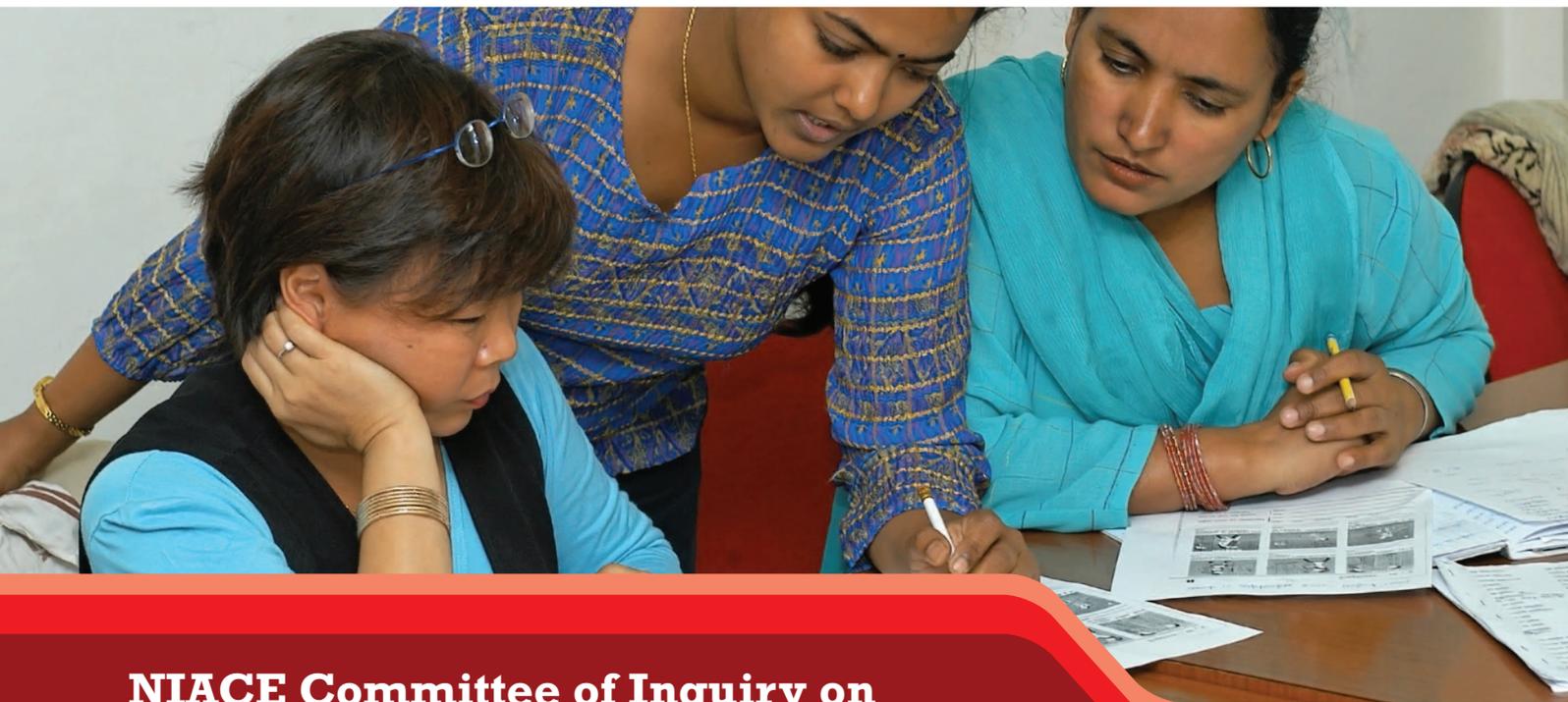


**‘More than a language...’**



**NIACE Committee of Inquiry on  
English for Speakers of Other Languages**

**Chaired by Derek Grover CB**

**Executive summary**

**October 2006**

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promoting adult learning



# 1 Preface

At a time of rapid industrial and demographic change, hundreds of thousands of people have migrated to the UK to fill vacant jobs. Many thousands of them need improved English language skills to contribute effectively. They join the hundreds of thousands of Britain's settled communities who also need strengthened English language skills to participate fully in society at large, and at work. The combination of demand has overwhelmed what was already overstretched supply, and makes clear the need to look afresh at how we best make provision to meet these needs. There is also a disturbing and disagreeable underbelly in British polity that blames foreigners for their 'foreignness', and fails to recognise the enrichment of our lives that cultural diversity brings. The negative strain also fails to recognise the major economic contribution settled refugees and migrants make. It is a mark of civilisation where countries offer asylum to people whose lives have been dislocated by war, famine and social chaos. Giving English language skills to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers alike makes economic and social sense.

