



BRIEFING PAPER

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Adult ESOL in England

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Summary

Current provision and funding

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is the term used for English language courses taken by people whose first language is not English and who need English to communicate in daily life.

This briefing covers ESOL for learners aged 19 and over (referred to as adult ESOL) and relates to England only; different ESOL systems are in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

ESOL courses

A new suite of ESOL Skills for Life qualifications were accredited by Ofqual in 2014 and have been available to learners since 2014-15. The qualifications comprise three modes: reading, writing, and speaking and listening. It is possible for learners to take awards in a single mode, as well as a 'full-mode' certificate that combines all three. Courses may be taken at five levels: Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3 are basic level courses and Level 1 and 2 courses are equivalent to GCSEs.

ESOL funding

Government-funded adult ESOL is funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in the same way as other further education courses. Previously, the ESFA also funded ESOL learning through its community learning budget but from 2016-17 funding for community learning has been included within the wider Adult Education Budget and is no longer ring-fenced.

The ESFA will fully fund ESOL learning delivered in the classroom up to and including Level 2 for eligible learners aged 19 and over who are unemployed and in receipt of certain benefits. All other eligible classroom-based adult ESOL learning is co-funded by the ESFA, meaning that the ESFA pays some of the costs and the provider may pass on the remainder to the learner. There is no funding provided for ESOL provided in the workplace.

As funding for adult ESOL courses is demand-led, there are no future budgets set for their level of funding. Data on past funding levels (not including community learning) has been provided in response to parliamentary questions and shows that, other than in 2012-13, real levels of funding have fallen in each year since 2009-10. The overall reduction up to 2015-16 was 60% in real terms.

Estimated ESOL funding, England

	£ million cash	£ million 2015/16 prices
2009/10	203	222
2010/11	169	182
2011/12	117	124
2012/13	128	133
2013/14	120	123
2014/15	104	105
2015/16	90	90

Note: Academic year values adjusted using December 2016 financial year GDP deflators

Source: PQ 5953 [on English Language: Education] 11 January 2017

ESOL participation

The number of people starting funded ESOL courses has followed a very similar trend to funding since the start of this decade. Participation fell from almost 180,000 in 2009-10 to just over 100,000 in 2015-16.

In a survey of ESOL providers carried out by the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) in 2014, 80% of responders said their institution had "...significant waiting lists of up to 1,000 students..."; 66% said that lack of funding was the main cause of this.

Community-based English language programmes

In addition to ESOL provision funded through the ESFA, between 2013-14 and 2014-15 £8.45 million was allocated by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to six projects delivering community-based English language provision.

In January 2016, David Cameron announced a new £20 million community fund to teach English to isolated women. The Government stated that the funding would “build on and extend the English language fund run by DCLG” and would be “targeted to specific communities based on Louise Casey’s...review into segregation in England.” In July 2016 the Government stated that as “a first step” in rolling out the programme, £3 million would be allocated to the six providers of the DCLG’s community-based English language programme to allow them to provide tuition up to the end of March 2017. The Government further stated that it would “shortly be issuing a new prospectus, inviting applicants to run the bulk of the new programmes from 2017.”

Changes to ESOL funding since 2007

Up until August 2007, ESOL courses were eligible for automatic fee remission and, during this time, demand for and expenditure on ESOL increased substantially. Since this time, a number of changes have been made to ESOL funding, including:

- Automatic fee remission was withdrawn from 2007-08 and fees were introduced for ESOL courses. Only people in receipt of certain means tested benefits (and their unwaged dependents) and asylum seekers who had been waiting over six months for their asylum claim to be processed qualified for full funding. Other eligible learners were co-funded.
- From 2011-12 full-funding for ESOL courses was further restricted to individuals in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance or Employment Support Allowance (and in the Work Related Activity Group) and funding for ESOL in the workplace was withdrawn. Other eligible learners continued to be co-funded.
- Following changes to the requirements placed on Jobseeker’s Allowance claimants, £30 million of ESOL Plus Mandation funding was allocated in 2014-15. The funding was allocated to providers in areas that had been identified as likely to experience increased demand for ESOL as a result of the changes.
- Following the 2015 Summer Budget, ESOL Plus Mandation funding was withdrawn from 2015-16. The indicative allocation for 2015-16 had been £45 million.

Casey Review and other reports

The final section of the briefing provides brief information on a number of recent reports relating to ESOL, including the report of Louise Casey’s review of opportunity and integration, which was published in December 2016. The Casey Report raised concerns regarding the possible disadvantages caused by “English language proficiency issues” among certain groups. It recommended, among other things, that the Government should support “further targeted English language provision”, and should review whether current provision is sufficiently coordinated and meeting those who need it most.

In October 2017, the Government stated that it would respond to the Casey Review “in due course.”

1. Current provision and funding

1.1 Introduction

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is the term used for English language courses taken by people whose first language is not English and who need English to communicate in daily life. ESOL learners are very diverse, ranging from highly educated and proficient learners tackling a new language, to individuals who have little or no experience of schooling and are not literate in their first language.

