottrill, and Watkins. 2013. p23.

¹² DoH, 2003. p13

¹³ Lewis 2011 p50

¹⁴ Alexander, Edwards and Temple. 2004. p29

over the idea of having a 'stranger' interpret quite personal information, and the risk of that information somehow becoming public. Conversely, there was also a recognised concern that family members or friends would not have the required level of medical or judicial expertise to be able to interpret accurately.

What is clear is that a reliance on interpreters, either formal or informal, puts the individual in a position of vulnerability and disadvantage. Therefore, it is not only the financial impact we must consider in determining the 'cost' of interpretation, but also the potential psychological and emotional impacts. By far the most satisfying result would be to enable individuals to 'speak for themselves'.

ESOL provision

The quality and type of provision we make available is of vital importance if we are to benefit as many learners as possible.

In Wales, ESOL is delivered by a number of different organisations in the public sector, private sector and Third Sector.

We must ensure that the quality of our ESOL provision in Wales maintains a high standard, and that tutors are trained to the level which enables them to effectively and efficiently teach ESOL. We must also endeavour to ensure tutors are supported appropriately, enabling them to reach the expected standards.

We expect our providers to:

- Ensure that both current and aspiring ESOL teachers have ESOL specialist qualifications and training;
- Offer professional training opportunities and support on the additional learning needs of ESOL students; and
- Develop more opportunities for ESOL teachers to have full time or fractional contracts to provide them with the security needed to maintain high professional standards.

Funding

Welsh Government funding for Adult Community Learning in Wales is under mounting pressure, and we are all facing challenging times ahead. Accordingly, we need to consider a stronger culture of co-investment between government, employers and individuals across all available funding sources. This will help to increase the overall levels of investment and ensure that we can continue to support the provision for the future. We will be consulting on a co-investment policy in 2014.

We must ensure that the funding system we have in place is equitable and that all learners have equal opportunity to access provision.

We will be working with providers to ensure the monitoring systems in place accurately and effectively record the progress made by our learners, to ensure the data can properly inform our funding decisions.

Flexibility of provision

Whilst a basic understanding of the English language is essential, individuals also need a more detailed understanding of the vocabulary of their profession if they hope to progress into employment. Contextualised ESOL courses would be a valuable asset, and could help individuals to work towards updating their existing qualifications to those recognisable within the UK.

Helping people into work is only part of the goal. We also need to help those already in employment to improve their career development prospects. Currently, the majority of provision is delivered through long term courses (between 15 and 34

weeks on average), and is often at fixed times which can limit accessibility for ESOL learners who are in work.

If learners are to achieve these goals, the provision on offer must be flexible, varied and adaptable to meet ever changing demands, and the needs of learners. There cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach in terms of delivery of ESOL or expected achievements.

We must ensure that the qualifications we offer are effective and robust. As part of the ongoing development of all post-16 funding in Wales, we will be looking at our current provision to ensure we fund the right qualifications to benefit our learners.

Support for learners

Many ESOL learners come to the UK as refugees and asylum seekers, and it is important for providers to consider the psychological and physical condition of these learners when planning provision. Learners may have suffered severe trauma before their arrival in the UK and as such they may be especially vulnerable and require more support in undertaking their learning. It is vitally important for providers to not only make this support available, but to ensure they provide a safe and secure learning environment, and that staff are suitably trained to understand the potential difficulties these learners may face.

We must also help learners to practise their skills, and be supported within and outside the classroom.

We will:

- Develop a co-investment policy to maximise investment and to ensure we have sustainable and equitable provision for the future;
- Encourage providers to help learners to develop social groups for social interaction and skills practise;
- Continue to support specific initiatives to support ESOL learners in the workplace, and encourage employers to contribute to this provision; and
- Consider the qualification and accreditation needs of learners and continue to promote and fund appropriate qualifications and units of credit.

We expect our providers to:

- Increase and improve the role of ESOL trained classroom assistants;
- Encourage trained volunteers, to support the development of learners within the classroom;
- Provide more classroom support for students with additional needs; especially those who have a low level of literacy in their own language;
- Provide appropriate levels of language support in vocational classes to enable more Bilingual/ESOL learners to access mainstream provision, and address the needs of learners at transition from school to further education;
- Ensure that class sizes are appropriate and relevant to the needs of the learners;
- Ensure that learners understand the level at which they have been initially assessed, the level they are advancing towards, and the accreditation they need to progress further;

- Offer provision to meet the variety of needs of learners, taking into account: appropriate levels, location, timetables and the educational backgrounds of learners;
- Improve the opportunities for learners to enrol at appropriate times;
- Offer provision in a variety of locations, including in community and neighbourhood settings; and work with employers to provide in-work ESOL where possible.

Performance Measures

Progress and outcomes are fundamental to all learning provision. ESOL learners must have definable goals, with clear opportunities for them to progress.

In order to ensure there are clear outcomes for the learning provided, improved systems must be developed that enable the progression of ESOL learners to be monitored and benchmarked appropriately. Only with clear, reliable data will we be able to accurately measure the impact of our work and inform future policy making.

Learners must also receive an accurate initial assessment of their skills to ensure that they are placed on the appropriate training programme.

We must ensure that we are evaluating the performance of ESOL learners fairly and accurately, reflecting the individual modes of learning, and the length of time necessary for ESOL learners to progress.

We will:

- Develop guidelines on measuring all progress achieved and distance travelled;
- Develop methods of capturing data on ESOL,;
- Widen the use of tools to record softer outcomes;
- Continue to publish data on completion, attainment and success.

We expect our providers to:

- Ensure that assessors are adequately ESOL qualified.

Taking ESOL delivery forward

We will work with our partners to ensure there are suitable structures, resources and support systems in place to deliver ESOL.

We will:

- Liaise with other government departments and agencies on the delivery and development of ESOL in Wales;
- Develop a network of ESOL practitioners in Wales, to share and promote good practise, resources, and information;
- Support partnership structures for providers to co-ordinate ESOL provision and ensure the appropriate level of representation and commitment from providers and stakeholders; and
- Develop cohesive planning and funding arrangements for ESOL in line with post-16 planning and funding framework, which encourages partnership working of all ESOL providers.

We will retain the services of the ESOL Advisory group to support delivery of the new policy. The will provide invaluable expertise and experience of ESOL delivery, and act as a 'critical friend' in challenging the development and delivery of ESOL in Wales.

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