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, established an inquiry into English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to contribute a fresh look at the issues. Its recommendations are wide-ranging and challenging, and I am happy to commend them to government departments, employers, and providers alike.

As this report makes clear, English language learning has an impact on individuals, communities and the productivity and safety of workplaces in England. For individuals it makes a difference to the way we relate to each other and it impacts on our children. Without doubt there is for many a correlation between their self-esteem and the level of confidence they have in spoken English. For many, confidence in English language opens doors and helps people engage in and contribute to civil society. Lack of fluency in the language condemns many people to poverty. ESOL is both a subject in its own right and a means to an end for individuals. English language is a recognised route to citizenship, and language competency is now a requirement. At the societal level, the opportunity to improve English language should be a right; a chance to contribute to and at the same time shape the communities in which we live and work.

In the workplace ESOL can make the difference between a confident and skilled workforce and one that is hesitant or exploited, where individuals are at risk of missing opportunities, and in some contexts at risk for their lives. It can make a difference to economic development and to the effectiveness of services and companies. Good communication is always at the heart of what employers say they need from employees, and it is a pre-condition for flexible, responsive and competitive enterprises. Without it, there is less opportunity for all. In short, ESOL is more than a language; it is both a language and a skill for life.

This is the final report of the NIACE Committee of Inquiry on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The major concerns highlighted in the Interim Report remain. Our executive summary highlights these major concerns and some of the recommendations which the Committee believes will begin to address them. I am grateful to Derek Grover CB for his work in chairing the Committee and drafting the report, and to the Committee members for their hard work. I am also grateful to the support team at NIACE: Jane Ward, Peter Lavender, Giustine Kettle and Yanina Dutton, who have helped the Committee and the Chair to produce what I think is a very clear report. Thank you all.

**Alan Tuckett**  
Director, NIACE

## 2 Introduction, executive summary and summary of recommendations

### Introduction

- 2.1** This report provides an overview of the major challenges affecting the provision of English language teaching for speakers of other languages (ESOL).<sup>1</sup> It is based on evidence, written and oral, submitted to our committee,<sup>2</sup> a study of the relevant documents and on discussion in the five meetings which the committee has held. It is the first comprehensive overview of policy on ESOL since the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) committee which produced *Breaking the Language Barriers* in 2000.
- 2.2** The situation described in this report gives serious cause for concern. Over the last six years there has been very significant investment of public funds in ESOL provision. In the 2004–5 academic year the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) spent £279 million on ESOL funding which provided 538,700 ESOL learning opportunities. Effective ESOL is critical to empowering adults to gain independence and control over their lives, to increasing social inclusion and cohesion and to the country's skills agenda. It is also of increasing importance to a wide range of key government policies, including community regeneration, combating racism, improving health and housing, as well as the obvious areas of education and skills. Demand for ESOL provision is rising, in part from migrant workers from the new members of the European Union, but also from refugees and there is significant unmet demand from members of settled communities. Despite the substantial investment, funding is not always well targeted to those in greatest need, and the quality of provision is worryingly patchy, with too much sub-standard provision. In some parts of the country there are not enough qualified teachers, and the structure of ESOL teaching qualifications is in urgent need of the reform which is now under way.
- 2.3** Our recommendations are designed to address this situation. We believe that policy development and planning of the delivery of ESOL should be coordinated across the full range of government policies and the full range of providers. We recommend a series of actions to ensure that there is more ESOL provision effectively targeted on the world of work. We recommend a coherent package of activities designed to address the most significant quality issues, including important concerns about the recently introduced qualifications for learners. We welcome the work being done on ESOL teacher qualifications and make some further suggestions which we believe will help improve teacher supply and quality. Finally we recognise that the present funding situation is not sustainable and make recommendations which are designed to target resource on those learners and potential learners most in need, and to increase the range of funding sources available to support ESOL provision. Some of our recommendations are somewhat technical: we make no apology for that, as careful attention to the realities of the provision which is made on the ground is essential to secure real and lasting improvements. These recommendations are intended to be a coherent package and we commend them to the government, the funding bodies, the organisations responsible for the learning infrastructure, and to the providers, public and private, of ESOL.