This briefing covers ESOL for learners aged 19 and over (referred to as adult ESOL). It relates to England only; different ESOL systems are in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Box 1: Profile of adult ESOL learners

In October 2013, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published a research report evaluating the impact of learning Below Level 2 (Level 2 being broadly equivalent to GCSEs). The evaluation included a large-scale telephone survey among learners who had taken Below Level 2 further education courses. The report identified a number of key points about ESOL learners arising from the survey, including:

- 70% of ESOL learners were women. 30% were from a white ethnic group but the largest group of ESOL learners had Asian ethnicities.
- The qualification profile of ESOL learners was more polarised than other Below Level 2 learners - higher proportions had no qualifications but, also, higher proportions were qualified at Levels 4 or 5.
- ESOL learners were less likely than other Below Level 2 learners to have been in employment prior to their learning and more likely to have been economically inactive.
- ESOL learners were much more likely to have paid some or all of their course fees than other Below Level 2 learners.
- 87% of ESOL learners were satisfied with their course.
- Slightly more than three-quarters of ESOL learners reported that their course led to a qualification.
- Following their learning, 36% of ESOL learners were in employment or self-employment, compared to 32% per cent prior to their learning.
- Of 23% of ESOL learners who were in work before and after their course, 81% felt that their work situation had improved since their course, most frequently because their job satisfaction level has risen.¹

1.2 ESOL courses

In 2001, the Labour Government published [Skills for life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills](#). This introduced national standards and a national core curriculum for adult literacy and numeracy qualifications.² ESOL was, for the first time, benchmarked against these national standards and was based on a national [Adult ESOL core curriculum](#). Prior to this, ESOL provision had been informal in nature.³

¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Evaluation of the Impact of Learning Below Level 2](#), October 2013, pp115-6.

² Department for Education and Employment, [Skills for life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills](#), 2001, pp45-7.

³ Demos, [On Speaking Terms](#), August 2014, p37-8.

A new suite of ESOL Skills for Life qualifications were accredited by Ofqual in 2014 and have been available to learners since 2014-15. The qualifications are required to meet the requirements of the National [Standards for Adult Literacy](#) and demonstrate “a clear relationship to the [Adult ESOL core curriculum](#)”, neither of which were changed with the introduction of the new suite of qualifications.⁴

ESOL Skills for Life comprise three modes: reading, writing, and speaking and listening. It is possible for learners to take awards in a single mode, as well as a ‘full-mode’ certificate that combines all three.⁵

Courses may be taken at five levels: Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3 are basic level courses and Level 1 and 2 courses are equivalent to GCSEs. A report by the Association of Colleges in 2013 said that there was “high demand for ESOL at Entry level 1 and Entry level 2, falling off sharply at Levels 1 and 2.”⁶

Box 2: International ESOL qualifications

International ESOL qualifications are available up to Level 3 for non-native speakers who want to demonstrate their ability to communicate in English – for example, candidates who are preparing for entry to higher education. These qualifications are more akin to proficiency tests, with the learner demonstrating their ability in English rather than learning new skills.⁷ International ESOL courses are not funded by the Skills Funding Agency.⁸

It is also possible for learners to take more informal unaccredited ESOL courses. Such courses are often offered by colleges and local authorities as part of their funded community learning provision. They may also be provided by voluntary groups and funded wholly through voluntary contributions.

1.3 Funding for adult ESOL courses

Government-funded adult ESOL is mainly provided through further education colleges, as part of local authorities’ community learning provision, and by independent training providers. Courses are funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in the same way as other further education courses.

The ESFA will fully fund ESOL learning aims⁹ delivered in the classroom up to and including Level 2 for eligible learners¹⁰ aged 19 and over who

Community learning covers a wide range of non-formal courses, such as IT courses, employability skills and family learning. It is provided primarily by local authorities and further education colleges.

⁴ Ofqual, [Criteria for English for Speakers of Other Languages \(ESOL\) Qualifications](#), July 2011, p2.; City and Guilds, [Changes to ESOL: Revised Qualifications: Shifting Policy Expectations](#), November 2014.

⁵ Association of Colleges, [The experience of colleges using new ESOL OCF Skills for Life Qualifications](#), March 2015, p7.

⁶ Association of Colleges, [ESOL Qualifications and funding in 2014: Issues for consideration](#), October 2013.

⁷ [International ESOL](#), City and Guilds, last updated 20 October 2016.

⁸ Skills Funding Agency, [Qualification Eligibility Principles](#), September 2016, p6.

⁹ ‘Learning aim’ is defined in the [Skills Funding Agency’s common funding rules](#) as “a single episode of learning which could be a regulated qualification, a component of a regulated qualification or a piece of non-regulated learning activity” (para A10.2).

¹⁰ Details of who qualifies as an eligible learner are set out on pages 19-24 of the Skills Funding Agency’s [Common and performance management funding rules](#), July 2016.

are unemployed. Learners are defined by the ESFA as unemployed if at least one of the following applies to them:

- They receive Jobseekers Allowance.
- They receive Employment and Support Allowance and are in the work-related activity group.
- They receive Universal Credit, earn below an earnings threshold and are identified by Jobcentre Plus as being in one of: the All Work-Related Requirements Group, the Work Preparation Group, or the Work-Focused Interview Group.¹¹

Box 3: Creation of the ESFA

From April 2017 the Education Funding Agency and the Skills Funding Agency merged to form one body – the ESFA. The ESFA is responsible for the funding of education for 5-16 year olds, education and training for 16-19 year olds, apprenticeships and adult education, and for managing school building programmes.¹² Prior to the merger, the Skills Funding Agency was responsible for the funding of adult education and training.

