

“Making ESOL
policy work better
for migrants and
wider society...”

ON BREAKING TERMS

Ally
Neil

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Ally Paget

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August 2014

Executive summary

English learning provision for migrants is called English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). ESOL began as a grassroots movement providing courses for migrants, and is now a professional industry, with standards overseen by government and a specialised method of teaching and learning, backed by research, funding and various professional bodies. Government funded ESOL courses are mainly provided through further education (FE) colleges, adult community colleges and independent training providers. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is the main government body responsible for ESOL, with funding administered via the Skills for Life programme by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). In addition, a large number of initiatives around the country deliver ESOL via voluntary and community networks.

The English language is vitally important to the capabilities and integration of migrants – long-term residents, newcomers and people joining family members already here – who wish to build a successful future in the UK. However, in the last census around 850,000 migrants self-reported that they could not speak English well or at all. Immigrants who know the language are more likely to integrate and become part of civic life because they have the necessary capabilities to navigate British society. Yet current ESOL policy suffers from fragmentation, a lack of clarity about the aims and intended outcomes of learning, disagreement over the analysis and description of English language levels and abilities, and a general tendency to take a short-term view. Unlike Scotland and Wales, England lacks a national ESOL strategy. ESOL in England is not functioning as well as it could – or as well as it will need to, to meet the demand associated with demographic projections, which place the UK's ethnic minority population at

between 25 per cent and 43 per cent of the total population by 2056.¹ A coherent ESOL policy should be fit to unlock migrant capabilities, save costs to public services in the long term, and promote a more integrated and socially cohesive society.

Based on desk research, focus groups, interviews and workshops, this report evaluates the policy on ESOL in England, in order to understand the value of English language learning for students and wider society, identify deficiencies in current policy and practice, and suggest how England might offer a system that is of high quality, sustainably funded and equitably available to those who need it.

Advantages of ESOL

Our research identifies a number of advantages associated with English ability, which extend far beyond the labour market outcomes that often dictate the current, narrow ESOL policy remit. These range from so-called ‘soft’ outcomes such as independence, confidence and self-determination, to more tangible benefits such as better access to healthcare and education (and hence better health and better qualifications). We therefore argue for a view of ESOL that sees its aim as ‘unlocking migrant capabilities’, acknowledging the assets migrants already have, including bi- or multilingualism. Related to this, we find evidence for wider societal benefits from ESOL in the long term, from saving costs to health and welfare, to harnessing migrants’ existing and potential employment skills to strengthen the economy, and to creating a more socially cohesive society.

Problems with the current system

We find that successive government approaches to ESOL have failed to meet demand adequately. The lack of a national strategy for ESOL in England has contributed to a poor understanding of the scale of need and of the quality of provision, as well as a dearth of information for potential learners. Using a freedom of information request we found that government ESOL funding

has reduced by 40 per cent in the past five years, but there are large waiting lists around the country, which points to a paradox: an identifiable ESOL need and withdrawal of state support.

Furthermore, the funding system creates perverse incentives, which disadvantage learners at both the lowest and the highest levels, while migrants in employment find it hard to access classes. Workplace-based ESOL has proven effective and offers a potential solution for this group. Current provision fails to take account of the wide range of learner needs, aspirations and circumstances. The Skills Funding Agency and individual FE colleges try hard to meet the needs of learners from unregulated and discretionary sources of funding, but this is not a sustainable solution.

We find examples of good practice in the UK and internationally with the following features:

- opportunities for informal learning, including mentoring schemes
- workplace-based language learning
- information ‘hubs’ that unite FE colleges and the voluntary and community sector
- courses tailored to different starting levels and different learning circumstances, combined with initial learner assessments
- collection of data on learners that is used to inform future provision
- opportunities for migrants to use their first language

Recommendations

- 1 *Demos calls on parties across the political spectrum to include in their manifesto in the run-up to the 2015 general election a commitment to a national strategy for ESOL. This strategy will ensure that England functions at the same level as Scotland and Wales, and should:*

- *include short-, medium- and long-term plans for change*
- *have clearly defined aims with a wider scope than the current, single-track focus on employment*