### Executive summary

- 2.4** ESOL provision is critically important to the UK. It is essential to help secure social inclusion and help build stable and successful communities, and it underpins current policy on citizenship and settlement. It is also critical to policies on skills. There will not be enough young people coming on to the labour market to meet all the demands for new and changed skills which are foreseen. The shortfall will have to be met

<sup>1</sup> The Committee used a broad definition of ESOL to include all English language provision and support for adult speakers of other languages.

<sup>2</sup> The sources of evidence to our committee are set out in Annex 2 of the Final Report.

by retraining adults and by migrants. Skills acquisition by both these groups has to be underpinned by good ESOL provision. But the impact of effective ESOL provision goes wider than this. Language skills are also critical to the success of a range of other key government policies, including the child poverty agenda, health, sustainable communities, regeneration, and community integration and cohesion, including refugee integration.

- 2.5** This wider relevance makes it essential that ESOL provision is planned and delivered across the full range of relevant policies and activities, not considered separately in each of the relevant contexts. There should be a fundamental cross-government review of ESOL as part of the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. A minister should be appointed to lead the implementation of its conclusions. The DfES should set up a national advisory forum on ESOL to ensure that policy developments across government take full account of ESOL, and the LSC should set up local fora for the planning of ESOL delivery across the full range of providers in each locality.
- 2.6** Since the introduction of the *Skills for Life* policy, ESOL has been viewed as part of that programme. It has taken an increasingly large proportion of *Skills for Life* funding, and it is clear that this is of concern to policy makers. ESOL has both benefited and suffered from its position within the wider policy. It has undoubtedly benefited from a higher level of policy attention and from greatly increased funding, and that is very welcome. But ESOL goes wider than adult literacy, since it has elements both of a basic skill and of foreign language learning and levels go above the Level 2 threshold. Pedagogy, funding regimes, targets, and standards and qualifications which are, quite properly, designed mainly for literacy and numeracy learners are being applied in an ESOL context to which they are not entirely appropriate. This issue underpins a number of the current difficulties with ESOL provision. In developing policy and provision in the future, it is essential that ESOL is considered as a distinct element of the wider policy and that, where necessary, adjustments to infrastructure and delivery are made to meet the needs of English language learners.
- 2.7** Demand for ESOL is high and growing. The increased demand from migrant workers, especially from the A8 countries, has attracted much publicity and it is undoubtedly significant. But such learners, and refugees and asylum seekers, are only one element, although a growing element, of current ESOL learners. There are also increasing demands from the settled communities. One consequence of this changing pattern is that there are now demands in some areas, particularly rural, which have not hitherto experienced high demand for ESOL provision and which do not have the infrastructure of providers or teachers to cope. So far as migrant workers are concerned, mechanisms should be found to ensure that the employers who recruit them should take some responsibility for ensuring that they have adequate English language skills. Our recommendations on funding are designed to help cope with this increasing demand by focusing the available resource more sharply on those in most need, and by increasing the contributions made by learners themselves and by employers.
- 2.8** ESOL provision has a key role in promoting social inclusion. The link to citizenship is established in legislation, and it is clearly essential that enough high quality ESOL is available to people who wish to acquire citizenship or qualify for settlement. ESOL is particularly important in addressing issues of intergenerational learning and the agenda on early years policy set out in *Every Child Matters*. There should be a review of the role of ESOL in these policies, and specifically there should be an increase in the funding of ESOL related to family learning. ESOL is also important to enable people to play a full role in civic and cultural life and contribute to their local communities. The current state of ESOL in custodial settings is a matter of great concern: the improvements planned are welcome but they will not have an impact unless they are pursued vigorously and consistently in a planned and monitored programme.
- 2.9** Many ESOL learners are mainly motivated by a wish to gain work, or to progress at work. Progress in developing provision which links vocational and ESOL learning has been slow, and we have recommended a number of steps which would speed up progress in this area. The LSC has recently

taken over responsibility from Jobcentre Plus (JCP) for employability-related ESOL programmes for the unemployed. It is worrying to note that one consequence of this transfer appears to be that the resource available for this vulnerable group of learners has been sharply reduced. The LSC and JCP are reported to be working together on a new programme for this target group: it is essential that it should have both employability and learning outcomes, and that it should be available for lower-level learners, not just those learners who count towards the LSC's current Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets. It is also essential that ways are found of building on the successful ESOL Pathfinder projects involving employers, and of encouraging employers to contribute to the costs of meeting the ESOL needs of their employees. All Sector Skills Councils need to become more involved in this agenda, and it should also form part of the work of Regional Skills Partnerships and Regional Skills Strategies.

