

ESOL and Regional Economic Strategies: A scoping paper



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Introduction

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)¹ is one of the huge challenges facing the post-16 learning and skills sector in the UK. Changes in migration trends in recent years have resulted in a considerable increase in the number of adults wishing to develop their English language skills and transformed the profile of learner cohorts in many regions and localities. Recently arrived asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants have joined long-term settled immigrants who continue to need access to English language tuition.

Migrants bring a wealth of skills, knowledge and talent and make a substantial and positive contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of the nation. They are also needed to fill some of the UK skills gaps identified by Leitch (2006). In return, it is vital that they are supported to acquire the English language skills they need to live and thrive in the UK. There is compelling evidence that securing and progressing in employment is the most important factor in successful settlement (DWP, 2005; Home Office, 2005a and b; Phillimore *et al*, 2006). Yet in each region there are critical barriers preventing this, and these have implications for economic advancement and social cohesion.

More than a language, the report of the NIACE Committee of Inquiry into ESOL, was published on 3 October 2006 following a year-long gathering of evidence. The committee found worrying evidence that current ESOL provision is not meeting the needs of all adults who need to develop their English language skills. Demand has overwhelmed an already overstretched supply, and although ALI/Ofsted inspections indicate that ESOL showed a small but welcome improvement in 2004–05, the quality of teaching is very uneven and much ESOL provision is inadequate and inappropriate. The NIACE inquiry also found that teacher training and qualifications for learners and teachers need urgent attention, and the funding available is not sufficient to meet all the demand.

Patterns of demand for English language tuition and the challenges in meeting it vary between and within the English regions. Factors influencing this include dispersal of asylum seekers, the employment of European migrant workers and labour market trends. This means that a nationally determined ‘one size fits all’ approach to ESOL provision is not appropriate. It is important that regions

drill down into regional evidence, including demographic, skills and labour market information, to gain an in-depth understanding of the English language learning needs in their region to enable them to formulate effective responses and allocate resources to meet this demand.

However, strategic planning to ensure that provision and funding allocations reflect regional and sub-regional demographic trends and labour market requirements and align with regional economic and skills plans is at a very early stage in many of the English regions, and approaches vary substantially. For this reason one of the 39 recommendations made in *More than a language* is:

Work-related language training for migrants, refugees and members of settled communities should be addressed in Regional Economic Strategies and the work of Regional Skills Partnerships.

Following *More than a language*...

Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education welcomed *More than a language* and accepted many of the findings and recommendations, although not the funding recommendations, at the report launch event and in a subsequent letter to NIACE (October 2006).² A number of developments have subsequently been put into place.

The most significant changes relate to funding. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Annual Statement of Priorities, *Raising our Game*, published in October 2006, proposed a number of changes to ESOL funding from September 2007. Two of these proposals stimulated national debate; ESOL, unlike literacy and numeracy, will no longer attract automatic fee remission, and asylum seekers over 19 years of age will not be eligible for publicly funded ESOL provision.

A Race Equality Impact Assessment (DfES, 2007) on the changes was undertaken. This found a number of important concerns, mostly centring on the exclusion of asylum seekers, and access to ESOL for low-paid workers and women with no access to family income. A range of measures has been designed to address those concerns. These include the addition, in 2007–08, of £4.6m to the Learner Support Hardship Fund, and reinstatement of entitlement to ESOL provision for asylum seekers who are

¹ The term ESOL is used to cover all English language tuition for adult speakers of other languages. This includes all settings where teaching and learning takes place, and encompasses embedded language support to enable learners to access other subjects as well as discrete English language provision.

² <http://www.niace.org.uk/projects/esol-enquiry/documents/DfES-ESOLResponse.pdf>

legally in the UK for more than six months awaiting a decision on an asylum claim or appeal, or eligible for support under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

The government also plans to take forward the dialogue with partners about securing employer contributions to the cost of learning. Employers who have recruited workers from outside the UK will be asked to bear the cost of English language training.

New ESOL for Work qualifications will be introduced from September 2007. These are intended to have a stronger focus on the language skills needed for the work environment through shorter, more work-focused qualifications. These qualifications will not attract weighted funding.

Other developments include the following:

- A National ESOL Forum has been established.
- The Interdepartmental Skills for Life Group is establishing an ESOL sub-group.
- A scoping paper to identify the links between ESOL policy, provision and providers and key aspects of Every Child Matters and the 14–19 policy has been produced.
- Workplace ESOL case studies which will illustrate common themes, effective practice and inform the next stages of development for work-related ESOL language development have been commissioned.
- Relevant agencies are addressing teacher education reform and quality improvement.

The Department for Education and Skills commissioned NIACE to analyse developments concerning work-related English language training for migrants, refugees and members of settled communities in the Regional Economic Strategies and Regional Skills Partnership plans of each of the English regions. By regions, we mean the Government Office English regions: North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, Eastern, London, South East and South West. At the time of writing, in the lead up to a sub-national economic review, there is considerable debate about right size economic planning in terms of city-regions, core cities and other sub-regional arrangements which could, in the future, affect strategic planning for ESOL.

This paper is the report of this work and therefore outlines themes, approaches and concerns and makes recommendations for regional developments. This process was undertaken in February and March 2007 in

a context of rapid developments at both national and regional levels. It offers, therefore, a snapshot in which the overarching factors and concerns are likely to have relevance for the foreseeable future although specific features will develop and change.

Background

Demographic factors

Migration has long been a feature of UK demography (Phillimore *et al*, 2006). It is difficult to describe because data are only ever accurate for a brief period, and trends are even harder to predict. We do know, however, that the last fifteen years have been marked by rising numbers of refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. Although numbers have started to fall, the trend could reverse again in response to global events. Migration for reunion with families and spouses continues, and economic migration has increased substantially in response to labour market changes and the expansion of the European Union in 2004 (Berkeley *et al*, 2006).

