

A New Approach to ESOL – An update to partners

Introduction

1. This document provides the first update setting out what is currently happening and the timeline for further work, following the publication of [A New Approach to ESOL](#), jointly made available by the department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the department of Communities and Local Government in May 2009.
2. This document is for local authorities, providers, JCP, voluntary and community organisations and other members of local strategic partnerships. It asks that consideration be given to the activities that need to take place to ensure currently excluded groups, who are a priority for local authorities, are supported into English language learning.

The New Approach to ESOL

3. The government's vision for ESOL looks to support individuals who are not currently engaging with ESOL learning, and is giving local authorities the opportunity to highlight those individuals so they can receive the support and funding required to engage them and so promote better community cohesion.
4. The key elements of the new approach are:
 - To shift the mix and balance of provision and services towards locally identified priority ESOL learners
 - To allow local authorities more say over who has priority for ESOL funding
 - To facilitate greater access to learning for those suffering social exclusion
 - To support providers who are already working on this agenda to make change, and bring providers not fully engaged on-board
5. Letters requesting LAs and providers to take action, and a copy of 'A New Approach to ESOL' were sent from the Secretaries of State for BIS and CLG, on 6 May to all local authority Chief Executives; all LSC providers; and the intended 'pathfinder' local authorities who are currently fast tracking the approach. See Annex A for list of Pathfinder areas.
6. A 'lessons learnt' document will be published in September 2009 to support roll out across all LAs. The document will aim to capture the experience of the pathfinders and show case examples of how pathfinder local authorities and partners have started to work together.

Implementation

7. There are two parts to the implementation:
 - **Pathfinders:** 31 local authorities are currently 'fast-tracking' the new approach. A list of these of areas can be found at Annex A. Their experiences will be used to inform wider roll-out across all LAs from September 2009. Workshops have been held with all pathfinder LAs to support their start to this work.
 - **Full roll out:** From September 2009, after the publication of the lessons learnt document, the government expects all local authorities to begin work to identify currently excluded groups, identify key local partners in reaching these groups, and draw together a plan of action.
 - Workshops will be offered to all LAs in September 09 to support this.
8. Pathfinders are in the early stages of implementation including agreeing timelines, milestones, and success measures. A draft timeline is at Annex B.

Funding

9. The new approach seeks to bring together all funding, that is LSC, LA and other local funding sources, to produce a co-ordinated approach to funding the services and provision required to ensure currently excluded groups can access ESOL provision.
10. There is no additional funding available for implementing the new approach and the LSC will remain responsible for allocating the current FE ESOL budget of around £300 million per annum, which forms part of the Skills for Life budget to providers.
11. It is acknowledged that public funding alone cannot be expected to meet all the demand for English Language learning. For this reason prioritisation of public funds must happen to allow those who can afford to pay to make a contribution and supporting those most in need and who show a commitment to adapting to life in the UK.
12. Providers will still be expected to provide ESOL to those learners who demand it, outside of the identified excluded groups, as we expect only a proportion of the budget to be directed towards these groups. However, those learners who are not identified as part of this exercise, may need to wait for a place to become available as the demand increased by the new approach will cause some displacement.
13. The current fee remission rules will also continue to apply to LSC funding, with standard eligibility criteria for full fee remission remaining as set out in the LSC's funding guidance. BIS has instructed the LSC to continue to add some funding to the discretionary Support Fund until at least March 2010, which supports fees for certain groups of ESOL learners. Please see the [discretionary Support Guidance](#) for more details.

LSC Role

14. BIS has commissioned the LSC, and the Skills Funding Agency beyond, to implement the new approach and to work very closely with local authorities (LAs). In summary the LSC has been commissioned to:
 - continue to allocate the FE spend on ESOL
 - support local authorities in their key role
 - ensure providers engage with local authorities and change how and to whom they deliver ESOL in line with needs of any locally identified groups.
 - develop clear communications to all key partners involved in making the new approach work.
15. An *ESOL Implementation Group* has been established with colleagues from each LSC region, who will be responsible for leading implementation in their areas, with representation from BIS and the LGA.