- *provide for the establishment of dedicated groups such as an all-party parliamentary group (APPG), ESOL provider umbrella body, and national champion*, responsible for raising awareness of ESOL, supporting local authorities, providers and other stakeholders to make the transition to the new strategy, and sharing best practice to improve quality of provision
 - *commit to the collection of cost-benefit data* on ESOL across a range of (cross-departmental) outcomes. Where cross-departmental initiatives occur, these should not simply be time-limited funding pots for innovations which, once tried, do not go anywhere; there should be clear plans to move from 'pathfinder' schemes that prove effective to more sustainable programmes and funding streams.
- 2 *BIS should consult on extending FE advanced learning loans to ESOL level 2 and below.* BIS has recently launched a consultation on extending these loans to lower levels. The proposals under consideration exclude ESOL, though no explanation is given for this. As course costs are a significant barrier to accessing ESOL, and given the evidence that learner contributions increase learner engagement, loans would seem to have potential for widening participation among migrants.
- 3 *Employers should be encouraged to contribute towards the cost of, or otherwise support, ESOL learning for employees.* The national strategy should include a programme of education for employers about the benefits of promoting English language learning in the workplace in terms of health and safety, productivity, cohesion and reduced staff turnover. BIS should reintroduce funding for workplace-based ESOL, but employers should also be encouraged to provide non-financial support.
- 4 Demos backs the National Institution of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in *calling for the introduction of personal skills accounts combining government-, employer- and learner-funding.*² We further propose that:
- *the Government should provide matched funding for employer contributions*

- *accounts should be administered in the form of a prepaid card for user convenience, to assist monitoring, and to avoid fraud or mitigate suspicion of fraud*
 - *there should be alternative, non-financial ways for learners to earn 'credits', for example by mentoring less advanced learners, or by volunteering in the community – a form of 'time-banking' scheme*
- 5 *There should be a statutory requirement for local authorities to maintain an ESOL 'hub' website with information about how to access learning (including informal opportunities such as mentoring and volunteering) and how courses are funded, and details of local courses and providers; where possible this should include Ofsted evaluations of the quality of ESOL provision in the local area. Websites should include a facility for learners to rate and provide feedback on learning opportunities. This would be similar in purpose and scope to the 'local offer', which local authorities are required to publish from September 2014 under the Children and Families Bill 2013, and which sets out local provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.³*
 - 6 *There should be a statutory requirement on local authorities to carry out a needs assessment specifically for migrants. A strategic assessment of migrant needs (SAMN) would encompass the full range of potential migrant needs, including housing, employment, health and education. ESOL providers would feed into the SAMN by supplying data on participation and monitoring information (including, where possible, learner destinations). Finally, there would be a link with the learner ratings gathered through the 'hub' website. The SAMN would therefore allow a comparison of demand and latent (unmet) need, which would inform local targeting of ESOL in the future.*
 - 7 *If local authorities stop spending money on the translation of documents into foreign languages, savings should be ploughed back into ESOL provision. As part of his 2012 guidance to local authorities, '50 ways to save', DCLG minister Eric Pickles recommended that*

local authorities stop spending money on translating documents into foreign languages.⁴ If the aim is to reduce segregation and improve cohesion, local authorities ought to follow through by putting any money saved in this way back into ESOL – perhaps on a matched funding basis from DCLG itself.

- 8 *FE colleges should be contracted by the local authority to carry out formal and transferable initial needs assessments.* This would result in referral to one of the full range of local learning opportunities, including pre-ESOL courses and informal opportunities such as volunteering. Providers should receive funding for carrying out the needs assessment itself, to incentivise them to make appropriate referrals without regard for the likelihood of the learner achieving a qualification.
- 9 *The Government should consult awarding organisations and providers about how to reform the current ESOL standards and national framework, as well as how to improve the overall quality of ESOL provision.* There is widespread agreement that the current national framework creates perverse funding incentives, and fails adequately to capture learners' needs and progress. This has an adverse effect on learners at both the highest and the lowest ends of the spectrum. Adopting the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is a promising option, as it is tailored specifically to language acquisition and adopting it would bring the UK in line with most other developed countries and offer clarity on benchmarking and talking about levels of language ability.
- 10 *BIS and providers should look at ways of combining formal and informal or non-formal learning.* Learners spend most of their time outside the classroom – and they may do so in environments where they do not have many natural opportunities to practise English. Notwithstanding the need to ensure there is access to high quality, formal learning, more should be done to leverage informal learning opportunities from within existing volunteer and community networks, including arrangements like mentoring and time banking.