English language and work

Proficiency in English language is vital to the life chances of inward migrants to the UK and enhances the contribution they make to productivity and overall economic prosperity. Migrants with fluent English language are 20 per cent more likely to be in employment and earn approximately 20 per cent more than those with underdeveloped language skills (Bloch, 2002; Dustmann and Fabbri, 2003). Some groups, for instance Pakistani and Bangladeshi adults, are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market and this can in part be attributed to low levels of proficiency in English (Tackey *et al*, 2006).

The English language development needs of individuals are complex and determined by cross-cutting factors such as educational background rather than by immigration status. There are similarities in the employment patterns of settled migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers, but also significant differences. Migrant workers, for instance, often work for temporary periods in low-paid, unskilled employment but some are highly skilled and a number become permanent residents. Settled immigrants might be in the workforce but need to retrain as their employment, often in traditional manufacturing industries, disappears. Older women immigrants might have limited English and little labour market experience. Most asylum seekers are not allowed to work, but have to be prepared to enter the labour market if their claim is successful. Refugees and migrant workers can face considerable barriers in entering the employment market at levels commensurate with their skills, qualifications and experience (Bloch, 2002).

Work-related English language provision can assist adult speakers of other languages to secure and progress in employment. The most effective provision will focus on language, vocational skills, work cultures, work relationships and communication, and rights and responsibilities at work, especially health and safety. However, wider matters should also be included. It is important not to draw an artificial distinction between the economic and social aims of English language teaching because proficiency in English is crucial to families, citizenship, settlement, social cohesion, and democratic participation. Without sufficient English, individuals and communities can end up isolated and ultimately alienated from the wider culture and community.

Current ESOL provision is not well adapted to supporting adult speakers of other languages to develop employment-related language and communication skills. Neither are information, advice and guidance services well developed to meet their particular needs, and brokers are not always equipped with sufficient understanding of English language needs. Barriers to providing ESOL in the workplace include difficulties in engaging employers, shortage of tutors, and insufficient funding for development work and tuition. In addition, more creative solutions are needed to overcome logistical barriers such as shift patterns, long working hours, short-term contracts and high levels of labour mobility which can make attendance and progress erratic. Funding for set-up and development activity is often lacking, and work-related curricula and materials are still underdeveloped.

Regional strategic planning

National changes in migration play out differently in different localities and are influenced by factors such as the nature of the established population, local labour markets, and levels of employment. Migration can create increased or new demands on local services including education, schools, police and health which have differing capacity to respond (Audit Commission, 2007). Collecting reliable data on English language learning needs is a difficult task for a number of reasons. These include challenges in defining and assessing English language skills and learning needs; further, the population is mobile and their needs change. This is recognised by some regions, for instance the South West and East Midlands regions note the difficulty of getting quantitative data on migration in their evidence bases. Consequently there is a paucity of robust national and regional data to indicate precise demand for English language learning from either individuals or employers. Some regions, in particular London, have attempted to interrogate and analyse the data we do have, but this does not appear to be consistent either nationally or across all regions.

Similarly, up-to-date, reliable data are not available to provide a comprehensive picture of either learner or employer demand, or of all the work-related ESOL provision in the regions. We know from evidence to the NIACE ESOL Inquiry that there is a wide-ranging array of provision that includes both accredited and non-accredited programmes and spans all levels. However, it appears to be mostly provided on an unplanned and ad-hoc basis, and considerable demand remains unmet, not least because of shortages of tutors and funding shortfalls. Regional and local strategic planning and funding allocation is therefore crucial to reflect the nuances of regional circumstances and secure a closer match between regional strategic planning, learner and employer demand and work-related ESOL provision.

Regional Economic Strategies: an overview

As noted above, we recognise that there is a great deal of ESOL activity at provider level and some local planning and/or co-ordination in each region. The purpose of this paper is not to map or analyse this provision, but to examine the extent to which ESOL is considered in Regional Economic Strategies and the work of Regional Skills Partnerships. The paper will also note where regions have developed ESOL strategies, although these might be outside the Regional Economic Strategy frameworks. The development of the regional ESOL strategies to date has been led by the LSC, often working with local partners, with differing degrees of alignment with the Regional Economic Strategy and other regional strategies, especially those relating to broader priorities such as community cohesion.

The Regional Economic Strategies of the nine English regions clearly respond to a number of stated or anticipated policy imperatives, and the contexts in which they are written inevitably differ. The strategies contain a great deal of commitment and references to the need to respond to diverse populations, address economic inclusion, tackle barriers to learning and skills, and to employability. Although the contribution of migrant workers to local and regional economies is viewed as positive, the imperative to co-ordinate support services is rarely stressed. Only the London Regional Economic Strategy contains detailed actions on addressing work-related language training, although there are references to ESOL in the Yorkshire and the Humber, North West and South East Regional Economic Strategy documents. The remainder of Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Skills Partnership plans contain little detail. Regions that are currently in the process of reviewing and re-writing their Regional Economic Strategies are likely to take into account recent changes in patterns of migration as well the rising profile of ESOL.

Overall, there appears to be little evidence that the pressures and tensions that providers are facing on the ground have yet, on the whole, been translated into regional strategy and policy. Detailed consideration of how best to provide ESOL training that will equip adults with the language skills that will render them employable in industries and services identified as requiring an investment in people does not appear. There is also little reference to English language needs to support wider policy objectives including settlement, community cohesion and local democratic participation.

Four regions, the South West, Yorkshire and the Humber, North West and London, have well-developed or developing strategies and/or action plans in place in relation to work-related ESOL and language training. Others, including the West Midlands, are in the process of developing ESOL strategies that are not yet in the public domain. ESOL is also addressed in the regional migrant worker strategies that are emerging in some regions including the North East.

The vision statements for many of the Regional Economic Strategies demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and awareness of their region's position within the national and global market place. Diversity, equality and fulfilling potential are addressed. Emphasis is given to sustainability and quality of life for all:

... a leading economy, founded on our world-class knowledge base and the creativity and enterprise of our people, in order to improve the quality of life of all who live and work here (East of England);

A dynamic, sustainable international economy which competes on the basis of knowledge, advanced technology and an excellent quality of life for all... (North West);

Invest in success, lift underperformance and support quality of life (South East).

