

Focusing English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) on community cohesion

The National Association of Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) is the professional association for ESOL teachers, managers, teacher trainers and researchers. This response represents the views of its members.

NATECLA agree that learning English is key to helping immigrants adjust to living, working, studying and raising a family in the UK. We believe that a major barrier to learning English for many is the lack of accessible, high quality ESOL classes from the time of arrival in the country. We are certain that more resources will be needed to fully meet the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and to make a difference to people's lives. We would wish to see more ESOL classes available for currently excluded groups, for example asylum seekers in their first six months in the country, spouses from the date of entry and others who are currently unable to access provision.

The discussion about issues of social cohesion and integration focuses on lack of English as a barrier to community cohesion, reinforced by media suggestion and inference that immigrants do not want to learn English. We believe that the opposite is the case and that many people are prevented from learning English by not being able to find and join an ESOL class. We suggest that issues of integration and community cohesion are highly complex and factors related to housing, legal status, unemployment and health are likely to impact as much as lack of English on people's lives. The ability to speak the language is not a sufficient condition for community cohesion, other factors such as racism, poverty and inequalities of power and resources will also need to be challenged.

We would like to see this consultation extended to include the voices of some of those currently attending ESOL classes, to ask ESOL learners what they perceive as the main issues relating to integration and cohesion, There also needs to be a clearer definition of the concept of community cohesion and the role of ESOL in its promotion.

Question 1

a) We have proposed an indicative list of national priorities. 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?

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? Implications for internal migration and mobility have also not been considered. If priority groups vary from area to area then a person could be eligible for provision in one area and then be refused access to provision when they move to a different area.

ESOL tuition should be for all those settled in the UK, including spouses from the date of entry, not just targeted at specific groups. It is important that fees for ESOL do not act as barrier, e.g. for spouses from the point of entry and those on low incomes. These groups have not been identified as priority groups.

The Ruth Hayman Trust (NATECLA's charity arm) has indicated it is already receiving some applications from those who cannot afford to pay the high ESOL fees charged by some colleges and members are reporting that they have to turn away women whose partners are unwilling to pay their tuition costs.

b) 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?

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? There needs to be a steer from central government to ensure that ESOL is prioritised and adequately funded. There also needs to be clear guidelines and protocols to ensure that the views of ESOL

learners and other bi-lingual, multilingual adults are reflected in local planning arrangements. Supported mechanisms for inter agency planning to link ESOL developments into other community initiatives are required.

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

Local authorities already play a role in collecting and collating information on local needs. 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

d) 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?

This is very complicated and would depend on the type of local authority, the needs within their area and how funding is ring fenced and allocated. There would need to be a higher focus on collaborative approaches between agencies. We have pointed out that the issue of community cohesion is complex and cannot be addressed by focusing on just one factor. There are differing levels of knowledge, skills and experiences of the processes needed to develop local ESOL strategies and plans and respond to the challenges entailed in local accountability. Further work is necessary to establish the mechanism for ensuring that all Local Authorities give equal priority to ESOL in their planning processes.

Funding remains an issue. Feedback from our members shows that there is already tension between national and local priorities and a conflict of interest within the current planning and funding targets between recruiting more disadvantaged learners and achieving PSA targets. LSC funding tends to be directed at Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2 whereas learners from disadvantaged groups tend to be at pre-entry, Entry 1 & 2 that do not count towards the targets although this provides an essential progression route to high level provision. There will need to be additional funding allocated to ensure that these groups are included.

There also needs to be recognition of the inter-relationship between learning for work and skills and learning for community and the importance of work place provision in community cohesion. Funding for initiatives such as Train to Gain are targeted at the Level 2 and do not provide for learners within the workplace at Entry 1 – Level 1.

e) 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?

NATECLA is not in a position to say but we would imagine this is a varied picture across the country. It would depend whether local authorities have direct delivery services or subcontract their provision and whether in fact they have any provision for ESOL at all. 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.