Local authority role

16. Local authorities have been asked to:
 - take the lead in bringing together key local partners (the LSC, providers, Jobcentre Plus, voluntary and community organisations and other members of local strategic partnerships) and identify currently excluded groups
 - share all relevant information on priority groups and local authority funded services that could be reshaped to meet their needs;

- work with the LSC and local ESOL providers to agree how to drive up demand among these priority groups and what changes could be made to provision to meet their needs; and
- with partners, ensure that all appropriate funding streams that can address the needs of the identified priority groups are considered and mobilised. This should include sources from all relevant public funds, as well as contributions from employers/individuals where appropriate.

17. Further information on roles and responsibilities for all key partners are stated in [A New Approach to ESOL](#)

Important information for:

Local Authorities (LAs) not involved in the pathfinder activity

18. Local authorities who are not part of the pathfinder activity should read '[A New Approach to ESOL](#)' document, which begins to explain the new approach with an over-view of roles and responsibilities.
19. The department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association support the new approach and are working with the department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)
20. A document that sets out more detail on the process, with lessons learnt and case studies will be published early in September, to support the wider roll-out of the new approach across all LAs. It is at this time that we would expect areas outside of the pathfinders to start in earnest implementing the new approach.
21. LAs should start to consider what local data is available to identify which groups are currently not accessing or progressing in ESOL provision; which local partners should be invited to help support this work; and look to hold a meeting with local partners in September/October.
22. Workshops will be offered to LAs in September to support roll-out. The workshops will share the approaches taken by the pathfinder LAs to help inform how to get started and make progress on the new approach.
23. Where possible we would recommend the use of existing partnership groups and structures to help this new approach become embedded within the normal annual processes. For example some pathfinders have used existing ESOL task groups, MAA thematic groups or sub groups from their Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). In Peterborough, an ESOL Operations Group has been established that feeds directly into both the Learning and Skills arm of the Local Strategic Partnership and into one of the four priorities that underpins the local Sustainable Community Strategy for Peterborough. In the West Midlands a Local Planning Group was developed from an existing group that were already meeting to discuss ESOL in Birmingham. Using an existing group has proved to be a most effective mechanism in making rapid progress.

Providers

24. Providers within the pathfinder areas are likely to be approached by LAs over the next month or so to become involved, as local partners, in meeting the needs of identified ESOL learners.
25. Providers outside of the pathfinder areas will be approached to join discussions as the wider roll out begins in September 09.

26. All LSC funded ESOL providers are encouraged to read '[A New Approach to ESOL](#)' and start to consider how they will respond to locally identified groups of learners and consider changes they will make to their provision by 2010/11.
27. The new approach is unlikely to affect funding levels to providers, certainly within the first year (2010/11); however we do expect those providers who are delivering ESOL provision to review their methods of delivery, ie more intensive delivery, delivery within the community, evening and weekend delivery for those at work etc. We also expect around 85% per cent of ESOL provision to continue to be delivered at entry level. Level 1 ESOL achievements will continue to contribute towards the PSA target.
28. Many ESOL providers already support many excluded groups to access ESOL – this approach builds on this work. Providers may be concerned that reaching out to the most excluded and hardest to reach learners, many of whom may have poor literacy skills in their first language, may have implications for their success rates and Minimum Levels of Performance. We are reviewing these areas to ensure any barriers to reaching excluded groups are minimised or removed.
29. Allocation of the FE ESOL budget to providers, around £300m each year, will remain the responsibility of the LSC. ESOL funding directed through the ALR budget, TtG, ACL, FLLN and ESF budgets is in scope.

