



Towards an **ESOL** **strategy** for England

Introduction

This document is intended primarily for policymakers and funders not just in the field of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) itself but in other sectors such as employment services, health services, combined authorities, and Local Enterprise Partnerships. It outlines why England needs a strategy for ESOL and contains a range of proposals. It represents a consensus of views across a wide range of ESOL stakeholders, from practitioners and learners to awarding bodies and trade unions.

Over the past few years there have been repeated calls for a strategy for ESOL in England. England lags behind Wales and Scotland, who already have strategies (ESOL Policy for Wales 2014¹ and Welcoming our Learners: Scotland's ESOL strategy 2007 and 2015²). In 2014 Britain's cross party think-tank, Demos, produced a significant and comprehensive report on ESOL, 'On Speaking Terms'³, which concluded that a national ESOL strategy for England would be a key measure to 'help to unlock migrant capabilities, save costs to public services in the long term and promote a more integrated and socially cohesive society'. Demos' call has been endorsed by a number of stakeholders, including NATECLA, the Learning and Work Institute⁴, HOLEX⁵, Refugee Action⁶ and Cambridge English⁷. As Alan Tuckett of the International Council for Adult Education has written, '...we need the political will to recognise the importance of investing in ESOL to include everyone in our democracy'⁸. Yet ultimately, and despite politicians' apparent recognition of the importance of learning English, there has been a lack of political will to create a strategic framework for ESOL.

NATECLA has taken the lead to produce this strategy document, which has been informed by various reports and articles, as well as the Scottish and Welsh strategies, and the ESOL Manifesto (2012).

NATECLA put out a range of draft proposals for consultation between February and July 2016 and obtained feedback from a wide range of individuals and organisations. You can find a summary of the consultation process and findings in section 3 and a more detailed report on the NATECLA website⁹.

The publication of this draft strategy comes at a time when:

- immigration is a major issue in the public perception
- there are uncertainties about the future implications of the BREXIT vote, which may have a negative impact in terms of funding for learners and for research.
- integration of communities is a key part of government strategy
- the government plans to devolve the Adult Education Budget to local areas and this could well provide an excellent opportunity for a more joined-up approach to planning and delivering local ESOL provision.

There is a growing evidence base that 'ESOL works': recent government research, for example, found clear returns to ESOL learning in terms of increased earnings for those who had attended ESOL classes¹⁰. Learner testimonies and other evidence in recent reports by Refugee Action, Demos, the Greater London Authority and others show the clear benefits of language learning for individuals, communities and the wider economy.

In 1979 the very first NATECLA newsletter outlined the main objectives of the organisation. The third objective, never achieved, was to produce 'a policy document on the needs of ESOL so that local authorities can be persuaded into providing a more comprehensive service and so that the anomalies in provision between one area and another can be ironed out'.

We hope that now, nearly four decades later, this goal will at last become a reality and we will have laid the cornerstone for flexible, high quality ESOL provision that will benefit ESOL learners and our wider society for decades to come.

Jenny Roden and James Cupper

NATECLA Co-chairs, October 2016.

¹ ESOL Policy for Wales 2014 <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/140619-esol-policy-en.pdf>

² Welcoming our Learners: Scotland's ESOL strategy 2015-2020 http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/ESOLStrategy2015to2020_tcm4-855848.pdf

³ Demos (2014) On Speaking Terms <http://www.demos.co.uk/project/on-speaking-terms/>

⁴ In January 2016 NIACE merged with the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to form the Learning and Work Institute.

⁵ Sue Pember (2015) 'Why England is crying out for a national ESOL policy'.

⁶ Refugee Action (2016) Let Refugees Learn. Challenges and Opportunities to Improve Language Provision to Refugees in England.

⁷ Nick Saville (2015) Making a strong case for ESOL investment.

⁸ Alan Tuckett (2014) 'A Vital Conversation Everyone Should Join' *Times Educational Supplement*, 31.10.2014

⁹ <http://www.natecla.org.uk/content/631/ESOL-Strategy-for-England>

¹⁰ BIS (2016) Returns to Maths and English Learning (at Level 2 and below) in Further Education.

Section 1 - Summary

The main aim of this document is to make a case for an ESOL strategy for England. Section 2 describes the key features of ESOL and why we need a strategy. Section 3 gives details of the consultation which NATECLA undertook to inform this document. The proposals below are those options which were preferred by most of the respondents to the consultation.

NATECLA believes that having a strategy would be cost effective and would utilise resources which have already been developed. Among other things, it would

- target limited financial resources where they are most needed
- improve the language skills of those who are seeking or in employment
- utilise the skills of the many well-qualified migrants who are currently in low-paid work
- enable people from minority communities to participate more fully in society, leading to greater integration and less opportunity for isolation
- promote physical and mental health and well-being by developing people's language skills and confidence
- enable parents from minority communities to better support their children's education in school.