- 2.10** Evidence from inspections makes it clear that too little ESOL provision is good or better, and that there is still too much that is inadequate. A concerted approach is required to tackle this. There should be a thematic inspection of ESOL by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), complemented by a continuation of the valuable National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) research programme. New ESOL qualifications have only recently been introduced and the new framework has been widely welcomed. It will be essential to make an early assessment of their success, in terms of take-up and their impact on learners, teachers and providers, not least because some worries are already being expressed about their suitability. Alongside this evaluation, it is essential that the new qualifications are promoted to learners, employers, further and higher education and the professions. It will also be important to reconsider the way in which qualifications are used in relation to the funding system. The current discrepancy between the funding of ESOL and literacy qualifications, which is driven by the structure of the funding regime, should be corrected. Guidance should be produced on how best to implement the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) approach in the ESOL context, taking account of ESOL pedagogy and the needs and capabilities of English language learners.
- 2.11** Because of their often difficult personal circumstances ESOL learners frequently turn to the providers of their learning for support with concerns relevant to their wider lives. Many ESOL teachers deal with these issues with great dedication and skill, even though it is beyond their responsibilities. But it is essential to ensure that all ESOL teachers are aware of these wider issues and, even if they do not tackle them themselves, know how to get effective help for their learners. More work needs to be done on how best to provide this wider support in the learning context. It is also essential that other professionals dealing with the relevant communities are aware of ESOL issues and how to enable their clients to get access to appropriate provision. It would be helpful if the current DfES-sponsored review of information, advice and guidance could specifically consider the needs of ESOL learners. Learners who are disabled or who have learning difficulties face particular challenges: it is important that ESOL teachers are given an opportunity to learn about and discuss the new guidelines on disability. We also believe that it is important to continue development work on the use of ICT in ESOL teaching and we look forward to the practitioner guide which NRDC are to produce in this area.
- 2.12** Dealing with the wide variety of learners and the range of provision undoubtedly presents major challenges to the leadership and management of providers. It is important that senior leaders and managers have awareness of the particular challenges of ESOL and there should be effective continuing professional development (CPD) in place to promote this. There is an important role here for the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL).
- 2.13** Implementing our recommendations would add up to a formidable programme of work, in addition to the costs of meeting increasing demand. Simply asking for more money for more of the same is not a sensible option. In these circumstances we do not believe that the current arrangements for funding ESOL are sustainable. We need to look for ways of increasing the streams of funding available to support ESOL learning while targeting public funding on those in greatest need.

**2.14** In the immediate future there is a particular issue about the entitlements to free learning available to ESOL learners and those available to literacy and numeracy learners. In effect free provision is available to eligible learners below Level 2. We would not argue that this position can be sustained in the long term, but it would be unacceptable to remove that entitlement from ESOL learners while retaining it for literacy and numeracy. Such a course of action would be unfair and discriminatory. For the same reasons it would not be right to introduce a means-tested regime for ESOL learners alone. But when the system of entitlements for literacy and numeracy learners is reviewed it would be right to review it for ESOL learners too. A better-targeted system might have the following main characteristics:

- All people with ESOL needs should have the right to a free initial assessment of up to three hours. This helps ensure that people are directed to appropriate provision.
- All ESOL learners with language skills below Level 1 should be entitled to free provision until they have reached that level.
- Above Level 1 provision should be paid for at vocational rates, with remissions available for those in financial need.
- These arrangements should be underpinned by a loan scheme for those who need it, aimed particularly at those with high-level learning needs.
- If the immediate entitlement of asylum seekers to free ESOL provision is withdrawn, asylum seekers should have the same entitlements as EU migrants when the target period for decision on their application has expired, or when their application has been granted. We recognise that this may well happen before a wider revision of the system.
- Spouses, fiancées and family members of permanent UK residents should have immediate access to the same entitlements to ESOL provision as permanent residents. This too could happen before a wider revision.
- Employers and agencies recruiting workers from abroad should be obliged to contribute to the cost of their acquiring language skills up to Level 1.