Learning providers are not permitted to make any compulsory charges relating to the costs of delivering a learning aim that is fully funded by the ESFA.¹³

All other classroom-based adult ESOL learning is co-funded by the ESFA, meaning that the ESFA pays some of the costs and the provider may pass on the remainder to the learner.¹⁴

Providers may at their discretion decide to fully fund eligible learners who are in receipt of state benefits and have earnings below a set threshold. In addition, the learner must be seeking employment or to progress into more sustainable employment, and the learning must be directly relevant to their employment prospects.¹⁵ Such funding comes from a provider's existing budget.¹⁶

There is no funding available for ESOL provided in the workplace.

Funding levels

As funding for adult ESOL courses is demand-led, there are no future budgets set for their level of funding. The Government does not routinely publish data on ESOL funding. The only data on funding is that produced in response to parliamentary questions and these cover past levels only. This is summarised opposite and shows that, other than in 2012-13, real levels of funding have fallen in

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Note: Academic year values adjusted using December 2016 financial year GDP deflators

Source: PQ 5953 [on English Language: Education] 11 January 2017

¹¹ Skills Funding Agency, [Adult education budget funding and performance management rules: For the 2016 to 2017 funding year](#), July 2016, pp4-5 & 9. Further information on the Universal Credit work-related activity groups is available at: [Claimant commitment: what work-related activity group you should be in](#), Citizens Advice.

¹² [New agency to provide joined-up education and skills funding](#), Department for Education, 28 March 2017

¹³ As above, p15.

¹⁴ As above, p9.

¹⁵ As above, p5.

¹⁶ Demos, [On Speaking Terms](#), August 2014, p39.

each year since 2009-10. The overall reduction up to 2015-16 was 60% in real terms.¹⁷

Data on ESOL funding by region since 2010-11 was provided in response to a parliamentary question in November 2017.¹⁸

Funding for community ESOL learning

Prior to 2016-17, the Skills Funding Agency (prior to the merger that created the ESFA) also funded ESOL learning through its community learning budget. From 2016-17 funding for community learning has been included within the wider Adult Education Budget (see box 3 below) and is no longer ring-fenced.

The National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults (NATACLA) has stated that this change to the funding system will give providers “greater flexibility to offer non-qualification courses, but it remains to be seen how this will affect community and family language provision.”¹⁹

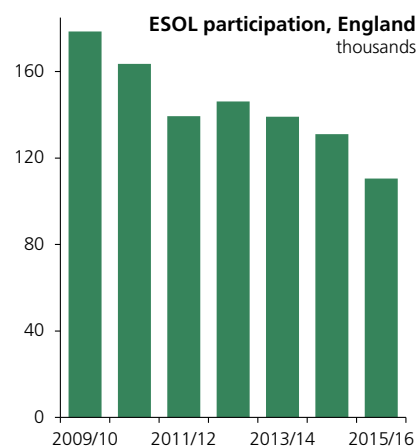
Box 4: Adult Education Budget (AEB)

The AEB was introduced in 2016-17 and combines within one budget all adult participation and support funding that is not European Social Fund, apprenticeships or advanced learner loans.

1.4 Participation in ESOL courses

The number of people starting funded ESOL courses has followed a very similar trend to funding since the start of this decade, as shown opposite. Participation fell from almost 180,000 in 2009-10 to just over 100,000 in 2015-16.

The National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) carried out a survey of providers in 2014, which asked about the size of waiting lists for ESOL courses. 80% of responders said their institution had “...significant waiting lists of up to 1,000 students...”. In addition, 66% said that lack of funding was the main cause of this.²⁰



Source: Further education and skills: January 2017, DfE

1.5 Community-based English language programmes

In January 2013, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) announced a new competition fund for projects delivering community-based English language provision.

The announcement stated that the Government was looking to back programmes that will “help to integrate participants into their communities and also offer financial benefits.” It noted that ESOL courses

¹⁷ These cover Department for Education and predecessor department funding through the Adult Skills Budget only and exclude any funding through community learning budgets and a total of £7.5 million from the Department for Communities and Local Government for six projects starting in 2013 (see section 1.4 below).

¹⁸ [PQ 110037](#), 6 November 2017.

¹⁹ NATECLA, [Towards an ESOL strategy for England](#), October 2016, p8.

²⁰ [NATECLA RELEASE: Migrants on huge waiting lists for English courses as government funding is cut again](#), NATECLA, 22 May 2014

may not always be suitable for non-English speaking residents and said that the Government wanted to find new ways to teach basic English to people in areas facing integration challenges:

While English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses provide an excellent service and help a lot of people, the nature of many English language courses means that a significant proportion of non-English speaking residents are not accessing this tuition, even when they are eligible for a fee reduction.

Often these courses are not suited to their needs. They may be held in large further education colleges without childcare facilities and too far from home, which can create an intimidating and impractical learning environment.