Respondents to the consultation called for:

1. Funding and entitlement

- 1.1 Provision to be free at the point of delivery not only for people who are unemployed, but also for:
 - people in receipt of other benefits not related to unemployment
 - beginner learners of English at Pre-Entry and Entry 1
 - those with low literacy levels in their first language
 - new arrivals such as spouses and asylum seekers
- 1.2 national funding arrangements which enable local demand for ESOL to be met including sufficient hours and cultural orientation where appropriate
- 1.3 additional costs of learning e.g. childcare, travel, examination fees etc to be publicly funded where this represents a barrier to learning
- 1.4 incentives to encourage employers to support employees with ESOL needs.

2. Monitoring and co-ordination - national

- 2.1 a national panel to lead the co-ordination of all aspects of the strategy, including the need for coherent approaches to language needs across key services such as health, schools and social services
- 2.2 ESOL to be a key strand of the strategies and programmes of other agencies in England, including their digital inclusion strategies
- 2.3 a curriculum and learning resources to be provided by central government via a national website such as the Excellence Gateway
- 2.4 professional development routes for ESOL practitioners to be maintained and improved, using on-line options where appropriate. A range of teaching qualifications from initial to advanced to be available, accessible and affordable

- 2.5 research in the ESOL field to be supported and extended, with opportunities for practitioners to take part
- 2.6 appropriate and affordable mechanisms for the overseas qualifications and experience of learners to be recognised and validated.

3. Monitoring and co-ordination - local

- 3.1 local hubs for mapping provision and signposting learners (See case studies on pages 6 and 7 of this document)
- 3.2 forums/partnerships of ESOL stakeholders- including learners, representatives of minority groups, ESOL providers, schools and other agencies to be set up in the local areas. The aim would be to plan and monitor local ESOL provision and share knowledge, expertise and resources.

4. Proposals for providers

- 4.1 collaboration between providers and wider partners to deliver classes, support and guidance on progression pathways in an integrated way which meets learner needs
- 4.2 flexible provision that harnesses new technologies and uses a range of innovative models to deliver learning, including vocational and blended options
- 4.3 all levels to be catered for, including Pre-Entry
- 4.4 learners to be involved in designing programmes that are relevant to their need. This could be related to, for example, family, education/training and/or employment
- 4.5 providers to support and encourage teachers from BME backgrounds.



Section 2 – Background to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

This section has two aims: to set out key features of ESOL and to provide a rationale for a national strategy for England. It covers information on aspects such as migration data, motivation, language levels and progression and funding.

Definition of ESOL

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is the term used to describe English language learning opportunities for adult learners who are 16 years or older. The provision is aimed at long-term residents in the UK who need to develop their English language skills so that they can operate more effectively and progress in society and employment. Learners attend programmes provided by adult education services, further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, the voluntary sector and training providers. Most are on ESOL programmes with English as the main learning goal, but increasing numbers work towards vocational and academic qualifications, GCSEs and functional skills qualifications.

The figures

This section sets out key information on migration.

- The number of migrants has increased significantly: from 3.7m in 2001 to 7.5m in the last census of 2011

2011 Census data			
Country	Population	Of which born abroad ¹	
England & Wales	56.1m	7.5m	13%

- A multiplicity of nationalities and languages are represented in the census data. The top three non-UK countries of birth were all majority non-English speaking: India: 694k, Poland: 579k, and Pakistan: 482k

- 726,000 people (1.3%) reported that they could not speak English well and 138,000 people (0.3%) that they could not speak English at all. However, the self-identification of the ability to speak English is likely to be an understatement of need: according to the census, 2.4m people in 2001 and 5.7m in 2011 were born in countries where English is not the first language. The OECD's Settling in Study (2012)¹ shows that 47% of migrants arriving in the UK in 2009-10 had a tertiary qualification; and that the proportion of graduate migrants increased by 12% between 2001 and 2010. This is a remarkable shift which calls for a discussion about how we support well-qualified migrants so that their skills and talents benefit society and the economy.

Motivation to learn English

Many people settling in the UK are highly motivated to learn English. Several studies on migrants and refugees such as Schellekens (2001)² found that the prime reason for learners wanting to learn English was to find employment. Learners also cited interaction with other people and managing everyday transactions with ease. New arrivals often have frequent contact with official bodies, such as employment and welfare offices. People with minimal English often find it awkward and at times distressing to be dependent on interpreters, friends or even their own children to discuss private matters. ESOL learners frequently cite breaking this dependency as a high priority for their learning³.

Timely access to English

Research has found that those who have lived in the UK for five years or less make more rapid progress than settled residents who access English for the first time³. It is thus important that people learn English as soon as possible after arriving in the UK. However, not all learners come to ESOL classes straight away. Recent research by Refugee Action has highlighted the barriers to provision that asylum seekers face. They are not allowed access to English language classes for six months and then are only eligible for co-funded provision (50%).