Train to Gain providers

30. Very little ESOL is currently delivered through Train to Gain. Alongside the new approach to ESOL which seeks to empower individuals, the government is also promoting ESOL to employers to bring about greater corporate efficiency. It is expected that Train to Gain funding supports this approach to ESOL.
31. Train to Gain funding can be used in supporting the new approach to ESOL but only where the employer is involved with local partners in reaching certain groups of learners. For example, a local area may identify a specific currently excluded group and in order to reach this group the local authority may work with employers who employ them to increase take up of ESOL. In this situation Train to Gain funds could support the new approach to ESOL.

Jobcentre Plus

32. Many JCP clients have English language skills needs and their needs should be considered by local authorities and partners. There is an expectation that there will often be an overlap between locally identified priority learners and JCP clients. JCP should feed the needs of their clients into local planning discussions. JCP have a special role when employability or progression to employability is identified as an outcome in the local action plan.
33. JCP partners should read '[A New Approach to ESOL](#)' in the first instance and contact their LA or LSC contact to find out about activity in their area.

Other local partners

34. Other interested partners, particularly those with a role in local strategic partnerships, should read '[A New Approach to ESOL](#)', which begins to explain the new approach with an overview of roles and responsibilities
35. If you are within the pathfinder area, contact your local authority or LSC contact to find out what action is taking place in your area.

36. If you are outside the pathfinder areas, look out for the lessons learnt document that will be published in September, after which your local authority will begin action.

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

37. The new approach seeks to engage the voluntary and community organisations in terms of working with partners to resolve the barriers many excluded groups are likely to face in engaging with ESOL learning. VCS organisations are expert in engaging and winning the confidence of specific, often excluded, groups. To find out more read '[A New Approach to ESOL](#)'.

38. VCS organisations, relevant to this work, will be approached as part of the local authorities work in identifying key local partners and bringing them together.

39. If you are within the pathfinder area you can contact your local authority or LSC contact to find out what action is taking place in your area.

40. If you are outside the pathfinder areas, look out for the lessons learnt document that will be published in September 2009, after which your local authority will begin action.

Further information

41. For further information contact your LSC contact or the ESOL webpage at <http://www.lsc.gov.uk/whatwedo/adultlearner/> which holds links to a number of useful documents.

Annex A - Pathfinder areas

Pathfinder area	LSC region
Newcastle	NE
Greater Manchester LAs	NW
Manchester City	NW
Salford	NW
Bradford	Y&H
Leeds	Y&H
Derby	EM
Lincolnshire	EM
Leicester	EM
Birmingham City	WM
Peterborough	EE
Slough	SE
Bristol	SW
London West Hounslow	LON
London West Ealing	LON
London Central Islington	LON
London Central Camden	LON
London Central Westminster	LON
London Central Kensington & Chelsea	LON
London Central Southwark	LON
London Central Lambeth	LON
London Central Wandsworth	LON

Annex B - The timeline

Pathfinder		National roll out	
Key Milestone	Deadline	Key Milestone	Deadline
Workshops for all pathfinder LAs to kick start activity	17 June 2009		
LAs identify priority groups with local partners	July to Sept 2009	Lessons learnt published to support national roll-out	Early Sept 2009
LAs, in consultation with local partners, produce Local Action Plan (covering where possible 09/10, but aiming for roll out in 10/11)	Sept to Nov 2009	Workshops offered to LAs to support national roll-out	Sept 2009
Service and learning providers implement any changes possible in 09/10	Sept 2009	LAs identify priority groups with local partners	Sept to Nov 2009
LSC publishes commissioning documents for 10/11 [still to be agreed]	Nov 2009	LAs produce Local Action Plan for 10/11 in consultation with local partners	Dec 2009
Changes to ESOL services and provision for 10/11 planned by service and provision providers	Jan/Feb 2010	Changes to ESOL services and provision for 10/11 planned by service and provision providers	Jan/Feb 2010
Changed services and provision implemented	Aug 2010	Changed services and provision implemented	Aug 2010