



New English Language Requirements¹ - Further update note for districts and training providers

Introduction

This note provides a further joint update from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Skills Funding Agency on the new English Language Requirements (ELR) which were introduced in England from 28 April 2014.

Update

The new ELR have been in place for several months so now is a good time to reflect on how the process is working, address any common issues you have raised and share some examples of good partnership working between Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and training organisations and information on the provision that seems to be working well.

The feedback so far has been broadly positive but we are aware that some DWP districts and colleges and training organisations have raised questions concerning the process and capacity to deliver the provision. We have therefore provided some answers in the Q&A at Annex B which might be helpful.

In addition, to address some of the challenges JCP and colleges and training organisations have been facing, Annex A provides a range of feedback and some case studies in the following areas:

- 'roll-on/roll-off' provision
- training that is available outside college term times

¹ Known to providers as 'ESOL Plus Mandation funding'



- shorter, more intense courses, rather than 'long/thin' courses, staggered in intakes

JCP and colleges and training organisations have built successful partnerships by working together constructively, communicating regularly and understanding how each other works, with JCP and colleges and training organisations responsive to JCP's needs.

One significant change introduced since April 2014 is the new Genuine Prospects of Work (GPOW) test for jobseekers from the European Economic Area (EEA). The new GPOW limits EEA jobseekers' period of claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (**JSA**) to three months (from six months) before they must show that they have a genuine prospect of work. As a result, we have been asked what we should do for claimants who would ordinarily be subject to ELR.

Where an EEA jobseeker is subject to the GPOW after three months, they will still be mandated to a college or training organisation for a full assessment. However, the college or training organisation will only recommend training for those who are assessed as being able to achieve a learning outcome before the GPOW takes place.

Claimants who the college or training organisation assess as unable to complete the training before the GPOW takes place will be referred back to JCP. The work coach will then decide whether to refer the claimant to any other locally available training that will help the claimant achieve their job goals.

However, EEA nationals who have worked in the UK previously and have lost their employment involuntarily may be classified as a "retained worker". Any EEA national given "retained worker" status will receive JSA for six months before being subject to the GPOW.



Department
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Skills Funding
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We hope this note will provide you further assistance in ensuring that the ELR are successfully delivered. If DWP Districts have further questions, they should email Lesley.robinson@dwp.gsi.gov.uk.



Annex A

Early Feedback and Emerging Good Practice ESOL Plus (ELR provision)

Introduction

The Association of Colleges (AOC) commissioned the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) to carry out small-scale research into the provision of ESOL Plus Mandation funding. The objectives of the research were to review early practice among training organisations in providing ESOL Plus Mandation programmes and to summarise key principles underpinning successful provision. We have extracted the following examples of good practice from the research and the full report is available at <https://www.aoc.co.uk/teaching-and-learning/quality-improvement/projects>.

Early Feedback and Emerging Good Practice

Initial and diagnostic assessment

Colleges and training organisations are using a variety of initial assessments, all of which they have developed themselves, including a spoken component in all cases.

One college had developed an initial assessment for learners to complete at the start and again at end of their programme, so that the teacher, learner and JCP could identify progress clearly and quickly.

One college held regular initial assessment sessions for approximately 90 people referred from JCP. Four staff (two ESOL teachers and two employability support



staff) managed these sessions, which took the whole morning and included free writing, literacy and a five-minute speaking assessment.

Induction

All ESOL Plus colleges held induction sessions at the start of the programme to lay ground rules, particularly in relation to attendance and punctuality; to cover health and safety and equality and diversity; and to complete some diagnostic assessment (partial rather than full on the shorter courses). One college included a tour of the library, which has an ESOL readers' section.

Course length

All colleges were running short, intensive courses to help meet JCP needs, for example flexible provision that is 'short and fat', rather than 'long and thin', with frequent intakes. Courses varied in length from four to 15 weeks and in intensity from 13.5 to 15 hours each week.

The shortest learning block was 48 guided learning hours (GLH) and the longest 210 GLH. Most colleges had developed short, incremental programmes to allow for learner progression where this need was agreed with JCP. There were varying expectations of learners being able to do more than one block.

Schemes of work

All colleges and training organisations had Schemes of Work (SOW) for their programmes. In most cases the SOWs comprised learning blocks of four or more weeks that could be repeated if JCP re-referred a learner. The learning skills were the same in each block but the topic was different, so that students were not duplicating learning but rather reinforcing and building on their skills in different contexts. For example, one college developed the SOW structure outlined in Table B (below) for each delivery level. They used the same structure for every group but the content was different. In this SOW the college had developed five different blocks of content.



Table B Example Scheme of Work

	Language skill	Topic – Block 1	Topic – Block 2
Week 1	Language development and language input	Greetings, basic skills – alphabet, numbers	Food and drink, shopping
Week 2	Language development and language input	About ourselves	Where I live
Week 3	Applying learning to a work situation and employability skills	Jobs and vocabulary	Customer service, getting to an interview
Week 4	Applying learning to tests: use of presentations, role play	Practice, revision, assessment	Practice, revision, assessment

Every four weeks there was in-class assessment which contributed to the Individual Learning Plan with targets for both language and employability. In every college's and training organisation's SOW there was particular emphasis on Reading and Writing in the pre-entry literacy block.