All the strategies provide broad statements on employment, learning and skills. Improving employment rates, particularly in areas of concentration of deprivation and disadvantage, is prioritised in one way or another in all of the strategies, and raising literacy, language and numeracy and qualification levels also features.

Despite the major contribution that migrant workers are making to many regional economies, meeting their work-related language needs is rarely considered in any depth, if at all, in Regional Economic Strategies. In some regions this will be because the migrant population has increased since the Regional Economic Strategy was developed. The need to address the development of skills and

qualifications at intermediate and higher levels (Levels 3, 4 and 5) is seen as key to productivity and economic growth. However, there is little overt consideration of how to support the migrants who have higher-level skills but need to enhance their proficiency in English language to secure employment commensurate with their skills and abilities.

Work-related ESOL training in Regional Economic Strategies and Regional Skills Partnership plans

Consideration of work-related ESOL within Regional Economic Strategies varies. The majority of strategies are committed to inclusion and black and minority ethnic groups. However, few consider English language as a variable affecting inclusion and economic prosperity. Members of these groups do not necessarily have any English language development needs, but there are few examples of initiatives to collect data to indicate the percentage of regional black and minority ethnic populations with English language development needs, the type and level of language support they need or whether they have high levels of qualification which may or may not be easily transferable.

Regional Skills Partnership plans are more detailed in relation to specific groups and to language needs. They differ considerably in their stage and process of development, presentation and content, and there are as yet few instances of Regional Skills Partnership plans containing strategic coherent and co-ordinated plans to address English language needs determined by individuals and employers in different regions and sectors.

South West

In the South West 'strong and inclusive communities' are at the heart of the Regional Economic Strategy, and migrant workers are cited as part of a growing, ageing and more diverse population whose economic inclusion should be addressed. The issue of migrant workers will form part of one of 'Five Great Debates' which will, over the next couple of years, tackle critical issues facing the region's economy. The South West Regional Skills Partnership has established a Migrant Workers' Task and Finish group that has determined that supporting ESOL programmes is the most effective way of addressing nearly all issues for migrants. This aims to reduce pressure on programmes for more settled communities.

The South West undertook a 'gap analysis' of regional plans and priorities to inform the development of the Regional Skills Partnership statement of priorities for 2007–08. This analysis identifies Skills for Life as 'an issue of major importance' to the region, and ESOL as a particular hotspot due to the recent and increasing presence of migrant workers. Nearly 70 per cent of these

migrant workers registered with employers were working in administration, business and management, hospitality and catering, and agriculture.

The LSC South West Regional Skills Action Plan 2007–10 picks up some of the issues highlighted in the gap analysis. Actions are planned to meet the information, advice and guidance needs of migrants and an induction to English programme is currently being devised for migrant workers. This will be supported by ESF monies and will thereby help to maintain the balance of provision for the settled population of the region. ESOL forms part of the South West Skills for Life Strategy and the infrastructure to deliver this strategy is currently being developed.

South East

In the South East there are few references to ESOL in the new Regional Economic Strategy: *A Framework for Sustainable Prosperity 2006–2016*. The first reference to migrant workers in one of the introductory sections of the Regional Economic Strategy states that:

... labour shortages are being resolved by drawing in workers from outside the region, which increases the pressure on infrastructure and particularly the need for more housing.

Skills-led growth objectives seem to be focused on ensuring that *existing residents* (p. 38) can take advantage of the economic benefits of regeneration.

It is known that companies in the prosperous Thames Valley area of the region are recruiting migrant workers of high calibre and skills, although in other localities the effects of immigration appear to be placing pressure on public services. In high-growth areas like Slough the employment needs of settled communities, including Asian women, are seen as crucial. The importance of language training to support migrant workers is acknowledged as a priority within the section Smart Growth Skills:

The growing importance of in-migration from the European Union and beyond also offers a unique opportunity to support the transfer of existing skills as well as bring global perspectives to the business environment. This will only happen if new and existing communities are supported to avoid being trapped in, or even excluded from, the lowest paid jobs. This requires the provision of adequate language skills support and through removing barriers to accessing information, employment and training.

However, only one supporting action is identified:

promoting re-training schemes for refugees and asylum seekers and lobby to change the law in relation to access to work for these groups.

This is under the 'Employment' theme, which is about improving the employment rate rather than supporting people already in work.

SEEDA has been very committed to supporting the workplace basic skills agenda, although the 2005 Regional Skills for Productivity Alliance Plan does not refer specifically to the ESOL needs of migrant workers. There are indications that the new Regional Skills for Productivity Alliance plan, being prepared to respond to the Regional Economic Strategy, is likely to include statements about migrant workers and ESOL.

The LSC's Regional Commissioning Plan commits the LSC to increasing opportunities and support for those without basic skills and first Level 2 in both its Action for Communities and Action for Business priorities, but this will be within the context of national funding policy. Action for Communities is named in the Regional Economic Strategy as one of the four priorities. In response to recent ESOL developments, the LSC has established three sub-regional forums, based on the Professional Development Centres for the region, to gather and share information about provider practice around ESOL. The LSC is involved, informally, in dialogue with partners, providers and stakeholders about the changes in funding policy for ESOL and it is hoped that there will be opportunities to further support ESOL provision within the new Regional ESF Plan currently being prepared.

London

In London, the Mayor's Economic Development Strategy, *Sustaining Success*, places considerable emphasis on tackling barriers to employment, reducing disparities in labour market outcomes between groups and addressing the impacts of concentrations of disadvantage. There is an acknowledgment that London's refugees and asylum seekers face barriers including language problems and concerns about their rights to live and work in the UK. Improvement in the quality and quantity of literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision form part of the Implementation and Action Plan for the Strategy. Within the Action Plan, the Greater London Authority group is also tasked to 'explore ways of recognising qualifications amongst migrant populations'.