The government wants to support those missing out by uncovering new ways to teach basic conversational English to people in areas facing significant language barriers and integration challenges. This can increase the opportunity for people to take part in their communities, mix with neighbours from different backgrounds and help move them towards employment.²¹

In November 2013, it was announced that £6 million of funding would be shared between six projects covering London, the Midlands, the North and Bristol.²² The funding was intended primarily for 2013-14 and 2014-15 but the competition prospectus stated that there was scope to extend funding to 2015-16.²³ Further information on the chosen projects is provided in a DCLG press release, [Thousands to benefit from exciting new ways of learning English](#).

The projects received £8.45 million of funding up to the end of 2015-16.²⁴ Additional funding of around £3 million was then allocated to them for 2016-17 "as the first step" in rolling out a new £20 million community fund to teach English to isolated women (see below).²⁵

A parliamentary question response in October 2017 stated that DCLG had invested £12 million since 2013, supporting 54,000 learners as part of its community English language programmes. The learning had been at pre-entry level and focused on "women with no or very little English who are unlikely to access classes in more formal settings." The response added that the Government had been reviewing the evidence on the cause of poor integration and would "bring forward plans for tackling these issues through a new integration strategy."²⁶

Funding for teaching English to isolated women

In January 2016, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced a "new £20 million community fund to teach English to isolated women."²⁷ Announcing the fund in an article in *The Times*, Mr

²¹ [New £6 million competition fund for English language learning](#), DCLG, 15 January 2013.

²² [Thousands to benefit from exciting new ways of learning English](#), DCLG, 13 November 2013.

²³ DCLG, [Community-based English language competition](#), May 2013, p14.

²⁴ [PO 60891](#), 2 February 2017.

²⁵ [PO 42570](#), 20 July 2016.

²⁶ [PO 108238](#), 25 October 2017.

²⁷ ['Passive tolerance' of separate communities must end, says PM](#), Gov.uk, 18 January 2016.

Cameron cited figures that “190,000 British Muslim – or 22 per cent – speak little or no English despite many having lived here for decades” and stated that it was therefore “no surprise 60 per cent of women of a Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage are economically inactive.”²⁸

A Government press release stated that the £20 million would “build on and extend the English language fund, run by the DCLG” and that classes “will take place in homes, schools and community facilities, with travel and childcare costs provided to remove some of the greatest barriers to participation.” The announcement added that that the scheme would be “targeted to specific communities based on Louise Casey’s...review into segregation in England.”²⁹ A parliamentary question response in February 2016 confirmed that the scheme “will not just be restricted to Muslim women.”³⁰

In July 2016, the Minister, Marcus Jones, stated that “as the first step” in rolling out the programme, £3 million would be allocated to allow the six providers of the DCLG’s community-based English language programme (see above) to provide tuition up to the end of March 2017. He further stated that the Government would “shortly be issuing a new Prospectus, inviting applications to run the bulk of the new programmes from 2017.”³¹

1.6 ESOL funding for Syrian refugees

On 4 September 2016, the Government announced £10 million of funding to boost English language tuition for those arriving under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). A news story published on Gov.uk stated that:

...the additional funding for English language training will mean all adults arriving through the scheme anywhere in the UK will receive an extra 12 hours a week of tuition, for up to 6 months. This is in addition to the language support already provided by local authorities, which is accessed by refugees within a month of their arrival and will assist families to integrate into their new communities more quickly and make it easier for them to seek and obtain work.³²

In response to a parliamentary question, the Minister, Robert Goodwill, stated that the funding “is provided to help refugees learn English and integrate into British society.”³³

1.7 Controlling migration fund

The Controlling Migration Fund includes a local services fund worth £100 million (£25 million in each of the four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20), which councils in England can bid for funding from.

²⁸ [We won't let women be second-class citizens](#), *The Times*, 18 January 2016.

²⁹ ['Passive tolerance' of separate communities must end, says PM](#), Gov.uk, 18 January 2016.

³⁰ [PO HL5837](#), 10 February 2016.

³¹ [PO 42570](#), 20 July 2016.

³² [First anniversary of government commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees](#), Home Office, 7 September 2016.

³³ [PO 49968](#), 31 October 2016.

The [prospectus](#) explaining how local authorities can access the fund makes clear that proposals for funding should demonstrate how they will benefit the resident community in the first instance. It also notes, however, that “legitimate migrants may be the focus of some projects, for example English language support.”³⁴ In response to a parliamentary question, the Minister, Robert Goodwill, additionally stated that local authorities had been encouraged to consider whether the fund could be used to “help with any short-term pressures as a result of recent arrivals of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.”³⁵

1.8 Midlands Engine Strategy

In March 2017, the Government published its [Midlands Engine Strategy](#). The strategy followed from the industrial strategy and set out actions aimed at addressing productivity barriers in the Midlands.

The strategy stated that the Government would establish a Midlands Skills Challenge with the aim of “closing the skills gap between the Midlands and the rest of the country.” As part of the support to help the region meet the challenge, the strategy announced that the Government would provide £2 million “to offer English-language training to people in the Midlands whose lack of ability to speak English is holding them back from accessing employment.”³⁶

³⁴ [Controlling Migration Fund: prospectus](#), DCLG and Home Office, last updated 3 April 2017.

