

Focusing English for
Speakers of Other
Languages (ESOL) on
Community Cohesion –
Consultation Report

May 2009

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1 Executive Summary

Introduction

The consultation 'Focusing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) on Community Cohesion' was launched on the 4th January 2008 and ran until 4th April 2008. A formal consultation document was available electronically and in paper form, and a specific web-site for stakeholders to respond to the consultation.

This document reports on the key findings from the stakeholder events and the responses to the formal consultation separately, with Section Three drawing out the key themes arising from all the components.

In total 188 participants attended the DIUS stakeholder events, 143 attended the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) stakeholder events and 199 individuals or organisations responded to the formal consultation.

DIUS wished to test the response to the consultation proposition which is *'to foster community cohesion, a new partnership approach to planning is necessary which targets English Language provision at local need. We need a 'whole community approach' in which ESOL needs are considered as part of wider local planning arrangements, such as Local Area Agreements and City Strategies'*.

There was generally a positive response to the overall proposition, with most concurring that need should be identified at a local level through robust planning and strong, inclusive, collaborative partnership working.

However, there were a number of provisos given to this positivity about the general direction of travel which largely centred around how this process would work in practice.

Key issues

National framework and local priorities

Whilst many could understand the rationale for a national framework with scope for local prioritisation, clarity is needed on how this would work in practice. Some negativity relating to the national framework resulted from a misapprehension that if certain groups were not included in the national priorities, then they could not be a priority at a local level. However, some felt it would be unhelpful to publicise a national list that could become redundant if it doesn't appear to work. They raised the following issues:

- the fact that individuals move in and out of priority groups could create difficulties in terms of provision;
- asking local areas to justify a different prioritisation to that nationally was adding an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy; and
- a view that this would not address community cohesion on its own and this point should be recognised in planning and evaluation of provision.

A common theme at the stakeholder events was that the national priorities as currently proposed are so generic that almost any group or audience could be fitted within them. As such, they are not providing clear guidance. There was a feeling that some of the terminology (such as 'excluded women' or 'social cohesion' itself) could be more tightly defined. This reflects that many respondents appear to have been commenting on the categories as if they are eligibility criteria rather than a guide to priority groups, so greater clarity about this is required.

In terms of priority audiences not currently included in the national framework, two key groups generated much debate and discussion:

- migrant workers; and
- asylum seekers.

Many felt strongly that **migrant workers** should be a priority group in local areas. They cite examples of localities with a large influx of migrant workers experiencing tensions resulting from cultural misunderstandings, overcrowding or the poor behaviour of young men away from home in a foreign country. They felt that, in many cases employers would be unwilling to invest, and that there is a strong argument to provide ESOL to this group in order to facilitate integration and social cohesion. However, others felt that migrant workers should not be prioritised as they are often more qualified and better placed to get work than other groups.

Many also felt that **asylum seekers** should be eligible for ESOL provision as soon as they enter the country (rather than those who have been in the country for over six months). In many cases there was a practical rationale for this; a delay can cause people to become either entirely isolated or integrated into a non-English speaking community. Either outcome means that they are effectively harder to reach at a later stage.

Many also mentioned **spouses** of both migrant workers and asylum seekers as a key priority group. People in prison and ex-offenders were also mentioned, as were children and young people, older people, those with no or low levels of literacy in their own language, those with learning difficulties or learning disabilities and low-paid workers.

Leadership and co-ordination

Whilst many concurred that the identification of need and planning is required at a local level, there was some concern about sufficient resources in place to do so.

Whilst it was noted that local strategic partnerships and local area agreements would be the appropriate mechanism through which to co-ordinate local planning activity, there was concern that the strength of these partnerships was variable. There was a strong call for a diversity of representation and existing structures to be built on through links into other local and regional planning fora (for example Children & Young People's Plans, Local Neighbourhood Partnership Plans, Equality fora) whilst, at the same time, ensuring that the partnerships do not become too unwieldy or bureaucratic. Issues raised include:

- a **lack of clear leadership**. In some cases the local authority was felt to lack the skills and resources required to take a clear leadership role. Some also mentioned the need for an ESOL 'champion' within the partnership to help drive things forward;
- a **lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities**. There was some uncertainty about the roles of key partners, including local authorities, the Learning & Skills Council (LSC), Jobcentre Plus and training providers;
- linked to this was some uncertainty about **accountability** and a call by some for local authorities to be accountable to central Government;
- some referenced a **potential tension** between LSC fundholding and local authority driven plans;

- a **lack of flexible, long-term funding** to ensure effective long-term planning, with some call for ring-fenced funding (for either the planning process or the delivery of provision for priority groups);
- in some cases the local partnerships were seen as **fragmented and difficult to access**, particularly for smaller community groups. Many called for more support and funding to be directed to ensuring representation; and
- the issue of **competition** between providers was raised and that this might not engender effective partnership working.

A significant issue for many was **the lack of a local, up-to-date evidence base** upon which to base local planning decisions (in terms of both current provision and current and future need). It was acknowledged that this is a complex area and many related issues were raised including the lack of a single integrated database, the difficulty of identifying ‘invisible’ need and keeping track of the rapidly changing demographics. There was a number of calls for ring-fenced funding specifically for this aspect of planning (and some concern that if it was not provided, then decisions would be made without it).

Suggestions to address some of the issues raised included an ESOL ‘champion’ within the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), ESOL networking events and the sharing of best practice. The provision of clear national guidance on accountabilities, roles and responsibilities for local planning was also called for, with greater recognition of the role of the voluntary sector in planning and provision.

Impact of current targets

The perception that **current targets are having an adverse impact** on the delivery of ESOL and the objective of fostering community cohesion was a key theme running throughout the consultation responses and the stakeholder events. There was a strong belief that provision is led by targets rather than actual needs of communities. Some also raised concern that some **targets are conflicting** eg the lack of alignment between LSC targets and the proposed national ESOL priorities.

Many felt that the real need for English language provision lies at **pre-entry and lower levels** but that current targets mean that providers are encouraged to focus on those at higher levels. There was a call for targets to be reviewed or the addition of some revised performance indicators/proxy targets.

Some also felt that the system of targets for ESOL and the focus on employment and qualification outcomes was inappropriate for the audience and type of provision and that there needed to be recognition of ‘softer’ targets and qualitative and not quantitative measurement.

Delivering ESOL more effectively

Many responses focused on how ESOL could be delivered more effectively. Some referenced the need for better cross-Governmental working (between those responsible for community cohesion, citizenship, immigration and education and skills). Others mentioned the following:

- a more formalised or strategic approach to outreach activity, greater recognition of the role of the voluntary sector and volunteers and provision of long-term, sustained funding to facilitate their involvement;
- embedding learning within practical abilities;
- joining up with health services, family literacy and numeracy strategies, arts and crafts;
- improved information, advice and guidance (IAG) and increased use of mentoring;
- more accessible delivery options and accessible assessment approaches;
- more flexible progression routes and a particular emphasis on the development of flexible routes to accredited learning;
- development of a more effective referral system from community organisations to training providers; and
- sharing best practice in the involvement of community organisations (through mentoring, identifying hard to reach, training provision).

Community cohesion

Some felt that there was not necessarily an automatic link between ESOL and community cohesion and that ESOL is not necessarily a solution on its own; ie increased language skills imply that people can play a fuller part in society but doesn't mean that they will value or believe the same things. Therefore, some felt that the impact of ESOL was difficult to measure solely in these terms. However, others suggested a wide range of possible indicators and outputs could suitably demonstrate community cohesion, including crime and safety indicators, better take up of health services and reduced funds spent on translation.

Others were uncomfortable about the perceived separation of the workplace language agenda from community cohesion.

Employers' issues

Whilst many thought that employers should contribute more towards ESOL provision (in terms of both input into planning and funding), many were unsure about how this would work in practice.

Some questioned the drivers for employers becoming more involved, particularly in instances when supply of labour outstrips demands or where employers are concerned that the provision of training may increase the likelihood of staff moving on.

There were mixed views on the efficacy of coercion versus incentivisation. However, the majority felt that more could be done in terms of informing and educating employers about the potential benefits, stressing flexible delivery mechanisms and leveraging activity through health and safety regulations.

Communication and national guidance

The perceived **lack of communication** was a common theme running through the events and the consultation. There was a call for a clear message relating to the policy intention in terms of targets and priorities.

Communication was an issue in terms of:

- national communications – more information on what is happening, the associated timings and more clarification about priority audiences;
- local communications – what is happening locally and how organisations can access and get involved in local partnerships; and
- best practice both at a local and national level.

There was a call by some for more **national guidance**, and in some cases service level agreements, for example

- the provision of an accountability framework of rights and responsibilities relating to local planning processes;
- publicising of guidance on gathering local data, in conjunction with Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance;
- guidelines to clarify the role of volunteers and voluntary organisations in outreach and ESOL delivery;
- requiring local area agreements to take account of ESOL needs;
- making partnership working a key local authority delivery requirement; and
- the inclusion of softer targets in Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

2 Introduction

The Government's aim that ESOL funding should be more specifically targeted to foster community cohesion and integration. Guidance has recently been implemented which ensures ESOL funding is targeted towards the most disadvantaged groups and funding changes were introduced in August 2007 to improve accessibility for the most vulnerable learners.

However, the Government is still not convinced that enough of the hardest to reach are being attracted into ESOL provision. It believes that local authorities and their partners are best placed to define the issues which are hampering community cohesion in their areas and to define the solutions to the specific questions they face.

The Government has, therefore, proposed a number of changes:

- setting a national framework and developing national priorities;
- setting ESOL priorities and planning at a local level;
- utilising outreach provision and the role of the voluntary/ community sector;
- improving the quality of ESOL provision and training of providers; and
- incentivising employers.

The proposition as per the consultation document is outlined below and the consultation questions shown in full in Appendix A.

The proposition

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

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

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

The ESOL consultation was launched on the 4th January 2008 and closed on the 4th April 2008. A formal consultation document was available electronically and in paper form, and a specific web-site for stakeholders to respond to the consultation. Responses to the formal consultation were analysed by COI and are summarised here.

In addition to the formal consultation, DIUS commissioned COI to run a series of facilitated events for stakeholders in five locations. These had the aim of exploring the issues raised by stakeholders in greater detail and to encourage participation from organisations in each locality. The events ran from the 11th March until the 3rd April.

NIACE also conducted events to give learners the opportunity to give their views and facilitated four Regional Achievement Dialogue Meetings.

This document reports on the key findings from the stakeholder events and the responses to the formal consultation separately.

Throughout the report, cited instances of perceived good practice are highlighted in boxes.

3. Summary of the Stakeholder Events

DIUS stakeholder events

In order to complement the formal consultation process, DIUS commissioned COI to conduct a series of facilitated, stakeholder events in five selected locations. These events aimed to explore the issues raised by stakeholders in detail and to encourage participation from organisations in each locality.

Events were held in the following locations:

Location	Date	Attendance
Ealing	11th March 2008	50
Stoke	13th March 2008	23
Rochdale	17th March 2008	29
Peterborough	1st April 2008	45
Bristol	3rd April 2008	41

In total, 188 participants attended from a range of organisations, including colleges and training providers, national and community organisations and Local Authorities.

Participants debated each of the consultation questions in small table discussions. The events also included presentations, some plenary feedback and Question and Answer sessions.

This report summarises the participant responses from the five events by theme.

National and local priorities

Process

Overall, there was support for the broad concept of focussing on social cohesion although there was some ambiguity as to “what this looks like.”

A need was identified for clearer, more practical national guidance, with current national priorities perceived to be too generic, vague and difficult to assess. It was mentioned that ambiguity exists over some definitions. Terms such as “legal resident”, “excluded” and “foreseeable future” were hard to define in practice and caused difficulty, and it was felt that evidence required for eligibility is too onerous and demanding for learners and providers.

Some felt that the number of priority groups at a national level should be reduced rather than supplemented. A simpler system of categorisation was advocated; for example three broad groupings – those who are most excluded, those who are able to work but not in work and those in employment but who want to progress.

Overall, however, there was broad agreement with the identified national priority areas, though it was highlighted that within this framework, there needs to be flexibility to identify priorities at a local level.

There was a perceived disconnect between identified priorities and funding criteria, and it was suggested that an on-going forum should be set up at a national level to ensure a continuous dialogue between key stakeholders and policy-makers to better align national, regional and local priorities.

Local priorities

The proposed national priorities for ESOL were broadly supported, however it was emphasised that funding and strategies for ESOL could be targeted more effectively. Additional local priorities identified pertained particularly to groups who are perceived to be less well integrated within the wider population. These included:

- excluded women (there was broad agreement on this);
- older people and disabled people, due to their risk of isolation;
- children and young people, because they could help relatives integrate/communicate, to help prevent radicalisation and to counter the loss of learning opportunities when young people drop out of full-time formal education;
- people with the lowest levels of competence in English language, and low levels of general literacy and numeracy;
- newly arrived migrant workers facing discrimination, hostility or violence, and those with families to support. These people may also lack identification documents and may not be entitled to work in the UK;
- asylum seekers who have been in the country for less than six months;
- parents whose children have poor school attendance;
- those living a 'hand-to-mouth' existence; and
- prison population ex-offenders.

There was some divided opinion on migrant workers; some felt that they should be a priority because of the potential exploitation they can experience due to a lack of language skills, whilst others felt that they should not be a priority if they were not intending to stay for the long-term.

In the Peterborough area, migrant workers were a key focus of debate. There was general agreement that this group ought to be a priority, as they could often be poorly integrated into the wider community, and in part language issues were felt to be a part of this. There were mixed views about who should be responsible for funding migrant workers' ESOL learning, with some feeling it ought to be the employer who pays.

Participants tended to disagree that asylum seekers should only be eligible after spending six months in the country. Some feel there is a social obligation to help asylum seekers, with a practical goal to provide very basic training, rather than a full course, to enable them to function at a basic level in society. It was suggested that underlying problems should be used as the starting point for prioritisation, such as using ESOL to help prevent radicalisation of excluded communities. An example given was supporting women and young people from Muslim communities. One local authority stated it was providing ESOL training for new asylum seekers out of other budgets to ensure this provision was not lost.

There was a strong view at a number of events, and particularly in Stoke, that the best time to engage people (particularly asylum seekers) was as close as possible to the time of arrival in the country, to ensure that they did not become isolated, and thus hard to reach, due to a lack of language ability.

However, it was acknowledged that due to course start dates, a six month wait is often the de facto outcome, regardless of whether this is the policy.

The importance of reaching people generally at the right time was highlighted, as waiting to get onto classes can mean that the opportunity is missed. There was a suggestion of "holding" classes where people are taught basic pre-entry level skills until they can get onto a formal class, but keeping them learning and engaged.

Local planning and evidence gathering

Local Authorities/LSC

Participants stated that whilst local stakeholders should play a key role in identifying priority learners at the local level, national guidance must clearly delineate areas of responsibility and accountability between different stakeholders, particularly Local Authorities and the LSC.

It was suggested that there is a need for a local/regional ESOL champion/coordinator. Whilst the Local Authority could be seen as the most appropriate organisation to do this, there were some views that they are not best placed, due to lack of knowledge or skills. Some stakeholders had reservations about Local Authorities' abilities to manage planning and funding, due to their perceived lack of experience in relevant fields and organisational structures.

- one of the key obstacles for ensuring that the national targets are delivered locally was felt to be the issue of inflexible funding, with some feeling that LSC funding distribution methods are out-of-date and that larger boroughs should receive proportionately greater funding. There was also a belief by some that there will be a general cut in ESOL provision because there has been a reduction in adult learning funding and there are already very strict conditions on how the existing funding can be spent.

There was support for more coherent planning of ESOL provision, and a more efficient and consistent process for funding allocation that ensures a good fit between community needs and the available funding. Some stated that there needs to be funding ring-fenced for ESOL since currently, there is a lot of competition for funding (such as Skills for Life funding) against other priorities. Suggestions for ways of funding ESOL more effectively included maintaining an overview of the effectiveness of different providers, individual learner progress reports and matching learning to providers.

Funding being provided for community and voluntary organisations was also thought to be important if the community cohesion agenda is to be pursued effectively.

Multi-agency working

The value of working in partnership and engaging with a range of stakeholders for planning and provision was strongly emphasised across the board. It was felt that wider and closer involvement between Local Authorities and other parties would enable more informed and locally tailored planning to occur and maximise access to services.

LSPs were felt to be key to delivering ESOL at a local level and regular meetings and appropriate representation were felt to be crucial. It was suggested that there was either a need for ESOL to be a requirement for LSPs, or that LSPs should include someone who can champion ESOL.

Data

There was a call for Local Authorities to be accountable to Central Government in the formation of local priorities but for the system to be as flexible as possible. The need for a continual review of priorities was mentioned given the constant changes in demographics and associated community needs, raising a need for continuous review mechanisms, baseline assessments and need evaluations. It was felt that these should be consistent across local and national institutions to ensure that priority groups are reached.

There was a view that more resources should be dedicated to systematically identifying those with the greatest ESOL needs. This should include better, up-to-date baseline data at a local level on which to base local planning decisions.

There was concern that many individuals with ESOL needs are not captured via mainstream channels, and many suggested that proxy data be considered to identify this “invisible need” and assist local planning. It was pointed out that since the link between crime, economic activity and low literacy is recognised, measuring need would require a review of a range of wider societal factors outside of ESOL targets. Sources of information mentioned included health services, housing and tenancy information, schools and education, employers, Social Services, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), churches and religious organisations and immigration services. Proxy measures also included employment profiles, including agricultural labour and the black labour market. It was felt that a multi-agency approach would make this more efficient.

The need for greater partnership working was identified particularly with regard to gathering information. Many felt that Local Authorities should work more closely with other parties with the relevant knowledge to help provide insight into the composition and needs of local communities. Many were also concerned that existing local records are often incomplete or out of date. It was therefore suggested that comprehensive, baseline data systems should be developed for identifying priority learners; tracking course retention rates; assessing entitlement; and recording achievement and feedback.

In addition to looking at the needs of the population, it was also felt that evidence gathering should stretch to looking at providers, who should be assessed for the extent to which they are accessing the priority groups with their ESOL provision. This could be supplemented through evidence gathered via schools, workplaces and community centres (an existing example cited in Luton), in addition to that provided by social services, Jobcentre Plus, local chambers of commerce and employers.

Appropriateness and effective delivery of the proposition

Targets

There was debate over the extent to which targets assisted in the appropriate provision of ESOL. Some argued that community cohesion does not lend itself to a target driven approach and that ESOL provision should be steered by needs established at the grassroots level. There was a frequent call for 'softer' targets rather than a focus on qualifications, with the rationale that community cohesion has softer objectives that are harder to measure than other potential ESOL objectives.

It was further commented that the results of the proposed policies would be difficult to measure, and therefore inflexible targets and criteria set at a national level could be problematic at a local level. However, a majority felt that Government targets were important to ensure that ESOL is perceived as a priority and some felt that more direction was needed from the top. The latter could include making partnership working a delivery requirement.

A key concern was potentially conflicting national targets. For example, many pointed out that LSC targets are not aligned with the proposed national ESOL priorities, as they are focused on achieving qualifications at higher levels. There was a strong call for a review of targets as those based on learning success do not encourage providers to engage the hardest to reach. It was argued that a greater focus on pre-entry would help meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

New Deal targets were also mentioned as problematic, as they focus upon employment, and, therefore, learners are frequently unable to continue ESOL training if a job comes up.

In practice

Whilst some were confident in the proposals, others felt that there were ways in which the delivery mechanism could more effectively deliver the objectives. Most delegates who expressed a view were broadly in favour of delivery being monitored via the LSPs as long as this is embedded in a wider framework with a partnership approach that ensures an effective dialogue with relevant stakeholders. This partnership at a local level would need to be underpinned by clear direction and monitoring at local, regional and national levels. Some felt that the regional role that has been fulfilled by the LSC needs to be retained or strengthened.

There were, however, some concerns about the proposition and how it would work in practice. Some felt that existing arrangements should be changed rather than just 'built on' because they were unsatisfactory. Others felt that changing the system could be counter-productive and there was some concern about how partnership working would develop in future. There was also uncertainty about how the mapping exercise of local priorities would work in practice and that priorities may be set before an evidence base has been established. Concerns were also voiced that decision-making should not be left to people with a limited understanding of the skills and education systems.

It was also commented that strategies which 'single out' specific groups can negatively impact community cohesion, creating tensions around the issues of 'queue jumping'. One alternative strategy suggested was to set more generalised criteria, for example, prioritising those with pre-entry, entry 1 and entry 2 level needs. It was commented that as Further Education (FE) colleges are under pressure to achieve high enrolment figures, places are allocated on a first-come-first-served basis, as opposed to assessment according to greatest need. Participants suggested that community organisations and centres should be the focus of local planning for ESOL and community cohesion, as opposed to the colleges, as these organisations cater for the needs of the priority groups.

It was suggested that measurement should make greater use of student feedback, which would be likely to be more qualitative in nature. Many felt that learners must be involved in setting their own objectives and assessing their own achievements. This could be developed in accordance with Individual Learning Plans. It was suggested that formal exams and tests were not always the most effective way to measure achievement, and that alternative settings like trips to museums can provide an effective means of getting people talking and therefore assessing their achievements and needs.

Another suggestion for developing assessment strategies was to bring in more practical, task-oriented tests.

A cited example of good practice was Bristol City Council's assessment centre, where a record was made of personal history, including educational experience and English language needs. This enabled the council to better understand need for ESOL and target it appropriately.

Better linking providers to existing planning arrangements and engaging new partners

Local partnership working

Greater cooperation between stakeholders was seen as crucial to achieving a coherent and cohesive approach, notwithstanding the reality that different stakeholders have differing objectives and criteria of success. Some felt that the inflexibility of current funding structures and criteria compels organisations to occupy the same ground in outlining their eligibility, and suggested that greater recognition (at national level) of the different roles and objectives fulfilled by different local stakeholders, and greater flexibility, might reduce perceived competition and facilitate greater cooperation.

The LSP was mentioned as having made a positive contribution to partnership working in some places; although others felt their Local Authorities required more staff and resources to undertake the role of coordinating further and deeper collaboration between ESOL stakeholders. Greater clarity was called for about the roles and identity of those involved.

There was also uncertainty over how local level partnerships would work, including ensuring all those who want to be involved are able to participate. These concerns stimulated requests for better communication of the proposition, policies and underlying ideas, including examples of best practice. Networks were seen to be important, and it was felt that these should be set up where they do not currently exist.

Including diversity of partners

It was felt that networks and partnerships should include the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. Several potential partners were mentioned, including: Local Authorities, providers, employers, unions, planners, health services, police and fire services, support workers, community facilitators, schools, libraries, community organisations, LSC, Jobcentre Plus, DWP, religious leaders and institutions, service users and local residents.

Many people felt excluded from current arrangements and were keen for the opportunity to be more closely involved, although some stressed it was hard to make the time and resources available to do this (particularly for community groups).

It was suggested that a register to which new partners could add themselves, should be created to enable more organisations to participate. These might include the large pool of potential child carers, and 'community brokers' who could provide outreach and help engage hard-to-reach people

Finally, it was suggested that creating guaranteed representation, (whereby particular groups must be invited into partnerships), would help build local plans for identifying and involving the 'hardest to reach'.

Providers

Some felt that it would be beneficial to ensure that providers had closer relationships with Local Authorities and the LSC. An example was cited of a Local Authority meeting with each provider and the LSC separately, rather than creating a wider forum for discussion and planning. There is a desire for providers to be more closely engaged with planning via the councils and Local Area Agreements.

There was also some recognition that providers are under pressure related to funding, and that it can be difficult to make the time available for effective partnership working – this needs to be recognised as part of the job specification for those working in ESOL.

Employers

Employers were recognised as a key stakeholder, with the challenge being how to persuade them of the value of ESOL. It was felt that greater dialogue between providers and employers would help convince them of the value of developing their workforce's English language skills.

It was emphasised that communicating with employers at the right level and in the right way was key. Some recommended organisations like the Federation of Small Businesses be involved to represent the views of SMEs.

It was recognised that in the context of community cohesion, it was important to engage outside the sphere of employment as well.

Engaging the hard to reach and use of community organisations

Role of community organisations

It was felt that the key considerations in engaging with the hardest to reach were understanding the differing needs of different communities, working in a joined-up fashion to reach these communities at the appropriate level, linking grassroots with providers, and ensuring sufficient provision to provide support when and where needed.

A main issue highlighted was that voluntary and community organisations and groups who have real insight and access to the communities should be fully integrated into ESOL planning and provision. It was argued that at present ESOL provision is linked too much to larger organisations, and this is related to the lack of appropriate funding that smaller and voluntary organisations can harness. A possible increased role was identified for intermediary funding organisations, which could access the national funding and then distribute to smaller organisations.

It was observed that there is a lack of funding for basic English, and it was felt that this would be the most beneficial in terms of assisting community cohesion for the hardest to reach, as their English language needs tended to be at the most basic level. Thus, there is a heavy dependence on voluntary provision, either delivered by communities and groups from community charities, or by discretionary funding from colleges.

Wider needs of the hard to reach

It was argued that those responsible for funding needed to be more aware of diversity of subjects that need to be delivered in order to deliver social cohesion for the hardest to reach. Legislation was considered by some to have created additional barriers to accessing ESOL, making it more geared towards formal provision, which can be harder to access for many.

It was suggested that in order for ESOL provision to reach the communities who could most benefit from it, it must fit their specific practical needs – for example, the lack of childcare and crèche facilities for parents with ESOL needs was emphasised as a key barrier to ESOL training. There was a suggestion that there should be a greater focus on ways to provide ESOL support outside of the classroom setting, as well as providing classes at a time and setting to suit the learner and encourage attendance.

Suggestions included

- ESOL being available outside working hours particularly for those who work shifts;
- provision being linked to crèche facilities;
- links to strong foci in the community such as churches;
- family learning that links children and their parents into learning at school; and
- more collaboration with sports organisations to access the 'hardest to reach' younger people and families.

The role of pre-entry level was highlighted, providing a means of supporting learners on a path to entry onto accredited ESOL learning programmes.

However, whilst accessing and engaging the hard to reach was seen as vital, it was also perceived as important to have levels of provision available in order that, once engaged, individuals could move directly into ESOL learning.

Targeting/Channels

It was felt that particular efforts would be needed to engage women who identify as part of their family rather than as part of the wider community, people from certain ethnic or national backgrounds who may be more disengaged and young people who are not in education or training.

Means to overcome such resistance were suggested, including identifying and addressing the practical and psychological barriers to engaging with ESOL. This could include providing crèche facilities, or engaging with people who did not feel they could ask for support. Targeting people soon after arrival into the country and linking ESOL to wider skills (how to access health and social services etc) could also help engage them at a time when they are open to learning.

Women coming to the UK as newly-weds were mentioned as a particularly excluded group, as they lack knowledge of the system and also the status required to access services such as ESOL provision. Participants also said that women suffering domestic violence often find it difficult to seek and sustain ESOL training, due to lack of confidence and sometimes lack of ability to express themselves in their own language, due to little or no schooling. It was also noted that women may not have access to documentation regarding their household income, and therefore cannot prove their eligibility for remission of fees.

It was widely recognised that for the hardest to reach, informal engagement is often more appropriate, for example, working with link workers, community groups and at the grassroots level. Health services, police and Citizens' Advice Bureaus were also seen as routes in, as well as schools, which facilitate access to the wider family system and referral from service providers. These groups and individuals need to work in partnership with providers to provide the necessary routes into ESOL learning and recognise ESOL referral as part of their role.

Some examples of good practice were put forward: In Somerset, they are working towards establishing "BME Hubs", using local knowledge to solve problems at a local level. The "One World Group" was set up to provide a day in Family Day Centre for people new to an area. Drawing in people from wide range of backgrounds, it includes introductions to ESOL, as well as family learning, multicultural exchange etc. This includes a crèche that enables families to attend. A further example was using art in schools to provide a means for children who needed extra support to learn English outside of a typical "classroom" environment.

Outreach

It was felt Local Authorities should take a strategic approach to strengthening outreach work in support of ESOL. Suggestions included ensuring that organisations dealing with wider local issues such as health and education are taking account of ESOL, reviewing the organisations undertaking sub-contracted work to ensure best fit and establishing a register of community organisations be developed to facilitate effective commissioning in future.

Participants suggested that a more creative approach be taken to outreach activity and perhaps using new technology or approaches to identify audiences or provision. ESOL welcome packs for new migrants were suggested, as well as audio classes on CD and short bursts of learning via mobile phones. These suggestions, and others, would work towards providing classes at a time and setting to suit the learner and encourage attendance. An example was given of holding classes over lunch after people had attended church. Short intensive courses were also suggested as an alternative to learning over a longer period.

Some suggested that dedicated outreach workers were required. This could be linked to the provision of information, advice and guidance, and could be professionally accredited. Less formally, liaison with community leaders was suggested as useful means of outreach. However, there was a need for volunteers to be appropriately trained.

Participants agreed that more funding specifically for outreach work must be allocated, as in many cases voluntary organisations are well placed to identify and 'reach' priority learners, yet lack the resources to deliver further help and guidance towards training.

Volunteers

Some called for a national strategy to clarify the role of volunteers and voluntary organisations; others felt this could be determined at a local level. In any case, the role of volunteers was deemed crucial, although when looking at potential volunteers, it was thought important to recognise their limitations and the support that might be needed to optimise their contribution. One effective use of volunteers was felt to be in a signposting role, i.e. the volunteer acting as the single point of contact for a group of learners. Volunteers can also offer translation services and help learners with wider learning needs, distribute information and provide teaching assistance.

Many felt that voluntary organisations could benefit from training, advice and guidance in relation to ESOL, and more national recognition, such as a national volunteer project or accreditation. It was emphasised that volunteers should be supported and provided with training to ensure that they are in a position to maintain the high standards that have been achieved in ESOL via qualifications for tutors. Given that training can be time – and resource – consuming, participants suggested that the training of volunteers should be taken more into account when funding is allocated.

The types of volunteers who are or could be involved in ESOL included: retired teachers or business people, retired doctors (linking ESOL and health, and how to communicate with health workers), mothers, hospital befrienders, unemployed people and people conducting community service. Other suggestions for broadening community provision included recruiting skills from the communities being taught, emphasising the role of peer support, for example, mentors within colleges and also from the target communities. Embedded learning and incentives for teachers could be a mechanism for this.

Supporting the professional development of teachers and others

Qualifications

It was identified that there is a potential tension between encouraging greater community sector involvement in training and maintaining standards. Whilst the support of volunteers was recognised as being valuable for outreach, and also in some cases for providing classroom support, it was generally recognised that ESOL provision requires qualified teachers.

However, some felt that there ought to be greater flexibility to allow those without the full set of qualifications to be involved at lower levels.

It was noted that colleges and other educational institutions already run teacher-training courses specifically for ESOL and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), and that there is a grants process in place for organisations that provide these courses, which depends on competition between providers. If the organisations providing these courses are receiving public funding, then they will eventually come under an inspection regime.

It was mentioned that the Level 4 qualification could be adapted to include community cohesion and social issues, or that diversity, equality and cultural and religious awareness training could be provided separately. However others felt it important that ESOL tutors are not encouraged to step outside the boundaries of their role into the role of counsellor or advisor

In addition to formal qualifications, mentoring programmes were seen as a means by which ESOL teachers can develop their skills. The Crystal Chandelier service in Somerset was cited as an example, however there had been difficulty getting teachers released from teaching commitments in order to attend sessions.

It was mentioned that, in addition to providing continuing professional development for ESOL teachers, support is also needed for those people coming back into ESOL after time away or abroad, and in order to inspire new people to enter the field. Some noted that there was space for qualified Learning Support Assistants, and this was a means by which people who had started as community volunteers could move on to achieve a qualification.