In terms of work-related language training, the significant action plan in London forms part of the Skills for Life Strategy, developed by the LSC, in partnership with the London Development Agency, Jobcentre Plus and other regional partners under the auspices of the London Skills Commission. The Strategy provides a framework for multi-agency collaboration and a coherent approach to planning and funding all Skills for Life provision in London. (See Appendix, 'London Case Study', p. 16.)

East of England

In the East of England, the Regional Economic Strategy is currently being revised. The previous strategy (November 2004) acknowledged that:

the use of migrant labour to address skills shortages and other recruitment difficulties is likely to be an increasing trend as a result of EU enlargement. The region will need to co-ordinate support services for migrant workers to ensure that their skills are fully utilised to the benefit of the regional economy.

The 2004 Regional Economic Strategy recognises that some black and minority ethnic communities, refugees and asylum seekers are extremely vulnerable and face unacceptably high risks of unemployment or disadvantage. It is envisaged that the revised Strategy will address this. The Eastern Regional Skills for Life Strategy was published in March 2005 and is currently being revised. The NIACE Regional Achievement Dialogues with providers and agencies in the region indicated that there is support for development of a regional ESOL strategy, but discussions are still in the early stages.

There have been significant increases in the numbers of migrant workers employed in a range of sectors across the East of England (Home Office *et al*, 2006). In response to this, the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) commissioned a research report, *Migrant Workers in the East of England*, which was published in Autumn 2005. This report highlights as an issue, 'A lack of suitable ESOL provision' and recommends encouraging increased employer commitment to work-based learning opportunities for migrant workers and that the needs of both employers and workers must be considered when discussing and planning ESOL provision. In response to this report EEDA has established a regional Migrant Workers Steering Group which is preparing a draft Migrant Workers Regional Action Plan. This contains a section on skills and their under-utilisation.

East Midlands

The East Midlands Regional Economic Strategy, *A Flourishing Region*, details as priority actions the development of adult workforce skills, stimulating skills demand, matching skills provision to employer demand and exploiting the opportunities of Higher Education. The Regional Economic Strategy, referring to the 'Eastern sub-area', acknowledges the seasonal temporary and casual employment of migrant workers in tourism, agriculture and agriculture. Migrant workers are described as providing a critical contribution to the local economy and an additional dimension to the socio-economic profile of the area. Annex C of the Strategy refers to 'Under-represented groups, one of which is migrant workers'. This short section makes general statements about the 'substantial benefits to the

economy' of economic migration and again refers primarily to South Lincolnshire (the 'Eastern sub-area'). It refers to key problems faced by employers in employing migrants – which might inform a future support action plan for both groups. There is little detail about the nature and impact of migration in the East Midlands as a whole, or specifically about the ESOL learning needs of migrants.

One of the priorities of the Employment and Skills Partnership in the East Midlands is to 'develop adult skills at all levels, to meet the needs of the regional economy', and specifically 'raising the skills of those already in work', including Skills for Life and Level 2 skills. There is, though, no reference to English language training for work. The LSC Regional Commissioning Plan 2007–08 addresses this in Section 28, where there is a reference to the need to further analyse the participation and funding of priority learners including refugees and asylum seekers. An example of this is given as: '*Speaking and Listening ESOL provision ... that currently does not contribute to targets*' but is of particular importance to migrant and immigrant workers wishing to access employment.

The East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA), acknowledging the significance and importance of migration in the region, commissioned research summarised in the report 'Migrant workers in the East Midlands labour market' (Green *et al*, 2007).

The webpage summary notes that:

... the report provides information and data analysis on the magnitude, characteristics and geographical distribution of people from outside the UK working and seeking work in the East Midlands. It also assesses associated impacts upon the East Midlands labour market and the non-migrant population.

It highlights the importance of 'distinguishing between volume and growth' in 'examining spatial patterns of migrant workers' (Executive Summary). Its purpose is to benefit EMDA and partner organisations in terms of regional policy development, including in relation to learning and skills (Section 1.1), though learning and skills (including ESOL) are not themselves part of the report's scope and are not addressed anywhere else in it. On the basis of the report, it may be that the Regional Economic Strategy will be adjusted to take account of the nature of migrants, their learning and skills needs (including language) and their impact on employment throughout the East Midlands

West Midlands

The West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy 2006–10 notes high numbers of refugees moving into the region, around 50,000 at the time of writing but numbers fluctuate, and increased worker mobility following

European Union enlargement. It acknowledges the opportunities that this presents for the economy. There is a commitment to improving literacy, numeracy and ICT, to ensuring that the population has access to training and employment, the skills and knowledge of all groups are recognised and utilised and to valuing all cultures for their contribution. The diversity in culture and languages in the region is presented as a great strength.

The review of the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy points to an ageing workforce, international migration and increasing diversity amongst the population. It cites a weak skills base and the especially high economic inactivity in black and minority ethnic groups as possible reasons for prioritising the encouragement of alternative sources of labour such as older workers and migrant workers.

The Regional Skills Assessment produced by the Regional Skills Partnership (October 2006) is detailed in its analysis of the issues facing migrant workers and settled communities, identifying high urban black and minority ethnic rates of unemployment and the *worst skills shortage problem in the country*. The language barriers that migrant workers face and the particularly low levels of qualifications in Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups are recognised. Addressing barriers to employment and learning, the skills needs of the economy and achieving social inclusion are high priorities.

The Regional Development Agency in the West Midlands developed a Language Strategy in 2003. It is primarily concerned with modern foreign languages, but does recognise the value of the language skills of migrant workers, and asylum seekers for employers. The social inclusion section emphasises the importance of promoting training opportunities for ESOL. The LSC in the region is developing an ESOL strategy but this is not yet in the public domain.