³⁵ [PQ67787](#), 21 March 2017.

³⁶ HM Government, [Midlands Engine Strategy](#), March 2017, p15.

2. Changes to ESOL funding since 2007

2.1 Ending of automatic fee remission in 2007-08

Up until August 2007, ESOL courses were eligible for automatic free remission and, during this time, demand for and expenditure on ESOL classes increased substantially.

In October 2006, the Labour Government announced that from 2007-08 automatic fee remission would be withdrawn and fees would be introduced for ESOL courses. Broadly, under the changes only people in receipt of certain means tested benefits (and their unwaged dependents) were entitled to full fee remission.³⁷ Learners not entitled to full fee remission were co-funded and expected to make a contribution towards the cost of the course fees.³⁸ The assumed fee contribution for learners who were co-funded was 32.5% and increased incrementally to 50% by the 10-11 academic year.³⁹

In response to concerns raised in a Race Equality Impact Assessment carried out in March 2007, the Government committed to reinstating eligibility for fee remission to asylum seekers who had been waiting over six months for their claim to be processed. It also committed to facilitate ESOL provision through employers within a joint agreement through the Union Envoy and Union Learning representatives.⁴⁰

Further information on the ending of automatic fee remission, including reactions to the change, is provided in a 2008 Library Briefing Paper, [Provision of English languages courses for speakers of other languages \(ESOL\)](#).

2.2 “Re-focusing” of ESOL from 2011-12

A strategy document published by the Coalition Government in November 2010, [Further Education – New Horizon: Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth](#), outlined a number of reforms to be made over the period to 2014-15, including that funding on ESOL would be “refocused”.⁴¹

Under the changes, from the 2011-12 academic year full-funding for ESOL courses was further restricted to individuals in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or Employment Support Allowance (and in the Work

³⁷ The benefits were income-based and contribution-based Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, Working Tax Credit (subject to an income threshold), Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit only) and income-based Employment and Support Allowance.

³⁸ [HC Deb 13 November 2007 cWA7](#).

³⁹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [English for Speakers of Other Languages \(ESOL\) Equality Impact Assessment](#), July 2011, p5.

⁴⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [English for Speakers of Other Languages \(ESOL\) Equality Impact Assessment](#), July 2011, p6.

⁴¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Further Education – New Horizon: Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth](#), November 2010, p5.

Related Activity Group). Other eligible learners, including asylum seekers who had been waiting over six months for their claim to be processed, would be co-funded. In addition, ESOL delivered in the workplace was no longer eligible for any funding and a programme weighting funding uplift that had previously applied to ESOL courses was removed.⁴²

The Coalition's full Skills Strategy, gave the following rationale for the changes:

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision is important to help those who do not speak English to gain employment and to contribute to society. However, we believe that those who come from other countries to work in England, or their employers, should meet the cost of their English language courses. Therefore we will not fund ESOL training in the workplace. This will enable us to focus publicly-funded provision on people whose lack of English is preventing them from finding work. Full funding will only be available for those actively seeking work on Jobseekers Allowance and Employment Support Allowance (work related activity group) benefits. For others ESOL will be co-funded.⁴³

Following the initial announcement some additional flexibility was provided, whereby providers could give full fee remission to unemployed learners on other state benefits who were learning English in order to find employment. Providers would not, however, receive additional funding from the Skills Funding Agency for this provision and it would come from their existing budget.⁴⁴

Further information on this change, including reactions to it, is provided in Library Briefing Paper 5946, [Changes to funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages \(ESOL\) courses](#).

2.3 Flat-rate funding for ESOL courses from 2013-14

In 2013-14 changes were made to the basis on which ESOL courses were funded. Previously, courses had been funded according to their guided learning hours; from 2013-14 courses would instead be listed on the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF) and providers would get a flat rate for a qualification, regardless of the number of hours offered.

As many ESOL courses are short courses and were only awarded a small number of credits on the QCF, concerns were raised that providers could lose funding for their ESOL provision compared to the previous system. Transitional protections were put in place until new ESOL qualifications were developed in the QCF from 2014-15 (see section 1.1 above). A document published by the Skills Funding Agency setting out

⁴² Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Further Education – New Horizon: Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth](#), November 2010, pp5 & 6; Skills Funding Agency, [Learner Eligibility and Contribution Rules 2011-12](#), May 2011, p19; and Skills Funding Agency, [Adult Skills Budget Funding Requirements 2011-12](#), July 2011, p33.

⁴³ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Skills for Sustainable Growth: Strategy Document](#), November 2010, p32.

