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Review of English for Speakers of Other Languages in the City of Manchester Executive Summary

Commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council
Greater Manchester

Margaret Davey
Judith Summers

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Executive Summary

Background to the Review

The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Review was commissioned in September 2007 as a sequel to the Literacy and Numeracy Review that had been undertaken earlier in the year.

The aims of the Review were to:

- Consider how the provision of ESOL contributes to the LSC's priorities.
- Assess the impact on employability and the worklessness agenda and also on social cohesion and children's learning.
- Comment on the coherence and relevance of provision.
- Identify progression, gaps, duplication, provision not fit for purpose, shortages or capability issues.
- Comment on quality and value for money.

The project involved desk work on reports relating to the city's post-19 provision, examination of LSC and local data, interviews with stakeholders and experts, visits to providers, focus groups of learners and discussions with employers.

A Steering Group was appointed to approve the specification of the project, receive reports of emerging findings and advise on recommendations. The Steering Group was chaired by Peter Lavender, Associate Director of NIACE, and a national expert in ESOL from NIACE was commissioned to advise on the research strategy, prepare a curriculum brief on the subject and to give comments on the draft report.

The Review was influenced by national as well as local considerations. National considerations included the Leitch Report on world class skills; the National Inquiry into ESOL 'More than a Language...'; the change in government policy regarding the payment of fees for ESOL learners, arising from the recent rapid growth in spending on ESOL and the recent consultation document *Focusing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) on Community Cohesion (Jan 2008 DIUS)*.

Local factors included the City's Operational Plan, arising from the Great Manchester City Strategy, the LSC's Statement of Priorities and the City's work to promote social cohesion. The local context for the Review was the contrast between the City's economic growth and skills needs and its ranking as the third most deprived local authority district in England, with some of the highest concentration of crime, poor health and worklessness in the country.

ESOL in the City of Manchester

The study of demographic data drew on a range of sources to consider the levels of need and potential need. It revealed that the profile of ESOL needs may alter rapidly and is spread geographically across the City. Numbers of workers from Eastern Europe continue to increase and their retention and best use of their skills has implications for ESOL provision. The number of asylum seekers may remain static or reduce. Dependants of new arrivals also have ESOL needs. There is a backlog of unmet needs in the settled communities. The predominant unmet need is for entry level 1 and 2 provision. Overall meeting ESOL needs is likely to have a long-term impact on social cohesion.

The report analyses the delivery of ESOL, noting limitations in the information base. The bulk of provision is delivered by City College, Manchester College of Arts and Technology and Manchester Adult Education Service, all with high volumes of provision. In addition, ESOL is delivered through Work Solutions (a not for profit organisation set up by Greater Manchester Local Authorities), Learndirect (University for Industry), Jobcentre Plus and a wide range of community provision. The latter access a range of largely short-term funding sources, of which European Social Fund is the most significant.

Findings

Need/demand

- Whilst current baseline data to assess need is not available, there are other sources of information available to inform planning.
 - There is considerable unmet demand at pre-entry and entry levels 1 and 2. Many providers use up their funding allocations early in the academic year and are therefore unable to respond to new needs. There is an identified need to offer 'just in time' provision for new asylum seekers and a latent need for ESOL among the settled communities, particularly women and some older people.
 - Numbers of migrant workers are increasing and some arriving with families. Skills are under-utilised and there is unmet demand in the workplace.
 - ESOL learners are highly motivated; however, childcare and travel costs are a barrier.
 - There is a tension between providers' performance measures, such as retention and accreditation, and learners' needs that may be focussed on employment.
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- The introduction of fees does not appear to have had a major impact because many Manchester learners are eligible for fee remission. Nevertheless there is a lack of transparency about the application of learner support funds.
- Although not part of the study, a concern about the level of performance in English by some groups at the secondary school phase is mentioned as having implications for employment and for post-19 ESOL provision in the future.

Learners' Views

- Learners' have multiple motives for learning including employment.
- Finding provision is a confusing and difficult process, with family and friends playing an important part.
- Timing and location of courses and childcare are important.
- Learners are pleased with the quality of their experience but want more speaking, listening and experiential learning.
- Learners are strongly committed to progressing to vocational courses, employment or higher education.

Structural/organisational

- The ESOL offer is not coherent or well-signposted and there is no single source of information. Providers largely work in isolation from each other. The main providers offer appropriate Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) at point of entry but there is no over-arching IAG or support for transition between providers or into work.
 - There is little progression information and tracking between providers is virtually non-existent.
 - Schools, in particular primary schools and Children's Centres have great potential to contribute to ESOL and family language but the level of understanding about ESOL needs is variable.
 - Community organisations are critical to the engagement of learners, particularly at the lower levels. However, their reliance on short-term funding can result in them 'holding on' to learners.
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- Jobcentre Plus provision is not co-ordinated with other provision and learners going on to New Deal mid course are not able to complete their accreditation.

Employers

- Employers are beginning to recognise the need for ESOL, though more in relation to the direct needs of the job rather than a wider responsibility.
- Trade Unions and the Union Learning Fund provide a valuable response to ESOL needs.
- Some employers avoid the need for ESOL by providing translations and, in one case, supervisors who speak the predominant language of the workforce. There is evidence that new arrivals' skills are not fully used.
- Employers are confused by current arrangements for funding ESOL.
- Colleges are viewed as more flexible than they were, but shift work and small employers present a problem of small groups which are costly. There is good practice in designing programmes for specific work areas, e.g. Transport and Care.
- Public sector organisations are well placed to offer work experience and language support.