Yorkshire and the Humber

The Regional Economic Strategy for Yorkshire and the Humber makes a broad commitment to improving education and skills performance and connecting even more people to jobs; members of black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in the priority groups. Over a third of the adults of working age in the region have few or no qualifications and this group are much less likely to be in work. Consequently the improvement of English language, vocational and core skills for employability and everyday work is high on the list of actions. As part of the evidence for the strategy, it is stated that there is a need to reach out to groups who have concentrations of workless people, including black and minority ethnic adults or other groups such as refugees.

The Regional Skills Partnership appears to be refocusing priorities on literacy, language and numeracy skills and developing greater links between skills and employability. Whilst there is a general commitment to improving the skills of the workforce, there is nothing in detail and little that specifically mentions migrants, refugees or settled communities. The LSC is developing an ESOL strategy for the region.

North East

The North East Regional Economic Strategy outlines its vision of a region where '*... everyone will have the opportunity to realise their full potential*'. Much emphasis is placed on encouraging the setting up of new business and targeting groups believed to have the latent potential to start up their own businesses or who would benefit from the flexibility of self-employment. These would include 'young people, women, disadvantaged communities, immigrants and refugees'.

Promoting economic inclusion is seen as a priority which cuts across the whole of the strategy. A need to promote the economic benefits of equality and diversity to employers and service providers is also identified. There is a recognition that many people in the region lack 'basic skills, key skills and life skills' and that there are cultural barriers to employment within different ethnic groups. However, solutions to addressing these barriers tend to be seen as lying largely within transport rather than learning.

The Regional Skills Partnership, Skills North East, leads on the delivery of the Skills Action Plan for the region. The action plan acknowledges the low levels of literacy, language and numeracy and ICT skills, and the need to raise achievement in these areas as well as increase capacity to deliver Skills for Life provision in the region. However, the distinctive needs of bilingual adults and the distinctive nature of ESOL are not addressed. There is a commitment to promoting and mainstreaming equality of opportunity and realising the potential of the North East's diverse communities and 'harnessing the skills of refugees and immigrants' is seen as a key challenge for all partners. A migrant workers strategy is being developed by the LSC which could address migrant workers' English language skills needs.

North West

The North West has seen a fast-growing demand for ESOL due to an increase in the numbers of migrant workers. The number of asylum seekers has also grown as it is one of the top three dispersal regions in the UK. The Regional Economic Strategy in the North West is committed to growing the size and capability of the workforce. This requires encouraging economic activity

in the most deprived areas and among the most disadvantaged communities, which includes black and minority ethnic communities.

There are specific actions focused on migrant workers such as developing transitional programmes (including ESOL) for migrant workers and promoting best practice in their employment. An issue that this strategy addresses, which has less visibility in others apart from London's, is the transferability of overseas qualifications. The North West Development Agency is also funding Migrant Workers North West, an organisation that promotes best practice in the employment of migrant workers and the provision of support to migrant worker communities.

Tackling low skills and the employability needs of disadvantaged groups are key priorities of the Regional Skills Partnership in the North West. The LSC has recognised the positive contribution of migrant workers to the local economy and also the particular challenges that are faced by the increase in demand for ESOL and the forthcoming changes in LSC funding for ESOL. The NW Annual Statement of Learning and Skills Priorities 2006–07 points to the necessity of providing sector-specific ESOL in, for example, engineering, food and drink, land-based services and retail. The LSC has commissioned the Regional Language Network to work with sectors to develop a strategy for language development which will include meeting the needs of migrant workers.

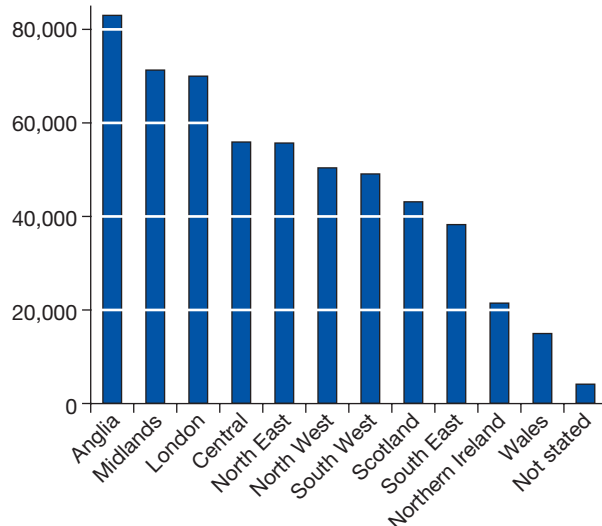
The LSC is also leading the development of a three-year ESOL strategy and implementation plan in order to raise awareness and address issues of delivery and quality, including information, advice and guidance. One of the key objectives is to 'Influence the embedding of ESOL across the North West employer engagement strategies through a sectoral approach'. In addition, the LSC is funding ESOL capacity building with particular emphasis on tutors delivering in the workplace to migrant workers in partnership with union learning representatives.

Common themes

Identifying and addressing learner need

The number of migrant workers from the European Union has increased significantly since 2004 but they are unevenly distributed across regions, creating different pressures and levels of demand for ESOL (see Figure 1). Although precise data on the language needs of migrant workers are not available, evidence to the NIACE Inquiry (2006) indicated that there is a significant level of demand from this group.

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of employers of registered workers, May 2004–December 2006.



Source: Accession Monitoring Report May 2004–December 2006.

Regions are based on the applicant's employer's postcode, where supplied. Regions are defined according to the Post Office's Postal Address Book regions (these are not exactly co-terminous with the nine Government English regions).

It is important that the migrant workers strategies under development in regions address language-learning needs. However, it is also important to recognise that migrant workers are still a minority of ESOL learners in many regions and the needs of all ESOL learners, including settled migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, also have to be addressed in regional strategies.

Gender is also an issue to be considered. Again, robust data are lacking, but anecdotal evidence persistently suggests that many women, especially from settled migrant communities, currently do not access ESOL, and this impacts on their employment prospects as well as community cohesion. Targeted ESOL can also support workless women to access the labour market.