⁴⁴ Refugee Council, [A lot to learn: refugees, asylum seekers and post-16 learning](#), January 2013, p12; [HC Deb 18 October 2011, cc818-9W](#).

the changes stated that under the transitional protections for 2013-14, it would “make sure that earnings relating to ESOL provision are at least the same as in 2012-13, based on like-for-like provision.”⁴⁵

A document published NATECLA provides an overview of the changes and the concerns raised: [NATECLA statement regarding SFA Funding Rules 2013-14](#).⁴⁶

2.4 Introduction of ESOL Plus Mandation funding, 2014-15

At the 2013 Spending Round, the Coalition Government announced that the requirements placed on Jobseeker’s Allowance claimants would be increased. As part of this, claimants whose poor spoken English was a barrier to work would be mandated to attend English language courses and face sanctions if they refused.⁴⁷ The new requirements were introduced from April 2014.⁴⁸

An additional £30 million, referred to as ESOL Plus Mandation funding and routed through the Skills Funding Agency, was provided in 2014-15 to help providers meet the increase in demand for ESOL that was expected to result from the changes. The funding was allocated to specific providers in 17 Jobcentre Plus districts that were identified as likely to experience the biggest increases in demand. An additional £2 million was made available to support delivery by providers in other areas, which would be prioritised for use in eight areas.⁴⁹

Removal of funding from 2015-16

In his Summer Budget of July 2015, the then Chancellor, George Osborne, announced in-year reductions to the budget for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. In a letter of 20 July 2015, Peter Lauener, Chief Executive of the Skills Funding Agency, set out how this impacted on providers’ funding allocations for 2015-16. Among other things, the letter stated that ESOL Plus Mandation funding would be withdrawn in full for the 2015-16 academic year.⁵⁰

An article in the *Times Education Supplement (TES)* quoted a spokesperson from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills as stating that part of the reason for the withdrawal of funding was because of an expected “considerable underspend” on the programme

⁴⁵ Skills Funding Agency, [A New Streamlined Funding System for Adult Skills](#), August 2013, p17.

⁴⁶ NATECLA statement regarding SFA Funding Rules 2013-14, NATECLA, 5 February 2013.

⁴⁷ HM Treasury, [Spending Round 2013](#), Cm 8639, June 2013, p26.

⁴⁸ Skills Funding Agency and Department for Work and Pensions, [New English language requirements](#).

⁴⁹ Skills Funding Agency and Department for Work and Pensions, [New English language requirements](#).

⁵⁰ Skills Funding Agency, [Funding Allocations 2015 to 2016](#), 20 July 2015.

in 2014-15.⁵¹ The indicative ESOL Plus Mandation funding for 2015-16 was £45 million.⁵²

Reaction to removal of funding

The removal of ESOL Plus Mandation funding was controversial; concerns were raised regarding the impact on both learners and providers, about the effect on integration and regarding the timing of the announcement.

The Association of Colleges stated that the withdrawal of the funding would “add to the isolation of some communities and make it harder for colleges to work with Jobcentre Plus to get people ready for work.” It also noted that colleges had “only two weeks notice” of the changes.⁵³

NATECLA contended that the funding withdrawal would “have an immediate and devastating impact on ESOL provision across the country”. It also criticised the timing of the announcement, stating that it came at a time when “planning for the next academic year is finished, prospectuses have been published and teachers are in place.”⁵⁴

A briefing note published by the University and Colleges Union (UCU) in October 2015 provided an overview of the Union’s concerns with the withdrawal of ESOL Plus Mandation funding and cited the Association of Colleges as saying that 16,000 learners would be affected:

The Association of Colleges has said that the removal of the mandate affects 47 colleges and 16,000 learners, and several local authority adult education services are also seriously affected by the change. The mandate was withdrawn without warning, forcing some providers to cancel classes due to start in the summer. As a result of the changes, several services are reviewing their overall provision and a number have already issued redundancy notices to staff.

[...]

The withdrawal of the ESOL mandate means that jobseekers will no longer be referred to free ESOL classes as part of a structured programme to improve their chances of finding employment. They will have to find alternative ways to access ESOL learning where this is available locally.⁵⁵

⁵¹ “[Colleges must offer Esol courses despite funding wipeout](#)”, TES, 31 July 2015

⁵² Skills Funding Agency and Department for Work and Pensions, [New English language requirements](#).

⁵³ [Further very late cuts to adult education funding announced](#), Association of Colleges, 20 July 2015.

⁵⁴ [NATECLA statement on withdrawal of ESOL Plus mandated learning](#), NATECLA, 21 July 2015.

⁵⁵ University and College Union, [English for speakers of other languages \(ESOL\): UCU briefing](#), October 2015.

3. Reports

This section provides brief information on a number of recent reports on, or relevant to ESOL.

3.1 Casey Review into opportunity and integration, December 2016

In December 2016, Louise Casey published the [report of her review into opportunity and integration](#), which had been commissioned by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, in July 2015.

English language proficiency issues

The report stated that data from the 2011 Census highlights “English language proficiency issues in Muslim, Polish, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities and reveals some inequalities for women and girls in particular communities.” It argued that this was particularly worrying because poor English language skills “have been shown to create a number of disadvantages” and stand out “strongly as a barrier to progress” in relation to integration and economic success.⁵⁶

ESOL

The report noted that 27% of ESOL learners go on to further learning and stated that “there is a clear link between the level of English spoken and the level of qualifications obtained, and between levels of English and employment rates and labour market capabilities.” It then highlighted concerns that had been raised regarding funding by providers of English language courses:

During the review, a number of providers of English Language courses told us that funding for such provision from Government had reduced in recent years, was being devolved locally and focussed more on higher-level language and other skills for those seeking employment. They felt that there was a significant gap in funding for pre-entry and entry level English language courses.⁵⁷

The report’s section on English language ended by noting the English language requirements placed on most non-European migrants as part of the immigration process.⁵⁸

Recommendations

The report recommended that central government should support a new programme to help improve community cohesion, which would provide targeted support for projects that would build more resilient communities. While the report stated that the Government should agree a final list of project criteria, it stated that they should include the promotion of English language.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Dame Louise Casey, [The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration](#), December 2016, pp94-9.