¹ OECD (2012). Settling In: OECD Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2012. OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264171534-en>

² Schellekens, P. (2001). English as a Barrier to Employment, Education & Training. London: DfES

³ Baynham M, Roberts C et al (2007) ESOL: effective teaching and learning. NRDC: London

As they have no income beyond very basic state support, it is almost impossible for them to pay fees. Refugee Action argue that removing eligibility restrictions would “support their integration from the day they make their claim.”⁵ Other learners, such as those who come to the UK as a spouse, or for family reunion, face eligibility restrictions which mean that they are treated as international students for up to three years. This means they are subject to international student fees, which few can afford, and motivation is likely to be affected as this is highest at the point of arrival. Without immediate access to ESOL, learners are more likely to become dependent on coping strategies, such as relying on friends and family, using interpreting services, or becoming isolated from the wider community.

Language and literacy levels

The language levels, work skills and education of adult migrants vary tremendously, ranging from those with no prior education and/or English language skills to those who are highly educated and speak English very well indeed. This calls for a variety of programmes to meet the variety of learner needs effectively.

Teaching literacy to new readers and writers is particularly challenging as they are learning to read and write for the first time, as adults, and in a new language and a new script. At the other end of the spectrum, skilled migrants who find work in their new country tend to be employed below their professional level and may remain in this position for years. Language is not the only barrier; people sometimes lack the cultural knowledge and contacts to find suitable jobs and perform well in interviews.

Migration status

The term ‘migrants’ covers a wide spectrum of people. Those most likely to attend ESOL classes are refugees, asylum seekers, people from Commonwealth countries or EU citizens. They may have been in the country for many years or be newly arrived.

A substantial proportion of people arrive in the context of family reunion: for example, reunion accounted for 68% of third country nationals’ migration in 2010⁶.

Gender

Two thirds of ESOL students are female. Migration and asylum affect women in different ways to men, and this extends to their experience of ESOL. A lack of access to childcare is a particularly acute problem for women with young children who wish to attend ESOL classes. Consequently their learning may happen in a piecemeal way over a longer period of time. Many are motivated to enrol in an ESOL class because they wish to support their children’s education but may not have access to family learning programmes that would help them do so. For more information on the difficulties facing migrant and refugee women in accessing ESOL support see the report ‘Empowerment Through Education: Women Breaking the English Barrier’ (2016)⁷.

Progression

Learners arrive in the UK with a wide variety of skills and learning needs. Since many need to attend more than one type of provision in order to progress, co-ordination between providers is needed. Yet, information regarding ESOL provision is scarce and can often be inaccurate or out of date. Key transition points are between secondary school and adult ESOL, and from ESOL to vocational training and academic education. For successful and sustained learning, routes both into ESOL and from ESOL to other areas of education, training and employment, need to be meaningful, clear and coordinated. This is certainly an area for development.

The two case studies which follow exemplify how information and guidance promotes effective placement and progression.

⁵ Refugee Action (2016) Let Refugees Learn. Challenges and Opportunities to Improve Language Provision to Refugees in England.

⁶ Control of Immigration report (2010).

⁷ Wonder Foundation Empowerment Through Education: Women Breaking the English Barrier (2016). <http://wonderfoundation.org.uk/RefugeeESOLReport>

Case Study



LEARNING ENGLISH IN LEEDS

What is LEL?

It is a website <https://www.lel.help> where providers can input their own information and anyone can access the site to look for an English class in Leeds.

Who are involved?

LEL is the first project under the umbrella of the Migrant English Support Hub (MESH), a consortium of learning providers and other stakeholders set up to support adult migrants as they make a new life in Leeds. MESH is made up of representatives from the University, Leeds City Council, the refugee training advisory service, Leeds City College, ESOL providers in the voluntary sector and the director of a private English college. The aim is to nurture an attitude of working together and supporting each other, rather than competing against each other.

When was LEL established?

In 2010, when the Leeds ESOL Audit Project, funded by Leeds City Council, found a mis-match between ESOL need and provision. MESH was set up to support the council in meeting its ESOL coordination responsibility and the LEL project study took place in the same year.

What did the 2010 project study find?

The study found that patterns of ESOL provision, funding and attendance were complex, and pertained beyond the neighbourhood boundaries to the city as a whole.

The general picture was one of fragmented ESOL provision locally and city-wide, in urgent need of coordination. One of the results of this research was the development of the website.

How is it funded?

Funding has come from a variety of sources during the course of the project. For example the University of Leeds paid for the evaluation study; a seedbed trust and Leeds City Council has kept the development worker in post, and the council's Refugee Welfare Fund has been used to develop the website. The current funding will keep us going until mid December 2016. The partners seek funding grants and also look to market the website concept to other cities.

What has been the impact?

LEL has enabled clear signposting of learners to English providers around the city. It enables the staff at the FE college to give students hope of interim ESOL provision while on a waiting list. Advisors and students themselves can use the site to look for information. LEL does not offer face to face support themselves, lel.help is a tool to be used by advisors when signposting learners. It has promoted joined up networking of provision in Leeds. There are still, it seems, not enough classes and more funding is certainly needed. But at least LEL has allowed available provision to be visible and easily found through the website.

Case Study



What is BEGIN?