Barriers

A key issue was funding for training and achieving the necessary qualifications, which often proved a barrier for potential new tutors, as did the lack of courses, particularly at Level 4. Some participants felt there should be greater incentives for trainee ESOL teachers, and for institutions attracting ESOL teachers. These could include financial incentives, clear routes to progression and a clear, well-regarded qualification in ESOL. Again, it was mentioned that contributions to lower level skills training were undervalued throughout the system. A lack of stability (short term contracts) also proved a disincentive to people gaining qualifications. It was also mentioned that it might help if qualifications were more internationally recognised.

It was suggested that greater parity between ESOL and subject teachers would be beneficial, and that this would help provide embedded learning (where ESOL is provided as part of other learning, e.g. ICT). Some considered that specialist teachers could be given the training to deliver ESOL and cultural issues.

Some felt there were problems with the retention of teachers due to high levels of bureaucracy. It was felt more could be done to reduce this burden.

Employers

Legislation

Some participants felt strongly that, as employers benefit from ESOL, provision should not be subsidised by Government. There was a view amongst some that employers should be legally obliged to allow employees to take time off work for ESOL classes, and to provide funding for ESOL training. However, the efficacy of legislation was debated, with some feeling that flexible delivery through outreach and online materials was preferable to coercion. It was felt that any penalty system would make it harder for people without English language skills to find work, although others argued that any penalties would help “level the playing field” in relation to cheaper immigrant labour.

It was noted that many employers would not feel that there was much of an incentive as in some organisations there is no room for promotion and others want a good supply of entry-level workers and are resistant to employees ‘moving up’ the ladder. It was also felt that employers had little incentive because supply of labour current exceeds demand.

It was also felt that public sector organisations should set a good example for the private sector. It was noted that the NHS currently has cleaning staff who could be trained for caring roles, if they had better English.

Overall, although engaging with employers was seen to be important, some emphasised the fact that the most vulnerable people in communities may either not be employed, or be employed on the black labour market or in bonded labour. For these people, it is highly unlikely that engagement via employers will be effective.

Incentivising employers

It was felt that employers currently lacked understanding of the potential benefits of ESOL, and how it could benefit them and their workforce. It was felt that ESOL had to “shout loud” amongst the various training initiatives and priorities which are competing for attention.

Various methods were suggested that could help engage employers:

- the introduction of financial incentives (particularly for smaller employers), tax breaks or levies, such as the French training system, which commits employers to spending a certain amount of individuals' working time on training;
- increasing the role for the unions to include, for example, facilitating the sharing of best practice;
- national level awards or recognition and "naming and shaming" employers who are not participating;
- increasing networking opportunities for employers to share their experiences;
- the promotion through Investors in People;
- highlighting the business case for employers through circulating case studies and testimonies from employers; and
- ensuring that the process for approaching employees about supporting their employees' ESOL needs is made simpler and the offering clearer.

Legislation and certification, particularly for health and safety, was seen as a key method for engaging with some industries, with the construction and food industries being cited as examples.

An example of good practice was a "Back-fill" project in Birmingham, whereby the LSC funded placement and temporary staff to be made available whilst permanent staff attended ESOL training.

It was felt that some of this should be co-ordinated at the national level, rather than duplicating effort at the regional or local level.

Consultation with employers themselves was felt to be key and it was acknowledged that this is happening as part of the wider consultation programme.

NIACE stakeholder and learner events

The following represents a summary of consultations with learners, providers and other organisations involved in outreach provision, carried out by NIACE in March 2008. This section of the report has been provided by NIACE who undertook the analysis and drafting of this section.

Stakeholder events

Background

NIACE was commissioned by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to consult with organisations involved in outreach work and gather their views on the proposals set out in the document Focusing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) on Community Cohesion, published in January 2008.

NIACE organised four consultation events, which took place in March, at venues in Leeds, London and Birmingham. The aim was to bring together a range of organisations involved in outreach work that supports learners and local communities with English language needs. Learning and Skills Council (LSC) – funded ESOL providers, the voluntary and community sector, and relevant agencies were all invited to attend. A copy of the invitation letter is attached at Appendix 1. The original intention was to offer up to 45 places at each of the three venues, but demand in London was such that an additional event was held to accommodate applicants.

A total of 143 participants (161 including facilitators and DIUS colleagues), attended the four events. By far the largest group of participants came from Further Education (FE) colleges (55), followed by Adult and Community Learning (26), and the voluntary and community sector (23).

A table showing numbers attending by type of organisation is shown below.

Organisation	Leeds	Birmingham	London	Totals
FE colleges	11	21	23	55
ACL providers	10	2	14	26
VCS	32	7	13	23
Private training	2	3	6	11
LSC	2	3	2	7
Consultants	1	0	6	7
RDAs	0	0	3	3
Local Gov't	0	0	3	3
HE	1	0	1	2
Awarding Body	0	0	2	2
TUC/Union	0	1	1	2
NRD	0	0	1	1
LLUK	1	0	0	1
Totals	31	37	75	743

The consultation events

Each event lasted for half a day and followed the same programme, except that the second London event took place in the afternoon, rather than the morning. The NIACE lead gave a brief introduction to the programme and participants then received an outline of the policy context and consultation process from the DIUS representative. Working in small groups, participants then engaged in three, round-table discussions, focusing on the first three themes in the consultation document:

- developing national priorities;
- working more effectively to plan and commission ESOL for community cohesion; and
- developing a more coherent and better supported outreach system.

The discussions addressed questions 1 to 4, considered by DIUS to be the most relevant questions for organisations involved in outreach work.

Each discussion lasted for around 30 minutes and was followed by a 10/15 minute plenary. Facilitators worked with groups to support and guide discussion, introducing questions and recording key points as they arose. Copies of the consultation questions were available at each table and facilitators were also provided with detailed programme guidelines and a briefing setting out the policy context to the consultation. An additional handout outlined a possible planning model and was circulated for comment during the second discussion.

At the end of each discussion, groups were asked to identify 2 key points to share in the short plenary. Facilitators led the feedback, and the DIUS lead responded briefly to participants' 'burning issues' and to clarify uncertainties or misconceptions. This process was repeated for the second and third discussions. Participants had a further opportunity to raise queries and observations with the DIUS and NIACE leads during a final plenary towards the end of each event.

Timing was tight and discussions necessarily focused. This worked well – there was a high level of engagement and much lively debate at each of the four events. Although participants were not asked to formally evaluate their experiences, informal feedback was generally very positive. Many commented that their organisations had already responded to the consultation, or were about to, and that the events had provided a forum for sharing concerns and engaging directly with DIUS. Participants whose organisations had not responded were encouraged to do so before the 4 April closure date.

Responses to the consultation questions

The detailed notes from the discussions that took place at each event have been collated under the themed headings. They reflect responses to questions, as well as observations and concerns, expressed by participants. All groups addressed each of the key questions posed, however, discussions were broad ranging and some issues – planning for example – came up in each one. In addition, groups focused more on certain questions or sub-questions than others, for example, question 2 generated more discussion and responses than question 3. This is reflected in the number and balance of responses recorded. The following section of the report highlights key issues arising from discussions and provides a summary of responses to each of the questions.

Discussion 1: Developing national priorities – is this the best approach?

1a) Are these the right groups?

At all events there was debate around whether or not there should be priority groups – such categorisation was seen as problematic for two reasons:

- a priority list could become a league table of worthiness; and
- people move in and out of groups – what happens if they no longer fit into the groups to which they once belonged? Will their access to learning be disrupted when they find they are no longer a priority?

In this respect, participants felt that categories could become redundant because they don't appear to work, and could create problems in terms of administration.

Concerns were expressed that some of the categories in the list of indicative national priorities are *'somewhat abstract'*, and would be hard to evidence – how to identify 'those raising concerns locally' or with 'multiple or complex problems' and who would do this? There was particular disagreement in Leeds about the first descriptor on the list, 'Legal residents who might reasonably be expected to be in the country for the foreseeable future' and how this could be established. Participants commented that the lack of clear identifiers could lead to arbitrary decisions by unqualified gatekeepers, and put pressure on ESOL teachers. While some saw benefits to loose definitions that are open to interpretation, a London participant offered another view: 'we like flexible but we don't like vague'.

Discussions centred on how the creation of a national list of priorities would be used to 'help prioritise ESOL funding', highlighting what appeared to be a degree of ambiguity in the language used in the consultation document. Some questioned whether this meant that groups on the list would be eligible for free ESOL classes; a Leeds group commented that

'It is important to understand the distinction between an eligibility criteria, which it [the descriptor] is not, and a guide to priority groups, which it is'.

DIUS may wish to consider clarifying this distinction in the report on the outcomes of the consultation.

The 'national – local' dimension of implementing priorities challenged participants. Many saw a national list as the wrong starting point, arguing that it assumes communities are homogenous and is at odds with local and regional planning, and yet recognised the need to balance local flexibility with sufficient consistency of approach to avoid access by 'postcode lotteries', which would be invidious for learners.

Despite the above concerns, the majority of participants took the view that *'if we must have groups, we would not want to exclude any of those on the indicative list'*, but were as one in their dislike of hierarchies. There was general agreement with some of the proposed categories:

- women with children;
- people with no or low levels of literacy in their own language;
- those with little or no previous education; and
- refugees and asylum seekers (the latter to have access from day one).

It was made clear, however, that simply being on a priority list does not mean that people will take up ESOL classes. Other barriers may need to be addressed first. For example, if women with children are to be a priority the implications for childcare and additional services need to be understood.

Participants suggested that the following groups should also be considered for inclusion:

- spouses ineligible in their first year here (lose the one-year eligibility rule);
- spouses without access to income to pay for courses (currently supported through the Discretionary Learner Support fund);
- the working poor, including migrant workers (although views on the latter were divided in Birmingham);
- young people aged 14-19, both in and out of education, and both residents and new arrivals;
- offenders and ex-offenders;
- those resident for 20+ years and not yet engaged in learning;
- single homeless people not on benefits; and
- those with needs below Level 1.

Participants were unanimous in the view that priority should be given to Entry-level provision and those, from all groups, with needs below Level 1. This approach (akin to an entitlement) would, they believe, address the needs of the same groups targeted by the indicative priority list. A London participant suggested research could be commissioned to corroborate this.

1 c) What evidence should be collected to ensure priority groups are reached?

There were few responses to this question beyond the comment that evidence could come from a variety of sources, existing and new, but that accuracy and currency of data would determine the extent to which it would prove useful for planning purposes. Participants thought this best achieved by local authorities working closely with partners to share and analyse intelligence.

1 d) Would these priorities meet cohesion needs?

It became clear very early in discussions that while participants understood the arguments behind the proposal to focus ESOL on priority groups of learners, not all were convinced that this approach would address community cohesion on its own.

A London group commented that,

'ESOL provision is not the sole answer to community cohesion. There are many other economic and social issues contributing to problems within communities that will need simultaneous attention'.

All noted tensions between prioritising groups and meeting targets, illustrated in the following points made in London and Leeds respectively:

'If ESOL provision is prioritised to meet local community needs, there may well be a conflict with the achievement of PSA targets, and tension between local and national priorities especially around working with pre-entry level learners. Government would need to recognize and accept this'.

'Beginners classes are reducing but the indicative groups would probably need exactly this sort of provision'.

Such tensions have already emerged in the last two years as different regions have responded to what they see as lower priority for funding ESOL provision at Entry 1 and 2 (a misinterpretation of LSC funding guidance) and the squeeze on adult budgets. It will be vital to ensure that clear messages and information about policy intention emerging from the consultation, address the above concerns.

Debate also took place around the nature of cohesion and who is expected to cohere. A London group felt that the consultation implied that the onus of responsibility for cohesion sits with 'incomers' without English language skills, whereas participants were clear that it is something for which we are all responsible:

'Community cohesion is a two-way process with responsibilities on the host community to play its part'.

Discussion 2: How can we work more effectively, locally and regionally, to involve people more and to plan and commission ESOL to support community cohesion? (Questions 2 and 3 in the consultation document)

2a) Is the proposition outlined... appropriate for commissioning ESOL to support community cohesion?

Participants were as one in their views that existing arrangements would only be appropriate if they create or build on strong, inclusive and collaborative partnerships and a clear, shared vision. They agreed that the local authority Agreements (LAA) would be key, but questioned the extent to which they currently take account of ESOL need. An example was given of Southwark, where funding pressures, especially in the voluntary and community sector (VCS), have led to ESOL being excluded from the LAA.

It would be important to recognise that local areas may come up with different models of working partnerships, depending on needs. For example, Nottingham uses a central co-ordinating application and referral agency (BEGIN), which all partners subscribe to, whereas Bradford College refers enquiries from local community based centres to the local Learning Partnership. London participants thought cross and inter-borough working would be essential. Comment was made that local models may need to be moderated by reference to national guidelines to help reduce the risk of vastly differing standards of provision in neighbouring authorities, and ways of establishing effective processes should be considered.

2b) How will this be done most effectively?

All groups felt strongly that successful and effective commissioning would depend on the following factors:

- not reinventing the wheel – partnerships should start by looking at what works locally and find ways of linking up existing structures where these are known to be effective. For example, Leicestershire Learning Partnership already focuses on Skills for Life and could, with partners, form the core of a revised and more inclusive structure that draws from and reaches into local communities;
- good baseline data – this would be vital. London participants in particular felt that *'Exhaustive "needs analyses" should be avoided – it is expensive, time consuming and out of date as soon as it is finished. Dialogue between partners is more important'*;
- new, light structures that avoid the trap of creating more hierarchical and bureaucratic groups to administer and implement change were thought more likely to be flexible and effective. Similarly, processes for assessing and planning should be dynamic and responsive, not locked into rigid systems of fixed funding regimes: *'Give them the money to do the job and back off'*;
- getting the right people around the table – planning and funding agencies, providers, learners, health and welfare services, VCS, employers and others. The challenge involved was acknowledged and could require additional funding in some instances, but the outcome seen as vital in order to achieve a holistic approach to community cohesion, with ESOL as part of the package. A Birmingham participant commented that, *'Representatives should have a realistic take on what could work in practice'*;
- reducing competitiveness and duplication between providers. In many areas, there is a culture of competing for funding as opposed to working together. Participants at all events referred to the difficulties created when providers charge different fees for similar courses, and when too many of the 'same courses' are offered by providers in neighbouring providers. Local planning strategies could begin to address these issues by looking at establishing an agreed policy on fees, for example. As a Birmingham group noted, it would be more productive to *'Build strategies, rather than chasing funding'*; and

- having the right provision in place to meet learners' needs. Participants were adamant that there is little point in revitalising planning structures and processes if the provision that people need isn't available to them. Participants in Leeds again stressed the need to prioritise the 'right sort of provision' – at Entry levels – that isn't currently a priority for funding in all areas because of the squeeze on adult funding, but should come to the fore *'if we are really serious about cohesion'*. They argued that: *'The very people who are being encouraged to learn English are excluded because of their inability to pay or because of the lack of suitable provision'*.

Concerns expressed by participants included:

- a significant reduction in funding for partnership working in some colleges. As a result, they have lost much of the successful collaborative work in which they were involved. There is an urgent need for interim measures to address this and a commitment to future funding to avoid repeating the same mistake in the future; and
- the need to engage employers in planning processes that may not always seem meaningful to them. Different incentives and more robust measures will be required to gain commitment to involvement from those who, so far, have been reluctant. A demand-led approach benefits at the planning stage from input by employers.

2c) How could effectiveness be measured?

This was seen as 'a complex question, requiring a patient, long-term approach and sophisticated processes'. All participants noted the difficulties involved in measuring impact, mainly that there are few existing baselines from which to start. A London group commented that the indicators suggested in the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion should be considered:

'They are wide-ranging and integral to the remit of a number of agencies. It will require inter-agency co-ordination to agree measures and to provide evidence of how they are being met'.

The same group said that impact measures should emphasise qualitative rather than focus solely on quantitative change, and suggested *'Local quality indicators could be developed to measure softer outcomes and could be included in Local Area Agreements'*.

Data gathered by the LSC and Jobcentre Plus allow measurement of what has been delivered to whom but, on its own, this is an insufficient measure of the effectiveness of focusing ESOL on community cohesion. Birmingham respondents noted that

‘Measuring impact is a challenge – getting jobs and qualifications is easy to measure, other factors are more difficult but perhaps equally important’.

3) Given the role for local authorities ...how might local planning processes influence the setting of priorities and allocation of funds?

There were few responses to this question. Comments from London and Leeds included, respectively:

“This is a cross departmental responsibility and should be planned for accordingly”

“Processes should be transparent, fair, dynamic, responsive and “have teeth” – the local authority needs to make recommendations and hold the LSC accountable for funding allocations and quality”

Discussion 3: How can we encourage better collaboration between public, private and voluntary and community sectors, to develop a more coherent and better supported outreach system? (Question 4 in the consultation document)

4a) How can existing outreach work be strengthened to support focusing ESOL on community cohesion?

Participants defined ‘outreach’ both in terms of delivering ESOL courses in local communities and in terms of wider engagement activities beyond education. Unsurprisingly, discussions at all events focused on the need for funding and clarification of roles.

Consistent and sustainable funding was considered far more effective than short term funding arrangements and essential to enabling long-term strategic planning. Participants in Leeds commented that community involvement needs adequate and sustained funding to develop community resources, and pointed out the costs involved in disseminating information about such resources so that ESOL teachers are aware of them and can advise learners of available options.

Funding is a particular concern for smaller colleges and providers, some of which are not resourced to support learners in the community. A London group pointed out that outreach work needed to be recognised as being separate and different from marketing (with which it is often, wrongly, confused), and funded accordingly. There is a need to:

“Revitalize the understanding of outreach work in FE – it lacks consistent funding and support, and is too often narrowly defined as an opportunity to promote or market provision”

Birmingham participants commented that a more flexible approach is needed for outreach delivery, with new funding approaches and less emphasis on retention and achievement. Argument was made for a separate pot of money for activities around initial engagement, enrolment and assessment, as well as for non-accredited provision and developing routes to accredited provision. Having support mechanisms such as childcare and welfare advice in place would enable more vulnerable learners to attend.

The existence of several different funding streams and the absence of inter-agency planning and collaboration can create problems. An example was given of tensions that arose in Bexley where ESOL classes were available free and with crèche support, while college courses were not and emphasised regular attendance and achievement of qualifications. Cohesive, collaborative networks were considered vital in helping to identify who does what best, avoiding overlap and chasing funds, and helping people become aware of what is available. London participants cited the ‘Meganexus’ system and TALENT website, which are used to raise awareness.

Examples of collaborative work shared during discussions included work with job centres, health centres and libraries, and development of family learning through schools, mosques and other faith centres. Other examples of effective practice including the following:

A model of joint working in Bristol – Bristol College took over local authority ESOL provision and they now work together rather than competing. The Community Outreach team engages learners and refers them to the college for provision – early signs suggest it is working, however it has only been possible through ESF funding.

Building the capacity of people from local communities to take on outreach roles in London. In one borough, women from the Bangladeshi community were trained to Level 3 in community support, although this was only possible through ESF funding.

The use of Learning Champions in Nottingham, where people from local communities act as ambassadors and recruit actively within their area (funded via the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund).

In Telford the local authority funds community advocates and advice and guidance groups.

4b) How can volunteers and the voluntary and community sector be better involved in supporting outreach work... what support would they need to do this?

Participants across all venues made strikingly similar points on ways of involving volunteers and the voluntary and community sector. A general point made was that there are currently few incentives for small organisations to join in partnership work – there must be benefits on both sides for this to be successful. A Leeds group suggested formalizing VCS involvement, through funding or otherwise rewarding their contribution to the outreach process. They further suggested that,

‘Outreach partnerships currently rely on short-term contracts that have no mechanism for self-financing or long-term sustainable funding. This needs to change at the point of planning, at both local and district level’.

It was suggested that Local Authorities could consider the direction of funding and the further use of service level agreements.

A further consideration in discussions surrounded the issue of what constitutes an appropriate role for a voluntary organisation or individual volunteer. While some organisations could, and actively want to be ESOL providers, others struggle under the weight of demands for inappropriate outcomes that accompany their funding. The following examples, taken from the London events, illustrate the funding dilemmas experienced:

- a VCS representative spoke of community based organisations that are required, as a condition of their much-needed funding, to *‘chase targets that are inappropriate for them’*;
- an orthodox Jewish centre that wants to put on ESOL courses but cannot be funded to pay salaries; and
- a local refugee organisation that had worked with an FE provider, running a successful on-site advice service alongside the ESOL class. This stopped when the refugee group’s funding was reduced.

As the London group pointed out,

‘The encouragement of volunteers could be done more systematically. The role of bi-lingual or multi-lingual speakers in supporting lower-level learners is well recognized. This requires careful planning of progression opportunities that enable volunteers to develop into assistant or teaching roles’.

Participants commented on the need to address variable quality in some VCS organisations, but thought this could be done through training and the application of appropriate and rigorous quality standards.

The need for specialist advice and mentoring for certain groups, outside the expertise of the ESOL teacher, was seen as a critical role that the VCS and individual volunteers could fill. Birmingham Churches Together plan, for example, use Level 2 ESOL learners as mentors for new learners, and suggested that others, such as Learning Champions, could be offered similar training.

A final point taken from the Leeds discussion:

‘Outreach work should focus on ‘community engagement’ as opposed to mere ‘delivery’. In order for community cohesion to be more of a priority, a shift ought to take place where the ‘imperative’ is not targets and delivery against a contract but social cohesion. This ‘change in culture’ will encourage FE colleges to work with community organisations, and neighbourhood learning networks to form links to adult learning groups’.

Conclusion

The consultation events provided an opportunity for organisations involved in outreach provision to participate in structured discussions about focusing ESOL on community cohesion, the outcomes of which will feed into and help influence Government thinking on the future direction of ESOL policy. Participants valued the opportunity to engage in this way and feedback, although informal, was positive.

In their responses to the consultation questions, participants raised important issues about prioritising on the basis of groups and the implications this could have for learner engagement and access to appropriate provision, and for PSA targets.

They considered the possible tensions between national priorities and local planning, in terms of the need for local flexibility and responsiveness on the one hand and, on the other, for measures of consistency and national quality standards.

Successful and effective planning was seen to depend on the quality of partnerships, which need to be collaborative and inclusive, and on the extent to which they are able to adopt a light touch as opposed to bureaucratic and unwieldy ways of working. While community partners need sustainable funding support in order to engage, it was thought equally important for them to be plugged into the strategic planning process.

Discussions around involving volunteers and voluntary and community organisations in developing effective outreach systems, raised important questions about appropriate roles, funding mechanisms and the need for access to training and development in order to improve capacity and quality.

The mix of organisations represented at the events, although weighted towards colleges, worked well nonetheless, and resulted in stimulating and fairly intensive debate. A participant at the Leeds event commented on relatively small number of voluntary and community sector organisations present, and suggested that, in the future, further thought could be given to using community-based venues, as this may prove more effective in engaging a greater number of voluntary and community sector organisations.

Learner events

Introduction

NIACE was asked by DIUS to undertake consultations with ESOL learners to seek their views on the document published in January 2008, entitled 'Focusing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) on Community Cohesion'.

NIACE, assisted by the relevant Local Authorities, organized three consultation events in Hammersmith and Fulham, Leicester, and Rochdale. Learners attending ESOL classes provided by the Local Authorities, community organisations, FE colleges and private providers, together with their tutors, were invited to attend. The aim was to attract 40 learners and 5 tutors in each location. In fact over 170 learners and 25 tutors attended in total, and the level of active participation was very high. Those attending were also asked to encourage other learners to express their views in writing and send them to NIACE. Written responses received after the completion of this report will be the subject of a further report.

The consultation events

Each event followed a similar programme. In small groups, the learners were asked to discuss what learning English and community cohesion meant to them. They received a short presentation on the consultation document from a DIUS representative. Finally they considered a range of questions which were identified as being relevant to the consultation document and the learners' situations. These questions related to:

- the priority groups for ESOL;
- how ESOL might be improved;
- how ESOL might be planned and provided in the local area to help community cohesion;
- which organisations should be involved in ESOL; and
- how more can people be encouraged to learn English.

At various points during the half-day events, reporting and discussion sessions provided the opportunity for learners to record their ideas on paper and share them in small groups and with the full group.

A range of materials was provided to encourage discussion and recording, including pictures and sticky notes. In addition the tutors and facilitators were provided with background materials including the consultation document and notes about the process and the questions. The NIACE staff leading the events aimed to ensure that clear and accessible language was used at all times and that all learners had the opportunity to understand and participate in the discussions.

Which ESOL learners were consulted?

The learners' English language skills and knowledge ranged from ESOL pre-entry level to level 3. The majority (over 75%) were women, and they covered the whole adult learner age range, from young adults to retired people. They were learning English in a variety of settings, including community and neighbourhood centres, colleges and schools, where they were attending courses provided by public, voluntary and private organisations. In Hammersmith and Fulham the learners recorded 27 countries of origin, with the largest group coming from Somalia; in Leicester the learners recorded 18 countries of origin, with the largest group coming from India; in Rochdale the learners recorded 14 countries of origin, with the largest group coming from Pakistan.

What learning English and community cohesion means to ESOL learners

Learning English was seen as vital by all the participants, who recorded a total of 546 reasons why they wanted to learn to speak, understand and read English. For those who were in the early stages of learning, the ability to undertake daily tasks without help was important, such as shopping and finding directions. A significant motivation was the desire to help their families by supporting their children's and grandchildren's schooling and education, and to communicate with schools, GPs and hospital staff.

Knowledge of English also enabled people to make friends, communicate with the younger generations, help their neighbours, make appointments, understand and complete forms, use a computer, the post office and the bank, take part in sports, read books, watch television and have fun.

A frequently mentioned reason for learning English was related to work aspirations. Learners wanted to improve their English to gain qualifications, or use their existing ones in order to build careers, or simply to be able to communicate well enough to gain employment or make progress in the labour market.

Many learners felt that learning English was important because they were living in England and they wanted to be able to contribute to and participate in the wider English-speaking society; to act as volunteers; and to feel strong and independent.

A Hammersmith and Fulham learner said:

'I want to learn English because I live in the UK and you have to learn the language where you are living and how you can communicate to people. For example when you are going to the GP, to help my children with their homework and to find a job.'

A Leicester learner said:

'I learn English because it is the national language. Without English you can't talk to people. It helps me to read the news in the paper; talk to the doctor at the surgery and listen to the TV. Without English you can't communicate with your grandchildren or help other people who can't speak English. I learn English because I would like to do voluntary work at the Royal Infirmary Hospital.'

A Rochdale learner said:

'English is important for living within the community, talking to the doctor, the teacher, finding a job, shopping, making friends, getting to know the neighbours, helping the children. If I get lost I can ask somebody in English. We can work with people from different countries. Call a taxi. Do sport in the community with different nationalities. When we go shopping we can ask for the right size'.

Community cohesion was understood by many learners as representing a concept that included living in a friendly neighbourhood and being able to participate in community life. Even those who lived in areas where the majority language was not English saw that knowledge of English was important to enable them to build good relationships. A knowledge of English had enabled the learners to contribute towards community cohesion by using public facilities, such as parks and playgroups, and communicating with other users; getting to know their neighbours and helping them out; participating in celebrations; respecting other cultures and mixing with people from other backgrounds; attending community meetings; and helping to make their neighbourhoods safe and peaceful.

One Leicester learner, describing his own experience, said:

'The thing I like about the area where I live (which is multicultural) is that I've got a retired English couple who are my neighbours. They look after my house when we go away and we look after theirs. I have an English friend who lives opposite. Me and Harry go out together on a weekend to a local club to play bingo. I have friends at the club and we all socialize and have good fun.'

Another, from Hammersmith, said:

'English helps people to work together, communicating with each other to solve problems, making areas safe, solving crimes, celebrating together, sharing opinions, parents from all communities working together, organizing events together. Communities being less scared of each other. Respecting each other's culture and religion. Multicultural Britain is a good thing'.

A third, from Rochdale, said:

'My neighbours are from Pakistan. If we can share experiences it helps. You can help others if you understand. She had a big problem and I helped. If I didn't know English I couldn't do this'.

The consultation questions

At each of the consultation events, the NIACE facilitator introduced the five questions from paragraph 2 above and gave a brief outline of the issues. Learners were then invited to choose a question which interested them and to join a small table discussion on that question, facilitated by a tutor. The ideas were recorded and reported back to the plenary sessions, when all the participants were invited to comment on each question.

The priority groups of learners – who should have free ESOL classes?

Groups of learners in all three events addressed this question.

Opinions varied on who should receive free ESOL classes. Some learners felt that everyone should be treated equally and ESOL should be free for everyone, with the justification that the benefits of increased integration and independence could outweigh the costs of providing free classes. A modification of this idea was that ESOL should be free to everyone for a certain period of time, perhaps two to three years. A very small minority thought that everyone should pay something towards the costs, since this would provide the motivation to ensure attendance. A modification of this idea was that the costs paid by the students could be reimbursed to learners who successfully completed their courses and passed their examinations, again to reduce drop-out rates. A further suggestion on this theme was that those who could not pay should be required to do community work in order to be eligible for free classes. However, these ideas did not have the support of the majority of learners.

To some extent the learners identified the same priority groups as those specified in the consultation document. These were parents and carers (including, in addition, parents and carers, especially women, who do not have control of or access to the family income); those who are permanently settled in the UK and those who expect to stay, including refugees and asylum seekers; and people without initial schooling and those who cannot read and write in their mother tongue.

In addition, the following groups were identified as priority groups for ESOL provision and free or low-cost classes:-

- those who have qualifications from abroad and who need English to enable them to overcome the language barriers that prevent them from re-entering their profession;
- disabled people;
- pensioners;
- employed people on low incomes;
- anyone on income support or incapacity benefit;
- those looking for work; and
- women with no access to the family income.

One issue which was frequently mentioned was the need to help some learners meet the costs associated with attending classes; in particular child care and travel and examination costs, which some learners found impossible to cover from their own resources.

How can ESOL be improved?

This was the most frequently chosen question to be discussed at all three events and the learners had a wealth of experience and ideas to share.

A significant group of learners felt that ESOL could be improved if learning English was combined with learning other subjects. The most popular suggestions were that ESOL could be combined with maths, life skills, computing, job preparation, vocational courses or citizenship. One learner suggested 'ESOL and singing'.

A further suggestion to improve learning was that more opportunities to speak English could be arranged through volunteering schemes, where the learners could participate as volunteers, helping members of the settled communities, which would enable the learners to practice their spoken English. ESOL learners also wanted to practice their English in community settings by meeting English speakers. Many learners asked for more opportunities to learn to speak English. They wished to spend at least some of their time learning alongside English-speaking students.

The learners also had ideas about the availability and arrangements for ESOL provision. Some complained about the length of time that people had to wait before gaining a place in an ESOL class. Others wanted shorter intensive courses, particularly for those with higher-level qualifications from their

home countries. Several suggested that the classes should be held more frequently, with an increased number of hours of tuition and more full-time courses for those who could benefit. A further suggestion was for a better range and supply of learning materials and course books.

Again the learners emphasized the need for child care provision to enable parents and carers to attend.

How should ESOL be planned and provided in the local area to help community cohesion?

In part the learners interpreted this question in relation to the location of the ESOL provision. They expressed the view that both community and college locations were needed, the former especially for new learners and the latter for those at more advanced levels. Primary schools were also seen as good community locations to start learning English.

The neighbourhood was recommended as the place to encourage and publicize the learning of English and to involve learners in community events, meetings and celebrations, and to facilitate contacts between different groups.