⁵⁷ As above, p97.

⁵⁸ As above, pp97-8.

⁵⁹ As above, p167.

It additionally recommended that the Government should support “further targeted English language provision” by making available sufficient funding, and should review whether English language provision is sufficiently coordinated and meeting those who need it most:

A shared language is fundamental to integrated societies. The Government should supporting further targeted English Language provision by **making sufficient funding available for community-based English language classes, and through the adult skills budget for local authorities to prioritise English language where there is a need. It should also review whether community based and skills funded programmes are consistently reaching those who need them most, and whether they are sufficiently coordinated** [emphasis in original].⁶⁰

Government response

In February 2017, a parliamentary question asked whether the Government will respond to the Casey Review by “providing extra resources to councils to fund ESOL provision.” The Minister, Marcus Jones, stated that the Government would come forward with its plans for tackling the issues raised by the review “in the Spring.”⁶¹ Responding to the October 2017 debate on English language teaching for refugees (see box 5 below), the Minister, Brandon Lewis, stated that the Government would respond to the Casey Review “in due course.”⁶²

3.2 NATECLA, *Towards an ESOL Strategy*, October 2016

In October 2016, the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) published [Towards an ESOL strategy for England](#). The report aimed to “make the case for an ESOL strategy for England” and set out proposals for inclusion in such a strategy.

The argument for an ESOL strategy

The report highlighted the funding reductions to the ESOL sector since 2007 and argued that waiting lists were “at an all-time high” and that “people who want to learn English find that both entitlement to learning and the number of places have dramatically reduced”⁶³ It also contended that the Government’s emphasis on integration had “not translated into a coherent strategy for ESOL provision in England” and that ESOL policy suffered from a lack of co-ordination, with the Department for Education in the lead, but the Department for Work and Pensions, the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government also having roles.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Dame Louise Casey, [The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration](#), December 2016, p169.

⁶¹ [PO 59394](#), 2 February 2017.

⁶² HC Deb 24 October 2017, [c102WH](#).

⁶³ NATECLA, [Towards an ESOL strategy for England](#), October 2016, p9; [NATECLA launches Towards an ESOL Strategy](#), 6 October 2016.

⁶⁴ NATECLA, [Towards an ESOL strategy for England](#), October 2016, pp9-10.

The report argued that an ESOL strategy would:

- target limited financial resources where they are most needed
- improve the language skills of those who are seeking or in employment
- utilise the skills of the many well-qualified migrants who are currently in low-paid work
- enable people from minority communities to participate more fully in society, leading to greater
- integration and less opportunity for isolation
- promote physical and mental health and well-being by developing people's language skills and confidence
- enable parents from minority communities to better support their children's education in school.⁶⁵

A draft ESOL strategy

The process of producing proposals for a draft strategy was initiated by ESOL stakeholders and taken forward by a steering group. Proposals were drawn from a range of sources, including the existing ESOL strategies in Scotland and Wales, before being subject to consultation with stakeholders.

Box 5: ESOL strategies in Wales and Scotland

Unlike England, both Scotland and Wales have ESOL strategies. The [Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland](#) was published in 2007. This was updated in February 2015 to cover the period to 2020: [Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015 – 2020](#). The ESOL strategy for Wales, [English for Speakers of Other Languages \(ESOL\) policy for Wales](#), was published in June 2014.

The report's summary set out the proposals that were preferred by most respondents to the consultation. They include (but are not limited to):

- Widening eligibility for full-funding to include, among others, people in receipt of benefits not related to unemployment, asylum seekers, and those with low literacy levels in their first language.
- Funding the additional costs of learning, such as childcare, where they represent a barrier to learning.
- Establishing a national panel leading on the co-ordination of all aspects of the strategy.
- Creating local hubs for mapping provision and signposting learners and partnerships of ESOL stakeholders to be set up in local areas.
- Providers catering for all levels, including pre-entry.
- Providers supporting and encouraging teachers from BME backgrounds.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ NATECLA, [Towards an ESOL strategy for England](#), October 2016, p2.

⁶⁶ As above pp2-3.

3.3 BIS Research on labour market returns of Maths and English learning, May 2016

In May 2016, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published a research report on the labour market returns for individuals achieving qualifications at “Below Level 2” and “Level 2” in English further education. The research estimated separately the earnings, employment probability and probability of being on active benefits for individuals who achieve their learning aim relative to those who have the same aim but did not achieve it.⁶⁷

For ESOL learning, the report found “good earnings returns to ESOL learning”, with learners achieving a Below Level 2 ESOL learning aim earning 6.1% more than learners who had the same learning aim but did not achieve it. Learners who achieved their Below Level 2 ESOL learning aim were also found to be 0.2 percentage points more likely to be in employment, and 0.1 percentage points less likely to be observed on benefits.⁶⁸

3.4 APPG on Refugees, *Refugees Welcome?*, April 2017

In April 2017, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees published a report, [Refugees Welcome?](#), looking at how government policies supported refugees in the UK.

