

## ESOL as part of an integrated approach to skills and employment in London

Outcome note of confidential ideas building session, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008

For the last 9 months, the London Skills and Employment Board (LSEB) has been engaged in significant work on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in London. This work has underlined the importance of opening up a dialogue with providers to develop the solutions needed to strengthen the effectiveness of ESOL in the capital.

The session on 12<sup>th</sup> February was hosted by the Board to give the opportunity for providers, public agencies, Board members and other key contributors to work together to build ideas to make ESOL support more effective for individuals and for employers, building on the successful approaches that are already being adopted.

Our goals for the session were to establish:

- a shared understanding of what effective ESOL looks like for London;
- practical ideas that will improve the effectiveness of ESOL, and
- agreed actions to take forward our ideas after the event.

This note summarises the main ideas and agreed actions arising from the session. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their valuable contributions to the discussions. Direct quotes are used where they reflect key themes in our discussions and are shown in speech marks and italics. They are not attributed in accordance with the confidentiality of the session.

**Jo Hudek, February 2008**

### A shared understanding of effective ESOL in London

Our initial discussions identified what we felt were the key features for effective ESOL in London:

- **“Personalised”** – provision and other services that recognise the differing needs and goals of individuals, and of employers;
- Enabling steady progression from one type of provision to another in the form of **“an escalator that works at the right speed”**, and
- Part of integrated pathways that support people into **“sustainable employment”** as well as into **“involvement in wider communities”**.

Central to our debate was how to get a shared understanding between providers, public agencies and central Government that employability and community cohesion are interdependent – for ESOL and for other skills development. We agreed that people develop skills that are relevant to employability and being successful in the labour market through a whole variety of different provision, not just that which has employment as the main goal.

We recognised that being able to connect with a ‘community’ outside one’s own helps to develop the skills and self confidence needed for working life. It is also true that someone may have a job, but be isolated from communities outside of their immediate one. We favoured taking the view that community cohesion

and employability should not be seen as separate areas for ESOL or any other area of skills development. Rather, we need to be clear about how people can be supported to develop the attributes that enable them to connect with wider communities **and** have successful working lives (both of which can be encompassed in the term employability).

For some, the journey may begin by being supported by community-based organisations, focusing on family welfare or self-help for health issues. For others, it could start with advice from a union learning representative. Whatever the first point of contact, the pathway should be personalised to meet the needs of the individual and to help them maximise their progression as they develop and change over time.

## The priorities for change

Our discussions centred on four key priorities where we felt that change was particularly important and where it could make a real difference to improving the 'journeys' for individuals who have English language needs. These are outlined briefly below, followed by a summary on page 5 showing the actions and next steps agreed to take the key ideas forward, along with contact details where appropriate.

### **1. An Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACS) that works for people with ESOL needs**

In considering the journeys of people with ESOL needs, we recognised the weaknesses in the current system. Advice is given and individuals' plans drawn up often with a focus on 'courses', rather than the wider purposes of skills development (engaging outside of a 'mother tongue community', volunteering, work etc.). People can be assessed many times by different organisations. Assessments and access to services is largely geared to learning, occasionally employment and rarely the other issues that we know prevent people from engaging effectively in skills development.

The importance of a joined up process for initial assessment, advice and guidance, 'pathway planning' and review was stressed. Some of us are already using Individual Employability Plans or Individual Action Plans. These plans identify ESOL provision as one element of an integrated packaged of support leading to a meaningful goal that encompasses skills development but does not see this as an end in itself.

Clearly, the new AACS is pivotal to addressing some of these issues. Work is currently underway to explore what this Service should look like, nationally and for London. The London Development Agency (LDA), in close consultation with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Jobcentre Plus (JCP), is leading the work to draft proposals for the LSEB on what the AACS should look like in London. We understood the requirement of Government Departments for this service to have a strong universal element, but acknowledged that it is critical for it to be 'enhanced' in London so that it can provide an effective service for people with English language needs.

Adopting the *"one stop shop"* **principle** of providing access to the range of services that an individual may need in addition to skills and employment support (childcare, housing, health, debt etc.) was seen as key. However, we felt that it wasn't necessary to locate physically all of these services under one roof. Rather, that *"the one stop shop approach should be located in every provider"*, that is, any organisation that is providing one service to an individual should take responsibility for identifying their non-skills needs and help them to access the appropriate services. In thinking about how to help people with ESOL needs, we also recognised that for some this means helping the whole family together.