There was also a recognition of the need for providers to co-ordinate their activities and planning to enable learners to access provision at different times and in different venues, to benefit from child care provision, and to progress to college-based courses which open up other learning opportunities.

Which organisations should be involved in ESOL?

This question was considered by two groups of learners, in Hammersmith and Fulham and Leicester. They suggested that a wider range of stakeholders should take an interest in the teaching and learning of English. These included organisations in the community such as schools, libraries, community centres, churches, mosques and other places of worship, sports clubs, and housing and tenants' associations. Larger organisations were also listed, including the NHS, the BBC, Welfare Benefit services, universities and employers' bodies.

While the precise roles of these organisations were not specified it was suggested that some could directly provide learning opportunities and others could support provision, encourage take-up and publicize opportunities. The learners felt that it was in the interests of many organisations to support ESOL, since this could reduce interpreting and translation costs.

How can more people be encouraged to learn English?

This question was addressed by groups in all three of the events. The learners provided a wide range of suggestions to overcome the barriers to learning.

Existing learners could encourage the others. One Hammersmith learner said:

'As a part of this community I have to play a role to influence the people around me positively. I have persuaded them that English language is a basic need. If you want to share with others you should learn. Firstly you have to go to college. Secondly you have to communicate with people who speak English. Thirdly I listen to English news, watch English movies, do a lot of reading. Finally as a volunteer there are many organisations that can help people do voluntary work'.

She was just one of the learners who suggested that community mentors could encourage greater participation.

Many learners suggested that ESOL classes should be better publicized in settings where potential learners could be reached. A Polish learner suggested that information about ESOL classes should be available in employment agencies and work places in a range of languages. He said:

'Polish people who asked me about how much I pay for lessons were surprised that it's not very expensive. They should be informed about the classes and the prices. This is very important information for people who don't earn much'.

Several learners drew attention to the barriers that confront women from some communities. They needed child care provision to be able to attend. Some women were unable to pay the fees and their husbands discouraged them from enrolling. It was suggested that women-only free courses, based in the community and with crèche facilities, could enable more women to attend.

A further suggestion to tempt reluctant learners was the provision of taster sessions.

The learners also identified the need to make more flexible provision for people who work long hours or are subject to changing shift work patterns or had heavy family responsibilities. They suggested more provision across the week, including classes at weekends and in the evenings.

A final point to note is that there is insufficient existing provision in some areas to enable everyone who wants to learn English to gain an ESOL place.

The learners' additional Comments and their evaluation of the consultation events

A total of 146 learners completed an evaluation questionnaire during the last session of the events. All welcomed the opportunity the events had provided for learners to express their views. The most common words and phrases that they used to describe the experience were about enjoyment, interest, and being happy with the events and having their voices heard.

A Hammersmith learner said:

'I am very happy with this event because it has helped me to state my opinion'.

A Leicester learner said:

'I really enjoyed this ESOL event. In this event I learned everybody's thoughts about ESOL. I hope events like this will be organized every six months so ESOL learners encourage their ideas and study ESOL further'.

A Rochdale learner said:

'This meeting was very important and let us know more about the problems we face. I'm pleased to know that the Government is concerned about ESOL'.

Some learners also took the opportunity to record their personal views about ESOL. These included requests to increase the number and length of classes; to provide more crèche provision; to reduce class sizes and increase tutor numbers; to improve information about ESOL; and for intensive ESOL provision for those with qualifications.

Conclusions and main findings

The events provided a unique opportunity for the learners who attended to express their views about learning English, ESOL provision and community cohesion. The issues raised were even broader than those covered by the consultation document, but were relevant to the main themes of the document.

The level of English and the nationalities of the participants were diverse, but all were eloquent about the benefits of learning English, and provided 546 reasons for why it was important to them. The most common reason given was to help them to undertake everyday tasks independently, followed by being able to help their children and other family members, gain employment and make friends.

The importance of ESOL for community cohesion was also recognized, with learners wishing to be active community members by helping their neighbours, participating in community events, and respecting and understanding other cultures. Several learners stated that they needed to learn English because they lived in Britain and wanted to be part of society.

Some very important issues were raised about the role of women in the ESOL learners' communities and how English was necessary to enable them to help their children, grandchildren and other family members. Younger and older women play a significant role in supporting children's education, providing a healthy environment, and encouraging integration. They need to be able to communicate with schools and other services that support families. In addition these women wanted to help and communicate with their neighbours and other members of their communities, and undertake volunteering roles. For these reasons women were seen as a priority for ESOL provision. The barriers to learning that confront women were readily identified by the participants in the events and these should be borne in mind by those responsible for funding and organizing ESOL provision. Lack of childcare and lack of access to financial resources prevent women from learning. Therefore consideration should be given to the impact that course fees and other costs may have upon potential female learners.

Learning English to gain or improve employment was also seen as important and discussion of this issue raised points about the ways in which ESOL provision could be improved and tailored to the needs of the learners. Learners with qualifications from abroad identified the need for intensive courses to enable them to gain relevant UK qualifications and employment. Many learners thought that ESOL should be combined with other subjects of vocational relevance, such as maths, computing and job preparation.

Employed ESOL learners thought that classes should be more flexible and provided at different time of the week and weekends. Work places and employment agencies also have a role to play in publicizing and providing learning opportunities.

The neighbourhoods in which the learners lived were seen as places that should provide opportunities to encourage learning and to locate learning venues. Such neighbourhoods could also provide the opportunities to speak English, while meeting and mixing with other people, and the location for volunteering placements to enable learners to contribute to the community while learning English. These points demonstrate the importance of local well-informed planning of ESOL and associated provision. The need for co-ordination in planning provision for an area was also highlighted, since learners wanted to be able to progress to more formal provision outside their immediate neighbourhood, such as the courses provided by FE colleges, where wider education and training opportunities are available at different times.

A final point is the suggestion that learners' views should be sought more often, when considering the future of the services that are designed to benefit them. Even learners with the most limited English were able to make powerful and well-informed suggestions.

As one of the Leicester learners said:

'It is a good idea to ask people what they think and it is good for their communities'.

4. Summary of Consultation Responses

This part of the report summarises the responses to the formal consultation. Responses (via the web-site, email or on paper) were received from the following types of organisations:

Type of organisation	Description	Number of responses
Providers	Largely colleges	68
Voluntary sector	Includes national and local organisations	34
Local authorities	Includes City and District Councils and Departments within LAs	31
Other	Includes partnerships, public bodies/ associations, individuals and others	52
Not stated		14
Total		199

At the end of the consultation period, common themes were identified. The responses were grouped under these theme headings; where more than one point was made in a response it was grouped under more than one heading. This section summarizes the key points made in relation to each question and gives some indication of the frequency of issues raised. As this represents a summary, by definition, it distils down the information provided and, therefore, it is not a substitute for reading the actual responses.

In reading this report care must be exercised in attributing significance to the numbers of reported responses. The latter have been provided to be indicative only given that this was not a quantitative consultation exercise. It should also be borne in mind that not all organisations answered each question.

Verbatim quotes and case studies of cited good practice have been included to illustrate points made.

Question 1a): An indicative list of national priorities has been proposed. Are there any other groups we should consider for inclusion in this list, and if so, how high a priority do you consider them to be?

The core groups that stood out (in terms of the frequency that they were mentioned) were spouses, asylum seekers/refugees and migrant/low paid workers. Other frequently mentioned groups were: women/parents; children and young people; learners at pre-entry level ESOL and ESOL levels 1 and 2; offenders; the unemployed; older people; people with learning difficulties; the homeless, and; men. Many of these groups overlap (for example, women/parents and spouses), but this taxonomy reflects the content of the responses. Taken as a whole, the responses reflect a concern for specific groups of vulnerable women and new arrivals in the UK (both migrants and asylum seekers). Other respondents answered this question by outlining issues related to the national priorities indicative list in and of itself.

Respondents identified several groups who they felt were appropriate for inclusion in the national priorities list. Three groups comprise the most frequently cited. These were:

- **low paid/migrant workers** – Numerically speaking, this was the most popular group, being cited 74 times (spread fairly evenly across respondent types given the number of responses in each category type). Some expressed scepticism that their employers would be willing fund ESOL (see question 6), and many of the responses identified the difficulty of paying fees by those on low wages. Additionally, there was frequent mention of migrants from the new EU countries. In particular, those in this group with families and children in school show evidence of willingness to stay were felt to be deserving of inclusion (one local authority felt their families should be included too). It was generally felt that this group is likely to be exploited and excluded, and that the language barrier makes finding better employment problematic. Migrant professionals perhaps might form a subgroup, who need higher ESOL training to practice the profession they were originally trained for;

“English language for recent migrants is a key tool in promoting the cohesion locally as it is key to integration. Language skills are needed to ensure migrants are fully able to contribute to the British economy and to ensure that they are able to access local services”

(Local Government Association)

“Highly qualified refugees without the language skills to contribute to society to their full potential. They end up in low paid work and cannot afford to pay for ESOL courses – a wasted resource.”

(London Borough of Camden Strategic ESOL Group)

“It is important that the ESOL needs of migrant workers from European Union are also given due priority, especially as it is believed that there are significant numbers who have been in the country for over several years and are likely to be here for the foreseeable future.”

(Other)

“The DIUS priority list seems to include everyone except the low paid. Yet everyone who is in the UK, even temporarily, needs access to language and literacy provision, especially if they are cleaning our toilets, digging our potatoes and serving our coffee lattes (sic). If they are contributing in such a vital way to our economy and to the functioning of our towns and cities, they have the right to communicate and have a voice.”

(Researcher)

- **spouses** – (both male and female, but with a general emphasis on women) Many identified this group as being in need, especially those who are newly arrived (i.e. during their first year of living in the UK): this is the group who have not yet gained “indefinite leave to remain” status and are thus not yet eligible for funding. Many argued that this group would be receptive to integration and highly likely to remain in the UK. Several noted that childcare is an issue for this group, the burden of which inhibits them from being able to attend classes. The group was cited 48 times (disproportionately by providers). A typical response would be:

“Spouses should be eligible immediately rather than having to wait one year, as this can be crucial to integration, especially if there are children involved”

(Provider)

- **asylum seekers/Refugees** – This group was mentioned 47 times (and particularly by voluntary organisations, many of whom represent these groups). They typically advocated the inclusion of this group *at the point of application for asylum* and regardless of how long they have been in the country: this would be the group awaiting a ‘decision to remain’ in their first six months. However, one ‘other’ argued that since 80% of applications for asylum are granted a decision within 2 months, eligibility criteria for free ESOL classes should be lowered to 2 months. Many respondents noted that new arrivals are a particularly socially isolated group who urgently require ESOL to facilitate integration.

“A significant barrier to long-term integration is the government restriction on asylum seekers being permitted to work and learn English while they are awaiting an asylum decision”
(Voluntary Organisation)

Demos provided a particularly detailed analysis of the situation, which outlines the regional dimension of this group:

“Asylum seekers are an area of real concern. The question remains whether asylum seekers are the real cause of such rising demand for ESOL – and whether the consequences of making them wait for six months before they are entitled to fee remission are acceptable. First, the Home Office’s evidence shows that ‘annual asylum applications are at their lowest level since 1993’. Given that asylum claims have been falling steadily it seems contradictory to suggest that they are responsible for the marked rise in demand in recent years. Second, the government and the mayor must ask themselves about the impact of leaving people without English language provision for six months. Further, given some of the evidence about the importance of the English language as a force for greater integration and social cohesion, it seems risky on social as well as humanitarian grounds to wait for six months before offering fee remission. This is particularly the case for London, given that the standard Home Office assumption is that about 85 per cent of all UK asylum applicants live in the capital. If further reason were needed, research by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeric (NRDC) shows that new arrivals are more likely to make progress with learning English than those who may have already been in the country for six months before entering formal learning” A final factor to consider is that the majority of initial asylum decisions are now taken in just eight weeks. In the light of this figure, it seems sensible that entitlements should be activated at this point for the unfortunate few

who are still waiting on decisions in their cases. It would make most sense for the Home office to bear at least some of the cost of this extension. This would both reflect the reasoning behind the change (issues of social cohesion) and would set a good incentive to continue to speed up the process of dealing with people's claims"

(Demos)

- **women/parents** – related to the category of spouses (see above), women and parents (and women with other dependents) were a mentioned frequently and have been combined as a group, as for many respondents they seem to be synonymous. Several respondents emphasized prioritising marginalized and vulnerable women – although it should be noted that others praised the list for including 'excluded women', which appears either to have not been noticed on the list by some respondents, or not sufficiently delineated (see other issues). A recurrent barrier to entry that is mentioned throughout the research is the need for childcare to enable women and parents to take part in ESOL lessons: the provision of affordable, on-site childcare is clearly seen as a route to getting marginalized women into ESOL. A related issue is the effect that not being able to speak English would have on their children and their ability to integrate/do well in school. Typical responses would be:

"Women suffering or fleeing from domestic violence, particularly those living in hostels."

(Practitioner)

"Women, in particular from the Pakistani community, as Buckinghamshire has a relatively high proportion of Pakistani residents compared with the rest of the South East region. We recognise that a lack of English skills is potentially isolating, and can have a detrimental effect on the educational attainment of their children if they are unable to offer support at home or engage with the education system. We also recognise that this isolation can also have a detrimental effect on the long term emotional, social and mental well being of individuals"

(Local Authority)

The following groups were cited, but less frequently than the above (in order of number of times mentioned):

- **children and young people** – were popular as a group who need to be included in the priority list (mentioned 23 times). Some specified age ranges for this group, most frequently 14-19 year olds. Several pointed out that children and young people are likely to assimilate life in the UK but often slip through the provision net as they are too old for school (if 16 or over). Also: children and dependents that are recently arrived and haven't secured school place for current year will be temporarily excluded from provision. There were also concerns for: children with special education needs; children with interrupted education; children who would be excluded from further/higher education and vocational courses due to proficiency in English and; school leavers with low capability in English.
For example:

“While many should receive their language provision as part of mainstream, education, we need to ensure that everyone is reached by this. Furthermore, we would recommend that those that may have chosen to leave formal education at 16 or have arrived after this age should still be a priority as knowledge of the language would be crucial in determining their access to the labour market or indeed re-entry into formal education and/or training.”

(Institute of Community Cohesion)

- **the elderly** – were cited 20 times. They generally stated that the elderly should be considered due to their vulnerability to isolation, particularly from BME groups, older widowed women and older members of the Asian community. Widows in particular are at risk of being marginalized and unable to access services that they might need at this stage of life;

“Older members of established communities who have not learnt English are difficult to target as they often do not understand the benefits of learning the language, especially as they are likely to have already gained citizenship. However as potential carers for grandchildren, and as potential users of adult social care services, English language skills would be of benefit to them.”

(Local Authority)

“In our experience, many older women from some communities are widowed in their 50s or 60s as they may have married husbands much older than themselves. Their culture, and their husband, may have meant that they have integrated very little and have very little English. Many South Asian and other widows can be like this. Without ESOL they will require interpreting and translation for health and social care interactions for the following 20 or 30 years, risking poor healthcare, but also much higher healthcare costs as a result.”

(Age Concern)

“Please remember older people who may be refugees or asylum seekers or otherwise entering the country without English. Their potential for contribution to society is just as valid and important as younger people”

(Future Years)

- **offenders/people on remand** were mentioned 14 times (largely by providers and local authorities). Whilst most simply stated ‘offenders’ or ‘ex-offenders’, one ‘other’ respondent specified that offenders who have driving offences due to lack of awareness of UK driving laws and stipulated that they should be included if they are likely to remain in the UK. One respondent suggested that ESOL might reduce probability of re-offending;

“Whilst there is provision of ESOL in prison, the need for ESOL provision alongside other forms of sentencing in the community is not referred to in the consultation paper”

(Other)

- **unemployed/NEETs** – One local authority specified unemployed males who are not child carers as they are underrepresented in terms of general uptake of ESOL;

London Skills and Employment Board Task and Finish Group produced a review on London ESOL provision – they recommended that as well as helping people get sustainable work and better jobs and also properly engage those who are most excluded. This should be through ‘employability pathways’ to enable the most excluded to get involved in their local communities e.g. involvement with children’s school. These pathways are the stepping stones to promote social cohesion and employment.

- **learners with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities (LLDD)** – This group was mentioned by 10 respondents, with many raising the issue of people with mental health problems. The following example demonstrates how these groups are frequently interlinked:

“Many refugees and asylum seekers suffer from mental health difficulties as a result of their experiences. Access to ESOL can help to reduce isolation and assist those individuals to rebuild their lives.”

(Voluntary organisation)

- **homeless** – 6 respondents advocated adding homeless or displaced people to the priorities list, one local authority noted that funding might be an issue for homeless people if they are not signing on for benefits. For example:

“There is a clear link between support to learn English, sustainable employment and the avoidance of homelessness, which is a threat to community cohesion”

(Voluntary organisation)

- **pre-entry, Entry Level 1 & 2** – This group was mentioned 11 times. As one practitioner noted:

“Learners who are currently below the level of the lowest LSC funded courses [should be included]. The ESOL Core Curriculum does not recognise a Pre-Entry level, but as a college that is punished for non-achievement we cannot presently cater for the hundred or so people (numbers from the initial assessment sessions held at [my] College) we have run who are below the level needed to achieve Entry Level 1. It is very disconcerting as a teacher to turn a learner away who is keen and obviously has a language learning need, but doesn’t fit the current provision.”

(Practitioner)

- **men** – were mentioned on 5 occasions. Special concern should be noted for Somalian men (specified in four of these responses).

Other groups were cited more rarely for inclusion on the national priority list:

- community leaders and faith leaders – one provider suggested that they should be offered general ESOL awareness training;
- those for whom there isn't an established community;
- people who have been in the UK for many years but have not had the chance to learn English before;
- learners living in social housing;
- small family businesses;
- those who not identify with or have no wish to work towards Skills for Life qualifications;
- those working in areas where poor English may endanger others (for example, care professions); and
- 'those who are exploited' – for example, people who are trafficked, end up in prostitution or work in sweatshops.

Citizens' Juries priorities

DIUS and DCLG commissioned two Citizens' Juries to feed into the community cohesion debate. The Juries were conducted in December 2007 in London and Hull. Whilst not part of the formal consultation the results have a bearing given that as part of the session, the Juries considered how ESOL provision could be prioritised.

Both groups felt that a key criterion should be the potential they could have for society and their ability to contribute 'something back' once having received funding. The Hull participants also felt that factors such as length of intended stay, potential to learn and their level of commitment to learning English should be considered. The London participants had a different view and felt that the other main criterion should be the level of vulnerability (identifying parents, particularly mothers, refugees, those with the lowest level of English and isolated individuals).

Other issues

A small number of respondents felt that the list was satisfactory as it is.

11 respondents, mainly providers, also felt that the national priority groups are open to interpretation and require clarification, hence why many emphasised spouses as a group to be added, since it was not clear whether they would fall into the category of 'excluded women'. 'Those who have not had any secondary education' was another problem category. A typical response of this type would be:

"It is difficult to put people into boxes and it is questionable whether the application of such criteria is workable. It is not clear what evidence will be needed. E.g. who decides if families have complex problems or not, or who is excluded or at risk of being excluded (excluded from what?), what evidence will need to be shown if there has been no secondary education?"

(NATECLA)

With reference to 'legal residents who might reasonably be expected to be in the country for the foreseeable future, one provider stated that:

"Clarification is needed though; is it 'legal residents who might reasonably be expected to be in the country for the foreseeable future' and the groups mentioned below (pp 9-10)? If not, any learner from the EU would claim, at enrolment that they were planning to stay in the UK for the foreseeable future. However, collecting evidence that people come from 'within families at risk of multiple or complex problems' clearly presents a number of problems for the provider."

(Provider)

It should be noted that some researchers were not supportive of the national priority list in its entirety: they found the concept of coherence ill-defined and that targeting group leads to an inability to see individual circumstances.

"Our belief is that ESOL is being used by too many strands of government as a panacea... for social issues and political problems that go way beyond whether people speak English well or not"

(Researcher)

Question 1b): How would local plans demonstrate that those identified in the plan are in the nationally specified priority groups and, if not, why are they considered a local priority?

Responses to this question clustered around several proposals and issues. Firstly, many advocated the development and use of local planning and structures: there was popular demand for local planning to have priority over national targets. Secondly, the use of partnerships was popular. Others advocated the use of demographic information by local authorities. Providers frequently cited their strategic importance in terms of their local knowledge, experience and ability to gather data. Consultation and data sharing was another popular method, particularly amongst voluntary organisations. Others cited the need for further evidence and research, under a wide range of sources.

On a methodological note – 27 respondents claimed this was not applicable to them or left the question blank, and a further five did not understand the question. Relevant issues are also raised in response to Question 3 and there is some duplication of key points.

Local planning/structures

The use of local plans was suggested to demonstrate that those identified are in the nationally specified priority groups. 43 respondents suggested measures along these lines. Typical responses would be:

“Developing an ESOL Delivery Plan which will set out priorities for the city following the recent ESOL review which will be fully embedded in relevant local plans.”

(Local Authority)

This type of response was raised most frequently by local authorities, although providers also suggested a variety local authority plans and structures through which local plans could be carried out. For example:

“[We have] already identified in a range of local authority plans, including ACL Development Plan, Community Development Plans and Community Strategy. These use mapping and demographic information at a local level to prioritise group.”

(Provider)

Local Area Agreements were a popular structure: for example:

“Linking the ‘plans’ to the strategic local planning alongside Literacy and Numeracy outputs/PSA targets, as recognised by the Local Area Agreement.”

(Local Authority)

A plethora of other local authority structures were individually advocated, including: Local Neighbourhood Partnership Plans; Neighbourhood Employment and Skills Plans; Children and Young People’s Plan; Equality Strategy (to provide supporting evidence); and Equality and Diversity Teams. These were advocated as a means of gathering data, identifying demand and, crucially, informing local plans

Others were in favour of local plans having dominance over national priorities, which were often perceived as bureaucratic, complicated and ill-adapted for addressing local needs. Correspondingly, there were calls for the need to use the *flexibility* of local plans, particularly from local authorities, although national priorities were felt to be useful as guidelines for directing ESOL provision:

“Needs at local and national levels are different and, therefore, call for different approaches and require to be treated separately. A needs-led approach at local level, taking into account specific demographic characteristics, with strong links with community groups.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“We should focus on local needs rather than specific groups and the regulations should be flexible enough to allow for new groups to be included. It is also not clear how the funding will be allocated at local level – could some areas be disadvantaged if local decisions do not prioritise essential ESOL?”

(NATECLA)

“We need flexibility within the broad headings to ensure specific local needs are met, i.e. subsets of national priorities. In our borough, there are many residents with very low levels of language skills that would specifically need addressing at local level.”

(Local Authority)

Although there is clearly a wide range of local plans proposed, an appetite for a local emphasis pervades the majority of the responses. Several of the responses warned that if local plans are too rigid, there is a danger of excluding some groups in order to prioritise others. It should be noted that this local emphasis was not universal: one provider and one 'other' were in favour of national guidelines that local authorities would be obliged to follow, using collated examples of best practice.

Partnerships

Several respondents felt that some sort of partnership work is essential for this process, in order to make sure funds are strategically targeted to those most in need and to involve the voluntary sector in identifying such groups. Working with stakeholders through LAAs and LSPs was also cited:

“Partnership working is essential but must be dynamic, responsive, have a light structure, avoid a hierarchical arrangement and of course be subject to a fixed long-term funding regime.”

(‘Other)

“Through effective and constantly reviewed local joint planning, involving LSCs (or future funding agency) for 19+ provision, local authorities for 14–19 provision, employers (with strong financial and legal incentives from central government), Jobcentre Plus, voluntary and community organisations, learners and other stakeholders. Local Learning Partnerships should also be consulted.”

(Provider)

Consultation/data sharing

Similarly other respondents, notably voluntary organisations, were more interested in a consultation process at a local level. Voluntary organisations tended to cite the voluntary sector as a source of expertise and local knowledge: one suggested involving senior members of communities. For example, one provider felt that local plans should be drawn up through consultation with people working in education, health and voluntary sector as well as the collection and use of statistics. A typical response of this type would be:

“Local schools, extended school services and the voluntary sector should also be consulted and able to contribute in order to have a range of agencies involved.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“Those with local knowledge about local priorities are able to contribute to setting local priorities. This includes voluntary community groups which include many ESOL learners and ESOL organisers in FE colleges.”
(Provider)

Strategic importance of providers

Providers often saw themselves as crucial to this process: 3 providers claimed that their experience in responding to local demand gave them the expertise to inform local planning. Additionally, 5 providers and 2 local authorities advised the use of enrolment records and data collection at enrolment to do this. For example:

“FE colleges, which deliver the majority of ESOL in London, have a wealth of information on current ESOL learners which would be useful in drawing up local plans”
(Provider)

“The national criteria are vague, which would create problems for local agencies in identifying priority learners. Local priority groups must be identified using local knowledge of all providers and clients.”
(Local Authority)

“(We – a local authority) have formed an ESOL Providers’ Network in order to maximise the impact that LSC funded and community providers can have on the population needing ESOL provision. Evidence has been gathered for a Local Plan from around 15 providers and community groups and also over 300 community members who have accessed or would like to access ESOL provision in the future. Employers have also been canvassed for their views.”

Local demographic data

Using local demographic information was also popular, with its use advocated to inform local strategy and to target priorities. Using local authority intelligence and data collection to target priorities, and using the data of children and young people to identify target groups was also referred to.

“Local authorities are best placed to use local demographic information, indices of deprivation, the local JAR, etc”
(Local Authority)

Evidence and research

All respondent types advocated the need for more evidence. Several respondents identified the need for local authorities to have up-to-date statistics to be shared across stakeholders and partners – a voluntary group and a provider that this was important given rapid shifts in migration that can and do occur. Research-based approaches were also advocated: perhaps through marketing, research or assessment tools to demonstrate membership of priority groups. Census information – which was cited three times – it was suggested by one respondent that there is a need to have a question in the census to identify original language. Using national statistics about new communities in place of local estimates, and national funding was also cited. One provider said that this could be used to inform a needs analysis.

Examples of regional initiatives to tackle this issue given by the Mayor of London include:

- regional and sub-regional analysis of training needs by Learning and Skills Councils;
- methodological study commissioned by the Mayor and published in 2006 (Mayor of London, *Estimating London's New Migrant Population: Stage 1 – Review of Methodology*, Sept 2006), now being taken forward in a national, ESRC-funded study by Leeds University which aims to create a New Migrant Databank; and
- proposed periodic survey of London's refugee and asylum seeker population, now under consideration by the Mayor's Board for Refugee Integration in London (to become the London Strategic Migration Partnership from April 2008) as input to work on integration of these communities.

A number of local authorities have researched their migrant populations, giving valuable area-specific insights. Methods devised for such local studies can inform the regional development of methods for gathering data on ESOL need and outcomes, and may offer useful checks on eventual output from regional surveys. There is however no prospect of generalising individual local exercises across all or most areas to provide the kind of objective and sustained data-gathering – consistent regionally and UK-wide – required for ESOL planning, resource allocation and monitoring.”

“The availability of data for planning ESOL provision is not adequate to meet need. In order to overcome this, partners in Nottingham, including FE providers, the local authorities, Greater Nottingham Partnership and ONE Nottingham, have funded a placement and appointment system for ESOL provision known as BEGIN. The management information systems have recently been strengthened and are now able to report on childcare need, duration of waiting time, employment status & aspiration, gender, country of origin, first language, area of residence and other information which can be used to facilitate placement into the most appropriate provision. When all of the providers & referral partners use the system this provides extremely useful management information, and reduces duplication in the system. Whilst we appreciate that the system would need to be realigned to new national priorities, it is a valuable partnership asset and provides a strong foundation for the future.”

Mixed methods: Many of the respondents cited a mix of these approaches – that is, local planning, research, local expertise, consultation and national guidelines. The categories are intended to be an analytical breakdown of the dimensions of the responses. Many felt that there was a need for both planning and further evidence. These suggestions were that: local plans should be drawn up through consultation with people working in education, health and voluntary sector as well as the collection and use of statistics (provider). Identifying local priority groups by assessing local needs involving statutory, voluntary and community organisation and the use of local demographic info to locate groups (voluntary organisation). Developing information centres to manage placement and appointment systems, and collect enquiries and data (voluntary organisation). A typical response of this type would be:

“We need to do an audit of ESOL needs in the city. A local plan needs to be put in place and this would be developed in partnership between ESOL providers and BME communities/representative organisations. DIUS would need to provide a template to work from, along with more comprehensive definitions of each priority group and should not underestimate the resources needed to undertake the audit.”
(Learning Partnership)

Other responses: Others made more general suggestions in response. These included: locating under 19s on waiting lists for college courses or waiting lists held by LA education department; offering free ESOL lessons to those in employment – maybe free laptops too; two respondents felt that events would be useful – Migrant Workers’ Events, open days and Local Community Forums were given as examples.

Why specific groups should be considered a local priority

In terms of why those identified in the plan are considered a local priority:

- parents – because of their care of and influence on children;
- asylum seekers – because: they need language to function in society; community cohesion won't be achieved without them having free provision; to ease them from isolation into the mainstream;
- migrant workers – because: they are not accessing provision despite being a significant part of the local population; they have children with bilingual needs; they are a priority for economic growth (local authority); they live locally and contribute to the local fabric;
- not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) – because: engagement and retention of this group is a main challenge;
- spouses – because: of the number of spouses who go on to become long term residents (practitioner); there is growing demand to meet the needs of this group;
- LLDD – to enable them to participate in mainstream provision within the heart of the community;
- 'nearly poor' – because the decline of traditional industries in Leicester has increased the level of unemployment within the city. ESOL is seen as being essential in providing learners with opportunities to engage in meaningful employment; and
- one provider felt that it is important to prioritise learners who are unable to attend local colleges and record information at enrolment and that, in their experience, priorities vary from one location to another.

One practitioner stated that they didn't have any participants from groups other than national priority groups and a local authority had found that a majority of their learners are migrant workers who fall into national priority groups in wider context. Furthermore, some stated concerns about this process, including one respondent who thought it would add bureaucracy to an already complex situation. Another was concerned that BME groups would be ignored (which, one respondent, alleged had happened before).

A practitioner in the East Midlands is involved in a service that provides impartial information, advice and referrals for those seeking and delivering ESOL or Basic Skills. This plays an important role in dealing with the lack of data that hindered with ESOL planning in the area by collecting all ESOL enquiries and centrally holding a raft of data on potential learners including: ethnicity, nationality, and first language; residency, funding and eligibility status; address and contact details; gender; age; employment status, work and study aims; 'screened' language levels; childcare and other learning needs. Providers can then use this information to enrol and place learners and plan provision. It also reduces duplication at every level (e.g. repeated learner assessments, multiple waiting lists) and provides a strategic tool to support planning of local provision.

Question 1c): What evidence needs to be collected to ensure that the priority groups are reached?

Respondents cited a plethora of both types and sources of evidence that already are/could be collected, in answer to this question. There were few outstanding trends in terms of which respondent types held preferences for specific types of data. In terms of the types of data, and in order of popularity: educational information, personal/background details, qualitative research with community organisations, demographic information, resident status, and needs analysis. The most popular sources for this information are providers, local authorities and their partners, community organisations, employers and the LSC.

Types of evidence

- **educational information** was mentioned most frequently, to be gathered by ESOL providers (mentioned 27 times). Specifically for individual learners, achievement/progress and attendance (most frequently cited); proficiency in English (most frequently suggested by practitioners); previous language learning experience; prior literacy level (in first language); programme level and whether completed. More general information was also mentioned, namely, patterns of enrolment and waiting lists. The difficulty of getting this information was cited by one respondent:

Achievement and participation rates which are useful; more reliable information about learner progression information which can be patchy and hard to obtain, very little is available longitudinally; More evidence needed is needed about 'typical' prior attainment/literacy/numeracy by priority group type to ensure provision is appropriate."

