

London Colleges' response to ESOL Funding policy changes



Leading learning and skills

From Annual Statement of Priorities 07/08

The 20 largest FE providers of ESOL in London were consulted by the LSC to:

- describe key issues facing them in relation to ESOL in 06/07
- quantify the impact on learners and provision of the LSC policy changes for 07/08 in respect of SfL, with the emphasis again on ESOL.

In terms of provision they represent 70% of London's ESOL provision 04/05 (£119.5m ESOL funding).

06/07 Key issues faced in relation to ESOL

The most overwhelming issue facing providers this year and expected to be no different next year is the sheer volume of demand and how best to manage this. Demand is greatest at Entry 1 and Entry 2 and includes increasing requests for ESOL for citizenship.

Providers also feel that the sector would benefit from public recognition by the department of the quality improvements providers have made over last 2 years: moving to NQF provision, meeting PSA targets, improved success rates and ALI inspections.

07/08 Policy changes

London colleges always endeavour to respond quickly to government/LSC requirements and in the case of ESOL provision these have been ongoing for the last 3 years. As much as anyone they understand the issues with provision and are alert to 'unintended consequences'. They would welcome the opportunity in the future to contribute to policy discussions at the earliest stage.

There is a good understanding of the intention of the changes, in seeking to redirect public funding towards those with greatest need. However there is great concern of unintended consequences.

ESOL no longer attracting automatic fee remission – there is a strong belief that this will make no savings in ESOL spend nor target provision better on priority groups. Those that will be hardest hit will be the low paid and those unwaged not in receipt of benefits - specifically women carers. This latter group is additionally being hit by the reduction in learner support funds impacting on child care support. So this harder to reach group would be required to pay towards both their course and also the childcare provision to enable them to attend.

A further potential unintended consequence is the barrier this will raise for those with little or no English, in understanding that they may still be eligible for free provision.

Withdrawal of funding for asylum seekers 19+

There is general concern on this measure and its impact on the social inclusion agenda, and very real concern that this will be damaging to colleges' relationships with their local communities.

There was strong support for the idea that there could be a system for entitlement to learning once the Home Office 8 week period has elapsed even where the asylum request has not been processed and particularly where people are in the dispersal system.

New ESOL international quals

There was concern that the FE sector has not been engaged properly in the development of these qualifications. This is a missed opportunity in getting the qualifications right. There has been no indication of when the qualifications might be available even in draft form and yet providers are expected to deliver from September 2007. There was a question about whether a need for these qualifications has been established and whether QCA has issued any guidance about these and where they will sit with existing international qualifications. There is concern that this may be a re-badging of the former EFL-type quals which are not considered appropriate at Entry level. There may also be an unintended consequence of learners being attracted to these international qualifications rather than target bearing ESOL SFL qualifications.

Employers who recruit outside the UK to bear full costs of ESOL training

Providers support this with this decision but are interested to know how it can be implemented. Colleges are unclear how they can do so and will probably be unaware of this situation when enrolling learners. Further thought might need to be given to the sectors where this will most impact (e.g. NHS) and the role of the Sector Skills Councils.

At L1 and L2 only approved qualifications will be eligible for funding

London Providers have already implemented this measure following London LSC regional SFL guidance over the last 2 years.

LSC office

Learning and Skills Council London Region
Centre Point 103 New Oxford Street London WC1A 1DR
T 0845 019 4144 F 020 7896 8686 www.lsc.gov.uk/