## **2. Flexible provision based on what works**

We agreed that there is good practice in responding to employers' and individuals' needs, and felt that if these examples could be shared more widely it could help to roll out successful approaches.

We also acknowledged that whilst there is some scope to develop greater flexibility within the current system of funding streams, programmes, targets, qualifications etc., full potential won't be realised until these reflect and support the aspiration of personalised and integrated pathways of support. Work is continuing within Government departments and public agencies to explore how best to do this (unitisation of qualifications, move towards demand led funding etc.). Delivery partners were invited to feed in their experiences of how they have managed to create flexibility within the current system and what critical blockages are preventing them from doing this. The ESOL for Work qualification is being piloted and participants were also invited to feedback on their experiences of using it.

The *"employability templates"* (Licence to Skill) were highlighted as a useful tool in helping to develop flexible, integrated pathways, including identifying the 'blend' of funding streams and partners that should be involved. They can also be used to 'troubleshoot' blockages and identify gaps – information which the agencies working on joint planning and investment models would find very helpful in ensuring that *"we bolt together the right bits"*.

Some participants highlighted that they would like to know more about the employability templates. Further information can be found at [www.jhconsulting.org.uk/licencetoskill.asp](http://www.jhconsulting.org.uk/licencetoskill.asp). Some support is available to help organisations to use them.

A number of other ideas to increase flexibility were also raised, including modular provision, and a skills passport that could provide a portable way of individuals taking their assessments and achievements from one organisation to another along their pathway.

## **3. Incentives for employers and employees to sign up for ESOL training and pay where appropriate.**

The importance of providing a personalised service not only for individuals, but also for employers was highlighted as an essential element in helping to *"incentivise"* employers to support their employees' English language development. This includes having qualifications that are relevant to employers and employees.

This is particularly true if London is to emulate what happens in other major European cities where employers support the training of their employees in the knowledge that this is for the good of the economy as a whole rather than just for individual business benefit. Current developments including the London Accord, Local Employer Partnerships and Train to Gain are all highly relevant. The importance of reflecting English language needs and training as part of a single employer offer for London was raised, as well embedding the 'ESOL offer' in the development of a unified skills brokerage and business support service.

The development of flexible packages of training and support that meet individuals' and employers' needs was highlighted, drawing on successful examples including union learning, current pilots and others.

Showcasing these successful examples, where employers are working with training providers to support employees with ESOL can also be extremely helpful in incentivising other employers to engage.

The LSEB will create a page on its website to showcase London examples and participants were invited to send these in (see page 5 for details). DIUS highlighted the Skillstories national web platform developed

with Business in the Community, which provides a mechanism for employers and providers to upload and share best practice for work-based ESOL, literacy and numeracy. Participants were invited to contribute to this if they had successful approaches to share. A booklet has also been produced to outline the benefits of ESOL in the workplace, as a promotional tool that can be used with employers. It can be found through the following link - [www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/English Language in the workplace](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/English_Language_in_the_workplace)

#### **4. Coherent services for people with ESOL needs – a ‘vision’ and single funding pot for London.**

The enduring theme of the need for greater coherence for ESOL planning and investment at national, regional and local levels was a strong feature of our discussions. We heard about the work that is underway (for the LSEB) to establish cross agency planning and investment regionally for all adult skills. ESOL is a critical element of this. We agreed that there is a need for clarity about how a single funding pot for ESOL should be spent informed by a clear, cross agency vision for ESOL in London. This should identify the investment for initial engagement in skills development, the provision itself and the progress and outcomes that should be expected. The Licence to Skill approach could help to inform this process.

Local joining up is also critical. We were aware of the importance of continuing to tease out how cross agency working should be implemented at local level to create the right environment for providers to integrate their services more effectively, and to support the achievement of Local Area Agreements. Exploring this is a key part of the response to the DIUS paper ESOL for Community Cohesion. DIUS colleagues emphasised that they are keen for all stakeholders to respond to the consultation. The LSEB offered to coordinate a joint response from members of the group.