(Local Authority)

"The simple and straightforward way is ESOL providers to send regular waiting lists. This will identify what % are from which group. This can then be measured against lists of current ESOL students – what % are from what group"

(Provider)

- **personal/background details** were cited by respondents from all groups (mentioned 22 times). Namely: family status, resident status (see below), age, nationality, educational background, postcode, gender, ethnicity, employment status, family commitments, and marital status. These were all mentioned at least once, and sometimes up to three or four times. Employment status (and related information, such as benefits status) was cited more regularly than most, ethnicity being the next most frequent response;
- **qualitative research with community organisations** (see below section on sources): many organisations, particularly voluntary ones, were interested in engagement and consultation with community organisations to inform a needs analysis;

“Ascertain the impact of ESOL on personal perceptions, attitudes, identity as it is for getting people into further training or employment.”

(Voluntary organisation)

- **demographic information** many cited that this would provide information for the needs analysis above. Sources included local authority cohesion teams, housing and employment intelligence or census data:

“Population mapping and an understanding of the mobility and demographic make-up of an area”

(Institute of Community Cohesion)

- **resident status** – providers, practitioners and local authorities all cited this. In particular, passports, Home Office documents. Intention to stay in England, date of arrival in the UK, information about ILR (Indefinite Leave to Remain) status and duration of stay/time spent in UK were referred to;
- many emphasised the importance of **needs analysis** for local areas – many possible sources were cited, including: researching baseline figures for people in priority groups; surveys of target groups and who has accessed ESOL provision in the last 6 months/two years; people on low wages who may not have joined yet; Individual Learning Plans and Information Advice and Guidance Sessions were mentioned by one respondent;
- other responses included: feedback from learners (mentioned 3 times); LSC and other funded allocations; childcare needs; poverty/ deprivation indices;

Sources of evidence

- **providers** (colleges, FE colleges and community colleges): collection at enrolment was cited most frequently as the point at which most data can be gathered, such as personal details and background information:

“At a provider level, the initial assessment of learners will enable providers to make a judgement about whether a person falls within a category group”

(Provider)

This could generate much personal information and migration information as well as data such as what types of people are being turned away. Using Individual Learner Records (ILRs) was also mentioned by one provider. Providers can give information on attendance, participation and enrolment, the number of priority groups enrolling, feedback from the courses, numbers of and reasons for refusal as well as collecting personal details from participant at initial assessments. This was a popular source for all respondent types.

- **local authority and their partners** were cited to be sources of information. Organisation and sources mentioned included:
 - local authorities themselves, particularly the demographic information that they hold;
 - housing services and rental service;
 - health services, GPs, PCTs;
 - social services and Children’s Health Workers;
 - LEAs and Local Learning Partnerships;
 - schools, Extended schools, Curriculum support services, School Improvement Services, EMASS and parental networks;
 - GP surgeries/clinics and health workers;
 - local Area Agreements;
 - Diversity Unit;
 - Police;
 - Community Development Teams;
 - Child Benefits Agency;
 - DWP;
 - LSP;

- Home Office – for data on asylum seekers;
- census information;

“Information is being collected by a number of local forums and agencies through Local Area Agreements, Extended Schools, and Children’s Centres, Curriculum Support Services, Local Learning Partnerships, and Voluntary and Community groups”
(NATECLA)

The DCLG response outlined their Cohesion Delivery Framework, which will be in place by summer 2008, which will include guidance on how local areas can gather data about their area to identify different groups and cohesion challenges. They also mention their ‘Cohesion Impact Assessment tool’, which can be accessed via the internet: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitycohesiontool

- 21 respondents stated the need for evidence from community organisations and the voluntary sector to gather information on hard-to-reach learners and key communities. Community organisations at a grass-roots level, community centre managers, BME community groups, priority group representatives (e.g. Refugee Forum and Refugee Council), volunteers and their organisations were all popular suggestions for sources of evidence;

“Key evidence includes: consultations with community organisations and other key stakeholders/delivery agencies, local partnership agreements with community organisations in the delivery of ESOL provision, inter-agency strategies for outreach, inter-agency strategies for delivery of ESOL, clear plans to make ESOL accessible and cost free to priority groups, comprehensive inter-agency information strategies to reach vulnerable groups (including information in multiple-languages), outreach records, statistics on enrolment and completion of ESOL courses from priority groups”
(Voluntary organisation)

“Evidence of consultation with key voluntary and community sector agencies in the area, and of links made with those agencies delivering services for ‘new’ refugees. Some voluntary and community sector organisations will need assistance to work with local authorities to then ensure refugees are reached. Many organisations currently do not have the additional capacity to help plan services, particularly where they are run by volunteers and delivering services to already tight budgets. The Home Office holds good data on asylum seekers and those receiving Section 4 support, and publishes this data quarterly. It is also in the process of establishing a refugee integration and employment service nationally, which will be charged with identifying ESOL needs for its clients. Jobcentre Plus also collects information on refugees through LMS and the use of the voluntary marker. This information can be aggregated to identify those refugees on benefits with ESOL needs.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“We are happy to share with the Department our experience of an EMF-led pioneering training scheme designed to enable marginalized Muslim women in England to access labour market opportunities by developing their skills and knowledge base.”

- others stated that evidence could be gathered about learners **through their employment**. Employers/local employers were mentioned by several respondents – to understand the number and needs of migrant workers. Employment agencies/jobcentres/ Jobcentre Plus – as possible source of information about nationalities and economic status. 13 responses were along these lines; and
- it was also mentioned that the **LSC** currently collects and collates data on learners that they fund in the form of ILRs. This was thought to be useful data set on this group.

Other issues

One provider believed that no data collection was necessary, also stating that LA education departments and colleges already have this information; another thought that this was a sensitive issue given the government’s record on data collection:

“We would like to stress the importance of extreme sensitivity when working with potentially vulnerable, complex and diverse groups... we would be concerned if personal issues were discussed with learners by providers in order to verify individual’s eligibility.”

(Other)

Several respondents noted the difficulty of gathering information. For example the Association of Colleges response emphasises that evidence-gathering would be difficult, as the target groups are not visible, and therefore will depend on local intelligence, which can be difficult to obtain and imprecise. They suggest that information can be gathered directly from learners through the Individual Learning Record scheme, although changes to the ILR would be required.

There were also concerns that this would create a bureaucratic burden and further complicate ESOL provision: providers in particular raised this issue, with several saying that extra funding would have to materialize to cover the cost of data-gathering:

“Requirements to collect and report on additional information about the personal circumstances of an individual at the point of enrolment or study of an ESOL course would be difficult, time-consuming and costly.”

(Provider)

Question 1d): How would local authorities apply the national list of priorities in their area and how well do you think these priorities would meet local cohesion needs?

Partnership-working was seen as essential in applying ESOL strategies. However, most respondents felt that local priorities should take precedence over a fixed national list, as local situations are variable and subject to frequent change. Local authority respondents identified LAAs as effective mechanisms for developing local ESOL plans. Involvement of voluntary and community organisations, and providers, at the planning stages was seen as essential. Many respondents emphasised the need for evidence-based planning. Concern was expressed regarding confusing funding systems.

National guidance

A small number of respondents felt that clear national guidance would be required in applying the national list of priorities.

- national guidance should include safeguards to ensure that all priority groups have access to free ESOL provision in the local area;
- national guidance on how to address the barriers that currently prevent refugees and asylum seekers from accessing language training is key to increasing cohesion. These include:
 - lack of knowledge of entitlements;
 - lack of knowledge of education and training opportunities;
 - unable to pay course fees/travels costs;
 - lack of access to childcare;
 - lack of recognition of foreign qualifications; and
 - refugee dispersal scheme.

“This should largely be a matter for local authorities. However we are conscious that some local authorities may not have a long history of migration into their areas, and may be uncertain of how to put together local plans for prioritisation of ESOL funding. There may be a need for government to have some guidelines and guides to best practice available. Local authorities should also have to demonstrate that they are working with relevant and appropriate ESOL providers and community

organisations. We are perhaps less concerned with the activities of localities with a long history of having and working with settled communities than with localities with much more recent experience of working with such communities.”
(Union)

Greater responsibility for local authorities

Overall, respondents were in favour of local authorities taking a greater role in determining the ESOL agenda for their local areas.

- more power to local authorities to decide where the money should be spent; and
- local authorities’ priorities should take into account specific needs of the local conditions. Instead of trying to apply a national list to the local level, it would be preferable to start with local priorities and extend them to the national level.

Local priorities

Many respondents, from all stakeholder groups, outlined the difficulties in applying a general list of national priorities within local contexts. It was stated that the proposals are vague as to whether local or national priorities would take precedence in situations where they conflicted. Many respondents also emphasised that local populations and cohesion issues are subject to continual change and flux, and, therefore, applying a fixed list of national priorities would be an ineffective means of responding to local issues and enhancing community cohesion. Specific issues raised included:

- it may be difficult for local authorities to apply the national list of priorities in their areas with regards to refugees and asylum seekers. This is because they cannot account for transient populations;
- there may be conflict between national and local priorities and which takes precedence;
- some discretion would be needed by local authorities if they are to respond to particular and changing needs in their locality; and
- there is an issue in too prescriptive a list of priority groups unless it can take account of changes in local circumstances – sudden influx in migrants; changes to employment opportunities locally through business closures; etc.

“The present system of National PSA Skills for Life Targets, enforced by the LSC, makes it impossible to apply this list of priorities. The Community Cohesion agenda is totally at odds with the current targets, which focus funding on those at Entry 3 and above, whereas the cohesion need is most obvious amongst those with lower level English skills. This issue needs addressing before any reprioritising can take place.”

(Provider)

“In the Council [West Midlands], we prioritise the hard-to-reach groups and take them to a stage where they can either apply for a course at college or university or access employment or self-employment. Some of our learners have been in the UK for many years but have never been to English classes. Many of these people have little or no literacy in their own languages. Many are unemployed or stuck in low-paid, dead-end jobs like the catering industry for Chinese workers. Some would not be allowed to go to college but will come to a local community centre or library. Some earn just above £15,500 with working tax credit but are unable to pay the college fees because of family commitments. Some have children and the college cannot provide a crèche place for them. Some work shifts which do not fit the college provision. In some cases this is because, although they are well-qualified and have been in white-collar jobs in their own countries, they are for example driving HGVs at night until they can improve their English. Some are new arrivals, often asylum seekers who are keen to learn English and integrate into the community. In fact, this has been one of the great success factors, as new arrivals such as Kurds and Afghans have taken pleasure in joining mixed language and cultural groups of learners and have joined the local library. They value the opportunities offered so highly as they have had so little opportunity for education back home.”

Existing partnerships and structures

Most respondents felt that existing partnerships and structures could be built upon to draw up local plans and priorities for ESOL. Many local authority respondents considered that the LAA would be the most effective mechanism for planning local ESOL strategies.

“The totality of public spending in an area should flow through the LAA as there is clear proof that allowing more decisions about priorities and funding to be taken locally improves outcomes for local people. The LAA would set out what the specific priorities would be, would provide detail on the groups to be targeted and why. The local authority would provide the strategic lead in order to ensure delivery.”

(Local Government Association)

Some respondents emphasised that LSPs should play a key role in coordinating local planning and involving different stakeholders.

“Working through the LSP would ensure that the relevant agencies work together to develop shared priorities, pool funding and provide co-ordinated and innovative services”

(Local Government Association)

Other coordinating bodies

There were a few other suggestions for a central coordinating body.

- a brokerage system that is LSC funded, working with a local consortium of partners, to include, local colleges, schools, voluntary agencies, community groups etc;
- a “Local ESOL Forum” might be established in each local authority, tasked with monitoring the application of the national list of priorities;
- local authorities could use their Equality scheme action planning as a central co-ordinating tool, for them to apply cross-departmental and networking with key local agencies; and
- through borough partnership boards coordinating ESOL, IAG and outreach work, and Parent Strategy Groups supporting parents as carers and first educators as well as promoting parents’ own development through learning and employment opportunities.

Several responses outlined the importance of involving regional-level agencies:

- through sub-regional partnerships and associated joint investment frameworks; neighbourhood renewal partnerships; city-employment strategies; regional skills partnerships/regional skills and employment boards.

Evidence-based

A large number of respondents, mostly local authorities and providers, stated that local authorities’ ESOL plans must be evidence-based.

- an assessment of needs has to be carried out at a local area level based on population estimates, actual and comparisons, and have plans based on this;

- a needs analysis should be carried out, by the funding agency, at local levels; and half-yearly updates should be provided to respond to ever-changing needs in a timely manner;
- demographic profile, housing and employment intelligence should be used to inform provision; and
- ascertaining which districts have made most use of linguistic info lines in doctors' surgeries and other basic services. Providing door to door market research with bi-lingual skilled research facilitator.

"The Commission suggests Local Authorities develop an evidence based strategy for deciding which local groups are eligible for free ESOL to avoid discriminatory selection."

(EHRC)

Inclusion of key partners

Most respondents, especially from voluntary/community organisations, emphasised that involvement of voluntary and community organisations in local partnerships and planning would be essential in identifying, reaching and providing for 'priority' groups.

- local authorities need to formally recognise the key role of community organisations in delivering ESOL and reaching the national priority groups. In order to deliver ESOL effectively to priority groups, formal agreements and sufficient sustainable funding needs to be made available to community organisations; and
- discussion with members of the BME community groups, local education providers, members of BME local action groups and refugee and asylum seeker groups.

Many respondents, particularly providers and local authorities, also stated that providers should be involved at the planning stages.

Several other agencies were mentioned, by respondents from all stakeholder groups, as key partners in the planning process: schools; health, housing and social services; police; employment agencies; employers; parent groups.

- local authorities should speak with other agencies in the area, for example, the police, job centres, benefit offices;
- local authorities with their strategic partners are well placed to ensure a holistic approach to community cohesion and to link ESOL provision with a large range of other local services e.g. health, social

services, schools, employment and regeneration programmes, sports and leisure, housing etc;

- consultation and monitoring between all stakeholders including employers, providers and representatives from ESOL communities; and
- draw on a wide range of evidence from, for example, police and probation services, education, health, housing and welfare. ...There would need to be good links with all education providers, advancement agencies and voluntary and community groups to ensure that information is appropriately disseminated.

The Herefordshire Literacy Project has run a project funded by ChangeUp and recruited and trained 15 community volunteer interpreters, several of whom are developing skills further to become registered with the Home Office. There is a steering group involving migrant workers, council officers, police, health, education, and VCS. There is also a forum supported by faith.

Funding

Respondents from all groups were concerned that funding should be sufficient and appropriately allocated, and that funding streams and application processes should be clearly outlined and explained. Issues raised included:

- a perceived tension between national and local priorities and a conflict of interest within the current planning;
- making funding available to smaller community organisations who are better able to engage the hard to reach; and
- allocate funding to organisations which have a proven record of good quality teaching.

There is a need for clarification of any ESOL funding formula for local authorities. "The consultation document does not indicate whether there will be different levels of funding for local authorities with different levels of need, how the level of need, particularly of unmet need, within a local authority will be ascertained and by whom, and how changes in demand for ESOL provision over time would be accommodated."

(Other)

"There is a danger that focusing on ESOL will be seen by providers of public services as an opportunity to reduce linguistic support services such as interpreters and translated materials. The DCLG has issued guidance to Local Authorities saying they

should look to divert any savings in reduced translation service to strengthened ESOL provision.” (‘Guidance for Local Authorities on Translation of Publications’, December 2007, DCLG).
(EHRC)

Further suggestions

- Flexible courses at a range of times to meet shift patterns, or women only courses for female learners. More vocational courses could be included;
- integrating ESOL into job search, enterprise and/or volunteering opportunities would strengthen the cohesion agenda;
- cluster provision to target highly-skilled refugees who need higher-level ESOL in order to return to their profession;
- greater promotion is needed, such as placing flyers in doctors’ surgeries and local shops; and
- there should be appropriate support and advice to enable learners to progress into further study and/or employment.

Question 1e): How far have local authorities already assessed the priority of English language needs being met in local areas to meet the objective of community cohesion?

The assessment work already done varies from region to region. In some cases, mapping exercises have been put in place, but in others, very little appears to have been done. Funding specifically for this purpose is requested. The partnership approach is generally favoured, with the caveat that this is systematic and streamlined

Assessment of ESOL needs has begun

Many respondents, primarily from local authorities, stressed that assessment of priority ESOL needs is already being done in some capacity

- considerable work has and is already being done and is the basis on which this response is being submitted. Any further work should be by building on what already exists as opposed to significant change;
- we are already engaged in this through the Skills for Life strategy and draft community cohesion strategy;
- the LA has already undertaken extensive mapping and research and is acutely aware of the scale of need for ESOL and the impact on cohesion;
- Greater Manchester LSC has recently completed a city-wide review of ESOL provision (partly to examine) the impact of ESOL on social cohesion and intercultural relations in the City;
- for those on courses, particularly community programmes, enrolment forms and on going course data is already centrally collated and reported to the LSC. Information on numbers, ethnicity, gender, employment status, age, disability etc, is already gathered and reported locally; and
- the Regional ESOL Group has already carried out a mapping exercise of the region's ESOL provision and plans to carry out a needs analysis to be able to better assess capacity, reach and need; this could be a useful baseline from which to focus ESOL on community cohesion.

Examples of current assessment methods

- Respondents cited a range of methods for assessing priority ESOL needs in their local areas, as this sample indicates:

An independent enquiry was commissioned by the Safer Neighbourhoods team, which highlighted that the Polish and Somalian communities were not able to access language classes, and that this had a negative impact on community cohesion.

The authority's most comprehensive assessment of need is conducted through Lancashire Adult Learning, Lancashire County Council's adult education service. In response to local need, ESOL courses are provided across the county, to complement provision made by other local learning providers. In response to ongoing need, LCC maintains a translation and interpretation service and has a corporate translation practice. This provides us with a database of the most required languages for translation.

In our LA – Hartlepool, the placement of the Inclusion Coordinator within the School Improvement and Inclusion Team has worked well towards this end.

We [local authority] use local demographic information about mother tongues and ethnicity in the adult population and in schools; waiting lists for ESOL classes; demand expressed by the community in local consultations; demand for translation services; feedback from local employers; feedback from service providers and the voluntary sector.

Regional and local variation

However, the overall variation in responses showed that the level of assessment currently being carried out is unevenly spread across different regions and localities. Some respondents specified that this was the case.

“We would anticipate that the amount of assessment local authorities will have already undertaken varies, probably depending on how long migrant communities have been settled within their areas. Some may have done some assessment in relation to school children, and some in relation to economic regeneration strategies”.

(Union)

“We would imagine this is a varied picture across the country”
(NATECLA)

Not enough is being done

Despite many examples of current assessment initiatives, an equal number of respondents, mainly voluntary organisations and providers, stated that not enough is currently being done to identify ESOL priorities in local areas.

“This area is under-developed by local authorities who have had little responsibility for direct provision”
(Institute for Community Cohesion)

- there has been little communication from the local authority in assessing to what extent the needs of priority groups are being assessed;
- local Authorities do not always know what the local language needs are;
- no overview of this issue seems to be currently available;
- Bradford shows a considerable gap between an expressed desire to map out the provision of ESOL, and the reality of the situation. We therefore recognise a need for greater transparency and accountability as regarding the use of ESOL funds at the local authority level; and
- not enough market research has been done by people in key positions – it is all happening too far back from the grass roots level.

A more systematic and coordinated approach is needed

A common response, from mainly providers and voluntary organisations, stated the need for a more unified and comprehensive system for assessing priority ESOL needs in local areas.

“We suspect that in most local authorities there has been little undertaken in relation to ESOL needs of the adult population, in a systematic, coherent and consistent manner – not least because for the last seven years local authorities have not had funding responsibilities for adult learning, even where they maintained local adult and community learning services”
(Union)

- some boroughs or wards or organisations may have done extensive research in their own areas but this is rarely extended across whole authorities;
- the local LSC has been drawing together local intelligence from colleges, the city council and the voluntary and community sector. It has not yet managed to achieve a complete picture;
- some activity is in evidence, but considerably more work is necessary to produce detailed local maps of the existing landscape and its potential; and
- more unified & specific data collection across all LAs could be carried out. (There is a bigger issue in some LAs than others, therefore specific LAs could be targeted where it were more of an issue). The process would need to be systematic and co-ordinated (perhaps via a steering group) in order that stakeholders are aware of the local situation and understand what is available to whom, where and how.

Partnership-working is needed

A need was identified by a large number of respondents for a partnership approach to mapping local ESOL priorities.

- Significant assessment of the language needs in the local area still needs to take place by Local Authorities. This should take place in cooperation and partnership with other stakeholders in the region. National guidance needs to ensure that voluntary and community organisations are fully involved in the process of needs assessment;
- a forum to engage with all ESOL service providers in the city and local LSC will be helpful to enhance understanding of the local situation as well as joint planning in relation to maximizing best usage of the available funds with other stakeholders, including employers, where practicable;
- LSC funded FE ESOL provision also works with local communities and providers often have a clear picture of the English language needs within their areas and the range of learners accessing provision; and
- community organisations and religious bodies are highly instrumental in helping to identify needs.

Examples of current partnership assessment projects

This is not solely the responsibility of the local authority. In Tower Hamlets a group of providers has been meeting regularly to co-ordinate ESOL provision, to share information about existing provision and waiting lists for current classes, to plan where possible progression opportunities exist and to seek opportunities to make bids for funding to meet the needs of client groups that do not fit with existing criteria set by the LSC.

A partnership led by Southampton City council comprising of local providers and the voluntary sector have secured LSC/ESF funding to address the gaps in the ESOL provision in the city – a holistic approach.

Nottingham demonstrates effective partnership working between colleges providing ESOL which collects useful data that maps local language need. Basic Educational Guidance (BEGIN) is an attempt to co-ordinate information and ESOL provision across the city. Its central role is to work in partnership with local colleges to ensure the coherence of ESOL provision across the city and its activities including organising a central database of enrolments/waiting lists and identifying ESOL contacts. It also collects and disseminates data relating to asylum seekers.

ESOL needs are considered as part LAA and City Strategies and local authorities and partners will determine how ESOL funding allocations are best aligned against community needs and national priorities. We are currently working to explore how the Local Area Agreement reflects the overall needs of the community and, in this respect, a key area in promoting cohesion remains availability of fit-for-purpose and adequate provision of ESOL in Peterborough. Adequate targeted funding is a key element to ensure effectiveness of this process.

Linking ESOL needs assessments with existing local frameworks

Some respondents pointed out that opportunities exist to tie in ESOL needs assessments with existing measures for assessing community cohesion indicators.

- links with the Community Development Plan and the Community Compact would have to be considered (Provider/Manager);
- local Area Agreements show many areas where ESOL needs would have to be met to allow for meeting of indicators. However these ESOL needs have not been mentioned in the LAA. (Provider/Manager); and

- neighbourhood Learning Networks (NLNs) and other partnership structures operating at a locality level, could be coordinated centrally. Further work needs to be done on this to ensure an effective approach (Local Authority/Manager).

Difficulties

The most common difficulty cited was the constant changes in local demographics and social issues, due to shifting residence and migration patterns:

- mapping need is difficult as the ESOL learner population is very fluid. Local authorities do not know who makes up ESOL communities from one month to the next;
- in this borough there is rapid change: significant migration and the need for integration have been identified as clear challenges to community cohesion; and
- in Central London, residence and need spreads across boroughs, so it's not entirely possible to identify issues on a borough-by-borough basis.

Funding

It was also frequently stated, by respondents from all stakeholder groups, that funding is not currently available specifically for this task. It was stressed that comprehensive ESOL needs assessments depend upon adequate, ring-fenced funding for success.

- Local authorities have assessed this objective but lack the funds to be able to implement it thoroughly. Funding for ESOL prioritisation is currently biased to the higher level learners, particularly with an emphasis on returning to work, impacting against community cohesion as those with very low levels of English encounter increasing barriers to speaking and learning English;
- local authorities in general are very aware of the ESOL needs in their local area in relation to promoting community cohesion but are unable to fully meet these needs due to lack of funding overall and lack of funding for specific priority groups such as recent arrivals;
- the LSP partners are working to identify a profile for the district but this requires resources and is not sufficiently detailed for planning purposes; and

- money is located to different government agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, which often compete for the same learners and therefore disrupt learning and waste money, for example when a learner on a college programme is moved to a different programme.

Question 2a): Is the proposition outlined, building on existing arrangements, appropriate for commissioning ESOL to support community cohesion?

Responses were mixed on the perceived appropriateness of the proposition. A majority of the respondents either said the proposition is appropriate but attached provisos or did not state whether they thought it was appropriate or inappropriate but stated areas of concern or barriers to entry. The key issues and barriers that were referred to were: funding (or lack thereof), changes that need to be made to ESOL provision itself, giving ESOL a local emphasis and flexible local authority-led planning, listening to community voices and concerns about particular marginalized group. These same issues were recurrent for respondents who responded positively but stated provisos and those who responded negatively, suggesting that what is a surmountable barrier to some is not to others. In general, there is recognition that ESOL makes an important contribution to community cohesion, but that community cohesion is complex and dependent on a local circumstances and that ESOL alone will not guarantee this goal.

Yes, it's appropriate

There were respondents of all types who endorsed the proposition outlined as appropriate for commissioning ESOL to support community cohesion (17 respondents). One respondent stated the importance community cohesion in relation to language needs:

“We would support the integration of planning and funding arrangements across policy in order to ensure that the best possible degree of commonality is achieved in planning and delivery. Changes to the Machinery of Government published since this consultation was launched now make the local integration of policy-making, planning and funding all the more important and the community cohesion strategies in each locality should reflect the language learning needs of the community”

(Provider)

Yes, but with provisos

Many thought it was possibly appropriate *with the attachment of certain provisos*. The provisos clustered around several key issues

- **funding:** a common response was that whilst it was possible, a crucial issue would be funding – all respondent types cited this issue (referred to 16 times). There were calls for funding to be flexible, sustained, transparent and fair across regions and local authorities. Two local authorities maintained that finding should be linked to LAAs, given that the LSC will cease to exist in 2010, whilst one provider saw the LSC as having a clear role in commissioning as there are concerns about appropriate funding and maintaining capacity and quality. Others were concerned that funding wouldn't be reaching priority learners because of the need to pass speaking and listening exams for full funding and because the struggle to access the Skills for Life Curriculum.

“Only through sustained funding. Not all existing arrangements in terms of providers are necessarily appropriate. There is currently disparity in terms of quality of delivery and breadth of provisions amongst providers.”

(Provider)

“ESOL funding is currently seriously flawed from the point of view of the needs of the learners. Regardless of what the learners need, they have to pass speaking and listening exams (or the whole lot at one level) for full funding, high achievement, and success boxes to be ticked”

(Practitioner)

“As long as there is enough flexibility to really allow local authorities and education providers to use that money to support their students and communities in the way they feel is most appropriate.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“Yes, in the main. It would be helpful to continue to allow colleges some discretionary and flexible funding. The involvement in the planning process of local and regional organisations working with the priority groups must be incorporated, with the repeated concern that in some areas voluntary and community sector agencies may require assistance to enable them to participate and share their expertise.”

(Voluntary organisation)

- **Changes in ESOL provision:** Several responses revolved around issues about how ESOL provision is planned and delivered. These were variously: LSCs, LEAs and other local funding should find pockets of good practice and ensure that they are supported and extended; there needs to be occupation-specific ESOL courses, designed to use the skills of speakers of other languages; new systems should build on old ones rather than starting from scratch; LSP partnerships need to be independent and empowered to make a responsive service, as LAAs might not reflect this requirement; the need to ensure high quality provision, and; making sure that provision is tailored to the needs of the individual. For example:

“If we are to draw in the most difficult to reach women in particular it would be helpful to be able to provide classes to draw them into the sector by providing classes e.g. sewing which are attractive to women and their families”

(Provider)

- ESOL needs a **local emphasis:** some stated the need for locally led planning and delivery and that there is a need for flexibility. Regional planning, given the intra-regional differences, could provide effective delivery and targeting of resources. For example:

“It would be important that the local authority has autonomy in regards to enabling providers to target need. There is a need for a process to develop local plans, built on the LAA which feed in to LSC regional commissioning. We would welcome this bottom up approach.”

(Local Authority)

“We would also suggest that planning processes be refined so that they may take account of very localised e.g. neighbourhood, needs.”

(Provider)

- **Community voices:** several respondents of all types felt that community groups and organisations should be involved in planning, delivery, targeting priority learners and (in one case) have access to funding.

“[The proposal] could be improved with a greater involvement of community groups of different backgrounds at the decision-making level. Real co-operation will only be achieved by a greater representation of community groups”

(Voluntary organisations)

- **Partnership/consultation with providers:** similarly, some stated that success would depend on providers having a role in planning and delivery.

“Local planning can be strengthened by including local providers’ and learners’ voices e.g. learners, training providers, employers and teachers.”

(Local Authority)

- The role of **employers:** a few felt that success would hinge on employers and whether they would fulfil the expectation to fund ESOL for their employees:

“Employers who are taking the initiative in attracting migrant workers to the UK should take some responsibility for issues of integration via the provision of ESOL. Details from the DIUS as to how this will be enforced would be welcomed.”

(Other)

- **Understanding provision:** there needs to be closer review of what provision is available and from whom; LAs having a firm grasp of ESOL and eligibility requirements, and; recognising that language is not the only factor that impacts on community coherence – arts, sport, culture and heritage matter too.

“Yes, it’s crucial that LSC decisions are taken with reference to local priorities. The decision as to what constitutes priority must be taken by a decision making body with representations from all major stakeholders and target groups to ensure an effective long term strategy.”

(Provider)

Neither/nor – barriers to entry

Other respondents didn’t state whether they thought the proposition was appropriate or inappropriate but cited assorted barriers to successful ESOL delivery:

- funding and fees were a contentious issue again;
- some raised the issue of how important the ability to speak English is to cohesion – the consensus would appear to be that whilst it contributes to cohesion, ESOL on its own will not deliver this objective. There were also issues raised with respect the definition of community cohesion:

“Although we acknowledge that a common language can help communication and participation in neighbourhoods and communities and help develop economic growth, we do not assume that lack of community cohesion is solely caused by residents not being able to speak English.”

(Local Authority)

“The proposition outlined is rather brief and social cohesion is wider than just ESOL. NATECLA would also like a clearer definition of community cohesion and the role of ESOL in its promotion; Community Cohesion needs to be properly defined in the commissioning process and how this process links with/ fits into the recent Machinery of Government paper was also queried.”

(NATECLA)

Again, issues of how ESOL is delivered were raised, by providers in particular. Specific issues raised were:

- larger learning providers have been given a dominating role; voluntary groups have been marginalized and should be included in planning;
- the ESOL teacher training programme being prohibitively long;
- targets make ESOL hard to access for weak students;
- a lack of childcare for mothers;
- unintentional exclusion may occur for those outside the priorities;
- classes provided by volunteers are ignored;
- formal, well-established, known groups would be acknowledged but what about the informal networks that exist. There must be a recognition of learners complex lives and a provision for both a skills and social practice curriculum; and
- rather than funding these ‘ESOL factories’ the money would be far better spent in smaller organisations where learners are self-referred, promoting short courses within the community encouraging language learners to build social networks with speakers of other languages.