Employability Skills

All colleges running ESOL Plus courses had explicitly embedded employability skills in their programmes. In three instances colleges had shared this information with JCP but this was not routinely the case, and on the whole JCP was satisfied to leave colleges to develop and run their courses without JCP intervention. This was considered to reflect the level of confidence JCP had with regard to the quality and content of the training provision.



One college is beginning to look holistically across its JCP programmes for opportunities for ESOL Plus learners to engage in, for example, the Sector-based Work Academies if jobs are appropriate to their skills.

Partnership working between JCP and colleges and training organisations

Seven of the eight colleges interviewed indicated that continued and extensive working with JCP had led to very meaningful partnership activity. By considering what had contributed to making the partnership work, some common themes emerged from these colleges.

1 Mutual understanding how JCP and colleges and training organisations work

Key points:

- Through regular communications and meetings, increase the level of understanding of each other's terminology, organisational targets and processes.
- Named contacts or a single point of contact at JCP and the college who are aligned in what they are trying to achieve and understand each other's organisations.
- Teachers and JCP work coaches should meet face-to-face.

The seven colleges with ESOL Plus funding all fed back the importance of learning how JCP works, what their priorities and targets were, and how to accommodate their needs in the college programme. Conversely, JCP staff had in some cases not understood how Agency funding allocations work. For example, there was an assumption that more enrolments would generate more funding for a college or training organisation. This mutual understanding leads to the possibility of negotiation between the two organisations.



2 Being responsive to JCP

All colleges and training organisations realised the criticality to JCP of being able to refer new ESOL learners regularly and frequently. One college noted that this was JCP's overriding concern: reaching their referrals target was as important, if not more so, as getting learners through a programme as quickly as possible. The research showed that all of the ESOL Plus colleges and training organisations had been able to negotiate longer overall learning programmes with the use of repeating blocks of learning. Regular referrals and short courses (regardless of the fact that learners would need to work through more than one of these) were the main requirements for JCP.

3 Senior management involvement

Support from senior managers and vocational directors to facilitate progression routes is crucial. The additional funding which in all cases represented a significant proportion of the overall college income had definitely helped to reinforce the position of ESOL at a time when all other adult skills funding was being reduced. Most colleges reported that they had benefited from a very supportive and understanding senior manager at JCP, although not all frontline JCP staff were flexible.

4 Good communications

All the ESOL Plus colleges interviewed cited regular communication as an essential part in building the relationship. Designated contacts at appropriate levels in both organisations was considered essential, for example at operational level this meant weekly meetings and a way of reporting immediately when a problem arose.

Within colleges, structures were needed for teachers to report absences and difficulties.

Also emphasised was the need for teachers and JCP work coaches to meet face to face. This was often through training sessions that each of them arranged as an induction to how they work.



In some instances college staff carried out their initial assessment at JCP premises, although for most this was managed at the college, both to cater for the large numbers of referrals and to familiarise potential learners with the route to college and the environment.



Annex B

English Language Requirements

Further question and answers

Q1: Should districts set the marker for claimants with ELR where there is no provision currently in place?

A: We still expect districts to set the pilot marker for referral to assessment. Obviously the marker indicating that the college or training organisation has completed the ELR assessment will remain open until such time as they are able to do this.

Q2: What should districts do where training provision is unavailable?

A: Districts should be having an ongoing dialogue with local colleges and training organisations and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) about the training provision needed in local areas. In cases where training is unavailable, districts should seek to resolve any issues together with their local colleges and training organisations in the first instance. Annex A provides examples of good partnership working. Where districts are unable to resolve matters with colleges and training organisations, they should raise this with the LEP. DWP and the Agency will keep under review the likely demand across all districts, through joint monitoring of the programme.

Q3: You said that funding had been set aside for a further nine districts for which increased demand is expected. When will those districts receive this additional funding?

A: We will allocate the additional £2 million to colleges and training organisations in January 2015.

Q4: Where a claimant has been referred to ELR training and subsequently signs off, will the pilot marker need updating or will it remain unchanged until the claimant re-signs?



A: The pilot marker will not need updating if the claimant signs off. On any reclaims within six weeks, the claimant should be re-referred automatically to the college or training organisations. For claims outside six weeks, the work coach should screen the claimant for ELR and refer to a college or training organisation if applicable. In either case, the work coach should review the pilot marker and update as appropriate.

Q5: Can a college or training organisation use the funding to expand existing ESOL provision capacity?

A: Colleges and training organisations must only use the additional funding to deliver training provision to those individuals with poor English speaking and listening skills (below entry level 2).

Q6: Our guidance states that the aim of ELR is to improve speaking and listening, but some colleges and training organisations think that reading and writing should also be included. Which is correct?

A: For claimants subject to the ELR requirements, the focus must be to improve English speaking and listening skills by one level. The training may take in elements of reading and writing, provided that the focus remains on improving speaking and listening by one level.