Question 2

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

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. We should look at 'learning' rather than just ESOL and also include other factors that impact on community cohesion. Mechanisms are needed to ensure progression - we cannot assume that there is integration just as a result of people's ability to speak the language. There needs to be closer alignment of budgets between other departments and more cross government working - a point that was raised in the NIACE Inquiry Report '*More than a Language*'. The consultation document does not make clearer the ways in which DIUS is working with other departments – particularly DCSF to encourage it to act together to maximise ESOL's key role in fostering community cohesion.

There will also need to be closer cross departmental working with DWP to heighten the impact of language development on the twin economic and social aspects of the community cohesion agenda.

It is clear that the existing LSC budget for ESOL will not be sufficient to target the most disadvantaged learners. The government has a key role to make sure that departments (both at a national and a local level) align policy, approaches, terminology and funding streams to maximise resources and

bring about a closer synergy between initiatives to address community cohesion. They also need to ensure that where funding is related to ESOL tuition, quality standards are not compromised.

Question 3

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?

This will be complex and require much detailed planning.

Question 4

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

We recognise the role of the Voluntary & Community sector in reaching learners. Properly planned progression routes and promotion of cross-departmental working should strengthen this. Outreach work also needs to take place within the public and incorporated FE sectors. There should be clear links between those involved in outreach work and ESOL providers. As new posts are being created, for example within Children Centres and Extended schools, these could be developed to support bi-lingual adults to access appropriate provision and services. However if this approach is to be successful then there needs to be an in depth understanding of how out reach work is developed across the field and appropriate training and funding provided.

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

Good multi- agency working is the key not devolvement of ESOL provision. It is difficult to have fully trained teaching staff within Voluntary & Community groups. We are now reaching a position where there are a range of good providers and improvements in the quality of ESOL provision and we should build on this. We do not want to return to a situation where provision is fragmented and quality is compromised. Quality Assurance and progression are the key. 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.

Quality and training

We recognise there will be a need to ensure quality in ESOL provision. We will ensure Initial Teacher Training and professional development for teachers and supporters of learning includes content relating to community cohesion.

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?

Initial teacher training programmes are designed to train ESOL teachers to teach across the whole sector – including workplace learning, offender learning, adult and community learning, and FE. We see professional development for promoting the community cohesion agenda as continuing professional development for teachers once they have gained their initial teaching qualification.

NATECLA provides a programme of continuing professional development and could contribute by providing training that would support teachers working in community settings.

Quality improvement grants are needed to support teachers in getting qualified and financial support to ensure that new teachers, especially those in community settings, have access to mentoring. If there is to be specific content teacher relating to community cohesion in continuing professional development then a clearer view of what is meant by 'ESOL for community cohesion' is needed.

DIUS should take up recommendation 8 of *More than a Language* report and commission a national programme to develop, test and disseminate models and materials for ESOL to support community cohesion and civic and democratic participation.

Employer Engagement

We are engaging employers in a wide range of ESOL initiatives through our developing strategy and we want to gain your views on what more we can do to promote the benefits to employers of investing in their employees who have ESOL needs.

Question 6

What would incentivise employers to support their employees who have ESOL needs?

NATECLA believes that the government should take stronger action to ensure that employers contribute to the cost of funding language provision for their workforce. Many of the larger employers are still unable or unwilling to provide language training for their staff, particularly now that fees have been introduced. However, we recognise the difficulties faced by many small employers and feel there should be financial incentives to encourage participation. However, there also needs to be an appropriate training offer and relevant qualifications. ESOL for work and Train to Gain do not meet needs in all contexts and for some learners. There is a need for programmes at E1 and E2. Trade unions have an important role to play.

Funding

NATECLA has frequently raised concerns about the funding allocated to ESOL in England. Our members have repeatedly pointed out that the funding allocation is not sufficient to meet the needs of learners, particularly those learners at Entry 1 & 2. The research is clear; families where parents have poor language skills are caught in a cycle of deprivation that impacts on the health and well being and the attainment of children. The economic benefits of breaking this cycle would clearly outweigh the investment. We would like to see a holistic approach to the development of ESOL that would improve life chances and provide high quality provision that reaches all learners.

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