**2.15** It is essential that the funding arrangements, both short and long term, can support the full range of provision that is required by learners. It is essential that local LSCs are reminded that Entry Level 1 and 2 provision leading to nationally approved qualifications is fundable, and that one of the objectives of their purchasing strategy for ESOL should be to achieve a balanced portfolio of provision with clear progression routes available for learners. So far as higher-level training is concerned, the loan scheme we have recommended, which would require some underpinning from public funds, would help, but we believe that those employers, such as the NHS, which place particular reliance on immigrants with higher-level skills, should contribute to these costs.

**2.16** This is a radically different approach to funding ESOL, but we believe it would use the public money available more effectively, be fairer to learners, and ensure that the system can make the full range of provision required to provide the ESOL needed to meet important national objectives.

## Conclusion

**2.17** This report makes it clear that having a successful system of ESOL is of fundamental importance to this country. But there are significant issues to be addressed if we are to meet that challenge. This report sets out a package of recommendations which we believe would have a major positive impact, and we hope that government, funders, infrastructure bodies and providers will respond positively to it. This is not a challenge that, as a nation, we can afford to shirk.

# Summary of recommendations

(Corresponding paragraph of location in the Final Report is shown after each recommendation.)

- 1 There should be a cross-departmental review of the current provision of, and future need for, ESOL across the full range of government policies and expenditure on it in the context of the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. 3.12
- 2 The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) should take the lead in setting up regional planning fora to implement the coordinated policies for ESOL agreed at national level. 3.12
- 3 A ministerial lead on ESOL should be identified with a specific brief to address ESOL issues across the full range of government policies, and to ensure implementation across government of the Comprehensive Spending Review study. 3.12
- 4 The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) should review the implementation of the *Skills for Life* strategy to ensure that ESOL is given appropriate attention and priority. 3.17
- 5 The DfES should convene a national advisory group or forum on ESOL to act as a source of expertise and advice on ESOL issues and to ensure that policy developments across government take full account of ESOL issues. 3.21
- 6 Work-related language training for migrants, refugees and the members of settled communities should be addressed in Regional Economic Strategies and the work of Regional Strategic Partnerships. 5.15

## Social inclusion

- 7 The DfES should ensure that the links with ESOL policy, provision and providers have been effectively made in relation to each of the key aspects of the implementation of *Every Child Matters* and the 14–19 strategy. 4.16
- 8 The DfES and appropriate partners should commission a national programme to develop, test and disseminate models and materials for ESOL to support civic and democratic participation. 4.18
- 9 The planned improvements to ESOL for offenders in custodial and community settings should be pursued actively in a planned and monitored programme if the current deplorable state of ESOL for offenders is to be remedied. 4.21

## ESOL and work

- 10 The DfES and appropriate partners should commission two development programmes: first, to identify and disseminate effective models and funding approaches for assisting learners with English language learning needs to succeed on vocational programmes; and second, to draw out and disseminate the lessons from English language and employability programmes. These developments should be explicitly prioritised in funding and planning guidance. 5.8  
5.9
- 11 The design of the new LSC employability and ESOL programme should take into account the distinctive needs of ESOL learners, and have both learning and employability outcomes, and ensure that the learning outcomes should address the needs of Entry Level learners as well as higher-level learners who count towards the LSC's current Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets. 5.11
- 12 The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) should commission the development of a curriculum and related materials for workplace-related ESOL and related teacher training materials. 5.17