BEGIN (Basic Educational Guidance in Nottinghamshire) offers a central advice and placement service for ESOL and Functional Skills across the Nottingham area. Each year it supports almost 4,000 adults over 16+ years, to find the right course - at the right level, time, location and cost that fits with work, childcare and other commitments. It matches the status of the client in terms of eligibility, income and additional learning needs with available courses. ESOL now represents 90% of BEGIN's work. In addition to referring by appointment, BEGIN also keeps records of each client's enrolment details and progress.

When was BEGIN established and how is it funded?

Established in 1982, BEGIN has survived with the support of countless stakeholders and through the ability to adapt to changing demands. In addition to significant funding from local colleges, an estimated £1.9 million has been sourced through many external bids and used to develop both ESOL and Functional Skills and the BEGIN service itself. However currently, with the imminent merger of BEGIN's two major funders, New College and Central College Nottingham, and annual trading deficits of £22K, it is forced to plan further cuts to 4.3 FTE staff whilst lobbying for wider and more permanent investment to protect its impartial work in the conurbation.

Is it only a signposting service?

No. BEGIN offers a 'staged' approach, giving people a range of opportunities while they are waiting for formal courses including: 30 conversation groups, online learning, unaccredited community courses and help with barriers like childcare, benefits and job search.

This approach has resulted in an increase in the range of courses available in Nottingham at a time when other cities have cut it. Nevertheless, 1483 people were waiting for assessment in June 2016.

Key features include:

- a central web-based client/contacts/course database (hosted by the City Council)
- coherent publicity and awareness-raising for referring organisations
- mapping of courses, conversation groups and relevant external services.

What are the advantages of a service like BEGIN?

- The single ESOL 'gateway' cuts waste and saves cost. It avoids, for example, multiple enquiries from learners and referring agencies to multiple providers of ESOL
- The system is fair, offering available spaces to people who have waited longest
- Effective screening and targeting learners to the right courses maximises limited provision
- Unique reporting of 'live' data and supply issues helps address duplication, gaps and inconsistent policy
- Wide networks allow large-scale communication of data, policy and good practice.

Partnership work levers additional or shared resources to address common priorities such as employment or integration. Examples of this are BEGIN's joint work with the Job Centre Plus, colleges, and children's centres.

www.begin.org.uk

Funding and provision

1 Impact on providers

ESOL has often been characterised by long waiting lists, indicating that funding has never been sufficient to meet demand, even at the height of state-funded ESOL in 2006 when ESOL enrolments peaked at 500,000⁸. Since then the sector has seen substantial reductions, while the number of migrants and refugees has doubled in the last ten years. The total Skills Budget funding for ESOL has halved from £203m in 2009/10 to £104m in 2014/15⁹. Demos' analysis of SFA data showed that the reductions in the Adult Skills Budget (since 2015- Adult Education Budget) have had a disproportionate impact on ESOL funding.

The effect of the funding cuts is visible in the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) table below which sets out enrolment between 2007/08 and 2011/12.



Level	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12	
	Full Year	Full Year	Full Year	% change 08/09 to 09/10	Full Year	% change 09/10 to 10/11	Full Year	% change 10/11 to 11/12
Total Learners (Participation)	1,312,100	1,449,800	1,430,600	-1.3%	1,471,300	-2.8%	1,538,300	-4.6%
ESOL (Participation)	207,400	203,000	192,400	-5.2%	176,000	-8.6%	150,900	-14.2%

SFA reports also show that enrolments in 2014/15 had fallen further to 131,000¹⁰.

The manner of the cuts has also been problematic. Lack of timely information and insufficient notice of major policy changes have had significant impacts on providers' ability to plan ESOL provision effectively. For example the sudden cancellation of £45m mandated ESOL funding for 2015-16, announced six weeks before the start of the new academic year. This decision had a considerably negative impact on providers who were already having to cope with cuts elsewhere in the adult skills budget.

In addition to SFA funding for accredited ESOL, the SFA Community Learning budget (now combined with the

Adult Skills Budget into the new single Adult Education Budget) has also funded ESOL provision. This provision has been mostly unaccredited and delivered by Local Authority adult education services in community-based family learning settings. The recent funding changes mean that Community Learning is no longer ring-fenced. Providers will have greater flexibility to offer non-qualification courses, but it remains to be seen how this will affect community and family language provision.

In addition, the sector also receives short-term funding from time to time, eg the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) announced, in 2013, a £6m competition to develop 'innovative and financially sustainable' community-based English language initiatives.

⁸ Paget and Stevenson (2014) *On Speaking Terms*, p.38. Please note that SFA reports in enrolments rather than individuals participating in provision.

⁹ BIS, Parliamentary Question HL5306 <http://www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/lords/2016-01-21/HL5306>

¹⁰ Skills Funding Agency Statistical First Release

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535589/SFR_commentary_June_2016_final_ofqual_update.pdf

Women from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali communities were amongst the target groups identified because they had self-reported the lowest levels of fluency¹¹. In early 2016, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron MP, announced a further £20m as an extension of the DCLG funding, with the new programme for 2016/17. Recently the Home Office has made available an additional £10m over the next five years to fund intensive ESOL classes for Syrian refugees.