Capacity

- High levels of demand in the autumn preclude targeted responses later in the year. More daytime and week-end ESOL provision is needed.
 - Statutory and voluntary agencies working with potential ESOL learners are insufficiently utilised. They need more information about the ESOL offer.
 - There is no clear view of the capacity-building needs of organisations in the voluntary and community sector.
 - Organisations are not well equipped to encourage progression, particularly in the voluntary sector, nor are they supported by the funding arrangements.
 - There is a shortage of ESOL tutors, particularly for the workplace. There are good practice examples of training learning representatives and the use of ex-learners as tutors or volunteers.
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Programme Development

- There are divergent views about length and intensity of provision. But there is agreement that delivery needs to be flexible with more daytime and week-end courses.
- There is evidence of good practice in designing provision for progress but this is not shared.
- Contextualised and work-related ESOL are successful and there is some innovative programmes including employability. Most courses include citizenship.
- There are good examples of practice beyond the classroom which are important for community cohesion and are valued by learners.
- The emphasis on achieving full qualifications which contribute to Skills for Life targets does not reflect learners' priorities and can impede progression; it is felt that the system is over-rigid.
- Family language learning provides a good entry point for some learners with planned progression routes. However, other community provision does not always maximise ESOL learning or lead to progression.
- There is limited use of e-learning and blended learning.

Recommendations

Strategic

- ESOL should be part of an overarching strategy for Skills for Life, led by the Skills Board and linked to the City Council's Operational Plan in order to link it to both the economic regeneration and the community cohesion agendas. The strategy should agree priorities, coordinate funding streams, use district-based delivery plans, clarify roles and responsibilities of providers and include provision for innovation.
 - Planning for ESOL should be based on an active working relationship between providers and agencies working directly with potential learners.
 - Priorities for funding should focus on the needs of the settled communities, including recent arrivals.
 - The City Council should identify funding sources for engagement and employment pathways that cannot be supported by the LSC.
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- There should be a common approach for allocating support from the Discretionary Learner Support Fund.
- The roles and responsibilities for voluntary and community organisations should be agreed and as a basis for eligibility for funding. Funding should be informed by the principles of the voluntary sector compact.
- In its work with employers, the City Council should encourage the business for improving ESOL among the workforce, using models of good practice.
- The City Council should encourage schools, particularly primary schools to contribute to family language and ESOL needs.
- ESOL needs should be addressed in the LSC/Jobcentre Plus (JCP) joint commissioning plan.

Organisational

- The Skills Board should ensure a lead is taken to introduce a partnership mechanism in order to share information; define roles and responsibilities, co-ordinate responses to priorities; create partnerships for progression and capacity building.
- The LSC should consider the feasibility of a central mechanism to make information coherent and accessible. The next step would be a centralised assessment and placement service as modelled in other cities.
- Providers and advisers should share good practice in how evidence for eligibility for ESOL and fee remission is interpreted and use this to train admissions teams.

Programme Development

- A welcome pack should be prepared for new arrivals, including survival English, signposting and advice on further information, plus training for front-line staff.
 - The East Manchester Home tuition project should be extended to other districts as a first step to bringing learners into local ESOL provision.
 - There should be more 'embedded' provision in both vocational programmes and other activity contributing to community cohesion.
 - Workplace-related ESOL should be expanded to support the transition to work, work placement and work experience.
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- JCP should work with contractors and providers to ensure those entering New Deal can complete their qualification.
- The LSC should consider piloting new means of delivering ESOL within Train to Gain.
- Best practice on tracking progress, transition to work, and tackling drop-out should be shared to improve transfer between providers.
- Innovative approaches, including e-learning, should be shared. To enable this and support a “prospectus” of all provision, there should be an agreement on common terminology to describe ESOL provision.
- Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) should be funded to extend language learning within the Family Learning programmes, working with Children’s Services to target areas of need.

Capacity

- The Learning and Skills Employment Network should be developed to enable capacity-building across the City for both the main providers and the voluntary and community sector.
 - Once the role of the Voluntary and Community Services (VCS) organisations has been agreed, their training needs should be audited and consideration given to how these are met, possibly through forthcoming eligibility in Train to Gain.
 - ESOL as a career choice should be promoted. More Family Language tutors should be trained. There should also be training for vocational and ESOL tutors in embedded provision. Advanced ESOL learners should be used to support community-based provision with appropriate training, accompanied by a volunteer support programme.
 - Work with employers and trade unions should include raising ESOL awareness. A programme to train workplace ESOL trainers should be organised.
 - City Council and other public sector bodies should train key workers in customer-facing departments to recognise ESOL needs and understand how they can help with referrals.
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**Learning and Skills Council
North West**

Arndale House
Arndale Centre
Manchester M4 3AQ
T 0845 019 4142
E grmanchesterinfo@lsc.gov.uk
www.lsc.gov.uk

If you would like a copy of this brochure
in any other format, including large print
please contact LSC North West on
0161 261 0424

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