Employer engagement

There is enormous scope to increase awareness of ESOL amongst employers and employment agencies to persuade them of the benefits of investing in the development of their employees' English language skills. Regional strategies could address this question of employer engagement at regional as well as national level, and agencies could facilitate a targeted approach linked in to other regional employer initiatives. Language proficiency is an important matter in all sectors where migrant workers are employed, and the Sector Skills Councils could play a role at both national and regional levels. However, some have not yet addressed English language training in their Sector Skills Agreements and are not compelled to do so. Asset Skills is leading approaches to support Sector Skills Councils to enhance their awareness of literacy, language and numeracy work related issues.

It is clear that trade unions can also play a major role in unionised workforces/settings in promoting a positive image of migrants and the contribution they can make to the workplace and the community. They are also well placed to develop awareness amongst union members and colleagues about the value of ESOL and encourage employers to support this agenda. There are examples in many regions of trade union activity to support ESOL programmes and promote a positive image of the contributions migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers and settled workers can make. However, in the largely non-unionised SME sector the problem of engagement is likely to endure without intervention and support.

Meeting individual and employer need

Demand for ESOL ranges from the most basic Entry Level to higher levels well above the Skills for Life ceiling of Level 2. The NIACE Inquiry found that there is considerable unmet demand for ESOL at pre-Entry and Entry Level. One reason is a tension between meeting national Public Service Agreement targets for gaining recognised qualifications at Entry Level 3 and Levels 1 and 2, and meeting the full range of ESOL needs

Funding is linked to qualifications that are not always most appropriate for workplace ESOL, especially for the many individuals who require fast-track English courses focused on specific work contexts. New qualifications to address this are under development and will be introduced from September 2007. At the time of writing, the ability of initiatives such as Train to Gain to support regional economic workforce and sectoral English language needs has not yet been demonstrated. Train to Gain is designed to support learners to achieve qualifications at Level 2. This is limited as it is not always regarded as the most appropriate level or qualification by either learners or employers and does not support ESOL learning at Entry and higher levels.

There is anecdotal evidence of considerable activity in relation to ESOL taking place in voluntary and community sector organisations, although much of this is unmapped. There is particular pressure on these organisations to meet unmet demand at Entry Level, but in some regions there are informal reports of rising concern that demand for learning is growing beyond the capacity of this sector.

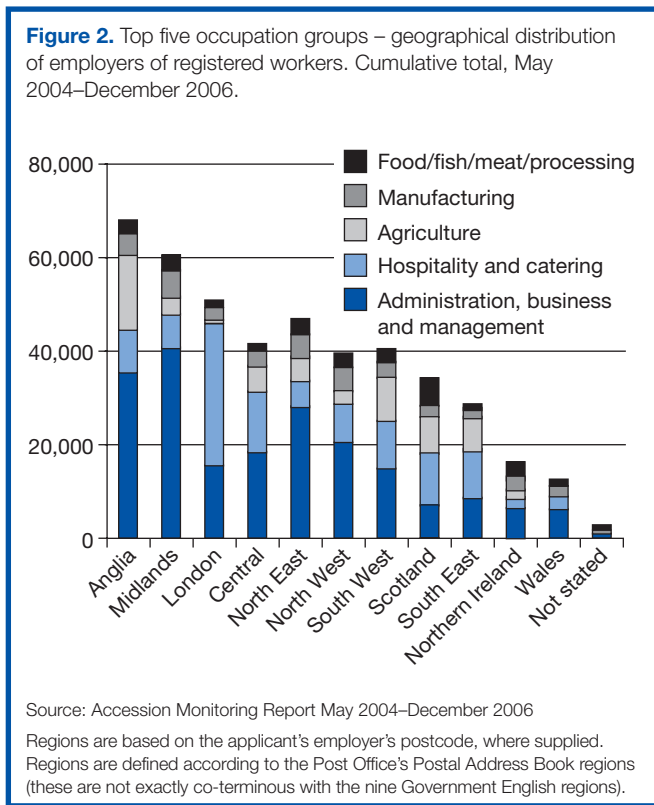
National research indicates that refugees and other migrants with qualifications and work experience well above Level 2 have potential to make a significant contribution to the regional economies (NIACE, 2006). However, only London and the North West appear to be addressing this explicitly in regional ESOL strategies at the time of writing, although there is acknowledgement in other regions that refugees, asylum seekers and other

members of settled communities have skills and knowledge that are under-utilised.

Curriculum

In all regions there is a lack of alignment between a predominantly generic curriculum offer and individuals' priorities for ESOL for employment and employability (NIACE, 2006). Needs in regions are often related to specific sectors depending on the workforce profile. In the East of England, for instance, there is a particular need for language training for employees in construction, care, hospitality, and food production and processing which is not being met. Figure 2, which illustrates the distribution of sectors employing migrant workers, illustrates this. This provides some help when planning ESOL, but for regions where migrant workers form only part of the populations needing ESOL support these data provide only a partial picture. They need to be complemented by data on the employment patterns and English learning needs of both employed settled immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers and those outside the labour market.

The figures do not include all migrant workers and, as they are a cumulative total for the period May 2004–December 2006, do not provide an accurate reflection of the current picture. However they do provide a clear indication that there are significant regional differences in the distribution of occupations. Twenty-seven per cent of those working in agriculture were working for employers in Anglia, whereas only 1 per cent of agriculture workers were in London. In contrast, 28 per cent of all those working in hospitality and catering were working for employers in London.



Although there are providers who have developed provision for specific employment-related purposes, this is sporadic and inconsistent rather than embedded across regions and sectors. There is clearly a need to tailor provision much more closely to the skills needs and goals of ESOL learners in relation to work, to the requirements of employers and for national development to save resources and duplication of effort. *More than a language* (NIACE, 2006) recommended that:

The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) should commission the development of a curriculum and related materials for workplace-related ESOL and related teacher training materials.