## Quality

- 13 The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) should undertake a national survey inspection on the quality of ESOL which would analyse existing reports and undertake field visits, with a view to making recommendations, taking into account the recommendations of this Committee. **6.3**
- 14 The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) should be commissioned to continue and extend its programme of research and development work on ESOL as an essential complement to the thematic inspection of ESOL which we have recommended. **6.4**
- 15 The impact of the new ESOL learner qualifications should be assessed, and the DfES and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) should consider how best to promote them to learners, employers, higher education and the professions. **6.13**
- 16 The disparity between the assessment requirements of literacy and ESOL qualifications in relation to the national *Skills for Life* targets should be corrected. **6.15**
- 17 The appropriateness for ESOL learners, particularly at lower levels, of the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) process should be reviewed. **6.21**
- 18 The current DfES review of information, advice and guidance (IAG) services should urgently look at the needs of ESOL learners. **6.29**
- 19 The Matrix standards should require that candidates who advise ESOL learners are properly briefed and trained to enable them to respond knowledgeably and effectively to their specific circumstances and requirements. We also recommend that the survey inspection proposed by the Committee should examine in particular how appropriately skilled and qualified learning assistants, learning support workers and teaching assistants can be used effectively to support programmes. **6.29**
- 20 There should be training for ESOL teachers on the new guidance on disability and how effectively to share assessment strategies in relation to ESOL learners with learning difficulties or disabilities across their organisations. **6.31**

## Teacher training

- 21 As pre-service training routes to employment are introduced, employers should be actively discouraged from employing new ESOL teachers who are unqualified. **7.11**
- 22 Consideration should be given to offering small amounts of core funding support to appropriate voluntary professional support organisations and peer group networks to enable them to maintain and expand their provision of continuing professional development (CPD). Ways should also be developed of helping colleges and other providers to share expertise. **7.16**
- 23 Progress towards introduction of the new qualifications for teachers should be kept under close scrutiny. If there is any danger that they cannot be fully and effectively implemented to the current timetable, urgent consideration should be given to extending the cut-off date for teacher training courses meeting the current standards, to avoid a lacuna of courses for teachers in September 2007. **7.13**
- 24 Incentives should be introduced to encourage employers to introduce a more secure career structure for ESOL teachers and increase the proportion of teachers employed on permanent contracts. **7.19**
- 25 The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the LSC should consider the level at which they are prepared to fund ESOL teacher training, to ensure that the new qualifications include high quality teaching practice placements in a range of learning contexts, with support from ESOL specialist teacher trainers and mentors. **7.21**

- 26 Guidelines to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) on means-tested maintenance grants and funding guidelines for teachers taking ESOL teacher-training courses should be clarified. 7.22
- 27 The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) should undertake work on professional development relating to ESOL for college managers at all levels. 8.7
- 28 ESOL should be more specifically addressed in the national quality improvement strategy for *Skills for Life*, funded by the QIA. 8.8

## Funding and entitlements

- 29 One of the objectives of the funding arrangements for ESOL should be to ensure a varied network of high-quality providers. 6.5
- 30 The guidance to local LSCs should make it clear that Entry Level 1 and 2 provision leading to nationally approved qualifications is fundable, a sub-target for Entry Level 2 should be introduced and one of the objectives of their purchasing strategy for ESOL should be to achieve a balanced portfolio of provision with clear progression routes available for learners. 9.12
- 31 If the immediate entitlement of asylum seekers to free ESOL provision is withdrawn, asylum seekers should have the same entitlements as home learners when the target period for decision on their application has expired. 9.18
- 32 Spouses, fiancées and family members of permanent UK residents should have immediate access to the same entitlements to ESOL provision as permanent residents. 9.19
- 33 When the current *Skills for Life* entitlements are revised, all ESOL learners with language skills below Level 1 should be entitled to free provision until they have reached that level. 9.25
- 34 There should be an increase to the LSC's Personal and Community Development budget to support an increase in family ESOL programmes, aimed specifically at increasing opportunities for women from under-represented ethnic minority communities. 9.25
- 35 All adults with ESOL requirements should have the right to a free initial assessment of up to three hours. 9.26
- 36 The government should explore the development of a subsidised loan scheme for individuals not entitled to further free provision who wish to undertake ESOL learning beyond their basic entitlement, especially for higher-level learning. 9.28
- 37 The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) should make it a condition of granting licences to employment agencies recruiting from EU countries that they should, at their expense, ensure that their workers are enabled to secure adequate English language skills, whether in their country of origin or in the UK. 9.29
- 38 The new criteria for the designation of A-rated sponsors for non-EU migrant workers should include the provision of appropriate ESOL training. 3.25
- 39 The government should ensure that employers secure ESOL provision for their workers, whether from migrant or settled communities. To support the measures recommended in 37, 38 and 39 it is crucial that regulatory and enforcement measures are adopted to ensure employers are prevented from transferring costs to workers, including migrant workers, and ensure the exploitation of migrant workers does not increase. 9.29





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