“The Skills for Life provision targeted the need, professionalised the work force and increased the accountability and monitoring by institutions. The length of the waiting lists in Reading, similar to many other areas of the country, demonstrates the demand for ESOL. It also bears witness to the credibility ESOL has earned in the BME communities. The mutual trust and respect has been hard won, and it would be counter-productive to undermine the existing arrangements. One of the main threats to the professionalisation of Skills for Life ESOL at present is the proliferation of private providers who do not have such rigorous monitoring, inspection and assessment procedures, who can offer a cut-price or second-rate product for ESOL learners”

(Provider)

- The marginalization of certain groups was also an issue, in particular, women, asylum seekers, migrant workers and the homeless, particularly amongst voluntary groups. For example:

“Community cohesion could also be affected in a negative way if certain communities are not on priority list i.e. Migrant workers integration and cohesion with other communities in the city might be affected, as they are not a priority.”

(Learning Partnership)

“Commissioning arrangements and targeting of funding in local areas (linked to LAAs) may be problematic. If the English language needs of refugees and asylum seekers in local areas are not prioritised then ESOL provision will be untargeted and inadequate Dispersal policy in relation to asylum seekers will have an effect upon local funding arrangements.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“Many priority learners are not fundable by the LSC because they struggle to access the Skills for Life curriculum. We are specifically thinking of women who have been outside mainstream education both in Britain and in their own countries and who have acute literacy needs. Similarly, funding has to be attracted for asylum seekers who have been in the country for longer than 6 months.”

(Provider)

- The importance of employment as an outcome seems to be contentious, particularly among providers. One provider felt that Local Area Agreement money seems to have moved to exclusively being aimed at job outcomes. ESOL is unlikely to be prioritised via this method.

“There is a potential risk that cohesion targets may not fully support other funding outcomes – qualifications are not always appropriate to the immediate needs of learners. Insistence on full qualifications as a measure of success, as required by the LSC, does not always reflect the profile of learners and learners’ own priorities, which for many is to obtain employment. There is a strong view that, once in place, a credit framework, would introduce a welcome flexibility into an over-rigid system.”

(Local Authority)

Several respondents cited the need for national guidelines: There should be set targets by central government on who should be prioritised with the funding allocations. Targets should be set when considering other government spends, such as translation services.

“One voluntary organisation felt that without national guidelines and safeguards in place, there is a risk that certain groups will not be prioritised locally and minimal funding allocated (even though they are included in the national priority list). Clearly there needs to be a degree of moderation to ensure [a] consistency of approach, and [b] to address situations where the overall costs exceed the regional allocation. Presumably this moderation would form part of the LSC commissioning activity referred to”

(Voluntary organisation)

“It is important not to forget the other reasons – principally to encourage people into learning, training and employment. Therefore, we hope that local data for unemployment, low skills, deprivation and an English learning need will also be considered when calculating how much funding each area receives.”

(Voluntary organisation)

- The need for partnership working was also raised to variously: drive commissioning; set priorities; reach scattered groups living in multiple areas and aid planning. For example:

“Commissioning needs to be driven ‘bottom up’ and locally integrated through LSP Learning and Skills forums, which will need to be put in place if they do not already exist.”

(Provider)

- The need for a local emphasis was cited and a ‘bottom up’ approach was approved of:

“[We] believe that these matters should be determined locally but with the help of the development of a good practice resource guide. We believe it is not helpful to be prescriptive at this stage and would like to see innovation allowed to grow and new practices emerge in a ‘bottom up’ way.”

(Institute of Community Cohesion)

Other barriers cited were:

- success depends on how good existing arrangements are;
- because LAAs operate on a three-year cycle, they may be too inflexible to respond quickly to changing patterns of need and sudden population changes;
- intelligence data supporting the need identified must be up to date;
- safeguards need to be put in place so that the decisions made by local politicians do not have a negative impact on ESOL provision;
- depends on composition, procedures for membership and function of local partnership teams;
- there is difficulty in getting local partner input to the skills and learning priorities now that local LSC members have been abolished; and
- tension with the LSC agenda:

“From our perspective the essential issue which needs to be addressed is the potential tension between the community cohesion agenda and the LSC’s skills agenda. We undertake a substantial amount of ESOL work with people in the priority groups identified. A substantial proportion of this (at least £2.5 million in LSC funding) is with people whose English language skills are at pre-Entry level. The LSC’s skills agenda identifies provision down to Entry 1. We would like to undertake all of this work within a RARPA framework as there are no appropriate qualifications on the NQF. However, local LSCs are often under pressure to reduce substantially funding of other provision. For example, despite genuine support from the LSC, a third of our ESOL provision, made up almost entirely of people in the priority groups, is currently under threat.”

(Provider)

No, it is not appropriate

Some were more pessimistic, and provided a range of reasons why they felt the proposition is inappropriate. These respondents were mainly providers and local authorities. Three respondents felt that no one-size-fits-all policy will work because local communities differ so much:

“There would be difficulties in effectively addressing local needs through regional commissioning. There is a wide variation in the profile of ESOL learners...commissioning may reflect these diverse needs”
(Local Authority)

Similarly, three respondents also felt that LSC targets neglect the most needy learners. For example:

“No – there are currently not any appropriate performance indicators within LAAs and all targets relating to skills for life are qualification related and set at Entry 3 or higher. Research shows that in Hull the vast majority of ESOL learners are below this level so that LSC targets do not capture much of the work that is undertaken. Additional funding needs to be identified in order to ensure that both LSC and community funded providers can sustain capacity, if not grow it.”
(Local Authority)

Individual respondents felt that: it would be needlessly bureaucratic, and that automatic fee remission with an obligation on new arrivals to learn English would be better; implicit is the belief that ESOL should be targeted at learners with a low level of ability and; LSPs are required to choose 35 of national indicators for their LAA, and may not choose ESOL. In difference to the scepticism of many concerning regional planning, one ‘other’ respondent felt that there was not enough emphasis on regional strategy:

The Mayor of London felt that it was unlikely to work for London:

“No. The Mayor considers that the approach outlined here is flawed in two basic respects and is unlikely to work for London. He questions also whether it can meet Government objectives for the UK as a whole. The two weaknesses of this proposition are as follows: It fails to recognise the paramount importance of ESOL for employability and the need to make it the investment priority in coming years – alongside a protected core of work on ESOL for social cohesion purposes. The Mayor is clear that strategy for providing ESOL in London, including the framework for commissioning ESOL services, has to be set at regional level as an intrinsic

part of wider responsibilities for promoting skills, employment and migrant integration which have been assigned to regional bodies by statute or by agreement between them and Government. Effective and efficient delivery of ESOL requires this regional strategic context, and cannot be achieved through an agglomeration of local plans as proposed by DIUS.”
(Mayor of London)

Question 2b): How will this be done most effectively?

Question 2bi): How do we build on the work to identify and engage the hardest to reach that has already been undertaken locally by the LSC and their local authority and other community-based partners?

The main approaches referred to were (in order of frequency): developing partnerships and strategy groups; involving community/voluntary groups; changing how ESOL is funded; changing ESOL delivery itself; changing how ESOL is marketed, and; mapping need for ESOL.

Partnerships/strategy groups

There is an appetite for more joined-up planning of ESOL delivery. Plenty of respondents cited the need for partnerships and strategy groups (see 2biii) – this was the most frequent type of response (mentioned 43 times). There was enormous variety in terms of the composition of these groups and their purpose(s): they were most often associated with planning to engage the hardest to reach, but more specifically: sharing good practice; gathering and sharing data and information; targeting resources; co-ordination of delivery; identifying duplication of provision. The bodies involved were most frequently: local authorities, providers, community groups and the LSC, but also involved: LSPs; LAAs; Adult Learning Partnerships; health sector; schools; housing teams; youth teams; employers; jobcentres and; unions (see section 2biii for more detail).

Examples would be: an LA ESOL strategy group; a multi-agency approach managed by learning partnerships; a working group to gather information and provide updates on ESOL provision and requirement in each area and share good practice; a stakeholder group to share responsibility; working as close to the grass roots as possible, whilst making funds available at local

level to support community learning; a dedicated liaison to get to know specific areas; engagement across LSPs, for instance using schools and housing officers; LSC having a mechanism to include and commission the voluntary sector; LAs engaging voluntary and community based organisations and; recognising ESOL priorities within LAAs.

“Local ESOL steering groups should be set up, where the local authority, community groups and all the publicly funded providers, would work together to ensure resources are being targeted appropriately. There are some concerns about the increasing levels of bureaucracy that will result.”

(Provider)

“The local authority assuming a coordinating role and forming a partnership of representatives of local providers, the voluntary sector, community groups (EU, Somali etc), Surestart centres and school representatives, jobcentre to decide on priority groups and actions to be taken.”

(Local Authority)

“It can be hard for larger organisations such as local authorities, colleges and adult education services to contact people with an English learning need. It would help to work through Neighbourhood Management (NM) structures who are in touch with community groups, who are in turn in touch with these people. Westbourne Neighbourhood Forum is one of six NM structures in Westminster. We are known locally as Local Area Renewal Partnerships (LARPs). Also note that we are often asked to identify how many people in the area need and/ or want to learn English. This is hard to quantify, and evidence is anecdotal. Also a significant proportion of people in need are missing from official statistics, such as the census.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“Through our ESOL Working group we are working as a team to provide cohesive support for ESOL learners. At the moment our group involves the local Sixth Form and FE Colleges (both of whom have Mentors who work specifically with ESOL learners), Adult and Community education, the local authority Language for Living scheme, Connexions, and the Youth Service.”

Making the most of local expertise: (see 2biii)

Respondents of all types focussed on involving hard to reach communities and their representative group themselves at all levels of ESOL, from planning to delivery (38 responses). They often recognised that the expertise is 'out there' already, and that these groups should be involved in a more joined up process: consultation, information gathering, outreach and, where necessary, funding. For example:

"We regularly work with: faith groups; the voluntary and community sector; multicultural organisations; The BME network; The Asylum Team; community groups; the Family Learning team; mosques to provide publicity; social services; medical practices"

(Provider)

"By meeting with and including local organisations who represent refugees, asylum seekers, those working with women from the BME communities and representatives from long-established (but still needing ESOL) communities in order to ascertain need and incorporate this into planning provision and into seeking funding. The communities need to be actively listened to and involved at all stages."

(Other)

"We already have a model of working with grass roots voluntary organisations to identify need and then identifying appropriate local providers to meet those needs. This has been recognised as outstanding practice by OFSTED."

(Local Authority)

"Working in partnership with communities and education providers and voluntary sector bodies who have the actual experience of how communities are working, where tensions lie, and how initiatives can best benefit their area."

(Voluntary organisation)

Together for Peace: “Through my work mentoring refugees and people seeking asylum at Park Lane College in Beeston, South Leeds (where they were studying ESOL) in 2003-04, I developed and have since sustained good relationships with 70+ of them. Since then, I have enabled many (at least half) to become actively engaged (volunteering etc) in community projects, local politics, to enter and develop social networks in and beyond the refugee communities, etc. One interesting point is that those who are less ‘mainstream’ (those whose asylum claims have failed etc) are more available for participation in positive community initiatives (such as volunteering at a annual community festival), because they have more time and fewer opportunities to participate in the life of their community.

Through strengthening these social networks, people in established communities are more likely to encounter individuals within new migrant communities and have their preconceptions/prejudices broken (I’ve seen it happen repeatedly). This is particularly true for people in established migrant communities (eg the south Asian communities) and more marginalised white communities who find themselves studying alongside people in the refugee and asylum-seeking communities through ESOL or other basic skills classes.”

Funding/resources/building capacity

Many responses raised the need to change funding arrangements and building capacity (31 responses – this was frequently an issue for local authorities). As well as increasing funding and making it more long term, there were calls for increased flexibility, sustainability and transparency. Four of these responses called for money to go straight to local authorities, to reach the most vulnerable learners rather than those who fit into LSC-determined national priority groups. Three respondents advocated that funding should not be based on achievement – some students don’t have strong educational backgrounds, may find literacy difficult and so on, but English is important to them nonetheless. Other responses based on this issue advocated: maintaining ESOL hardship funds to cover childcare costs; funding for small group work; clarification of funding arrangements; long term funding for outreach work (cited twice); ensuring that funding “flows through”; targeting resources for delivery at established providers; reducing fees payable by those eligible for funding, and; funding provision for all ESOL levels. For example:

“More funding must be made available for the most vulnerable learners.”
(Local Authority)

“We will need to achieve much more effective alignment of related funding sources, particularly those where there is greater flexibility in terms of required outputs and may be used to support progression to more formal (or qualification based) ESOL provision.”

(Local Authority)

“A sustainable and transparent funding strategy should be developed for providers in the voluntary and community sector. It is currently an extremely difficult funding situation for voluntary and community organisations. As the primary providers of ESOL training, a sustainable funding strategy in this area would enable these organisations to effectively develop their communities’ engagement in ESOL and other learning.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“The LSC funding methodology has not actively funded outreach and in the last few years, the focus for providers funded by the LSC has been to meet employers’ needs rather than widening participation. There can be a tension between the LSC priorities and local needs. Further reductions in bureaucracy surrounding LSC funding would also assist such community based organisations.”

(Other)

Changing ESOL provision

Other advocated the need to change the nature of ESOL provision itself (23 responses). There was enormous variety within these responses, but they all recognise a need to adapt courses to the specific requirements of learners and reduce factors that might be off-putting to the most needy. For example, providing targeted courses (e.g. single gender courses); the provision of childcare; reducing monitoring requirements that intimidate learners with lengthy forms; engaging private providers; or the introduction of realistic, fundable shorter term achievement aims or providing a “wraparound” service (involving community outreach, taster sessions, informal learning, accessible information, advice and guidance and pastoral support). Others called for: compulsory paid time off for staff to join ESOL classes; providing more advice and guidance on ESOL; providing ESOL in community settings and using alternative venues; making more use of informal learning; developing mentoring and outreach schemes; embedding ESOL into other courses and; deploying personnel who are trained and experienced in working with hard to reach groups. For example:

“Providing ESOL in a community setting such as a Church or community hall rather than local colleges is essential to effectively engage with refugee and asylum seeking populations. Cultural sensitivities need to be taken in to account. Women often find it difficult to access mainstream ESOL classes. Educational establishments can be intimidating so providing English classes in a ‘neutral’ venue may break down any potential barriers... This model strongly promotes the social inclusion of ‘hard to reach groups.’ Additionally, if ESOL is target driven – relating to retention and exam results – pregnant women face discrimination as their reason for attendance is to learn some basic literacy in a short time period (due to imminent birth). For them, access to ESOL is not about taking exams and getting results, it’s about the real basics that aid integration and cut down on their isolation. ESOL classes need to be offered at child friendly times with free/cheap childcare provision”
(Voluntary organisation)

“Provide initial sessions within particular communities in the first instance, with a view to integrated groups after a few weeks, perhaps linking them with other community initiatives e.g. based around particular schools or estates.”
(Provider)

These issues were also raised at the Citizens’ Juries commissioned by DIUS and DCLG. Participants mentioned a range of delivery suggestions including the provision of family learning sessions, taster lessons, a mobile ESOL ‘learning bus’ and holding lessons in community centres and religious settings. Also mentioned was the need to teach people about British culture and society through ESOL.

Marketing ESOL/raising awareness

9 respondents believed that marketing and raising awareness were the key, to sell the benefits and provision of ESOL, as well as the support available. This is to be done through: the media; developing an IAG leaflet to signpost provision; providing ESOL awareness training to people working with those in need; local Asian Radio Networks; community centres; the use of online communities; healthcare professionals, and: ESOL classes themselves. Advertising in community languages was also mentioned. One provider also advocated promoting the potential economic benefits of ESOL. For example:

“Promote the existing work more widely to draw more people in. Provide promotional material in accessible languages and formats”
(Salford Museum and Art Gallery)

“We also need to ensure that provision (often by a variety of funding sources and providers) is presented in a coherent, transparent and well-signposted for both learners and support agencies to ensure priority groups are both informed and fully able to locate and access appropriate provision.”

(Local Authority)

“I would like to draw your attention to the free Facebook group “Language Exchange” created by a colleague of mine at Sussex University. It allows local people with different languages skills to volunteer to teach each other. It started with a student society at the University of Sussex in Brighton UK where we are already hundreds of members exchanging our native languages and culture with peers locally. There are members in 54 languages already. Please contact Fernando Perini for more info. Or search for Language Exchange on Facebook www.facebook.com/apps/application.php?id=2516930352&ref=n”

Research/mapping

Others advocated the need for more research and evidence to identify the hardest to reach groups or research upon which to build local strategic planning. Together with consultation of providers and community groups to gauge demand (as above), suggestions were made such as: a central database; an annual audit of need versus provision; needs analysis; developing an “honest broker” type information service to contribute to planning, by analysing data and evaluating completed courses; mapping existing services, and: linking to DWP/JCP data.

Related to this, some said there needs to be mechanisms to share good practice between local authorities.

Question 2bii): How can we better link providers to existing planning arrangements and priorities so that they can better target their resources to develop their communities' engagement in ESOL and other learning?

Again, there is consensus that partnerships and consultation are the way forwards, particularly involving providers in planning to understand ESOL demand and the pressures of ESOL delivery. The issue of changing current priorities was referred to, which some felt compromised the goal of engaging hard to reach learners. Furthermore, changing how ESOL is provided was raised again, as was funding.

Providers strategy groups (see 2bi): Many responses suggested partnerships and strategy groups specifically involving providers (18 responses – 9 of which were from providers themselves).

- As we have seen above, there is an appetite for joined up working, which would include the input of ESOL providers. To add to this, several felt that providers' fora/networks (i.e. groups constituted exclusively by providers) would be useful for sharing data and good practice. These groups should be involved in wider partnerships;
- another related issue, cited by several respondents, was wasteful competition amongst providers for richer learners: the solutions suggested were shared targets set by LAAs for providers and closer coordination and cooperation amongst providers (to ensure smooth progression of students);
- another partnership included developing better linkages through PCDL, Learner Partnerships to regeneration neighbourhood management and LAA plans;
- one provider advocated establishing a requirement for all providers to collaborate in targeting resources; and
- providers working with neighbourhood area teams.

Sample of responses:

“Regular borough-wide providers' fora to consult, share good practice and engage providers and learners in the planning processes. Providers will attend fora if they are able to influence the decision-making process.”
(Provider)

“Community provision partnerships with other ‘learning institutions, (FE, Adult Ed etc)’ should be established, bridging the gap between communities and supporting with advice and guidance and progression routes.”

(Local Authority)

Involving providers in planning

How providers are involved in planning was an important issue in the responses for this question, stressing the importance of the role that providers’ expertise can play (14 responses – 8 of which were from providers).

Suggestions were:

- providers need to be involved in consultation as they’re best placed to give insights into demand;
- another respondent recommended making sure relationships between colleges and local authorities are flexible – some providers will already be experienced in reaching hard to reach groups;
- furthermore, one provider asked that providers receive copies of the local plan;
- LEA/FEA warned that providers will attend fora if they are able to influence decision-making;
- not imposing ideas without consultation;
- keeping providers informed – much information is picked up by chance; and
- using reputable providers to inform local authorities and the LSC.

Typical responses would be:

“Providers should be involved at every stage of the planning processes for ESOL provision in the local area. This includes the strategic development of local plans and priorities, inter-agency strategies for local delivery and promotion of ESOL, and strategies for outreach and community engagement.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“We do feel strongly that ESOL teachers should be involved in decision making processes, providing practical experience and first-hand understanding of the issues.”

(Provider)

Equality and Human Rights Commission: “In the North East, there is a regional ESOL group co-ordinated by the North East Strategic Migration Partnership. This group attempts to network the region’s ESOL providers together to share good practice, concerns etc. and link the network into the wider work going on in the region with new and emerging communities (e.g. around employment, cohesion etc.).”

Changing priorities and provision

Some claimed that current targets and priorities compromise their ability to engage hard to reach learners, and thus on community cohesion. One provider felt that they should be incentivised to work with disadvantaged communities. For example:

“Emphasis on target-based and time restricted funding discriminates against the most vulnerable who need intensive support. On the other hand our current students are self-selected and highly motivated and since the abolition of fee-remission our retention rates have increased. We would like to continue to offer subsidised (not free) courses to migrant workers, as we feel this contributes the whole community in integration, community cohesion and contributes to the economic benefits.”

(Provider)

“Just measuring exam results is not a measure of success. Speaking in particular is important for community cohesion and this should be reflected in the targets. We also need to measure: getting into employment or improved employment; ILPs and samples of work; Attendance; Record statements of achievements.”

(New Directions)

“All providers must be committed to working against identified priorities from this plan and not be forced into fulfilling other criteria (i.e. attendance and attainment targets, qualification targets)”

(Local Authority)

In particular, a few were interested in starting pre entry-level classes of a more informal nature to engage the hard to reach. Other suggestions in this category were: use the spare capacity of private schools to teach pre-entry ESOL; consider ways of supporting students in their mother tongue and; allowing each skill to be assessed separately and to be given the same weighting.

“To target the hardest to reach we need a level before the pre entry classes which are not formal in structure or outcome. These might be informal women’s groups, sewing, childcare or beauty classes. They are more likely to draw in the most difficult to reach than formal ESOL classes. We also need to provide free ESOL classes for those who do not have an income themselves but depend on their families or husbands to pay the fees for them.”

(Provider)

Finally, one provider noted boundary issues:

“At present local boundaries (e.g. county) can get in the way of co-operation between LSC, local authority and providers, especially where catchments areas overlap; this should be resolved first by charging meetings to agree equitable methodologies for linking providers and communities”

(Provider)

Question 2biii): Are there new partners who should be involved in this process and what would be needed to engage them?

The responses to this question fell into 4 categories: community/local organisations, as already discussed; employment related groups; family related groups, and; miscellaneous other public services.

Partnerships with community organisations

The most popular answer involved partnerships with community organisations working at ‘grass roots’, due to their connection with marginalized groups (see 2bi – ‘Making the most of local expertise’). This would include community groups faith groups, minority group, community forums, community leaders and the voluntary sector.

“The Mayor, with the London Development Agency, welcomes the Government’s intention to further open the market for ESOL to new providers and organisations, particularly from the voluntary and community sectors. But in order for this to be successful, the Further Education sector will have to work far more closely and collaboratively with voluntary and community sectors, and vice versa. As part of this, it is important that all public sector bodies engaged in this area adhere to the principles of the Compact between Government and the Voluntary

and Community Sector, aimed at improving their relationship for mutual advantage and community gain (as set out at www.thecompact.org.uk).”
(Mayor of London)

Reaching learners through employment

Some advocated seeking partnerships with the aim of reaching potential learners through their employment (18 responses. Also: see question 6). Local and national employers were mentioned often. There were also a variety of employment support agencies and bodies including: benefit agencies, Jobcentres, the Learning and Skills Council, Employment Agencies, Connexions, Jobcentre Plus, Learndirect, Trade Union representatives, Union Learner Representatives and employers themselves were all mentioned. Typical responses would be:

“Local employers should be involved in the process. Although unlikely to gain any immediate financial benefit they could influence the structure and content of provision and could benefit from gaining local employees or better skilled local employees Jobcentre Plus should also be involved and other local brokers.”

(Provider)

“Jobcentre Plus as the administrator of the welfare benefits system has a role to play in referring its clients to appropriate and quality provision, as well as providing data on those who require ESOL provision.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“In many cases employers have productive relationships with providers for vocational training, but ESOL is not always addressed. Where no provider relationship exists, Train to Gain brokerage could develop the relationship.”

Reaching learners through their families

Many also mentioned reaching learners through their families, especially children (13 respondents). Schools (both faith and primary), Children’s Centres, Sure Start, Social Services, youth groups and sports clubs, were cited as potential partners. This would provide an access route to parents and excluded women in particular, and could also be used to channel provision.

“Women especially are linked to schools and therefore good to link ESOL to schools and Children’s Centres – also need to address issues of childcare as a barrier to accessing classes.”

(Local Authority)

East Central 3 Extended School Partnership: “Run classes at local schools and community centres where parents/carers, and particularly new arrivals, feel most comfortable. In this way, they can become part of the community straight away and mix with their local community by taking part in other groups... extended schools partnerships can be very effective partners as they bring together schools, and voluntary and community groups as well as statutory agencies.”

Reaching learners through other public services/bodies

Local bodies and structures were also mentioned by several as sources of potentially useful relationships (24 responses overall). Specific bodies mentioned were:

- Local Strategic Partnerships
- Local Area Partnerships
- Adult and Community Learning Providers
- Equality and Diversity Action Teams
- Housing Teams/Associations
- Economic Development Teams
- Neighbourhood Management Teams
- Learner Engagement Team
- Home Office (and immigration officials)
- Offender Institutions
- NHS/Health services including GP surgeries
- Area Parliaments
- Local Libraries (and museums and archives)
- Sports and music groups
- Translation services
- Domestic violence refuges
- Local media/radio
- Student Unions

Other responses to this section were:

- partners will vary from area to area;
- new partners should only be engaged if they can satisfy sensitive but also rigorous organisational and professional criteria; and
- there will always be new partners as demographics shape communities and needs change over time. Giving groups and providers a stake in being able to influence decision-making will engage them.

Question 2c) How could the effectiveness of the proposed arrangements in supporting community cohesion be measured?

Respondents stated a range of statistics, indicators, outputs and methodologies that could be used to measure the aforementioned arrangements. These fall into two categories – those related directly to education and those related to wider indicators of community cohesion. In both of these categories, there were quantitative and qualitative measurements. The most popular were quantitative educational statistics concerning recruitment and retention, achievement and provision/funding data. This was followed by quantitative community cohesion indicators. There was also demand for information about learners and their communities.

Quantitative educational information

Recruitment and retention

Recruitment and retention was the most frequently mentioned response by 27 respondents. Participation, engagement and enrolment were important for all respondent types. Keeping people on the course is equally important, so retention statistics were also cited. There was often a comparative dimension, such as comparing those attending with the local community population (hence the need for learner/community data – see below) or in relation to employment for men and women. Targets could also be set in relation to this according to local priorities. Typical answers would be:

“Effectiveness could be measured by matching the percentage of local population to the percentage of learner take up e.g. if 35% of Polish are at college – does this reflect the percentage in the community... Map successful recruitment from the organisations dealing with ESOL clients to identify where the learners come from.”

(Norfolk Learning Partnership)

“Using comparative data to show trends in student recruitment of priority groups.”

(Provider)

“Have specific widening participation targets such as engage X% excluded women on short courses in schools.”

(Provider)

Achievement

Educational achievement and progress data was also mentioned often (19 respondents). Often this was cited in conjunction with recruitment and retention data.

“Progress indicators/achievement of target levels”

(English UK)

“Comparative analysis of achievement data, based on nationality, would be an effective means of measuring the effectiveness of the proposals on an annual basis.”

(Provider)

“As far as possible, quantitative measures should be applied; simplistically, perhaps, the participation in ESOL classes by members of the priority groups and, very importantly, their progression where appropriate to assessment and into employment.”

(University of Cambridge ESOL examinations)

Provision of data

Although this was mentioned less frequently than the above measure, some respondents were interested in information about provision and funding. This includes information about funding allocated, an audit of need versus provision available, accreditation results, and performance inspection and monitoring. Expected outcomes would be factors such as a reduction in waiting lists and funding being pooled to achieve the greatest impact. In terms of organisations, one respondent mentioned that the allocation of funds should be audited by the LSC to make sure they were correctly spent. Finally, one provider stated that providers should be measured through the new Ofsted inspections.

Qualitative educational information

Other measures of a more qualitative nature were mentioned. Almost all of these involved feedback from participants and/or teachers, for example, how able learners felt to participate in the community.

“Soft’ outcomes should be recognised, e.g., an individual’s own perception of their ability to communicate.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“Assessment must be through ‘learner voice’, rather than ‘learner volume’, and requires qualitative not quantitative measurement.”

(Association of Colleges)

Quantitative indicators of community cohesion

Education aside, many suggested indicators and outputs to demonstrate community cohesion at large (mentioned 39 times). These indicators were frequently mentioned in combination, as their cumulative effect indicate fluctuations in community cohesion. These included.

- increased employment levels were mentioned on several occasions: perhaps before and after ESOL – this was seen by one respondent as being key to combating the perception of people coming to the UK to ‘sponge’ – this might in turn reduce hate crimes etc. For example:

“Employment outcomes of priority groups. Progression outcomes to further training/education by priority groups.”

(Provider)

One voluntary organisation was against the use of progression to work as a measure, as this would have a “highly detrimental impact” on the most vulnerable.

- another popular suggestion in this section was to track the progress of learners’ children in school. Outputs would be better attendance and achievement in schools. For example:

“Monitoring of parental engagement in schools i.e. numbers, ethnicity etc in learning over each year alongside developments in achievement, behaviour, value added etc of their children.”

(Other)

- several respondents cited various safety indicators – for example a drop in antisocial behaviours, racist behaviour, crime rates and hate crimes. Also an increase confidence in reporting crime; and
- community engagement and access to public services by learner groups was also cited. For example:

“Only reliable way to measure impact in an objective way would be through a targeted sample survey of ESL learners that compared how they engaged with their communities and accessed services prior and after taking part in an ESOL programme. However, supporting indicators might include, increased take up of local services, e.g. libraries and community centres, individual perception, progression to FE provision, reduction in community based translation services.”

(Local Authority)

The following were also mentioned

- evidence of local initiatives and outcomes and an increase in collaborative community events;
- fewer funds spent on translation services or reduced demand for these services;
- surveys of local communities and residents;
- national and local economic indicators and measures of poverty and inequalities;
- monitoring local employers who maintain a workforce of low paid migrants;
- knowledge of local govt procedures; and
- increased number of applications for citizenship.

One respondent also suggested a question in the next census about first language, to gauge need.

Qualitative indicators of community cohesion

A range of qualitative indicators were referred to that might measure community cohesion. Indeed, several respondents felt that qualitative measures were preferable to quantitative ones (mention 27 times). These generally involved an increase in the perception of community cohesion. A popular indicator was to seek feedback from the local communities, community

groups and other stakeholders such as schools, employers and housing associations. Three respondents also stated that LAAs currently include indicators for community cohesion, by way of a source. Example responses include:

“Measurements need to be bottom-up – feedback from the streets, monitoring the use of local services.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“A general and perceivable increase in the cross-cultural involvement by residents of the local areas. Willingness, because of their new language confidence to be part of things on a day-to-day basis.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“If bureaucratic overburdening is to be avoided, there may need to be a primary reliance on qualitative evaluation. Most people are likely to want to improve practical, functional skills, but without the need for tests or other formal assessment requirements.”

(Local Authority)

Voluntary organisation: “I’d argue for new understandings of community cohesion/development that focus on qualitative as opposed to quantitative data. For instance, Leeds Met University Events Management Department have been working at developing alternative models and criteria for measuring ‘civic pride’, community belonging, etc.”

Information about learners/their needs/ community background

(See also q1c on background details)

In answer to this question, there were several calls for collecting data about learners’ backgrounds and data on their communities. Many stated that this would establish baseline figures, which would be necessary to inform a needs analysis. Others stated that information collected by providers through ILRs and MIS data should be included in baseline assessments.

“Analysis of learners who access provision, progress and gain qualifications through an effective MIS system. There is work needed to identify a baseline position.”

(Local Authority)

“We need to analyse learner data in relation to demographic and other local intelligence. All LSC and DWP funded providers should be required to pool data about activity relating to each local authority district so that the impact of LSC and DWP funded activity can be clearly measured.”
(Local Authority)

Other measures

The MLA-developed Generic Social Outcomes were mentioned twice with respect to this question – specifically: stronger and safer communities; health and well-being; and strengthening public life.

Other issues

A number of respondents questioned the feasibility of measuring community cohesion, given that it is a vague concept without definition.