While, of course, these initiatives are welcome and many provide short-term benefit, the long-term impact is unclear and even very successful programmes are vulnerable due to the lack of commitment to longer term funding to sustain the provision.

2 Impact on learners and society

People who want to learn English find that both the entitlement to learning and the number of places have dramatically reduced. Currently, the only people who are entitled to free state-funded ESOL provision are those in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance or Employment Support Allowance, or young 16-19 ESOL learners who are supported by the Education Funding Agency.

Learners who fall outside these categories are expected to make a financial contribution of 50% of course costs, even if they find it hard to make ends meet. Early NIACE research into the effects of the eligibility changes found that low-paid workers, asylum seekers and women with caring responsibilities, i.e those who could not claim eligibility on the grounds that they were seeking employment, were particularly badly affected¹².

Some providers have used their discretionary power to waive fees for learners who are unable to pay fees. However, the cuts in adult education make this increasingly difficult. As a result, many learners can simply not afford to attend ESOL classes. By contrast, adult literacy and numeracy learning remain freely available to all.

This lack of parity appears inequitable when ESOL learners have UK citizenship or are entitled to reside in this country and intend to do so long-term. In addition, learners of ESOL have similar, if not greater, needs to people whose first language is English. From an economic perspective it costs the state a great deal of money to provide housing and benefits to people who are unemployed or in low-paid jobs and who, with the right language skills, would be able to make a greater contribution to society and the economy. With some well-targeted language learning, it could be argued that a much higher percentage of second language speakers could become net tax contributors. And lastly, the lack of entitlement to ESOL for adult learners in England contrasts sharply with the support offered in other UK nations. For example, in Scotland ESOL provision remains fully-funded and Wales offers fully-funded ESOL up to level 1.

Policy

On the face of it, there is a great deal of consensus amongst politicians of all parties about the importance of everyone in society being able to speak English. For example, speaking in 2012, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May said:

[It's] about ensuring that people are able to integrate and participate fully in British society, and speaking the English language is an important part of that¹³.

However, such statements have not translated into a coherent, overarching strategy for ESOL provision in England. Much recent government policy has focused on increasing the requirement to speak English for people seeking to move to the UK – the topic of the immigration debate from which the quotation above is taken. Far less has been said or done about addressing the language development needs of those already in the country, some of whom are British citizens.

¹¹ DCLG (2013) *Community-Based English Language Competition. Stage 1 Prospectus*.

¹² NIACE (2012) *The Impact of Changes to the Funding of ESOL*.

¹³ <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2012-06-11b.54.2>

Whilst politicians often emphasise individuals' responsibility to learn English, far fewer speak about the need to ensure that there are sufficient, accessible and high-quality opportunities for them to do so. A major backlog of people already living in the UK who are unable to find a place in a class combined with continued migration averaging 215,000 people per year over the last four years¹⁴ ensures that demand for ESOL provision remains high, with 80% of providers reporting waiting lists¹⁵.

The government announced in 2015 that it would create a new Adult Education Budget and that this budget would be devolved to local areas by 2018/19. Local flexibility in the commissioning of provision may provide an opportunity for different kinds of ESOL, including delivery that is not based on achieving qualifications. There are grounds for optimism as ESOL providers and local communities will have an opportunity to make their voice heard about local priorities. Local planning also offers opportunities for ESOL provision to be co-ordinated across sectors and for some funding to come from other budgets, such as health and social services. In this way potential benefits to health, social cohesion and integration will be maximised. As commentators have pointed out, the case for ESOL and basic skills provision to support local economies and communities "is obvious in the town hall, if sometimes it is not in Whitehall"¹⁶. Yet, without a national strategy, there remains a risk that not all localities will prioritise ESOL.

The economic and social benefits of ESOL

The question of how best to support migrant workers' language needs remains unaddressed. There is much evidence of the economic benefits of migration, but as the EU referendum debate recently demonstrated, there are also concerns about the impact on local communities where migrants do not speak English.

There is also a lost benefit to the economy and society, if skilled migrants remain under-employed and those

who have not had educational opportunities in their country of origin remain under-skilled. They need language skills to unlock their talents and find work, as well as opportunities for better-paid, more secure and more productive employment. One suggestion to address this is that local areas with particularly high levels of migration should be supported to raise additional resource to tackle their specific needs through an employer levy¹⁷. This could fund language provision, as well as other learning opportunities for the benefit of local communities.

The Need for National Co-ordination

The previous section details the impact of a piecemeal approach to ESOL in England. ESOL policy, is now led by the Department for Education. However the Department for Work and Pensions, DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government) and the Home Office also have policy roles and commission education and training provision.

As the DEMOS report says:

'Current ESOL policy suffers from fragmentation, lack of clarity about the aims and intended outcomes of learning and the tendency to take a short-term view'.