Sector-specific needs could be met if this took the form of a generic core, including language structures, work cultures, work relationships and communications, and rights and responsibilities at work and health and safety that could be customised for specific sectors. The London Employability Demonstration Pilots and the Toolkit Templates may also provide curriculum models. At the same time there is a need for more development work to ensure that bilingual adults outside the labour market can access the high quality and intensive provision they need to support them into work commensurate with their skills and abilities.

Information, advice and guidance

Co-ordinated information, advice and guidance services are essential to support individuals and employers to access the learning they or their workforce need. The NIACE document: *IAG Review and the English regions: Some implications* (Plant and Ravenhall, 2006) comments on the benefits of a strategic approach to IAG which links learning and skills with other agendas, 'for example health, regeneration and culture', particularly in areas with high levels of worklessness. At the time of writing the national review of IAG had little visibility in regional planning. Moves toward better co-ordination and integration of services for employment and skills is happening at a national rather than regional level. Many advisers lack the specialist knowledge and skills needed for work with bilingual adults (NIACE, 2006). Specialist information, advice and guidance for ESOL learners is rarely considered in regional strategies, except in the London Skills for Life Strategy and Action Plan. The North East region reports that a comprehensive and up-to-date database of ESOL provision is a pre-requisite for accurate information, advice and guidance.

Funding workplace ESOL

Providers in most regions are reporting a high demand for ESOL. Current Skills for Life budgets do not stretch to meet all this demand. There are also concerns over the

proposed changes to government funding of ESOL provision. As from September 2007, funding will only be free to learners in receipt of means-tested benefits. Policy decisions are being made against this backdrop and the need to refocus or reprioritise funding. In the South West, for instance, the Regional Skills Partnership has discussed the balance and mix of provision and has taken the view that a new type of provision should be developed for migrant workers with its own source of funding, thereby freeing up mainstream provision for settled communities.

The question of how much individual workers should be expected to contribute and how much they are willing or able to pay is a subject of much debate. The matter of employer contributions is also at the centre of a polarised and somewhat circular debate. The view that employers should pay for provision is set against claims that the majority, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises cannot or will not. Creative approaches need to be found to resolve this dilemma at both national and regional levels.

Research is needed to establish how much employers and employees might be willing to pay and for what, and what differences in the capacity to pay there are between large organisations, small- or medium-sized enterprises or the voluntary and community sector. Sector Skills Councils, employers' organisations and trade unions could all make a constructive contribution to the debate.

ESOL teaching workforce

The capacity of the teaching workforce is a grave concern to national, local and regional planners as there are substantial shortages of experienced and qualified teachers in all regions, although not always in every locality (NIACE, 2006). A forthcoming survey commissioned by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) indicates there are currently 9,796 ESOL teachers employed in England, primarily in further education and concentrated in the largest employers (the largest 20 per cent of providers employ 91.6 per cent of all ESOL staff). Only 21 per cent are full time and just over half (53.9 per cent) are employed on a part-time, hourly paid basis. Twenty-eight per cent of these teachers are classified as fully qualified and 40.2 per cent are part-qualified. A further 26.8 per cent are classified as unqualified, but a high proportion of these teachers do hold certificates and diploma qualifications gained before the introduction of the new subject specialist qualifications. Five per cent hold only introductory or no teaching qualifications.

There are significant regional variations in the numbers employed, mode of employment and qualifications profile of the ESOL teaching workforce. The greatest number (34.1 per cent) of ESOL staff are employed in London, followed by national organisations (19.4 per cent), then the West Midlands (10.1 per cent) compared to only 2.9

per cent in the North East. The report signals the lack of sufficient robust data for an accurate regional breakdown of the numbers of qualified staff but indicates that there are significant variations between the regions. National organisations and the South West region employ the greatest numbers of fully qualified ESOL staff and the East Midlands and North East regions the least. This is a matter of concern, as weaker quality provision has been associated with a lack of experienced, qualified teachers (Ofsted, 2005).

This is often combined with a shortage of initial teacher education places, and a lack of continuing professional development opportunities for ESOL teachers to train to teach work-related ESOL. As previously discussed, not all regions have robust regional demographic and economic intelligence available to enable ESOL planners, funding bodies and providers to predict demand and assess whether the supply of trained ESOL tutors or the availability of support workers is sufficient to meet the current or future needs within regions. It is therefore not always possible to plan meaningfully for recruitment. Intelligence gathering, planning and co-ordination at a regional level would help to ensure that the ESOL teaching workforce development is aligned with individual and employer demand.

Alignment of strategies and approaches

It is clear that a lack of regional co-ordination and networking contributes to fragmented provision which is exacerbated by competition between providers. There is little evidence of awareness-raising of ESOL not only amongst employers but also amongst health, housing, social care, employment and other agencies (NIACE, 2006). There are few mechanisms to facilitate co-ordinated planning of delivery. Processes for gathering and disseminating intelligence about migrant labour and language training needs are needed to inform co-ordinated planning initiatives.

There is, however, evidence of regional voluntary sector strategies addressing ESOL: for example in the Yorkshire and the Humber Voluntary and Community Sector Skills Action Plan. The voluntary sector in the North East has LSC funding to develop a regional learning strategy for asylum seekers and refugees, and has developed a Sector Skills Action Plan to identify and address the training needs of the workforce. Refugee organisations can also play a large role in developing regional strategy and action. In London, representatives of LORECA [London Refugee Economic Action] contribute to the Regional LSC Skills for Life Flagship which has overseen the development of the Skills for Life strategy, action plan and templates. In the North West, Refugee Action is a member of the LSC ESOL Task Group.

Co-ordination between employers, support agencies and providers helps to ensure that the quantity and type of provision meets demand and need. Current thinking on a demand-led approach centralises learner and employer demand and consultation processes. There are considerable challenges to consider to include bilingual adults in consultation processes, not least language barriers. The Regional learner panels are being piloted in Yorkshire and the Humber before roll-out to the other regions could address this challenge. Regional guidance and support for mechanisms which would enable the employer and learner voice to feed into planning ESOL provision will be essential to make provision truly demand-led.