“We feel this question is based on at least two false premises; the first is that there is something called “community cohesion” (undefined in all the consultation documents as far as we can see) that will be threatened by people not speaking English. Another is that so-called “hard to reach” groups, by not coming forward to learn English, are putting community cohesion at risk. In our experience, there are many more would-be learners than there are places on courses for them. In general, money and life circumstances (such as working long hours, child care, care of elderly parents etc.) are what prevent people from learning English, not the will to do so.”
(LLU+ at London South Bank University)

“Measuring the effectiveness of community cohesion is difficult due to the intangible nature of community cohesion.”
(Voluntary organisation)

Finally, one provider felt that capturing data on community involvement may be too intrusive

Question 3) Given the role of local authorities and the variety of funding sources other than the LSC, how might planning processes influence the setting of priorities and the allocation of funds in a way that compliments the mainstream system for allocating FE funds?

Partnerships and collaboration

Many respondents commented on the need for Local Authorities to increasingly use partnerships with other organisations, collaboration and integration in order to ensure that funds are allocated in the most effective way. This would allow a more strategic approach to be taken to allocating funding in a local area.

The point was also made that Local Authorities would need to show direction and strong leadership to make this happen.

Strong call for an effective partnership model

Respondents from both providers and Local Authorities made this point.

Partnership working was felt to be crucial to the success of ESOL provision but that its complexity should not be under-estimated

- there was a call for local authorities to be encouraged to plan and fund identified local priorities more collaboratively. Cross-cutting themes that aim to tackle disadvantage, poverty, social exclusion etc need to be jointly identified and funds allocated to support the delivery of services through a joint working;
- many stressed the need to consult widely and support organisations to become involved, for example community/voluntary organisations (possibly through 'community gatekeepers'), employers, ESOL practitioners and schools;
- the need was also identified for local authorities to work much more closely with providers to map current and plan for future provision. Several made the point that all key partners need to be included not just the LSC funded learning providers; and
- furthermore, it was felt that ESOL provision cannot be viewed in isolation but it has to be integrated into other local authority planning, such as the children's plan and as well as educational strategies.

Some called for the development of local ESOL plans that link key stakeholders to FE funded provision. Examples given included:

- the Refugee Integration funded services commissioned by the Border and Immigration service;
- in the South East, the Action for Communities model was highlighted with the suggestion that the B&H Skills for Life Group could be expanded along the Action for Communities model, with links with FE, BME representative groups, community safety, Jobcentre Plus, VCS organisations around ESOL and Community Cohesion formed to feed into localised planning;

“Support for the effective delivery of ESOL needs to be understood as the role of all key partners not just the LSC funded learning providers. All front line service providers and community organisations can contribute to this agenda if appropriately supported to do so. ESOL activity should be reflected in local planning processes at all levels including the structures of the local Strategic Partnership which have responsibility for the delivery of the Local Area Agreement, individual service plans, locality and neighbourhood based structures. We need to identify the key roles in relation to ESOL provision which are best delivered through partnership working, particularly engagement activity, support to remove barriers to accessing provision, including childcare, and ensure that they are appropriately funded. Local networks and infrastructure can then ensure appropriate support”
(Local Authority)

“We believe that this is the key change that should be instituted. Consultation and links between local organisations should be established and local needs and provision should be systematically mapped. A forum created at a local authority level – should set the priorities and develop a strategic response to the needs of the local area, matching the needs of the community to the teaching skills available. In Reading, for instance, the provision would be from TVU (FE College provision,), New Directions (Adult Education), WEA and Job Centre Plus + private providers. There is little or no discussion between the four to prioritise ESOL teaching and learning in the area. In practice, each organisation specialises – TVU in full time courses, New Direction in part time courses, WEA with women’s groups etc. A strategic plan would

enable each institution to develop their own expertise, strategy and implementation, within an agreed framework, without the need to compete/duplicate provision”

(Provider)

- several made the point that local plans would need to clearly identify the most suitable source of funding for the various elements of the plan possibly via a steering group of cross-sector partners. Funds need to be focused on engaging communities and subsequently linked to mainstream, ie including IAG and signposting to ensure those who are engaged by LA provision are moved on to other provision where appropriate; and
- the point was made that partnerships can contain competing sets of priorities, particularly around funding, and that local authorities would need to play a role in co-ordinating this and supporting organisations to gain access to funding. The idea of having a collaborative bidding process through a consortia, allowing funding to be shared and encouraging learning to take place across organisations was mentioned.

“It is the colleges’ role to deliver, rather than develop communities’ engagement with ESOL, therefore a funding system which enables a more effective referral system, from community workers to college provision, could work. However, this should not be broker-centred, but rather based upon direct communication between colleges and communities. The role of learning representatives within trade unions would be a good model”

(Association of Colleges)

In an outreach setting, the FE college funds the teaching, the community organisation provides the premises for teaching and crèche, and the local authority funds the crèche. Barking College utilises this model where possible

Partnership through existing structures

There were also a considerable number of respondents who had thought in more depth about how current structures could better be utilised to make a more collaborative and strategic approach possible. Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements were mentioned particularly frequently as potentially having a key role in the process. There were a considerable number of local authority respondents who put this suggestion forward.

- Many felt that ESOL activity should be reflected in local planning processes at all levels including the structures of the LSP which have responsibility for the delivery of the Local Area Agreement, individual service plans, locality and neighbourhood based structures;
- links to the City Strategy, Children’s Plan, Working Neighbourhood Fund, local cohesion groups and Skills for Life local strategies were also mentioned;

“By linking activity to a broader Skills for Life local strategy which supports LAA targets and local Skills Board targets, the work would be framed in terms of volumes and priorities. Existing partnership groups, coordinated by local authority and LSC then offer the possibility of a forum through which individual partners can be identified as the deliverer of aspects of the plan. Commissioning of work to either individual partners or, where appropriate, a consortium of partner providers, could then be operated, with each partner bringing forward the resources it has access to”

(Provider)

- there was a strong call for a strategic planning group to map ESOL and have clarity in terms of the need and direction for ESOL in local area, with the local authority providing strong strategic leadership for this group;
- identifying links to PSAs was mentioned as a possible way forward of driving ESOL up the agenda;
- the link to regional planning was highlighted by some, for example the need for local planning processes to be fed through to the regional tier, GOs, RDAs and LSCs which should allow alignment of mainstream FE funds; and
- funding was also mentioned in this context, for example if ESOL was a priority, then pooled funding may offer a new stream.

“As far as ESOL funding is concerned, the planning and prioritisation at local authority level needs to have happened well in advance of LSC planning and prioritisation of its funding and those of the providers such as FE colleges. Then there needs to be a joint commissioning process for ESOL programmes by LSC, local authority and any other set of stakeholders such as health, housing, other parts of the education sector. This should encompass all available and appropriate funding

streams including the new European Social Fund. Then, should it be required, these ESOL priorities and programmes could be supported by joint investment plans and joint and co-ordinated outreach, information, advice and guidance and other support activities”

(Union)

“LAAs are also the most effective mechanisms to ‘bend’ the funding available locally so that it is more closely aligned to local priorities. They are also useful in ensuring that local partners work to and allocate funding to the same agreed local priorities”

(Other)

“This should be carried out through the ESOL Providers’ Network which has agreed to function as a consortium to identify further funding. LSC funded providers could work with Entry 3 and above learners wanting qualifications and other community organisations could work with lower Entry learners and those desiring soft outcomes. This creates problems in terms of capacity and professionalisation of the community sector but it is important to stress that further pots of funding need to be made available to address the need for conversational English, for example”

(Local Authority)

The Manchester Skills Board is currently working to increase curriculum coherence and supported progression routes for learners in Manchester. This work has investigated the current learning offer in key curriculum areas available from Manchester providers and how far the provision of learning of various types and levels enables learners to progress from entry level to predominantly vocational learning at level 2 and above. Given the challenges the Skills Board will also consider how existing capacity and contracts and funding sources, such as LSC (Mainstream and ESF), Jobcentre Plus and WNF and other resources are aligned and pooled to achieve higher levels of performance against Manchester's targets. The priorities here, being to better utilise provider capacity to engage low skilled residents in learning; recognise that managing progression is a specific task; and develop appropriate measures that locate employment/employability as valid outcomes from learning.

We need to work with all funders to ensure that funding is deployed effectively across the city, and ensuring that outputs required by funders are realistic and achievable and appropriate for both the activity and client group to be engaged.

We also need to work more closely with JCP. At the moment JCP provision, including the non New Deal provision procured by the LSC under the LSC/JCP joint plan and the re-entry level provision funded through ESF, is not co-ordinated with other provision and there appears to be no cross-referral arrangements with much provision being under-subscribed. Learners already taking ESOL courses who become eligible for New Deal have no clear means of completing their current learning and gaining their intended qualification.

The Employment and Skills Board sets priorities and contributes to the ONE Nottingham planning processes. Existing structures (ESB Executive Group and Making the Connection partnership) provide opportunities for employment and skills funders to meet and discuss how discretionary funds can complement mainstream funds in order to achieve partnership targets. Joining up commissioning across the whole of the LSP is a greater challenge, but one which Nottinghamshire is keen to embrace.

Partnership through new structures

A small number of respondents felt that the most effective way of assisting partnership working would be through the introduction of new structures for the purpose.

- A local ESOL sub-committee or advisory group could be set up to look at local information and make proposals. A forum would be a useful sounding board. The process should avoid dislocating learners and funds from centres where ESOL is already providing social cohesion and reaching target groups;
- requires a joint forum of ESOL providers to allocate funds based on equality of opportunity; and
- need partners to use a central information management system – reduce duplication, provide coherent service.

A single funding co-ordinator

While there was a desire for a greater strategic overview in the allocation of funding, a number of respondents also favoured a more streamlined decision making process, in order to make the process more simple and consistent.

- through local strategic partnerships. Build on existing local authority structures and processes by ensuring that all ESOL funds are ring-fenced and routed through the local authority Adult and Community Learning service which could take a lead role in commissioning through a local strategic partnership;
- if there is a single body, for example the local authority, communications will be more effective, streamlined with less chance of duplication. Gaps in provision will be easily identified and funding applied reaching the most in need. All providers and interested partner involvement is vital to ensure that there is fair play and those in the greatest need are reached;
- have one person who has a co-ordination role (and acts as a single contract awarder) to avoid duplication and to dovetail services; and
- the need is for a central strategic planning role in each local authority, working with a group of providers to plan and monitor provision

“There is a real danger of this becoming a confusing and incoherent mess, although different sources of provision is very important in reflecting different needs and patterns of provision. A single funding route is probably desirable, as long as the national priorities are applied intelligently and flexibly and do not create perverse incentives or hamper real need from being met”

(Other)

Allocation on basis of need

The key basis on which funding should be allocated, many respondents were keen to emphasise, was on need (for example based on deprivation, community composition or entry-level need rather than target-driven), and many suggested particular ideas on how to ensure that this remained a key determinant in the way in which funding would be allocated.

- there is a need to look at the groups who appear to have the most significant problems integrating into the community as a whole. Ways to assess these are varied but should involve all the agencies who interact with the priority groups – schools, colleges, training providers, health care professionals, social services and voluntary organisations. There needs to be an overview of where training is provided to ensure that there is not oversupply in some areas and undersupply in others. Many of those in greatest need are unwilling to travel far to obtain training;
- establish impartially applied criteria for funding allocation on the basis of need coupled with providers' suitability and fitness to deliver;
- local authorities will have intelligence of numbers of new arrivals to the city, numbers of children entering schools needing English support, location of new communities. Therefore they should be able to identify need in any area with a high migrant community and budget for ESOL provision accordingly;
- a more holistic needs assessment of each individual is required – one which would assess (a) people's level of English, (b) their literacy in their native language, (c) their eligibility for fee remission and (d) their motives for learning and the mode of provision they would prefer. This would better identify those with the greatest need for ESOL provision;
- in order to reach those learners who should be priorities, as well as creating places for these people with a national list of priorities, there is a greater need for outreach work in order to address why certain groups have not participated in ESOL provision in the past;
- in order that only the most effective providers are allocated funding, they should be required to demonstrate how their ESOL programmes promote and develop community cohesion, through schemes of work, lesson plans and location of teaching venues;
- local planning should streamline priority and allocation factors so that they are aimed at priority groups – collating statistics and identifying trends may be more useful than nationwide trends; and

- funding could go through PCDL partnerships as part of their PCDL Plan. A more equitable way of distributing funding that is linked to need or volume of provision needs to be allocated. Current allocations of PCDL funding are historically based, unrelated to need and grossly inequitable. Either ESOL funding needs to be allocated on a formula basis or open to bidding on the lines of NLDC funding.

Lack of flexibility in mainstream funding

A number of respondents identified a need for more flexible funding from local authorities in order that they should be able to respond to specific situations in their locality. These responses tended to come from Local Authorities.

- the current mainstream allocation of FE funds is too complex and rigid to respond to the frequently changing needs of types of ESOL provision in a community. This problem is likely to be exacerbated with the new LSC funding model from 2008/09;
- the approach to follow needs to be flexible and start at the community level. It is at the grass root that needs and priorities can be identified and inform local authorities as to where resources should be allocated. Such an approach implies that different local authorities will have different priorities and funding needs, and require a mainstream system flexible enough to accommodate these differences; and
- there isn't a significant variety of funding sources – LSC should hand over the role of setting priorities to regional/local bodies – hard to have both LSC and autonomous local planning.

“The local planning process could influence the local strategic partnership to identify the links between ESOL and other strategies, and therefore allocate greater funding to ESOL provision. At present, national policy on ESOL fees restricts the ability of local authorities to allocate funds to ESOL. If ESOL funds were allocated via the LAA they would not be ring fenced and it would allow the authority to allocate more funds, though this would be based on evidence of need in relation to other targets. The Council’s Well Being Powers also allows it the ability to allocate funds where it is deemed necessary in the interest of the local area”
(Local Authority)

“Flexibility at local level to be able to respond to local demand. So in Tower Hamlets, for instance, funding could be targeted more at lower levels (E1/E2) where there is huge demand as opposed to a Borough where demand is at higher levels. Allocations could be made locally to fit within an overall national target”

(Local Authority)

“There needs to be flexibility in the system to enable providers to develop provision outside of the LSC funding criteria, as these tend to focus on levels and not necessarily local need. Priority could be given to areas not covered by LSC, for example, low level ESOL work in order to promote access to funded places. Working through the LAA would enable local authorities to facilitate this. There is a need for a process to develop local plans, built on the LAA, which feed in to LSC regional commissioning The changing context around the priorities and involvement of LSCs in these local partnerships and access to their funding streams may need further discussion”

(Other)

Flexibility regarding achievement targets

A significant number of respondents referred to the current lack of flexibility regarding learning outcomes and ESOL funding. Many were keen to emphasise that there should be a wider range of valid learning outcomes which can be funded, in order that provision relates satisfactorily to learner’s needs. It was also put forward that there should be more flexibility regarding how money is used more generally. These points were more commonly made by providers of ESOL services.

- providers need to be able to develop provision outside of the LSC priority PSA targets which focus on level and not necessarily local need ;
- sources of funding such as PCDL and Neighbourhood Learning could enable forms of learning which are not measured by exam results or focussed on employment outputs;
- there is a conflict of interest between LA and LSC targets which needs to be resolved – LSC targets are set at E3 and above, while need for community cohesion is at E1 and E2;

- whilst there are some funding sources other than the LSC, these are generally restricted in their scope and often require qualification outputs that are not feasible with the proposed community cohesion priority groups;

“In deciding to what extent learners can progress into identified local employment gaps or should first progress along Entry Level ESOL programmes. Jobcentre Plus needs to liaise with ESOL providers to ensure learners are on the most appropriate programmes. Targets for employment need to reflect local levels of language ability as well as local work needs”

(Provider)

“Use of LSC funding means criteria has to be met and this often results in learners not being able to engage in ESOL. Alternative sources of funding often mean the criteria is not as strict so Asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants can usually access ESOL. These sources sometimes also provide money for travel and childcare which enables learners to join ESOL provision. Money can be used to do things not funded by the LSC, e.g. more vocational ESOL, informal delivery of ESOL”

(Provider)

- other funding sources could support LSC-funded language provision with regard to advice and guidance, translation, childcare, transport, costs of books;
- by requiring funds to be linked at strategic level e.g. funding for premises, advisory and support services etc joined with funds for ESOL courses – meaning small organisations are not required to do multiple bids for small specific sums. So any ESOL funding could have an automatic entitlement to a percentage of capital funding, crèche funding etc; and
- by providing flexible funding for engagement in non accredited courses as a means of engagement for progression to accredited courses. Following (or expanding) the wider family learning model.

Salford offers opportunities for learning that meets all the criteria in the definition of PCDL: learning for personal development, cultural enrichment, intellectual or creative stimulation and enjoyment. It is also learning developed with local residents and other learners to build the skills, knowledge and understanding/or social and community action. There is no requirement that learners must necessarily progress to other learning or achieve accreditation. This approach also recognises the wider benefits of learning in the community, including its contribution to broader government policies such as health (mental and physical well-being) and community cohesion.

Need for national guidance

Several respondents felt that there is a need for national guidance on alternative sources of funding. This guidance was thought to be needed by both organisations looking for funding and local authorities.

- an overview of what is available to increase provision and support in local areas was suggested, together with a clear mapping of services not funded through the LSC; and
- also a need for national guidance on the development of local plans and allocation of funds was identified.

“Without these safeguards, there is a risk that certain groups identified in the priority list will not be allocated sufficient funding. This is a particular concern for refugees and asylum seekers, due the significant levels of public misunderstanding and negativity towards these vulnerable people. With clear national guidance, continuity between local planning processes and the mainstream system for allocating FE funds will be ensured”

(Voluntary organisation)

Funding for priority groups to be kept separate

A small number of respondents put forward the view that there was a need for a certain amount of funding for priority groups to be kept separate from more general sources of funding. These responses came from a range of respondents.

- complementary funding streams should be ring fenced to ensure that resources are available for the proposed national priority groups; in particular for the pre-entry non FE funded learners;

- allocate funds to voluntary, faith and community orgs for ESOL provision that goes directly to priority groups to ensure that funding through LAAs/LSC is not absorbed by larger/more mainstream providers.

“There is a danger of tension between ESOL and Local Delivery Plan priorities if there is any competition for funds, therefore the ESOL priorities need statutory funding via the LSC to ensure ESOL needs are met. Moreover, other governmental public policy targets can be met through effective delivery of ESOL to target groups (e.g. NHS health literacy equality), and this kind of collaboration should be encouraged”

(Local Authority)

Need for longer term funding

A small number of respondents suggested that there was a need for funding to be provided on a longer-term basis in the future, as current short term funding makes it hard to plan effective and efficient provision. These responses came from a mix of respondents.

Other issues

A number of other issues were raised by small numbers of respondents.

- two respondents made the point that it can be very difficult to successfully plan for ESOL provision in areas such as London, where multiple local authorities are operating in close proximity to each other;
- ESOL providers need a lot of training in other aspects of social and cultural modes of different groups other than just a language skill;
- local planning processes should be brought together and analysed to determine national priorities. Systems must be in place to ensure that priorities are determined by a bottom up flow of information;
- the recent machinery of government changes proposed for LSC etc have superseded this ESOL consultation. A new set of questions needs to be drawn up to address the local and national elements of planning ESOL provision;
- this is very difficult – we could do follow up with a sample of students to see if there is increased involvement with schools e.g. attendance at parents evenings or increased access to preventative health care

or increased involvement outside the home. For women at the start of such a process of integration the signs of increased community cohesion may not be very obvious – this does not mean that there will not be a significant impact on families eg by being able to read with young children, to read letters from schools and to communicate effectively with schools and health care workers.

- it should be acknowledged that community cohesion is hard to measure. There are several groups that are collating information that give an indicator such as local police forces, hate crime reporting agencies and Anti-Social Behaviour teams; and
- as a consequence of this consultation process there is a greater understanding among all the partners of the challenges facing some residents in accessing English classes. However the only non-LSC funding that has been available is available no longer. Funding for similar courses in the future is subject to the same challenges in sustainability.

“The ATL is concerned that funding remains discretionary and therefore difficult to monitor in its allocation. The consultation document does not set out any proposals for the provision of information, advice and guidance to hard to reach groups with ESOL needs who would have no prior knowledge of the Learner Support Fund. Furthermore, existing eligibility criteria for access to Learner Support funding are restrictive and exclude identified priority groups, such as, for example, asylum-seekers aged 19 and over, who would most likely include women with children under the age of 16. ATL also notes that native English speakers can access free adult literacy programmes up to Level 2, whereas the abolition of automatic fee remission means that people with ESOL needs are precluded from accessing Level 2 tuition, which is discriminatory”

(Union)

Question 4a): How can existing outreach work be strengthened to support focusing ESOL on community cohesion?

Many respondents mentioned the need for increased funding, which is long-term and sustained. There was a slight tension in that there were a number of calls for greater flexibility but also some felt the need for greater formalisation of outreach and more stringent quality checks.

Other themes included less pressure to reach learning targets and more emphasis on those at lower levels and progression routes to formal learning. There were also suggestions on how to improve both outreach and the delivery of ESOL.

Adequate and sustained funding

Funding systems

This question comprised mainly Provider responses and it was widely agreed within this group that funding systems could be improved, often through direct and flexible provision rather than complex and rigid funding channels.

More streamlined, mainstream funding routes being available to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) would enable more targeted outreach work and better information collection to take place, as well as engagement in planning.

- providing funding directly to those organisations who can provide community provision was perceived by some as a better approach than ‘forcing it through rigid LSC regulations’. There was a call for greater flexibility generally;
- collaborative bids offering a range of support/service/courses/progression to learners amongst several different organisations were also mentioned;
- consider ESF funding to trial new ways of working.

The need for sustained, as opposed to sporadic and insecure funding was widely called for:

- continuation funding is crucial to enable work with community groups to be strengthened. More support – financial, manpower and from senior management – is required to mainstream existing work. This is particularly true of externally funded projects within the statutory sector;

- community outreach has been somewhat erratic due to spasmodic, short-term funding. The introduction of income-based assessment has led to some provision being more targeted at the hard to reach. The experience of the past year and 08-09 could usefully be researched to find out what has worked; and
- refugee integration funding will start in October 2008 – this needs to be linked in with existing support/outreach. Use third sector networks and European Social Fund effectively.

Funding levels

Insufficient funding was identified as an issue by a number of VCS respondents, which in turn impeded or reduced their level of provision. It was asserted however, that the quality assurance systems must be in place if more funds are to be allocated outside of mainstream provision. Comments made included:

- more funding needs to be channelled to the voluntary sector to enable ESOL to be delivered effectively, for example to pay for co-ordinator salaries, running costs and premises and contribute towards core costs of organisations, particularly if asking for organisations to assess and evaluate services;
- much outreach has been abandoned with the cuts in adult funding and what there is fragmented and dependent on project funding. Funding should be available to continue and develop existing ESOL projects, instead of focusing only on creating new projects;
- outreach work is essential and needs more funding – full fee remission should be restored;
- more funding is needed to develop local specialist relationships; and
- the need for funding to support hard to reach learners outside the family learning funding parameters was identified, as well adequate child care provision so that learners can attend classes.

Funding for improved facilities

A need was identified by providers for better facilities, in terms of accommodation, technology and childcare. There was a call for:

- local authorities to help by providing good quality community accommodation at competitive rates for colleges;
- 'Decent' facilities (e.g. computers, printers and photocopiers networked to colleges and other central providers); and
- childcare facilities.

Formalisation of outreach work

The term 'outreach' was seen as unhelpful by one respondent since ESOL delivery should be positioned to ensure that it is accessible for local people rather than necessarily in mainstream settings. There was some call for outreach work to be considered as part of mainstream provision.

- authorities should develop specific partnership agreements with community organisations to deliver ESOL and support their outreach to isolated groups; and
- by setting targets, expanding provision to meet needs and prioritising outreach.

Local systems were seen by some managers to be key to engaging providers to support and formalise outreach work, particularly through performance management processes and funding regimes:

- local area plans should define the role of different providers of services, either in supporting engagement of difficult to reach groups (particularly VCOs) or those able to deliver high quality provision that prepares learners for any next steps onto further, accredited provision (current FE and other providers); and
- existing outreach provision could be realigned around the proposed list of priorities with relative ease and targeted, funded programmes for specific priority categories could be established either nationally and locally to reflect need as identified in local plans.

It was suggested by some that funded outreach activity should be subject to similar inspection and monitoring procedures as provider-based delivery. Examples included:

- only in this way will the end users be able to derive the full range of benefits and be able to place their trust in this provision;
- public sector providers should have outreach work built into their targets, for completion either by their own staff or by collaboration or sponsorship of private, voluntary or community providers; and
- there should be evidence that the outreach work is taking place, and it is systematic. We would need to be confident that outreach work is happening in a systematic way and even, in some cases, that it is happening at all.

Less pressure on reaching learning targets

Some respondents highlighted the need for a greater recognition of the importance of informal Non Accredited Learning (particularly for pre-entry and entry levels) and the value of outreach work for community cohesion as progression routes into other ESOL provision, employment, more active citizenship, and as re-engagement into FE. They felt that performance targets should reflect this.

- link community outreach ESOL work more closely with Family Learning programmes (e.g. focusing FL on ESOL progression pathways and using FL funds more extensively to service these pathways in the community);
- adequate funding is needed for progression routes which do not necessarily hit NTQ and PSA targets. Outreach delivers success over a long period of time and cannot always provide an instant fix or be accurately measured; and
- strengthen progression links by funding support for people to move from informal to formal learning and develop a method of capturing information when learners enter formal learning that identifies what brought them to this point.

A more generous approach to funding non-target bearing on- and off-site courses was called for, as a highly efficient way of improving social cohesion. In this context, all non-target bearing courses would be subjected to the usual quality controls and would be part of the well-planned pathways to further study, vocational training/academic study and ultimately employment. A 'kite mark', awarded by the college, for community groups meeting the required standard would ensure consistency of quality.

It was suggested that, given the pressures faced by some learners, especially women with families, it is important to provide a means for such learners to continue to learn even if they are forced to take a break and that this does not penalise the provider. Whilst this does require an element of trust that the provider is behaving in an appropriate way and not covering up for poor support systems, the benefit is that providers would be more prepared to meet the needs of these learners but allowing them to sign on for classes perhaps over a couple of years.

Many respondents cited the importance of provision for lower levels of ESOL, to reach the people most in need. It was asked how the introduction of the Foundation Learning Tier might influence/affect such provision. It was noted that priority groups, such as asylum seekers and refugees, Central and

Eastern European migrants, including those who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness, would be unlikely to be able to access ESOL services provided through traditional routes such as colleges.

“There is a need to allow for some work which is not judged by exam results if we are to be more able to draw the most difficult to reach women into classes. It is a gradual process especially when dealing with women who have no experience of formal education.”

(Voluntary Provider, Manager)

Improve progression route from informal to formal learning

The majority of respondents were providers, with one local authority. There was a strong sense that the progression of informal to formal learning should be more seamless and the delivery of these services better integrated.

Comments included:

- outreach work and community programmes should ideally be integrated so that those who are encouraged into such programmes have a clear progression route to more formal provision, rather than discrete community provision which is time limited;
- enable FE and ACL providers to carry out outreach work alongside the voluntary sector, encouraging all to work closely together through the creation of clearly identified progression routes; and
- leadership from LA and LSC to support progression pathways.

There was also agreement that clearer progression routes need to be developed:

- development of localised examples of progression pathways for ESOL learners (including but not exclusively employment related) to highlight the possible routes for ESOL learners to engage with volunteering, civic society etc.

Integration & co-ordination with existing community organisations/partnerships/agencies

There was an overwhelming call, mainly from Local Authorities, for partnership-working for local planning and delivery, for example:

- existing outreach work/IAG needs to be planned coherently with an umbrella organisation or forum. There needs to be central co-ordination in each local authority so that all providers can work together and have common priorities and where possible to avoid duplication of effort and funding.

“Communication is vital. We are already seeing the benefits of this in our ESOL working group as we work together co-operatively to meet the needs of learners. We would also like to see an active involvement from learners themselves so that we can be more aware of cultural issues as we work with them.”
(Local Authority)

The beneficial interaction between community organisations and established providers was also identified.

- clear national guidance needs to be developed to significantly involve community organisations in the planning and delivery of ESOL provision and outreach;
- organisations need to share resources, practice and data in order to ensure that the offer is meeting target groups across the city.

“We need to ensure that the organisations that we work with, including direct delivery and infrastructure-based, are helping us to forge robust links to support the clients that they regularly engage with, particularly those that have direct contact with potential clients.”
(Local Authority)

- bring on board local individual/experts who have vested interest in the communities at the senior level;
- create better links at local level between planners and decision makers and VCS – through partnerships;
- work could be commissioned through voluntary organisations and other public services (housing, health, primary schools, etc.) and measured through numbers of visits, personalised guidance, admissions to classes and contribution to overall planning. There are

outreach models to draw upon, for example, the Connexions service working with young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET); and

- LFRS and Neighbourhood Policing Teams already have community outreach workers who visit the homes of vulnerable communities and migrants and they could be asked to identify ESOL needs. There could, though, be a resource implication in expanding their role.

Some suggested that Children's Centres and schools should work together to create a cohesive school community. Knowledge from link/community workers based around schools and Children Centres should be used more effectively to support families.

Many of the Children Centres have been informed that the provision they make must be for the children whereas formerly they used to link with local adult learning to contact hard to reach parents. The Extended Schools also have an ideal base where those children who are having difficulties to integrate or progress can be identified and parents can be contacted through outreach work. Working with adults and parents may not necessarily be something that an Extended School Outreach Worker will feel experienced enough to take on. Local Authority Adult Learning community development workers could work with School Outreach Workers to enable accessible provision for bilingual parents.

I am the Extended Schools Partnership (ESP) manager for East Central 3 in Bristol. Our action plan prioritises ESOL work in our schools. We are piloting an ESOL scheme of work that has been developed in response to parents' needs. This new scheme of work focuses topics that will assist parents to help their children's learning, includes information about the school, the English education system, how to talk to teachers, fill in forms etc. Staff from the school come to talk to parents about their role.

The parents feel more included and can become part of the Parents Group in the school, a group with an ethnically diverse range of parents. There are many activities these parents can become involved in as volunteers working alongside other parents from the local community, thereby increasing understanding and cohesion.

The ESOL courses are provided in partnership with the local adult education centre and another provider as they have the relevant expertise, and I have access to the schools. The partnership works very well. However, funding is an issue as to make real lasting progress, we need to provide classes all year round which the ESP does not have the funds to do.

Other suggestions to leverage existing activity in this area included:

- linking community outreach ESOL work more closely with Family Learning programmes (e.g. focusing FL on ESOL progression pathways and using FL funds more extensively to service these pathways in the community); and
- linking with Early Years provision and Family Learning groups to support parents and carers.

Other potential stakeholders were identified. These comprised private providers, MLAs, Trades Unions, resident communities, learners themselves.

MLA believes that we have a role at both national and regional level to strengthen these partnerships. MLA will be developing an adult learners offer from the MLA sector in 2008. We are actively developing partnerships with key strategic agencies in the voluntary and community sector to ensure we widen participation. There is a need to develop more connectivity at national, regional and local level to ensure we focus ESOL effectively on community cohesion. (NDPB/ Policymaker)

Experienced teachers/providers/outreach workers

There was a very prevalent concern to maintain a high quality of ESOL provision by using experienced teachers, providers and outreach workers both in delivery and support of less experienced providers. The specific expertise of outreach workers was seen to be valuable in reaching harder to reach groups and ideas included:

- the development of local champions from the ESOL community to act as mentors and first point of contact for new migrants and to support and promote to existing members of the community;
- using community outreach workers who have a specific remit in identifying the target groups and consulting and engaging local community;
- well-trained and experienced tutors mentoring less experienced providers;
- contracted providers in the community should be enabled and required to offer the same conditions of service and pay rates as FE colleges in order to attract good quality staff; and
- one response stated that the minimum target to run Level 2 teaching courses effectively disbars even experienced volunteers from qualifying to teach.