The report advocates a rethinking of the current policy and points out the benefits that a strategic approach will bring:-

'Over and above the savings to the public purse in welfare and health that will result from enabling migrants to navigate life in the UK better, and the desirability of a better integrated, more socially cohesive society, an English speaking migrant workforce can bring a significant skills boost to the economy'.

Two years after the DEMOS report, NATECLA's consultation has also clearly demonstrated overwhelming support for a national ESOL strategy for England.

¹⁴ NIACE (2015) Making Migration Work. Labour Market and Skills Solutions.

¹⁵ <http://www.natecla.org.uk/news/779/ESOLwaiting-lists>

¹⁶ David Hughes (2015) 'English, Maths and ESOL in a Devolved World'

<http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-thinking/blog/english-maths-esol-devolved-world>

¹⁷ NIACE (2015) Making Migration Work. Labour Market and Skills Solutions.

Section 3 - The consultation

The process of producing proposals for a draft strategy was initiated by a meeting of 15 ESOL stakeholders in February 2016 and taken forward by a steering group. The group who mapped objectives and proposals from various reports and articles, the existing strategies for Wales¹ and Scotland² and the ESOL Manifesto (2012)³, into a list of options for consultation.

The consultation

The consultation consisted of three strands: face-to-face, an on-line survey and emailed responses to the draft document.

Face-to-face - A series of workshops and briefings took place at various conferences and meetings throughout England organised by UCU (University and College Union), NATECLA and Action for ESOL over a 5 month period from February to July 2016. In addition, a focus group of 18 learners was held at Hammersmith and West London College.

Emailed responses - Detailed collective feedback on the draft strategy document was produced by the Roma community, the Bell Foundation, The Wonder Foundation and Basic Education and Guidance in Nottingham (BEGIN).

On-line survey - The on-line survey, which was circulated to a range of agencies, organisations and individuals including employers, refugee and migrant organisations, and libraries⁴, was completed by 268 respondents and generated a total of 524 individual comments. As expected, the four largest groups of respondents were from Adult Education (38%), Further Education (21%), ESOL learners (17%) and the Third Sector (6%). There was a low response rate from schools, academic research, employers and elected officials (all at 0.37%).

The proposals were summarised under the themes of funding and entitlement, employment, monitoring and co-ordination, curriculum and resources, professional development for practitioners and volunteers, objectives for providers and objectives for learners. Respondents were asked if they agreed or not and were given the opportunity to write a comment. These comments, plus those from the collective feedback mentioned above were subject to a thematic analysis.

The themes which emerged have been used to produce the proposals in this document.

The consultation process was supported by a webpage⁴ which provided background information, links to related reports, strategies and articles as well as updates on progress. It also contained the full draft strategy document and the link to the survey. As well as this there was an explanatory powerpoint presentation that could be used with learners.

¹ ESOL Policy for Wales 2014 <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/140619-esol-policy-en.pdf>

² Welcoming our Learners: Scotland's ESOL strategy 2015-2020 http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/ESOLStrategy2015to2020_tcm4-855848.pdf

³ ESOL Manifesto (2012) http://actionforesol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/ESOL_manifesto_BW.pdf

⁴ <http://www.natecla.org.uk/content/631/ESOL-Strategy-for-England>

Key findings

Predictably there was overwhelming support for a strategy (97%). There were 71 comments, all positive, about the benefits of a strategy ranging from providing stability and consistency to raising the profile of ESOL and facilitating social integration.

'A strategy that focusses on community cohesion is imperative post-Brexit'.

'It is important to have a cogent and comprehensive strategy that sits above party politics and funding fluctuations and makes sense to practitioners, employers, politicians and students alike'.

'For Awarding Organisations, stability in how qualifications like ESOL ones are funded year on year is a massively helpful signal. Individual AOs take rational decisions on whether or not to invest in developing new qualifications based on such market signals, their own capacity, demand for other qualifications and other competing priorities.' Joint Council for Qualifications.

The question about the desirability of an ESOL strategy produced two notable comments evidencing the success of the Scottish strategy.

'I work in Scotland and we have an ESOL strategy. It unifies those who deliver the service, and professionalises what we do. It makes it easier to bid for funding and serves as a benchmark for practice and evaluation'.

'The strategy in Scotland has been very beneficial in giving professional recognition and status to ESOL practitioners and driving the development of ESOL and TESOL (teacher training) qualifications which take into account the Scottish context'.

There was general agreement about the need for monitoring and co-ordination to be at both a national and local level and for provision to be sensitive to local need (proposals 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2). The availability of local information and advice about ESOL classes was considered essential, as was collaboration between agencies, providers and employers and the need for all stakeholders, including practitioners and learners, to be involved in decision-making.

'A well thought out strategy responds to learners' needs and brings a wide spectrum of stakeholders to work together to deliver good quality learning'.
'Other positive impacts of ESOL, related to health and wellbeing, independence and community cohesion, should be promoted and reflected in the more joined-up, cross-departmental approach linked to other broader objectives, such as eliminating modern slavery, child poverty etc.' National Roma Network.