The report stated that English language was key to successful integration, which allows refugees to “rebuild their lives and make full use of their talents and abilities to take part in and contribute to British society.”⁶⁹

The report raised concerns about the support provided to refugees in learning English. In particular, it stated, a shortage of ESOL classes “prevents refugees from being able to access other areas of support, from gaining employment and from taking part in community activities.” It added that reductions to ESOL funding has “led to longer waiting lists, a decline in teaching hours and a lack of classes that meet the needs of refugees.”⁷⁰

The report recommended that the Government should create an ESOL strategy for England, which should include increased funding and support for voluntary groups providing additional language support alongside ESOL classes.⁷¹

A [short debate](#) on the report was held in the House of Lords on 19 July 2017.

⁶⁷ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Returns to Maths and English Learning \(at level 2 and below\) in Further Education](#), May 2016, p15.

⁶⁸ As above, p12.

⁶⁹ All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, [Refugees Welcome?](#), April 2017, pp6-7.

⁷⁰ All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, [Refugees Welcome?](#), April 2017, pp6-7.

⁷¹ As above, p30.

3.5 Refugee Action, *Let Refugees Learn*, May 2016

In May 2016, Refugee Action published [Let Refugees Learn](#) as part of a larger campaign.

The report argued that refugees “have a great determination and desire to learn English” but are finding it harder to access ESOL classes because of funding reductions that have “resulted in shortages of provision, waiting lists, and other barriers to participation, particularly for women.” The prospects for high quality provision are additionally undermined, the report contended, by the fragmentation of ESOL provision between multiple government departments and by the lack of an ESOL strategy for England.⁷²

The report’s recommendations included:

- A fund should be created to specifically support refugees learn English that would enable all refugees to have free ESOL classes for their first two years in England.
- An ESOL strategy for England should be published, which should set national targets for ESOL provision and attainment.
- Equal access to ESOL classes should be ensured, particularly for women, by, for example, making sure learners have access to childcare facilities.
- Asylum seekers should be given with the right to access free English language learning from the point when they make their asylum claim.⁷³

Box 6: Westminster Hall debate on ESOL for refugees

On 24 October 2017 a [debate](#) was held in Westminster Hall on English language teaching for refugees. Opening the debate, Dame Caroline Spelman highlighted the role of English language skills in preventing loneliness and promoting the integration of refugees. She went on to argue that long waiting lists for ESOL classes caused by funding reductions were impacting on the mental health of refugees, in particular women, experiencing isolation. Ms Spelman stated that the Government’s new integration strategy provided “an ideal opportunity to invest in ESOL and acknowledge the key part it plays in ensuring successful integration and community cohesion.”

Responding to the debate, the Minister, Brandon Lewis, acknowledged the role of English language proficiency “as a key enabler for integration and participation in society.” Arguing that it was important not just to focus on the amount of funding available but on how it is used, the Minister contended that the ESOL funding rules relating to refugees represented “a good deal”. With regards to waiting lists, he stated that the Government was seeing what more it could do, but added that the “waiting list issue can be misleading” due to the fact that some people on waiting lists may have found provision elsewhere.⁷⁴

3.6 DEMOS, *On Speaking Terms*, August 2014

In August 2014, DEMOS [On Speaking Terms](#), which investigated the state of ESOL provision in England and how it compares with other countries. The report argued that ESOL in England “suffers from

⁷² Refugee Action, [Let Refugees Learn](#), May 2016, pp1-4.

⁷³ As above.

⁷⁴ [HC Deb 24 October 2017, cc89-108WH](#).

fragmentation, a lack of clarity and a short-termist approach” and, as a result, is “not functioning as well at it could – or as well as it will need to” to meet the demand of an increasing migrant population.⁷⁵

The report identified a number of advantages of English ability and contended that they extended beyond labour market outcomes to include ‘soft’ skills and wider social benefits. It argued for a change to the “current, narrow ESOL policy remit” to a view of ESOL that sees its aim as “unlocking migrant capabilities.”

Regarding the current system, the report noted the funding reductions to the sector and contended that “successive government approaches to ESOL have failed to meet demand adequately.” It also criticised the “perverse incentives” created by the funding system, including a disincentive to find employment while studying, and argued that current provision “fails to take account of the wide range of learner needs, aspirations and circumstances.” A lack of a national ESOL strategy had, it said, “contributed to a poor understanding of the scale of need and of the quality of provision.”

The report made a number of recommendations, including that:

- Political parties should commit in their 2015 election manifestos to a national strategy for ESOL.
- The Government should consult on extending advanced learner loans to ESOL level 2 and below.
- Funding for workplace-based ESOL should be reintroduced but employers should also be encouraged to provide financial support.
- Local authorities should be required to maintain an ESOL ‘hub’ website with information on how to access learning.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Demos, [On Speaking Terms](#), August 2014, p9.

⁷⁶ As above, pp9-15; [“On Speaking Terms”](#), Demos, 19 August 2014.

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