Improved IAG

It was suggested by a number of respondents that community based ESOL provision should be complemented by IAG, thus meeting a wider set of community cohesion and engaging more individuals with wider needs.

- community organisations need to be better equipped to give advice about course options, providers and an understanding of the structure of what's available locally. Advice and guidance to a good standard is essential;
- through an integrated programme of learning that includes literacy, numeracy, IT skills, citizenship, family learning and other subjects that engage hard to reach learners such as creative courses with embedded ESOL; and
- a broader palette on offer beyond just skills and employment would engage a larger number of potential learners. Current IAG thinking is heavily weighted towards employment.

Some respondents identified a need for IAG for providers themselves, particularly VCS, which would mainly be disseminated via networks and other sharing mechanisms.

- the biggest challenge in London is around getting a full picture of the available offer and comprehensive and improved Advice and Guidance;
- by providing IAG and mentoring support for the community sector, opening up training and enabling FLLN programmes to encompass basic ESOL; and
- a "Buddying System" where larger providers work with smaller providers to ensure they are able to access funding and meet quality assurance standards.

Various organisations and individuals were suggested as people who could signpost learners to ESOL:

- schools, chemists, doctors surgeries, supermarkets and community centres need to support learning providers by helping to encourage people to take up ESOL; and
- in some areas outreach/development workers have been recruited to specifically work with people in need of English classes to ensure they access the appropriate provision. This outreach/development worker could work with all the local providers, and therefore be

employed by a neutral organisation, such as the local authority, or via the LSP. Their role could include improving the information, advice and guidance given to learners and other 'signposters' within the community.

Flexible facilities/timings for lessons

Much scope was identified by practitioners and providers to engage learners more effectively through more flexible methods and times of course delivery that meet their needs and overcome some of the barriers they face. Creative courses and ways of learning were suggested that were thought to be able to attract students from the priority groups and contribute to wider community cohesion objectives.

To address the recurring issue of childcare, respondents suggested groups in the home for initial periods and teaching small ESOL groups in schools and in school time. There was a common view that all ESOL provision should be flexible and include childcare provision

To meet wider objectives of community cohesion ideas included:

- teaching numeracy and literacy classes to native speakers on site and sometimes mix literacy and ESOL classes so students can meet and thus promote cohesion;
- providers developing more innovative and creative standards of course structure and methodology. This could involve providing sewing, beauty and child care courses although these would not provide students with formal qualifications at the first stage. Outreach work can also support formal learning by providing practice between classes and homework support;
- Mosques and Churches could co-operate much more so as to allow social contact between their two communities e.g. joint bazaars and coffee mornings; and
- practicing English through a volunteering experience could give people a sense of being part of their local community and give their learning experience a social dimension too.

To address some of the social barriers that prevent people taking up ESOL, some suggestions were made as to an approach that is sensitive to their needs:

- the space in which learning is delivered was considered by many respondents to be of key importance. It was observed that formal environments can be intimidating and off-putting. Local Authorities and LSC should work with homelessness agencies' social exclusion projects, utilising the spaces provided by day centres and hostels to provide a learning environment that learners are comfortable in;
- women only venues, refuges, hostels; and
- some ESOL students may never have been in formal education before and any kind of classes will be terrifying. For this reason, non-LSC community learning – 'soft' ESOL routes like coffee mornings or other social opportunities appropriate to the target group – is of key importance.

Suggestions were made to address more practical barriers:

- provide more ESOL classes at the students' place of work. 2.5 hours once a week late into the evening after work in a college is not the most conducive method of effective learning. Students need more regular lessons which are shorter in length;
- as there are other demands made – especially on women with families – it is important that we provide a means for women to continue even if they are forced to take a break eg because of child birth or because of family demands being made on them and that this does not penalise the provider so they are happy to let them sign on for classes perhaps over a couple of years. This does require an element of trust that the provider is behaving in an appropriate way and not covering up for poor support systems; and
- providing ESOL in locations where families actually visit, like primary schools and health centres.

Luton has family workers in primary schools who visit the family of every new school starter and if they identify ESOL needs in the family they refer them to Luton ACL. Classes take place in schools and community centres near to where people live.

This is particularly important for young Asian women as the family is often reluctant to allow them to go a distance from home but are happy if they attend classes in the school where their children attend. Crèche provision allows them to attend class as does the opportunity to attend ladies only classes.

Groups or communities with specific needs were identified as follows, although it was not agreed whether classes should be taught by their specific community group.

- local refugee populations – availability and access to local ESOL classes, particularly in London is hugely problematic. Travel is problematic for refugees on low incomes and who live far from ESOL providers. Refugee teachers could play an important role in outreach to refugees and asylum seekers, particularly with delivery in the community context;
- new immigrants living dispersed around the UK (tiny minorities surrounded by white British people) – religious institutions, charities and voluntary organisations have a role in helping these to integrate;
- insular larger minority communities long established in the UK, e.g. the Nigerian community in South London. Community centres should promote the benefits of speaking English to engage these groups;
- people with multiple disadvantages need a sophisticated package of provision to address their needs, of which ESOL is just one component;
- settled communities can be ‘frightened off’ from joining classes by having to pay and in some cases by the composition of groups. Some find it challenging working alongside learners who can be highly educated and more articulate than they are. Provision needs to be all encompassing;
- Central and Eastern Europeans and asylum seekers, including those who may be homeless, many of whom will be unlikely to access services provided through traditional routes such as colleges. Creating stronger partnerships between ESOL providers and day centres would be a key way to achieving the engagement of this client group. Such an approach would link closely to Communities and Local Government’s Places of Change Programme (PCP). Investment from this programme must be accompanied by service delivery changes in day centres/hostels to help individuals move into education, training, employment and independent living. Linking ESOL to day centres with PCP funding would be a welcome opportunity;

In North Tyneside, apart from ESOL provision at Tynemet College, there have been other projects providing English tuition, all of which promote community cohesion.

- LSC funded part time class at a Bangladeshi centre providing English and IT tuition for (approx) 5 Bangladeshi men;
- a part time class targeted at Bangladeshi women, providing English and sewing, held at a local High School. This was funded by a successful Specialist College bid for community engagement obtained by the School, but is no longer running as the 8 women gradually ceased to attend; and
- a one hour weekly English Conversation class for new and failed asylum seekers and refugees (and anyone else who wishes to attend). This is coordinated by a local community based project (Walking With) supported by local churches. The classes are provided by volunteer teachers; the project has been funded by a piecemeal mixture of church and charitable donations and small grants from the local authority.

Two part time classes providing English tuition for (approx) 25 residents who are financially excluded from ESOL courses – mainly asylum seekers who have been in the country for less than 6 months, and Polish workers. To date venues and volunteer teacher expenses have been provided by funds from an underspend on a previous grant application and by contributions in-kind from other local projects. However the funds are now depleted and the classes are unsustainable.

Greater publicity

It was suggested that there will be a need for a concerted and prolonged publicity campaign involving a range of strategies including written materials available in a range of community languages, community radio/TV, local press, etc. Development of marketing of courses at college level was suggested to target groups.

There was a view that there needs to be more, and better-targeted, promotion and advertisement of ESOL opportunities in our communities, focusing more clearly on *why* people should participate in classes (i.e. the direct benefits for them) and *what* people will be learning. We would support a campaign of posters and brochures in different languages promoting ESOL opportunities. A free hotline number advertised, with operators who speak different languages, so that people could seek *initial* advice on ESOL opportunities may prove useful.

Question 4b): How can volunteers and the voluntary sector be better involved in supporting this outreach work and ESOL provision in general, and what support will they need to do this?

There were many responses to this question from a range of organisations. The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) was widely acknowledged to be key to outreach and ESOL delivery, and to need more consistent involvement and support in planning and delivery. Support cited mainly comprised funding, training, qualified staff and networks to facilitate sharing of good practice and improved coordination within the local area.

Capacity building, including training and ongoing support

Recognition

There was a consistent view across all sectors that the importance of the role of the voluntary sector in outreach and ESOL provision should be recognised and supported by appropriate targeted resources and funding. Genuine commitment and leadership was thought to be needed from senior managers at Local Authorities and the LSC.

It was widely considered important that voluntary sector involvement should be to become part of the overall local plan for ESOL delivery for the area, and should include planning and delivery of ESOL provision, attending staff meetings and playing an advisory role to programme co-ordinators.

“There needs to be first of all recognition by the Government of the work accomplished by volunteers and the voluntary sector. Such recognition should be accompanied by appropriate targeted resources and funding, to support the voluntary sector in its outreach work and ESOL provision”
(Voluntary organisation)

“The Voluntary Sector can be supported by becoming part of the overall local plan for ESOL delivery for the area.”
(Local Authority)

It was proposed that providers such as the VCS, who meet unserved demand, should have parity of funding, of development opportunities and of esteem with their public sector partners, and an emphasis should be placed on reducing the casualisation of employment arrangements which can be a feature of ESOL and outreach work in particular.

Role of VCS

The existing and potential contribution of the voluntary sector was described as wide and varied. Many voluntary and community organisations felt willing to develop this role but inhibited by a lack of capacity to do so. VCS activity cited includes:

- delivery of ESOL teaching (for example; in Leicester, using the NLDC model), and training to people who cannot afford it or cannot access LSC-funded provision;
- engagement with priority audiences, mentoring and support activity;
- advice on course planning, course content, accessibility issues like times, days location etc;
- the identification and use of community spaces and capacity building for sustainable development; and
- making students feel welcome, by working unpaid to help them.

Supporting roles

Some saw a role for providers/colleges to support the Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS), particularly by offering training and sharing good practice, but emphasised that additional resource would be needed to deliver this.

Suggestions for capacity building included:

- learning champions in Umbrella CVS groups to market and promote learning opportunities within local areas and to feed into partnership planning groups;
- overseas qualified teachers should be considered priority groups for ESOL funding as they can integrate themselves quickly through work/further training, can address needs in schools for more teachers and specifically support children/families/adults from their own communities in their own learning;

- commission small teams of professionals (e.g. working for an organisation like Refugee Council) to support, mentor, meet with, and be on the end of a phone to support a network of volunteers and workers;
- organisations like the Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and refugee agencies, play a key role in signposting, referrals and confidence building; and
- fund colleges for taking volunteers in order to provide time for effective mentoring.

Resources

Some responses called for a co-ordinated programme of recruitment, training and ongoing support for volunteers and workers. Training, funding and staff were considered to be the key resource requirements to support this work and are discussed in dedicated sections below. Specifically, the need for sustained and flexible funding was identified, and a range of training ideas were provided. There was a close link and, therefore, overlap between the two areas, i.e. more funding is needed to support training.

- many expressed the need for more staff, particularly qualified, paid staff;
- provide a rewards system for volunteers to encourage more involvement;
- technology support for all organisations (IT equipment and training) and good communication processes within umbrella groups to ensure all community groups are kept 'in the loop'; and
- in order to successfully host English classes, groups must be given financial support for the hire of the venue, crèche workers, marketing, IT support, recruitment, training, administration etc.

WAES has funded Westbourne Family Centre to provide ESOL classes since September 2007. WAES fund the tutor but that is it. The first term attracted very few learners because there were no crèche workers provided on site and Westbourne has a severe shortage of affordable childcare places (a separate issue). For term two the Children's Centre funded crèche workers from their under-spend, but are not in a position to do this for term three. Therefore, the Family Centre and WAES are now frantically trying to find funding from somewhere for the childcare element so they are not faced with learners not being able to access the course, despite an obvious need.

Training

Training was widely felt to be key to capacity building in the voluntary sector to enable them to support ESOL and community cohesion effectively. (26 responses cited training, in some form, as important). This could be delivered in a number of ways, including courses, mentoring and networks for sharing of good practice, for example:

- offer training days through FE colleges (in the holidays), then give them taster days as classroom assistants (without increasing paperwork);
- provide libraries, particularly mobile libraries with graded readers, workbooks and photo-copyable workbooks;
- shadowing effective ESOL teachers in action and mentoring. Get everybody involved. Teach learner support assistants the basics in ESOL;
- access to (free) professional development qualifications in SfL from Level 2 and support in delivery;
- opportunities to network, including practical activities, to share good practice and improve referral route;
- training programmes that improve awareness of other services available and provide opportunities to network and promote each other's work;
- a high quality volunteer scheme could be helpful. This would depend on the volunteers being qualified to an agreed high standard and being linked to a high quality provider such as an FE college;
- train some to be 'community champions' with the job of informing their communities of the opportunities that exist in ESOL provision;
- there should be 1-day courses for screening and signposting training to support the VCS, as well as supporting volunteer teachers;
- volunteers need to be trained to a good level of understanding of ESOL provision. Voluntary and community organisations to be given local training to be able to give advice and information to counter/reinforce the 'word of mouth' that dominates at present. (Local Authority/Policy maker); and
- Training packages linked to new qualifications.

At City of Sunderland College we already offer a service to our community partners where they can access our examinations system, quality control and assurance systems e.g. course validation and be involved in college based CPD).

Mechanisms

Good multi-agency working is felt to be the key to devolvement of ESOL provision, as is Quality Assurance and progression. Properly trained outreach workers and training for the voluntary and community sector to mentor and support those within the community to progress are identified as important requirements. However, funding needs to be attached to these approaches. The current LSC funding methodology does not cover the additional cost of outreach work. Suggestions include:

- use the local area agreements to establish quality thresholds in provision and delivery, which would further enhance the cohesion;
- partnership working between good quality VCS providers (Ofsted inspected) and community-based/refugee community organisations;
- in consultation and discussion; and
- local authority could set up a bank of volunteers to support work in the community.

For the last four years Stockton Adult Education has been running a City and Guilds Level 3 ESOL Subject Specialist course. One benefit of running this course is that to complete it, learners must undertake a minimum of 16 hours teaching practice. This has meant that we have had a trained team of volunteers who have often continued working with us on a voluntary basis after their course has completed. Some have gone on to be paid support workers. Another huge benefit of the course is its contribution to social cohesion. It provides people from Stockton who have met few foreign people to mix with a wide variety of immigrants. The course also provides a valuable understanding of the problems faced by immigrants and asylum seekers, it covers cultural awareness and it generally leads to a much greater understanding between people.

“The voluntary sector tends to provide ESOL for those who are waiting to access more intensive graded provision at colleges. It also has a role where childcare is an issue as informal childcare arrangements can sometimes enable learners to attend classes. There are often issues with the quality of provision, which could be improved through collaboration between providers and the provision of training and CPD for voluntary sector staff and volunteers. Training inevitably involves time and money that voluntary and community organisations do not always have”
(Provider)

“Don’t dismiss the role that private language schools could take. They have facilities, which are often vacant over weekends, trained staff and they are in regular contact with people that would benefit from ESOL but who are unable to pay for private tuition”.
(Provider)

Opportunities to share good practice

Many respondents were in favour of creating opportunities to share good practice, through training, mentoring and networks or fora.

- exchanging good practice is needed with local areas where there is effective involvement. Such groups need greater continuity of funding;
- a wider network to share information and resources, and regular discussions at a number of different forums to explore issues, raise the profile of ESOL across the city and encourage input from a greater number of groups;
- by recording quality ‘anecdotal’ evidence developing a sound database; and
- develop access to local centres of excellence or hubs in order to promote quality and responsiveness.

“It will be important to rediscover the lessons off previous outreach strategies and adapt and update them where necessary to meet current circumstances.”
(Union)

Sustainable and flexible funding for adequate provision

It was noted that there are cost implications in delivering quality outreach provision, and that perhaps an outreach funding methodology is needed. Voluntary sector respondents thought that it was important to be represented on any body that is held responsible for allocating ESOL funds locally.

Local and the regional commissioning arrangements of mainstream agencies make outreach work difficult to sustain and some thought that LSC partnership teams should be charged with commissioning this outreach work where there is a locally identified need.

It was acknowledged by a local authority respondent that there are very few funding streams are now flexible enough for VCS to be able to access, and this was corroborated by respondents of Question 4a. A number of respondents to Question 4b cited problems with maintaining provision, especially to priority groups, due to lack of reliable funding, although one example of current practice was cited:

- the need for qualifications in teaching ESOL are currently a barrier for the voluntary sector, especially as funding for staff development, learner support etc only goes to FE providers. There needs to be sustained funding, not one-off funding or project based funding that finishes after a few months for proper support to be given;
- there is a historical problem of funding/secure and sustainable investment. This could be strengthened through extended partnerships and funding to build the capacity of the voluntary and community sector;
- the negative press and public misunderstanding about refugees and asylum seekers also contributes to the difficulties in community organisations achieving sustainable funding; and
- local and regional funding has been repeatedly reduced in recent years, competition and funding requirements have increased, community organisations are in a position of dependence on few sources of funding and forced to rely on short-term funding regimes.

Barking College currently uses a good practice model in delivering its community-based ESOL. We have an extended network of over forty organisations that we work with and nine community providers who deliver ESOL. Our outreach team works very closely with parent support advisers in schools, volunteers in community organisations, extended schools, children centres etc. Once a group or number of individuals have been identified at the grass roots, we identify the most appropriate community provider to deliver locally, and facilitate the partnership.

There was an overwhelming call for more sustainable funding for the VCS. 6 out of 10 responses pertained to this.

“In order to effectively involve the VCS in ESOL provision and outreach, there needs to be a more comprehensive and sustainable funding strategy. There are currently severe difficulties for VCS to secure funding.”

(Voluntary organisation)

- by engaging with the VCS through a sustained, well funded, long-term strategy the VCO sector will be able to plan and implement well thought through outreach and support for ESOL provision;
- additional resources to ensure that funds to support the cost of caring for dependants, particularly childcare is essential to supporting the community cohesion role by not disadvantaging those who would otherwise be unable to access the provision;
- funding for volunteer ESOL conversation groups that encourage resident populations to practice English with BME groups to aid language development. Brighton & Hove has the Migrant English Project that survives with very little direct funding; and
- funding to support VCS is currently dependent on the commitment of local partners. These essential resources need to form part of local plan for the effective delivery of ESOL.

“Providers outside of the mainstream are reliant on short-term funding to an extent which makes provision unstable and mitigates against urgent needs and planning for progression. It can lead to organisations ‘holding on’ to learners rather than encouraging them to move to another provider when at the appropriate level; we need to consider more reward (for progression) based funding programmes to encourage providers to progress learners.”

(Local Authority)

Appropriate use of volunteers

There was a firm view that VCS should not simply be used as a cheap alternative to mainstream provision. There was also a strong concern amongst providers that using volunteers to teach ESOL could diminish the quality of ESOL provision, for example:

- the third sector should not be seen simply as a cheap alternative to more traditional patterns of provision, although has a key role to play in making provision more accessible. Primarily, this is about building stronger relationships between partners.

“The voluntary and community sector must not be seen as a cheap alternative to service provision as this in itself impacts against both the aims of the project/organisation and of community cohesion.”

(Voluntary organisation)

“It would be tragic if all the excellent work that has gone on in training and upskilling the ESOL teaching workforce is diluted with an approach using untrained volunteers.”

(Provider)

“This appears to conflict with the increased emphasis on professional qualifications and suggests a retrograde step to the type of provision offered 20–30 years ago. We would anticipate that any person involved in the delivery of ESOL would have the necessary professional qualifications.”

(Provider)

Some respondents felt that volunteers should not be used for teaching, but would be better suited to other forms of support, such as mentoring and establishing referral routes for learners. VCS contribution at pre-entry and entry level was widely considered to be invaluable:

- properly trained outreach workers and training for the voluntary and community sector to mentor and support those within the community to progress will be needed. However, there needs to be funding attached to these approaches. The currently LSC funding methodology does not cover the additional cost of outreach work;
- volunteers can be utilised to support the process but not replace tutors. In addition we believe a funded ESOL specific voluntary programme/training is needed to support volunteers in understanding the complexities of working with hard to reach learner groups; and

- The VCS should be utilised by using their spaces, reaching out and informing the community about provision, and taking advantage of ESOL training skills where they already exist in the community.

“Community based organisations whose main or sole remit may not be ESOL have an essential role to play in engaging and signposting learners and, where they are equipped to do so, in providing pre-entry and entry level learning, with the benefit that this is part of a range of activities which enables their clients to participate in the community in which they live. Those organisations will need support to develop an appropriate curriculum offer and linkages for progression of learners.”
(Local Authority)

Importance of translation provision

One local authority Manager felt that the role of community interpreters is vital and that funding for community interpreting and translation training should be a priority. It was noted that interpreting and translating can also provide employment opportunities and progression for ESOL learners.

Improving community links and co-ordination

“Volcom and public sector organisations are not very good at working together and sharing information because we each have our own agendas, funding mechanisms, management styles, neuroses etc. Very stupid because we end up not helping anybody by being wrapped up in our own internal dramas.”
(Voluntary organisation)

Mechanisms for better coordination identified included local planning, funding, training and networks. Funding and training are covered in detail in earlier questions; the responses below pertain to partnerships, coordination and planning.

Partnership

Closer engagement with the VCS was considered to be a key aspect of the partnership approach.

- partnership working between good quality VCS providers (Ofsted inspected) and community-based/refugee community organisations;

- through invitation into the partnerships and through direct engagement with third sector networks;
- local partnerships to ensure added value and reduce duplication;
- fostering better links between VCS and FE, particularly ESOL teams;
- building on existing local partnership/network that brings all stakeholders together for this purpose; and
- non-refugee agencies such as the Children’s Society, Save the Children, Centrepont and Barnados have a great deal of contact with refugee families and young people which could be better utilised.

“New and emerging Community Organisations are a vital conduit to effective outreach work, so it is important to ensure good working relationships with them and/or their partnership networks.”

(Regional Partnership)

Coordination

Good multi-agency working was thought to be key to the development of ESOL provision. Suggestions and current practice included:

- within London boroughs establish ESOL Borough Network Groups. Involve community groups, work in partnership, enable ESOL learners to volunteer or work in the VCS;

ESOL in Lewisham College is organising an ESOL Open Day. It is inviting local employers, voluntary and community groups, providers, support workers, LEA, LHA and others to showcase provision, meet learners, to establish unmet need and to set up a Lewisham ESOL Network Group.

- potential Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector delivery partners can be supported through Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) funding, provided by LSC to Local Authorities;

There is a strong and extensive VCFS Consortium in Lancashire, which reaches over 5,000 organisations, including BME groups. In addition, the Lancashire Learning Consortium represents VCFS organisations involved in learning, who can add brokerage and ESOL delivery to existing provision.
(Local Authority)

- RCOs provide the 'voice' for local refugee communities. Co-ordination between ESOL providers and RCOs is crucial for sharing information and expertise and for contacting some of the more hard to reach communities. They have the knowledge and expertise to inform mapping exercises about local population needs and signpost to local ESOL provision. They can also provide 'safe' and familiar premises to deliver ESOL classes.

"The voluntary and community sectors often have really excellent knowledge of their own communities, but no overview. This is why it is so important to have a coordinative body in each local area."

(Other)

Other ideas for facilitating coordination included:

- better communication and a closer working relationship between the local council and local FE colleges, with knowledge share and opportunities for training; and
- open days with voluntary organisations invited into colleges.

Libraries were cited by some as a hub for linking up activities. Some examples of existing practice in creating these links include:

The welcome to your library campaign funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation has carried out ground-breaking work in connecting public libraries and refugee communities. Libraries act as gateways to civic participation, with the library card as an easily accessible symbol of citizenship. Examples of good practice include:

North Tyneside Libraries, in partnership with the NE Refugee Service run ESOL classes concurrently with a drop-in session that offers information and advice to refugees and asylum seekers.

Leicester Library Service run well-attended citizenship classes and provide targeted support to refugee communities with help on offer to fill in formal documents such as application forms.

The Refugees into Libraries project in Leicester offered refugees opportunities to train as volunteer library assistants. This provided the volunteers with a range of opportunities to practice their use of English and obtain valuable work experience. Some of the refugees have gone on to gain paid employment and have also developed their confidence to engage more in their local community by becoming parent governors and so on.

(NDPB/Policymaker)

Planning

It was felt that the voluntary and community sector should be significantly involved in the planning, strategic development and delivery of ESOL provision. Comments included:

- local authorities should develop joint planning and delivery strategies with this sector, in order to ensure that the ESOL proposal is effectively achieved and implemented; and
- primarily, maximising the third sector contribution is about building stronger relationships between partners. Actually, the focus on commissioning may be unhelpful in that it will tend to contractualise relationships rather than emphasise shared purpose.

Raising awareness

The two local authority responses on this question called for recognition of the importance of the VCS role, and better use of its expertise and support.

- awareness raising needed, could be through Skills for Life Development Team.

“The importance of the role of agencies which work directly with actual or potential ESOL learners, but are not necessarily concerned with training, is generally insufficiently recognised and utilised and needs to be improved.”

(Local Authority)

Stronger marketing was felt by some respondents to be needed to engage learners more effectively. This should be reflected in planning and resource allocation.

- planning/market research group needed to co-ordinate provision, outreach of funding under Local Agreement;
- awareness training and marketing will need resources and funding;

Community-based volunteers and organisations were identified as suitable channels for marketing of ESOL services.

- Mosques could be much more pro-active in encouraging ESOL classes for the members of their communities;
- volunteers are able to engage with individuals who have come from similar backgrounds to themselves. In some ways it is easier for them to encourage others to participate in activities that they have either done or that they may be able to pursue together; and
- organisations such as the Council for Voluntary Services and Council groups such as Multi-Agency Forums can act as central points of information and exchange of expertise to support outreach work in this area.

A stronger link between language provision, IAG and other relevant services could consolidate work on community cohesion. It was suggested that local organisations who have contact with potential learners should signpost them to ESOL services.

- many VCS organisations deliver support for specific groups in particular contexts, e.g. financial, legal, domestic but don't make the connection to language provision. Need help to see the links; and
- organisations in the statutory sector, including City Council services e.g. Interpretation Services, need access to more information about how they may also signpost individuals to support (including the non-FE ESOL offer) in the city and how their own work can contribute to community cohesion. This will ensure that individuals are signposted as soon as they make contact with services and will ensure that we achieve a 'no wrong door' approach to provision.

The British Red Cross has 3,000 staff members and 30,000 volunteers, who are the lifeblood of the organisation and enable us to deliver a wide range of services. We have 14 centres that work with refugees and asylum seekers across the UK, and who deal with quite different local circumstances. The degree to which we promote ESOL and signpost people onto the courses differs between areas.

In cities where we deal primarily with destitution, the bulk of our work involves dealing with crisis situations, finding accommodation, providing emergency aid such as food and clothing, and signposting people to legal advice. We have found that there is still some confusion amongst staff and volunteers about eligibility criteria for ESOL funding, and it is not always straightforward to find courses to refer clients on to.

In Scotland, where we do a great deal of signposting as part of our orientation service, there are still challenges around finding places for the amount of people who want to take English courses. Although our staff and volunteers are delighted to be able to help in this way, referrals and finding courses all take a significant amount of time.

Any initiatives to promote new guidance, and streamline and simplify processes for finding ESOL providers would be welcome to help our staff and volunteers better engage with outreach work.

We are always keen to work in partnership with the statutory services and other organisations to assist vulnerable people in local communities.

Question 5): What programmes/resources are currently available to support professional development for teachers and others involved in improving ESOL delivery to help the community cohesion agenda, and what else might be needed?

Five key themes emerged from the responses to Question 5:

- there must be more support, funding and access for training and professional development within the voluntary and community sector;
- training for all teachers must include greater emphasis upon practical skills and understanding of local communities and issues;
- general concern to build, maintain and monitor high quality standards for training and delivery programmes;
- long-term planning is essential, which requires long-term funding; and
- improved regional and local coordination is key to building effective ESOL and community cohesion strategies.

Currently available resources and programmes

Respondents cited a wide range of resources and programmes related to ESOL delivery:

- ESOL Core Curriculum levels 2-5;
- ESOL Additional Diploma;
- ESOL Skills 4 Life materials;
- ESOL Access for All;
- PGCE ESOL or ESOL Stand Alone Courses;
- Cambridge ESOL (CELTA, DELTA, TKT);
- Citizenship (as a component of ESOL classes);
- NATECLA CPD programme; and
- FLLN ESOL programmes.

In addition, many mentioned available resources and programmes not explicitly linked to ESOL at present, some of which relate to the citizenship/community cohesion agenda:

- LLUK+ Citizenship materials;
- NIACE Citizenship materials;
- Learning and Skills Network Citizenship materials;
- QIA's Skills 4 life resources;
- Quality Improvement Programme Development;
- SFL learning materials;
- local training in racism awareness/cultural diversity;
- Equal Opportunities Training;
- PTLLS;
- resources from EQUAL department;
- induction training;
- observation of teaching and learning;
- team development training (including sharing best practice); and
- bespoke 'embedded citizenship/community cohesion' course elements.

Recruitment

Two key reasons for the shortage in ESOL tutors were identified:

- high fees; and
- unclear, complex, inflexible routes into teacher training and professional development.

Suggestions for relating to the recruitment of ESOL teachers included:

- raising the public profile of teacher training/value of ESOL teaching;
- clearer routes to qualification status and career progression;
- increased recruitment from BME communities;
- financial incentives/fee reduction schemes for potential tutors;
- recognition of non college-based experience; and

- increased outreach to individuals with teaching qualifications from country of origin.

“ESOL for Work qualifications are currently focused on achieving up to Level 1, or the equivalent of grades D-G at GCSE. Higher-level (Level 2 & 3) and intensive ESOL is required for those refugees with professional backgrounds who wish to return to those professions, for example teachers, engineers, health & finance professionals. Currently refugees can access basic ESOL provision that will lead to a level 1 qualification. This is not sufficient to work in a school, and there are very few affordable or free bridging courses available in the country to enable a refugee teacher to progress from Level 1 to a level where they can find employment or even a voluntary post in a school. The result of this is that we are missing out on skills and experience that could be more effectively used in the profession they would like to rejoin. Children from refugee communities also are missing out on positive role models”

(Other)

Planning

Overall, it was felt that professional development for teachers and others involved in improving ESOL delivery is currently ‘patchy’ and unevenly distributed across different regions, localities and institutions. Respondents called for a more structured, coordinated and accessible training programme to recruit and train ESOL teachers.

Regional and local coordination

A key element to successful planning, discussed by many of the different stakeholders, was regional and local networks and partnerships.

- improved local and regional support networks would address the quality issues faced by small ESOL providers working in relative isolation;

In Southampton a local tutor network that provides training has been established as part of the BRITES project. This project coordinates and develops ESOL courses and provides advice and information services for refugees and people from ethnic minority communities in Southampton to enable them to progress to further education or employment. It is funded by the Learning and Skills Council, through its European funded co-finance programme, and is managed by Southampton City Council in partnership with local FE Colleges, training providers and community organisations.

- coordinated CPD could be organised across a range of institutions, managed by the Professional Development Networks or similar agencies;
- improved networks could enable more sharing and scaling up of best practice;

For example, see the LSC Licence to Skills proposals. The London Skills and Employment Board plans to showcase London example of successful delivery that professionals can learn from.

- local authorities could identify good teaching practice and build substantial teaching posts with secure funding; and
- several respondents suggested that employers should be involved in planning, and links were made with workplace learning.

Long-term planning and funding

To achieve effective, coordinated ESOL strategies, respondents felt that long-term planning, supported by specific funding, would be necessary, together with time to embed new systems and greater consultation to ensure the agenda is appropriate and meeting local needs.

Twelve respondents from all stakeholder groups argued that long-term funding would be crucial to ensure successful local planning for ESOL and community cohesion.