While most respondents agreed with the guiding principles of inclusion, participation, quality, equality and progression, there was a significant proportion who stressed that 'empowerment' and 'diversity' should also be added. See 'our vision for ESOL provision in England' on page 15.

The positive value that ESOL learners bring to society was a recurring theme. A high number of respondents felt that the skills and qualifications of many with ESOL needs were not recognised and that this was a wasted resource (proposal 2.6).

'The recognition of overseas qualifications is critical both to individuals, and to our society receiving those individuals. It should be of a high quality, and evaluated regularly. Without such a mechanism freely available enormous unfairness, and waste of human talent, skills and education ensues. This we can ill afford to throw away'.

Inclusion (proposal 1.1, 1.2, 1.3) in terms of accessible provision, was another frequent theme.

'I think that free crèche care must be included to provide equal access to classes. Also more focus should be on pre-entry ESOL'



Another theme on which respondents also tended to agree (proposal 2.3) was that materials and resources for practitioners, including a curriculum, should be accessible and up-to-date. There was some criticism of the existing ESOL curriculum and also of current qualifications for learners.

'Very often exams are not focussed on real language needs and result in overstating certain topic areas... rather than allowing learners to express themselves in wider contexts'.

'Review ESOL qualifications to ensure parity (say with Functional Skills), currency and quality'.

Qualifications and training for practitioners were deemed a high priority and 95% of respondents agreed with the objectives for professional development for practitioners (proposal 2.4).

There was disagreement about developing a qualification for volunteers. Some felt it would devalue ESOL practitioner expertise. There was opposition to use of unqualified volunteers.

'There used to be professional qualifications so re-introduce them. Being able to speak English does not make someone qualified to teach ESOL. I can drive a car but you wouldn't want to employ me as a mechanic, would you?'

The question about funding and entitlement (proposal 1.1) provoked the highest number of comments (79) and there was a great deal of disagreement. Understandably, many respondents wanted to see free classes for all: 'I need free ESOL classes because I don't earn a lot of money. It is expensive!'

Others wanted classes free up to a certain level or for certain groups. There were suggestions for means-testing, or for a limit in terms of number of hours which were free. There was unanimous agreement amongst learners interviewed that more hours per week were needed. All these learners complained that the rules on eligibility were constantly being changed. There was evidence from one college that the rules regarding entitlement were being interpreted in different ways by different providers.

Generally, there was agreement that classes should start immediately for new arrivals and that cultural orientation was important for this cohort as well (proposal 1.1). Learners interviewed felt that settled learners as well as new arrivals need input about British culture.

There was strong feeling around the theme of employment, generating the second highest number of comments (70). There was agreement that employers should support ESOL for their employees (proposal 1.4) but disagreement about how or whether it could be achieved. Some felt employers should provide ESOL in the workplace, others that employees should be supported to attend local provision. Learners in the focus group felt that employers should pay for employees' ESOL courses because, not only was this motivating for employees, it would also enhance their language skills, which would be a benefit the employers.

'Learning supported by providers, employers and unions in the workplace will help make it (ESOL) relevant and accessible for learners'

'ESOL helps advance equality – it prevents workers being discriminated against because they do not understand their rights or are not able to form with their fellow workers to demand better treatment. The TUC has produced a Working in the UK guide to assist this process www.tuc.org.uk/workingintheuk.'

Clearly it was felt that there was a role for trade unions here.

The proposals for providers (4.1- 4.5) brought a variety of responses. The idea of a 'Best Practice Framework' for providers- as exists in Scotland- met with both approval and criticism.

'I think the notion of 'best practice' is so highly contextualised as to be pretty meaningless'.

Instead, case studies were often suggested as the way forward. Several comments stressed the importance of sharing good practice and making sure that research opportunities are available to all involved in ESOL 'not just university folk'.

'Good practice of working with specific groups and resources used should be shared among providers'.

A variety of classes were called for, for example classes which combined ESOL with vocational subjects, ones which had a less formal approach and ones which were non-accredited. It was considered important to integrate new technology into ESOL provision but not to the exclusion of some learners. Short term projects were criticised.

'Funding should be more secure and long term so that learners do not 'get lost' between projects; this is especially relevant in the context of the Roma community as they often do not trust services very easily'.

Many responses stressed the need for providers to offer opportunities for progression.