Throughout the session, we were reminded that we must also see ESOL through the lens of other critical areas of policy development including immigration and refugee integration. To ensure that ESOL is effective for London’s key priority groups, there should be better dialogue between agencies and Departments for skills and employment, and the Border and Immigration Agency and Greater London Authority. The development of a vision for ESOL in London needs to work with other key strategic developments including the Mayor’s Draft Strategy for Refugee Integration.

#### **The cross cutting theme of the ‘routeway broker’**

In considering the factors that currently prevent people from progressing as effectively as possible – in skills development and at work – the need for a strong mentoring and support role was seen as key. We agreed that the best kinds of training and support packages are often delivered by a variety of organisations, each playing to their strengths, but that the challenge is to make sure that people don’t get lost in this often complex set of interventions.

We felt that this critical factor cuts across all our priorities – the role is pivotal to the initial engagement of people, as well as supporting them at key transition points. It should be factored into the vision for ESOL as well as the planning and investment strategies for all skills development.

## Ideas into action

The table below summarises the main actions that we agreed to take over the next 6 months as outcomes from the session. Some will, of course, take longer to complete and some are subject to external timetables and process, but we undertook to make as much progress in that time as possible.

Idea	Actions and who will take them
An Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACS) that works for people with ESOL needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Feed into the development of the AACS work at Government Department level the key issues relating to people with ESOL needs (Public agencies and Departments)</li> <li>→ Feed into development of Board paper that outlines what the AACS should look like in London (responses to <a href="mailto:kriskrasnowski@lda.gov.uk">kriskrasnowski@lda.gov.uk</a> )</li> <li>→ Review and further develop links with JCP offices (providers as appropriate)</li> </ul>
Developing more flexible provision based on what works (individuals and employers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Develop a series of models of delivery based on good practice, including in the work of college Business Development Units and linking with Employability Demonstration Pilots.</li> <li>→ Share college waiting lists so that individuals can get started with another provider.</li> <li>→ Abolish start and end dates for provision so that individuals and employers can start training when they are ready.</li> <li>→ Further develop work placement opportunities for people with ESOL needs.</li> <li>→ Feedback to the LSC on examples of flexible provision that works, and where key blockages are in developing flexible offers (feedback to <a href="mailto:matthew.bird@lsc.gov.uk">matthew.bird@lsc.gov.uk</a> ).</li> </ul> <p style="color: red; text-align: center;">All these actions are provider-led.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Explore the use of Licence to Skill (<a href="http://www.jhconsulting.org.uk">www.jhconsulting.org.uk</a> support available if needed)</li> <li>→ Continue the work on exploring a flexible accreditation system, including portable credits (DIUS, QCA, LSC)</li> </ul>
Incentivising employers and employees to sign up to, and pay for training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Develop shorter full cost recovery courses that are more affordable (providers in partnership with employers)</li> <li>→ Trial ESOL for Work qualification and feedback to LSC and DIUS. (ESOL Transition fund providers are asked to feed back through the next interim evaluation reports in March and July. Information will be passed to DIUS. They can also feed back to <a href="mailto:matthew.bird@lsc.gov.uk">matthew.bird@lsc.gov.uk</a> )</li> <li>→ Showcase and reward successful employer/provider training partnerships (LSEB will set up a page on its website. Contributors should email their examples, marked 'ESOL showcase' to <a href="mailto:lseb@london.gov.uk">lseb@london.gov.uk</a>)</li> <li>→ Publicise good practice through the Skillstories web platform (providers and employers can upload to <a href="http://www.skillstories.org">www.skillstories.org</a> )</li> </ul>
Coherent services for people with ESOL needs – a 'vision' for ESOL in London and a single funding pot.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Continue to develop the vision for ESOL in London, arrangements for the single pot and its use (LSC, LDA, JCP/DWP with LSEB)</li> <li>→ Joint response to DIUS consultation paper on ESOL and Community Cohesion from members of the group (LSEB Secretariat to lead).</li> <li>→ Individual responses to the DIUS consultation (individual organisations – agencies, DWP, providers etc. Please respond to <a href="mailto:esolconsultation@dius.qsi.gov.uk">esolconsultation@dius.qsi.gov.uk</a> )</li> </ul>