Funding for direct costs

Several respondents also pointed out that funding for direct costs of training would enable more efficient planning and budgeting.

- funding for membership of IATEFL and membership of its ESOL Special Interest Group, as well as funding for attending conferences;

- regular (paid) workshops and meetings with local authorities, communities, educationalists – at tutor (grassroots) level as well as managerial; and
- funding to cover the direct costs of training in terms of release/cover costs for full time staff, paid attendance for part time tutors and course fees.

Link with regional funding streams

Two regional partnerships mentioned specifics:

- ESF funding (through Business Link North East) comes to an end in June/July 08. New ESF funding Priority 2 proposal and others need to be looked at; and
- until recently CPD funding was available via Regional Development Agency funded project. This project funded teachers to undertake Skills for Life subject specialist qualifications including ESOL. Consideration of introducing a similar funding stream should be considered.

Support for voluntary/community Sector, part-time and non-teaching ESOL staff

Professional development within the Voluntary/Community Sector

The most frequently cited issue, by 19 respondents across all stakeholder groups, was that the voluntary and community sector do not receive adequate support and access to the professional development opportunities available.

- the highly specialist level 5 route for Skills for Life teachers is currently unattainable for community teachers. There is a need for lower level qualifications to be developed which will provide stepping-stones towards the required levels; and
- Islington ACL has a CPD programme for all ACL delivery staff. This does not cover community-based staff.

Part-time/sessional work

Several respondents, mainly providers, emphasised that part-time tutors must be included in planning and funding for professional development.

- there is a need for funding and encouragement for part-time, sessional, agency ESOL tutors to attend CPD events on community cohesion.

Non-teaching staff

Some respondents discussed the need for community cohesion-related training for non-teaching staff, particularly those offering frontline support and IAG services.

Manchester City Council and other public sector bodies will train key workers in its customer facing departments to recognise ESOL needs and to respond in their own work, as well as understanding how they can help with referrals. MCC have already tried and tested this approach raising awareness of the needs of City Strategy clients to front line workers and will include ESOL awareness in future sessions.

ESOL training and community cohesion

Need for clarification

Several respondents argued that clarification regarding 'community cohesion' definitions and objectives were required.

"The current focus of development activity is around language development and citizenship. We need to ensure that staff and volunteers have a robust, shared understanding of what community cohesion means, how they can contribute to this agenda and the confidence to challenge misinformation and myths which threaten this work."

(Local authority/Manager)

"It will be essential that there is a clear understanding of what is meant by 'ESOL for community cohesion'. The NIACE Inquiry and Report 'More than a language' recommended a national programme to develop, test and disseminate models and materials for ESOL to support civic and democratic participation"

(Other)

Link with employability

A small number of respondents linked the community cohesion agenda with employability agendas already in place, arguing that employability is an essential element of community cohesion.

Link with citizenship

Some respondents, mostly providers, associated community cohesion with citizenship, often suggesting that existing citizenship programmes and materials could be an effective platform from which to launch the focus on community cohesion within ESOL provision

- NIACE citizenship materials are a good start, with embedded ESOL;
- the Citizenship materials are useful in this context but more CPD on how to use them effectively or to develop them would be valuable;

- courses to prepare for the 'Life in the UK' test are also valuable and could be incentivised by attracting a nil fee in FE colleges;
- more materials to be used jointly in schools for parents and children could be developed; and
- greater internal communication within Council departments that deal with community cohesion would be required.

The response of the Learning and Skills Network focused upon this question, highlighting some resources available from their Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme (delivered by the LSN Citizenship Team on behalf of the Quality Improvement Agency). The Team has published a pack entitled 'The Language of Citizenship: Activities for ESOL Learners'; which is designed to complement NIACE's 'Citizenship Materials for ESOL Learners'. The activities in the pack can be used with learners from Entry Level 1 and focuses on the 16 -19 age group. Other resources are available at www.post16citizenship.org.

Learner and community needs

The second most frequently cited issue, by nineteen respondents across all stakeholder groups, was that training for ESOL teachers must be more 'practical', focussing more on the specific and everyday needs of the local communities and 'priority groups'.

- link with existing equality and diversity programmes (with cultural diversity training provided only for tutors but also for support staff);
- opportunities for teachers to interact with local communities (with more local content added to courses to ensure local issues are reflected); and
- workplace, cultural institution and community-based training settings.

"NRDC research shows that teacher training does not sufficiently reflect the full range of contexts for ESOL learning, and tends to adopt 'a default position' of assuming that trainees work in substantial programmes in FE colleges. There is a need for more emphasis in Teacher training and CPD on the contexts of embedded and workplace provision, as well as community based programmes"

(Other)

Consider embedding museum, libraries and archive elements in ESOL programmes. ESOL practitioners have worked successfully with museums and archives to integrate creative object handling sessions into ESOL classes. This practice is particularly effective in supporting speaking and listening skills and is rooted in community cohesion. Typically ESOL learners are asked to pick an object in the collection that has a resonance with their identity. It promotes powerful story telling and sharing of experiences. Given the number and range of local museums and archives there is great scope to develop this creative practice and support professional development. MLA could broker partnerships to develop this approach.

Currently the Engaging Refugees and Asylum Seekers museums are working with ESOL tutors to deliver sessions and introduce people to the museum environment. ESOL packs have been produced involving all four museums in the partnership. They work as additional resources for tutors encouraging them to bring in students allowing them to practise their learning outside the classroom. Their response provided specific examples of how professional development and the community cohesion agenda are being supported in projects in Liverpool, Leicester, Salford and Tyne & Wear.

Teachers to be more involved with IAG and student welfare

Some identified the need for teachers to be in a position to signpost students to other services. Some felt that tutors should be more involved in the welfare of their learners, for example, contacting them if they miss lessons to find out why. This could also be another role for the outreach/development worker.

Link with basic skills and literacy

Several respondents emphasised the link between ESOL, community cohesion and training in basic skills and literacy. It was pointed out that many learners in the 'priority groups' have no, or low, literacy skills in their own languages, and therefore it would be beneficial for ESOL tutors to receive training in literacy issues and learning.

"It is too early to tell how successful the new teacher qualifications will be in raising the quality of ESOL teaching. However, they do not appear to include the very specialised skills of working with ESOL learners who have had no education in their own countries and do not read and write

in any language. It is important that we have programmes, such as the one run at LLU+ for teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners that address this issue”

(Other)

London Southbank University’s Teaching ESOL Basic Literacy Course was highlighted as an excellent example of a basic skills course

Some ESOL teacher training focuses on community cohesion aspects by raising teachers’ awareness of the place of language and literacy in society, particularly in multi-lingual communities. This forms part of the previous Certificate for ESOL Subject Specialists (Level 4) and the current Diploma in Teaching English (ESOL) in the Lifelong Learning Sector.

Initial teacher training

A small number of respondents, from different stakeholder groups, pointed out the importance of ESOL and community cohesion training at the ITT stage

- initial ESOL teacher training programmes (usually CELTA) are often designed for the overseas teaching market and, as such, contain few elements which support the community cohesion agenda; and
- it should be noted that Initial Teacher Training at PGCE level does not cover ESOL or EAL tuition in any depth.

“We would suggest that the Initial Teacher Training does not restrict itself to language only, but would include knowledge of various other aspects of service provision, so that teachers would at the very least be able to point ESOL service users in the right direction. If community cohesion is the objective, this is essential”

(National Voluntary Organisation)

Question 6): What would incentivise employers to support their employees who have ESOL needs?

A significant number of respondents (38 in total) felt employers needed detailed clarification of why supporting employees with ESOL needs would be beneficial for them. Many felt that some demonstrable or tangible proof of these benefits would also act as a strong incentive. This view was held consistently across different respondent types. The benefits cited by respondents focussed on improvements in:

- overall business performance;
- team working;
- customer service;
- increase in sales;
- employee retention;
- employee motivation and levels of job satisfaction;
- working atmosphere;
- health and safety at work;
- recognition generated by investment in staff, helping to improve the image of the employer and their profile in the community; and
- competitive edge as an employer from the perspective of potential applicants.

The point was made that benefits should be emphasised selectively, in order to highlight the factors with the most resonance for a particular type of employer:

“Give them the ‘business’ argument – if they have foreign customers emphasise language skills, if they have high productivity needs emphasise work ethic and importance of communication. If they have machinery emphasise health and safety language.”

(Voluntary organisation)

It was felt by some that the benefits were best expressed in terms of hard data, enabling employers to quantify them and calculate the likely return on investment. This was particularly the case if data had been generated from other companies in a similar industry or of a similar size.

One comment summarised the argument for clearly articulating benefits:

“We are creating an integrated offer to London employers to help them with the skills and recruitment needs, based on a clear articulation of business benefits beyond corporate social responsibility. Showcasing what other employers have done is also a good way to incentives employers.”
(London Skills and Employment Board)

Others felt that benefits should be articulated in a way which is relevant to small family owned businesses as well as larger companies. This was felt to be a significant challenge. One commented that:

“This may be difficult with very small employers (especially those where the workforce use their native language at work, such as restaurants for example”
(Provider)

Financial incentives

Incentivising employers through establishing some kind of financial benefit was also a popular view among respondents. Four providers and five local authorities (as well as three other respondents) subscribed to the view that some kind of financial incentive must be provided.

“[Promoting benefits] will only be effective if government provides a financial incentive for employers to send their employees to ESOL classes. No employer would support their employees fulfilling their ESOL needs if this means a loss of employees working time as well as an extra financial cost. Government should therefore cover direct financial costs in the short-term and make a case for the long term benefits for the employer of having a workforce fluent in English.”
(Voluntary organisation)

A further point was made that financial incentives should be modified along a sliding scale according to the size of the employer.

In addition to the group of respondents commenting generally on the need for financial incentives, others made more specific suggestions as to the nature of this incentive.

The most popular specific suggestion focussed on providing tax breaks or incentives for employers investing in ESOL training. Sixteen respondents from across the organisational spectrum made a suggestion in this area.

Other incentives suggested included:

- provide funding to cover release costs;
- pay for some of the costs of English lessons for employees, on a Buy One Get One Free basis;
- provide financial incentives for small employers to encourage participation;
- training grants or loans;
- create a funding allowance that goes direct to the learner to 'spend' on work time 'lost' through attendance on an ESOL course;
- economies of scale for SMEs – deliver language classes in cluster areas such as Chinese Business Association in Liverpool;
- a financial investment to allow workers to learn partly in their own time and partly in the employer's time;
- prioritise ESOL learners in Train to Gain or work-based learning funding;
- reward employer once employee successfully completes and achieves qualification (e.g. part refund of fee); and
- provide clear funding mechanisms relatively free from red tape.

Finally, three providers made the suggestion that ESOL provision should be made totally cost free to the employer.

Other incentives

A significant number of respondents also focussed on non-financial incentives. The most popular of these was some form of public recognition for employers who invested in ESOL training, for example

- the introduction of a Quality mark or kitemark which demonstrates commitment to improving standards of employees; and
- favourable publicity linking with the investors in People scheme.

Other suggestions for non-financial incentives were made by a small number of respondents. Their ideas covered:

- provision of support for employers in terms of housing, training, conflict management and community awareness problems to ensure the HR department is not overburdened;
- companies who provide ESOL training could become preferred suppliers to local and national government agencies;
- provide better support for employers when working with employees with ESOL needs e.g. specialist agencies, in a mentoring capacity.

Negative incentives

A number of suggestions were also made around negative incentives which would resonate with employers and convince them of the need to support employees' ESOL needs.

The most frequent suggestion was around highlighting the dangers of workers not understanding or implementing health and safety measures. Five respondents, including Demos think tank, made this point.

“One measure could be that employers should be required to demonstrate how they are meeting Health and Safety requirements effectively if their employees are found to be without basic English.”

(Demos think tank)

Others mentioned the following

- highlighting prosecution case studies where ESOL personnel had limited or no Health and Safety understanding;
- the imposition of financial penalties if ESOL provision was not made available; and
- preventing employers from receiving recognition or awards if they do not fund ESOL training.

Inform and educate

It was felt by many respondents that more should be done on a broad level to raise awareness among employers about the nature of ESOL provision.

Fourteen respondents made this point, including six Local Authorities and five providers. Suggestions included:

- promotional DVDs;
- case studies focussing on how empowered employees have made a difference to an organisation;
- enabling employers to talk to other employers who have offered ESOL support;
- providing clear and defined guidance on what is available in terms of public subsidies for both employers and employees;
- awareness raising literature being disseminated via employee representative organisations;
- promoting best practice examples of companies who have invested, on sector, regional and local levels; and
- include work-based and colloquial language in provision of awareness-raising literature.

Further activities intended to educate and inform employers were suggested by a small number of respondents.

- work with trade unions and workplace learning representatives;
- make visits to companies (possibly from voluntary organisations) and offer ESOL classes to employees;
- better direct promotion of ESOL for Work qualification;
- use larger employers as 'champions' to promote benefits to business; and
- more support available for employers working with employees with ESOL needs, e.g. specialist agencies in a mentoring capacity.

Flexible course development

Many respondents were sensitive to the varying needs of employers, with a corresponding sense that ESOL course development should be flexible and responsive. Thirteen respondents made suggestions focussing on this area, from across the organisational spectrum.

Some focussed primarily on the broad differences in the size and nature of business organisations, making the point that a standard training programme would not suit everyone.

“Analysing the need in the workplace and then addressing that would bring immediate gains to both employer and employee e.g. focussing on health and safety issues/notices/procedures with employees and on cross cultural communication issues with employers”

(Provider)

Others made the point that the languages and practices of the workplace should ideally be taken into account, to maximise the resonance of each training course.

One respondent focussed on the need for shorter course, highly adapted to the needs of the workplace.

Another highlighted the fact that existing relationships with providers could be better utilised to drive ESOL provision.

“Many employers have existing relationships with providers who could additionally offer ESOL in the workplace. Those who do not should be targeted by Train to Gain brokers – although Train to Gain should have the flexibility to offer entry and progression ESOL where required.”

(Local Authority)

Flexible course delivery

As well as flexible, targeted development of ESOL courses, a similar number of respondents highlighted the need for flexible delivery. Suggestions focussing on delivering ESOL training in the workplace, and at times which would encourage employees to attend.

“ESOL provision needs to be delivered in conjunction with employers were possible, and where possible it should be delivered on-site in the context of the particular role.”

(Union)

One respondent suggested that ESOL learning be made accessible online.

An in-depth case study focussing on successful delivery of ESOL courses either in or nearby the workplace makes draws a parallel with increasing community cohesion.

“USDAW has been involved in a number of situations where a ‘distance’ (if not an antagonism) has developed between ‘local’ workers and migrant workers. USDAW Union Learning Reps have responded to this by negotiating facilities for migrant workers to attend ESOL classes either in or near the workplace. Usually the employer will provide facilities and on some occasions we will negotiate some of the learning in paid time. Developing language skills like this has always helped to reduce antagonism, and develop social integration and cohesion. Two examples of this are:

In an East Midlands Distribution Centre owned by Christian Salverson an antagonism was building up between ‘local’ wagon drivers and migrant workers loading their wagons. The local union rep negotiated ESOL and Skills for Life courses, and the antagonism was reduced. As the rep said “now they can swear at each other in the same language!”

In a milk processing plant (Dairy Crest) near Wrexham there was antagonism between migrant workers who the employer put on one production line, and the ‘local’ workers on another production line. In this case, racist BNP leaflets were also circulating. The rep negotiated a number of changes with the employer. These included the use of facilities for a local college to come on-site to provide both ESOL classes and ‘Skills for Life’ courses. These measures greatly helped to reduce the divisions, and deal with the extremists.

A final suggestion in terms of flexible delivery focussed on ESOL provision as part of overall training package.

“Employers should be directed to ESOL provision through Train to Gain and it should be offered as part of a coherent package of training which is delivered in a bespoke, integrated manner. This would increase commitment to the learning programme from both employer and employee because the benefits of the learning would be clearly apparent. A potential avenue for further development of business relevant ESOL provision is the use of Group Training Associations to deliver it.”

(Union)

Empower employees

A few individual respondents raised ideas relating to employer empowerment. It was felt that if employers were given more responsibility and chance to exercise their influence, they would become more willing to take an active role in ESOL provision. Suggestions included:

- contracts to be drawn up between employee and employer guaranteeing that the employee won't leave within a certain timeframe if they are being supported with ESOL;
- more input being generated from employers, in relation to decisions about levels of English needed by migrants coming to the UK in the future;
- reducing the requirement for accreditation; and
- ensure employers are involved in development of ESOL courses.

Mandatory requirement

Despite the many suggestions for successful ways of incentivising and encouraging employers, there were a significant number of respondents who felt only some form of statutory requirement would finally convince employers to act. Nineteen respondents made a point in this vein, including nine unions:

“Incentives don't work – there must be statutory requirements placed on employers. Employers of low-skilled and low-paid workers are unlikely to participate in funding training. They employ people on the cheapest rates and do not see the need to train them to do more than they need them to do. Train to Gain is available but there is no motivator for employers of low skill/low pay workers to take up the offer because of the ready supply of such workers.”

(Policy maker)

“We recognise the work that has gone into developing new ESOL at work qualifications and other initiatives. However it is our view that the Government has expended vast amounts of rhetoric and not inconsiderable amounts of resources in brokerage, publicity and actual subsidies to incentivise employers around ESOL but that does not seem to be working and securing sufficient employer buy-in around ESOL provision at work. Serious consideration must be given to legislation to ensure that employers who are profiting from using non-English

speaking migrant labour are made to face up to their responsibilities and actually be made to pay for this provision either directly or through sector levies.”

(Union)

“Having waited in vain for the majority of employers to voluntarily comply with such initiatives as equal pay audits and stress management reviews, PCS is of the strong opinion that only a small number of organisations will respond to the call for investment in ESOL, or indeed other types of learning, without some type of legal requirement to do so. We therefore call upon the Government to consider introducing mandatory requirements of employers.”

(Union)

A number of additional individual respondents made comments specifically about the kind of legislation they envisaged having an impact.

- legislative ruling that anyone in work must learn English;
- legislation requiring employers to ensure that all employees have at least Entry 2/3 skills in ESOL;
- legislation requiring all employers to hold a health and safety certificate; and
- legislation forcing employers to train their workers.

There were also comments that Government should take action to ensure that employers contribute to the cost of language provision for their workforce.

“We believe that employers must accept their responsibilities and agree to provide English language teaching for all employees. This is needed not only for Health and Safety purposes and general communications within the workforce, but also for cohesion. As employers are often getting the advantage of migrant labour, it is only right that they should pay for at least some of the costs incurred. By putting this obligation onto employers, many of the funding issues that require the kind of prioritisation outlined in the consultation can be avoided.”

(Institute of Community Cohesion)

Other suggestions

A number of other suggestions falling outside of the above themes were also made:

- encourage large employers such as Councils to lead the way in meeting ESOL needs;
- extend the Train to Gain Skills for Life pilot, particularly at Entry levels 1 and 2;
- include ESOL in Train to Gain in order to provide subsidised time off work (would involve an extension of Train to Gain below Level 2);
- expansion of ESOL for work qualifications to Level 2;
- a scheme in which the LSC provides at least 50% of the funding for all employed ESOL learners who agree to a minimum period of employment with the given company, and to pay back their ESOL course fees if they leave the company within that time;
- link the issue of national insurance cards and mandatory English lessons to a certain level in both speaking and literacy;
- devise a national level programme which is marketed to workers in low paid employment, which is flexible (modular) and accessible, and isn't linked to a specific employer;
- engagement may have to be through employer's organisations at a national level;
- data on the ESOL profile of companies should be collected and published;
- obligation to consult with Union Learning Representatives; and

“Ensuring that when an employer receives public provision for their skills training (eg through Train to Gain provided locally or through the National Employer Service), they are obliged to consult with Union Learning Reps through their Unions on the ESOL needs of their staff. This would help ensure that ESOL needs would not be ‘forgotten’.”

(Union)

- reinforce perception of ESOL as related to employment needs.

“It is important that this consultation is not seen as indicating a move away from ESOL as related to employment needs. The relevance of ESOL can be increased by contextualising learning to the specific requirements of the workplace. We are concerned that providers may have construed the consultation as indicating a move away from employability skills. Whilst we recognise that this is not the government’s intention it would be useful for government to signal this to providers.”

(Union)

Question 7): It would be particularly helpful if local authority respondents could say how the indicative list of priority groups would be applied in their own areas, and which other groups they would propose to make priorities in drawing up a local strategy based on the need for community cohesion.

There were comparatively few responses to this question, as many local authority respondents felt their answers to Questions 1 and 2 had covered these issues. The need for increased, coordinated partnerships was reiterated. Some saw the role of LSPs and LAAs as central to the local planning process and the need for cooperation between local authorities, community organisations and providers was especially emphasised.

The 3 groups most mentioned as additional priorities (excluded from the proposed national list) were:

- migrant workers seeking employment;
- refugees and asylum seekers from day one; and
- newly arrived spouses.

Local partnerships and planning

As discussed in Questions 1 and 2, local authority respondents overall strongly advocated the partnership approach to focussing ESOL on community cohesion.

Many local authority respondents saw the role of LSPs and LAAs as central in applying the national list of priority groups in their own areas, acting as 'conduits' for local strategies.

It was also considered essential that local strategies and priority groups could be changed with a minimum of restrictions and bureaucracy, as local situations are subject to continual changes in population and cohesion issues.

One local authority respondent stated that their local area targets have already been set for 2008-2011 in relation to Migrants English language skills and knowledge. The respondent suggested that the overall employment rate would be an indicator of the success of the local strategy.

Another respondent felt it would be effective to promote Family Learning ESOL via PCDL as a means to help some 'priority' learners access language classes. This response also emphasised the importance of local authorities working closely with community organisations, to identify 'priority learners' and consult on the best way to engage them and provide tuition.

"The recent Manchester ESOL review indicated that many of Manchester learners are eligible for fee remission, which would indicate that the majority are in receipt of some kind of workless benefit or have very low income and will therefore remain a priority group for the city in relation to our over-arching skills and employment targets, particularly those relating to delivery of Manchester's City Strategy and Local Area Agreement targets. These include City Strategy Priority groups, i.e. those in receipt of Incapacity Benefit, Job Seekers Allowance and Lone Parents in receipt of Income Support. We also have additional cross-cutting priority group targets, including BME, 50+. For ESOL provision we would also like to see increased engagement of young people and families. We are currently developing both Literacy & Numeracy and ESOL delivery plans which will articulate the specific actions/targets relating to both types of provision."

(Local authority/Manager)

Additional local priority groups

Most respondents to this question referred to answers given in question 1a.

Groups mentioned in question 1a, and again here, were as follows:

- migrants seeking employment;
- refugees and asylum seekers;
- newly arrived spouses;
- 'excluded' women, including those with pre-school age and school age children;
- pre-entry level learners;
- migrants working long/erratic hours;
- male non-English speakers; and
- learners with no secondary education.

Specific local 'priority groups not already mentioned in question 1a, included:

- Czech Roma communities with little schooling in East Kent;
- Punjabi speakers in the Thames Gateway; and
- restaurant and bar workers and others within the hospitality industry – Chinese, Asian, Eastern European workers.

Question 8): Any other comments or suggestions not previously covered?

Summary

The responses to Question 8 referred primarily to the wider picture regarding equality in the UK. Respondents called for cross-departmental cooperation in working towards equal opportunities for all individuals and communities in the UK, and for impact assessments of current and proposed ESOL strategies.

Respondents also drew attention to barriers which prevent 'excluded' groups accessing ESOL provision and contributing to local economies and institutions. It was emphasised that ESOL strategies must not be viewed as a 'quick fix' solution to problems and challenges associated with migration, social inequality and cultural differences.

Cross-departmental working

Respondents emphasised that there must be consistency across government departments regarding community cohesion, citizenship, immigration and ESOL.

"There must be a consistent approach between the funding of ESOL provisions and the new proposals presented in the Green Paper 'The Path to Citizenship: Next steps in reforming the Immigration System', February 2008, Home Office. Joined-up departmental working on this issue is central to the success of delivery, and we support the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) on its recommendation for a cross-departmental review group to take account of ESOL policy development ('More than a Language...', October 2006, NIACE). In particular, we are concerned that the work of the Home Office, in agreeing entry requirements for new immigrants, should be co-ordinated with the work of the Department of Communities and Local Government in ensuring the integration of those new immigrants."

(Equality and Human Rights Commission)

- one response from an MP pointed out that the Border and Immigration Agency has put out a proposal that spouses must have English tests before coming to the UK. If that is put into place, learning should not then be put on hold when the spouses arrive in the UK;

- this response also referred to Lord Goldsmith’s review of citizenship, in which he states that ESOL classes should be affordable, at the same rate throughout the country, and suggests that ‘language loans’ should be made available to help newcomers pay for courses; and
- a National Voluntary Organisation (The Children’s Society) recommended that DIUS and the DCSF collaborate on the ESOL strategy:

“We have seen the way that ESOL can unlock potential, enabling children to achieve in schools and lifting refugee families out of poverty by enabling them to find work. As such we believe the DCSF, which has a remit to help children achieve their potential, and those other departments involved in cross-departmental work to lift children out of poverty, share the responsibility for ensuring its continuation and funding its provision”

Monitoring and impact assessment

Other responses stressed the importance of collecting data to assess the impact of current and proposed ESOL policies.

Race Equality Impact Assessment

“ATL requests the full publication of a race equality impact assessment of the new ESOL funding regime, given that the abolition of automatic fee remission means that people with ESOL needs are precluded from accessing Level 2 tuition.”

(Association of Teachers and Lecturers)

“We would strongly recommend that any guidance issued by DIUS to public bodies on implementing the new ESOL policies should emphasise the existing duty requirements to promote good relations and race, disability and gender equality, and remind local level bodies of the need to collect and analyse the relevant data and to adjust their policies to reflect their findings. This is a legal requirement and will also provide an important practical mechanism to ensure ESOL is benefiting traditionally excluded groups. Meeting the duties will also encourage local level bodies to make decisions on resource allocation based on up-to-date local evidence, with the national ESOL policy providing a strategic framework against which they can compare their local situation”

(Equality and Human Rights Commission)

Impact assessment of current ESOL policy

“As a result of the 2005 and 2007 changes to ESOL provision, anecdotal evidence has been collected that indicates there are several key issues with ESOL provision to address:

- overall enrolments have been affected across the board;
- learners who need beginner and entry-level courses have been turned away as course provision has moved to higher levels. It appears that this switch does not follow the pattern of demand; and
- those most affected by the new fees and by the cuts in beginner and entry level course provision are the most needy and most vulnerable people in the UK, often women on low incomes in settled communities or migrant workers.

The funds to support low-income learners are complex, inconsistent and patchy in impact and offer no long-term solution for many potential ESOL students on low wages. UCU believes that it essential to measure what the real impact of the changes to ESOL have been, and has suggested the LSC First Statistical Return is examined to review the figures for ESOL enrolment in September”.

(University College Union)

“We believe therefore that whilst DIUS must seek the most effective ways to use its existing levels of funding, it should also be collecting and monitoring data on the outcomes of its investment to support a case for increases to that investment which will adequately meet the level of demand that really exists and reduce the need to concentrate resources on only the “most vulnerable” groups. PCS recommends: that DIUS collects and monitors data on the outcomes of ESOL investment to provide evidence of the benefits of such investment to the economic and social well-being of the UK and its citizens”.

(Public and Commercial Services Union)

Comments on cohesion and equality

The final responses called for caution in focussing ESOL on community cohesion, emphasising that social equality cannot be achieved through language strategies alone. Lack of English skills is a contributory factor to communication difficulties and therefore 'exclusion', but any policy aimed at furthering 'community cohesion' must take account of the wider picture and other, inter-related, issues.

"UCU believe that the consultation paper conflates the use of English as a tool for communication, with English as a means of achieving community cohesion. Acquisition of English will not in itself solve many of the problems these groups face unless the other causes of exclusion and disadvantage, such as poverty, racism and inequities in the distribution of power and resources within communities and wider society are also tackled".

(University and College Union)

"We are pleased to see that the Government is aware of the dangers of stigmatisation in linking ESOL needs to issues of cohesion. We would urge the Government to be aware of this possibility, not only within its own ranks, but also at a local level and – perhaps most importantly – in both local and national media. Given the strong and often hate inciting coverage of migration issues in many tabloids, there is a danger that sections of the press may turn an essentially positive service into an anti-immigration campaign. If ESOL becomes an emblem of 'anti-Britishness' in the public imagination, this could potentially undermine the entire ESOL agenda"

(Runnymede Trust)

"We would ask that real emphasis is given to improving access to ESOL as a means of improving community cohesion and also breaking the cycle of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, disengagement in society etc. Therefore engagement and 'soft targets' as outcomes for funding streams should be afforded equal importance as accredited outcomes. The current climate is for quick fixes; however, a long-term vision is necessary which recognises that the engagement of parents with ESOL needs and their subsequent involvement in their children's learning, and encouraging the ethos of education and employment in children now is critical, if we want to break the cycle of poverty in many London boroughs".

(Local Authority/Head of Adult Learning)

Appendix A: Consultation questions

“Through the experience of our members working in JobcentrePlus and other services which support people in learning and work, we know that whilst some barriers to learning are educational, social or emotional, many are very practical. It is therefore vital that support for these sorts of needs is provided in some way through the local partnerships being proposed and that the programme does not fail because these basic issues have not been taken into account”

(Public and Commercial Services Union)

It is critical to prioritise refugees and asylum seekers in the new ESOL proposals. These people are isolated and marginalised in society and have limited opportunities to effectively assist their integration. English language training is essential for these individuals, so they have the opportunity to adapt and to access employment. Refugees and asylum seekers are caught in a cycle of poverty, unemployment and lack of access to services: due to high fees, it is even difficult for them to apply for citizenship and basic visas.

(Voluntary Organisation/Information Officer)

There is a certain amount of conflict between the need for new entrants to the UK to pass an exam to gain citizenship, and the need to be able to live effectively in the community. Achieving the first does not mean achieving the second, which is far more important.

(Local Authority/Strategic Director)

Q1a) An indicative list of national priorities has been proposed. Are there any other groups we should consider for inclusion in this list, and if so, how high a priority do you consider them to be?

Q1b) How would local plans demonstrate that those identified in the plan are in the nationally specified priority groups and, if not, why they are considered a local priority?

Q1c) What evidence should be collected to ensure that the priority groups are reached?

Q1d) How would local authorities apply the national list of priorities in their area and how well do you think these priorities would meet local cohesion needs?

Q1e) How far have local authorities already assessed the priority of English language needs being met in local areas to meet the objective of community cohesion?

Q2a) Is the proposition outlined, building on existing arrangements, appropriate for commissioning ESOL to support community cohesion?

Q2b) How will this be done effectively?

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

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

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

Q2c) How could the effectiveness of the proposed arrangements in supporting community cohesion be measured?

Q3) Given the role for local authorities and the variety of funding sources other than the LSC, how might local planning processes influence the setting of priorities and the allocation of funds in a way that complements the mainstream system for allocating FE funds?

Q4a) How can outreach work be strengthened to support focusing ESOL on community cohesion?

Q4b) How can volunteers and the voluntary and community sector be better involved in supporting this outreach work and ESOL in general? What support will they need to do this?

Q5) What programmes/resources are currently available to support professional development for teachers and others involved in improving ESOL delivery to help the community cohesion agenda? What else might be needed?

Q6) What would incentivise employers to support the employees who have ESOL needs?

Q7) For local authorities: how will the indicative list of priority groups be applied in your area, and which other groups would you propose to make priorities in drawing up a local strategy based on the need for community cohesion?

Q8) Any other comments or suggestions not previously covered

First published May 2009
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
www.dius.gov.uk
URN 222-09-SK-ON
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