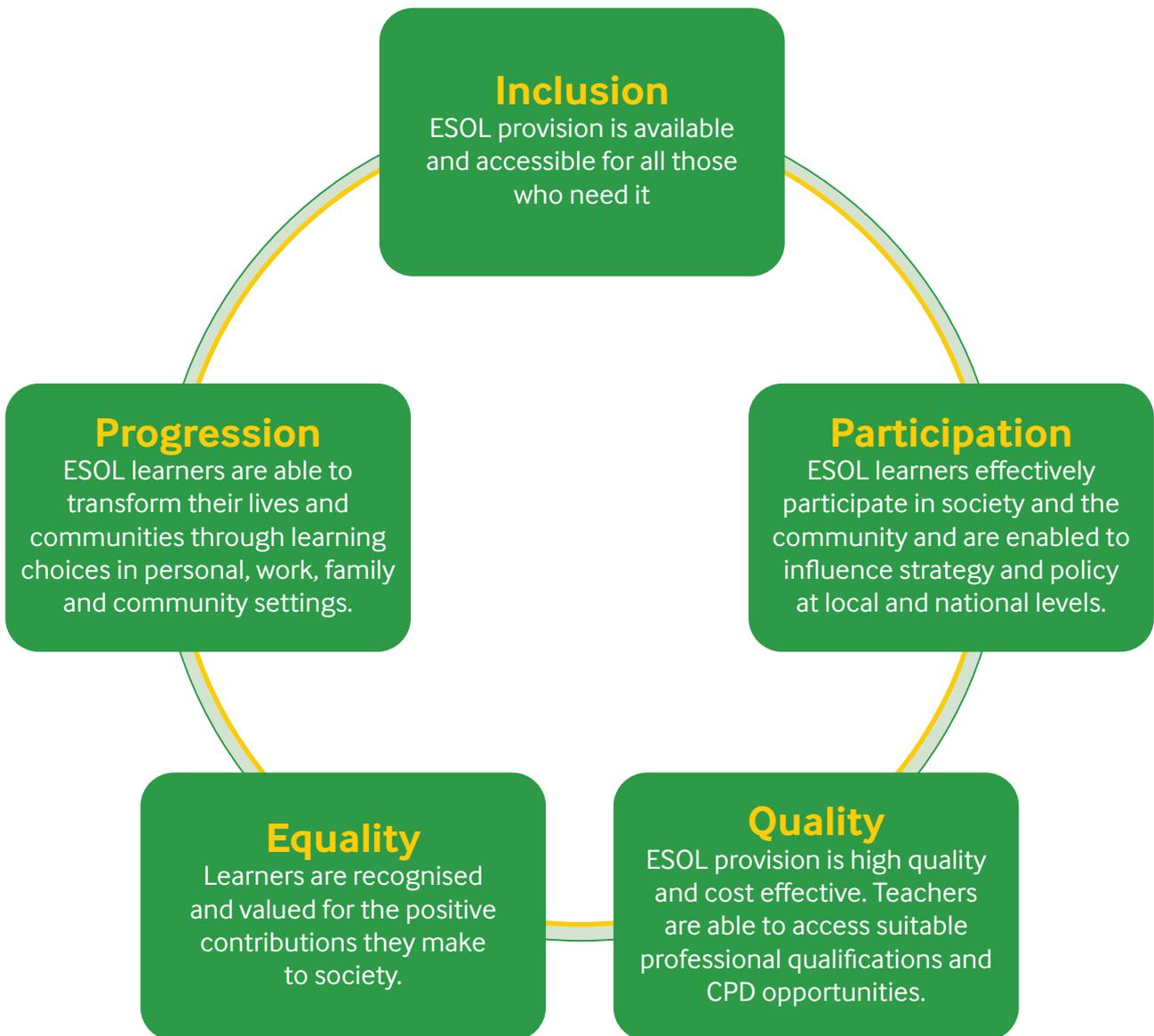
'Providers should encourage learners to move along pathways that take them to functional skills, vocational training and academic courses at FE and HE as appropriate'

'.....guidance on progression routes from ESOL can be a lot more organised/systematic – work clubs, volunteering, apprenticeships, academic routes'
BEGIN

For proposals see Summary on page 2.

For more details about the consultation process, source material and thematic analysis visit <http://www.natecla.org.uk/content/631/ESOL-Strategy-for-England>

Our vision for ESOL provision in England



Acknowledgments

NATECLA would like to thank the following organisations that participated in this project:

Action for ESOL, Association of Colleges, Basic Educational Guidance in Nottinghamshire, the Bell Foundation, English My Way, ESOL for Action, Migrant English Support Hub, National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum, National Roma Network, Reading Agency, Refugee Action, Tinder Foundation, Trinity College London, Third Sector National Learning Alliance, Trades Union Congress, University and College Lecturers Union, West London and Hammersmith College and the Wonder Foundation.

We appreciate the information and advice received from Helen Scaife from the Welsh government and Catherine Hamilton, Mandy Watts and Emily Bryson from Education Scotland.

NATECLA is grateful to the following people who generously gave their time to the production of this document either through writing, reading and/or editing.

Celine Castelino, James Cupper, Julie Day, Judy Kirsh, Jenny Roden, Dr Nick Saville, Dr James Simpson, Dr Philida Schellekens, Alex Stevenson, Diana Sutton, Andy Walls.

Researchers- Dr Carole Sedgwick and Sarah Gartland

We would also like to thank everyone who took part in the consultation.

NATECLA (National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults) is an independent charity, funded by membership and sponsorship. It is the only national forum and professional organisation for ESOL professionals in the UK.

NATECLA offers high quality, relevant training opportunities, both local and national, to ESOL professionals. It provides expert advice to government bodies and other agencies and it lobbies on issues that affect teachers and learners.

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