Recommendations

We have found that there is clearly a strong imperative for regional strategic approaches to ESOL provision, and work-related language training in particular. Greater coherence would facilitate improved access to provision, raise quality, maximise funding and promote employer engagement.

- There should be strategic planning and co-ordination of ESOL provision at a sub-national level. ESOL strategies must be closely aligned with the Regional Economic Strategies, Regional Skills Partnership plans and other relevant strategies. They should also be designed to align with Multi Area Agreements, Local Area Agreements and other key sub-regional and local strategies and plans. We recognise that this will be different in each region depending on factors such as existing infrastructure or current and potential demand. They might be separate strategies or sit as distinct sections within key regional or sub-national strategies as they develop.
- English language needs should also be addressed in relevant strategies such as regional skills, health, community cohesion, rural and voluntary sector strategies and Multi and Local Area Agreements. These also need to be aligned with each other and the Regional Economic Strategies. Strategies should be developed by regional stakeholders including planning and funding bodies, learners' forums, employers, providers from different sectors, trades unions, Sector Skills Councils, local authorities and other relevant organisations.
- NIACE recommends a data-driven approach to determine planning and funding allocation. This should take account of existing data, including the LLUK workforce survey (2007). Data collection related

to regional language demands and teaching workforce supply should be commissioned, and attention should be paid to the gender dimension of language skills and labour market access. Where appropriate the research should be from regional observatories so that it is aligned with key regional data. NIACE recognises that research arrangements will be different in each region, but they should conform to a common framework to allow regional and sub-regional comparison and benchmarking.

- Regional ESOL strategies should:
 - identify models of provision relating to the full range of economic and social purposes for which adults need English language – employability, work, and social justice;
 - link to the development of effective Information, Advice and Guidance services and the proposed universal adult careers service;
 - plan provision to take account of regional or sub-regional as well as local demand;
 - identify a range of different funding sources for liaison with employers and other relevant agencies, curriculum development work and provision, and agree approaches to make the best use of available funding;
 - develop progression and employment pathways (to include first steps, pre-Entry language training and recognition/validation of ESOL learners' existing skills and qualifications at higher levels);
 - develop employer engagement programmes to complement existing initiatives;
 - develop work-related language and communications curricula;
 - address the issue of workforce recruitment, training and development in a coherent way at a regional level;
 - be developed with users of the service – individuals, employers and other stakeholders.

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Appendix: London case study

The nature of regional demography means that London made an early start on regional strategic development. This case study has been included not as a blueprint but to learn from the London experience. We recognise that each region will have a different approach to meet particular regional circumstances.

The London Project Report (Cabinet Office, 2004) makes a strong statement about the lack of work-focused ESOL provision in the capital and its effects on Londoners and the economy:

Provision of job-focused English language teaching in London is insufficient, given the city's large foreign-born community.

This statement kick-started work to develop an evidence-based strategy for all London's ESOL provision, which later broadened out to encompass literacy, numeracy and key skills.

The three-year *London Skills for Life Strategy*³ comprises two Strategic Action Plans, one for literacy, numeracy and key skills and one for ESOL. The strategy recognises the vital role of literacy, numeracy, key skills and English language in helping people into work as well as in tackling poverty, social exclusion and disempowerment. It acts as a guide to support the 'development of all Skills for Life provision in the region to ensure that those living and working in the capital have the skills that they need to access jobs and learning opportunities and to take full part in London's community'.

The Strategy provides a framework for multi-agency collaboration aimed at bringing a coherent approach to planning and funding of all Skills for Life provision in the region. Involvement of organisations and individuals responsible for delivery, including further education, adult and community learning, voluntary and community organisations and work-based learning providers are seen as key to the success of the Strategy. Equally so is dialogue with Sector Skills Councils, Business Link for London, the National Employment Panel and others to ensure that the needs of employers, employees and those moving on from welfare to work are met. This collaboration of key partners has been formalised in the development of the Multi Agency Skills Team (MAST) that includes the London Development Agency, Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus and other regional partners. The work is contributing to the development and delivery of the Skills

and Employment Strategy that is in the process of being drawn up by the London Skills and Employment Board.

During the course of its work to date, MAST has identified some key features of provision and services that successfully develop employability and promote economic development and social inclusion. To enable these successful approaches to be shared as a development tool for all providers, a blueprint and toolkit for employability and inclusion has been drawn up. The Toolkit (also known as The Templates) responds to the need for different types of programmes shaped by an individual's needs and goals rather than by provider or funder 'convenience'. It also responds to employer need and directly links to the recommendations of Leitch (2006). The Templates describe the characteristics of groups and individuals and acknowledge that many learners will have a range of needs in addition to skills including health, housing, welfare, employment and re-integration. It is also acknowledged that 'The success of learning and skills interventions will be dependent in part on these other ... needs being met effectively'.

The Templates are being piloted in three boroughs before being rolled out more widely. In addition, as part of the LDA Employability Demonstration Pilots, the Templates are being used in a number of colleges that are working in partnership to creatively develop routeways through provision and into employment or towards employability. These are not new courses, but new approaches to using funding flexibly. For example, one college is developing a non-accredited employability module with their ESOL learners as part of current ESOL provision.

The partnership approach, involving the establishment of a 'community of organisations' has been explored and taken forward in the London Borough of Southwark, where adult education providers and support services met in February to develop the idea of a 'virtual campus'.

The London Strategy recognises that the needs of ESOL learners are complex, particularly in relation to employment. The focus on employability within the Templates is a fresh attempt to address those needs collaboratively and coherently.

³ The Strategy and Action Plans have been developed by Jo Hudek, JH Consulting. All documents relating to the Strategy, and regional activities relating to it, can be downloaded from: <http://www.jhconsulting.org.uk/strategy.asp>