- ¹¹ *BIS should work with providers to develop 'fast-track' pathways into employment where talented ESOL learners can use their bilingual skills. This initiative would support learners into paid employment where their first language skills were a recognised asset – for example, as EAL teaching assistants or learning support assistants or ESOL teachers.*

Introduction

Aims

This project evaluates the policy on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in England, in order to understand the value of ESOL for learners and wider society, identify deficiencies in current policy and practice, and suggest how the UK might offer a system that is of high quality, sustainably funded and equitably available to those who need it.

Methodology

In compiling this short report, we carried out a combination of desk-based and qualitative research. We:

- reviewed literature relating to past and present ESOL policy in the UK.
- reviewed (English and French language) literature on host language policy and practice in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and New Zealand; this included (where available) statistics on migration, migrant outcomes and language learning, information on language requirements, and evaluations of host language programmes
- held two focus groups with around 10 ESOL learners, one with a group of Somali women in north west London, and another with a group of Polish learners in west London
- held two expert workshops with 10–15 participants each, comprising representatives from FE colleges, government departments and professional bodies, academics and consultants
- held supplementary interviews with key stakeholders

What is ESOL?

In the context of this report ESOL refers to English provision for adult migrants settling in the UK who do not have English as their first language. This should not be conflated with terms such as English as an Additional Language (EAL), and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). England, Wales and Scotland have different ESOL systems. This report looks at ESOL in England – the only country of the three not to have a national ESOL strategy.

Government-funded ESOL courses are mainly provided through further education (FE) colleges, adult community colleges and independent training providers. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is the main government body responsible for ESOL, with funding administered via the Skills for Life programme by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). In addition, a large number of initiatives around the country deliver ESOL via voluntary and community networks. These may be wholly voluntary funded or part funded by local authorities. Until 2013, initiatives may have received support from the European Integration Fund, which existed (since 2007) to promote EU member states' efforts to facilitate integration for third country nationals.

Migrants are able to take ESOL classes at different levels: entry 1, entry 2, entry 3, level 1 and level 2 (see appendix 1 for more information on ESOL levels and qualifications). The highest, level 2, is roughly equivalent to GCSE level, although there is debate around real equivalencies, descriptions and assessment of different levels of English between different benchmarking systems. For instance, there is a forceful argument about adopting the CEFR, which this report covers later, to offer clarity on this issue.

Students at FE colleges, around 70 per cent of funded students, as well as students learning via private providers, study full time (12–24 hours per week) or part time (2–5 hours per week). Course length varies from short 12-week courses to full academic year courses. Other community or volunteer-based modes of study vary, but are generally once or twice per week for an hour or two each session.

The aim of the current ESOL system is for learners to progress from ESOL to mainstream adult learning. Students learn three components of the English language: speaking and listening, reading, and writing. Courses use a specific ESOL core curriculum, which is based on National Standards for Adult Literacy.

It should be noted that the term ‘migrants’ includes people who are here as students as well as longer-term and permanent residents. When we use the term ‘migrants’ we are referring to long-term settlers in the UK. The profile of UK ESOL learners – long term migrants learning English – varies dramatically, by country of origin, starting level of English, level of education (including first language literacy), cultural background, and personal circumstances. All these affect how best, and how quickly, people learn English. The 2011 UK Census provides a rough, recent snapshot of learner profiles. Of the 850,000 people who reported that they could not speak English well or very well in 2011, the two largest groups of migrants broken down by their first languages are the 37 per cent of people who speak South Asian languages and the 17 per cent of Polish speakers. This is mirrored in the ethnic composition of ESOL learners on the main Skills for Life programme, with 29 per cent Asian British and 33 per cent classified as ‘White Other’ in 2011/12.

What is putting pressure on our ESOL system?

Our ESOL system is under strain because of significant demographic, political and funding pressure. Net migration to Britain has been running between 200,000 and 250,000 per year over the past decade. The foreign-born working age population has increased from around 3 million in 1993 to 6 million in 2012. Of these, around 2 million migrants were born within the European Economic Area (EEA) and a further 4 million born outside the EEA. The 2011 Census revealed that close to 1 million people speak either poor English or none at all. There is thus a blockage of skills and language potential, which require English to be ‘unlocked’.

A high proportion (95 per cent) of Britons think that to be considered ‘truly British’ you must be able to speak English, a figure that has increased from 86 per cent in 2003.⁵ The Government has taken note of this view and raised the English language requirements for settlement in the UK. The Labour Government introduced the Life in the UK test in 2002, which is a civic test carried out in English. Initially intended only for those applying for citizenship, it has since become a requirement for any non-EU migrants wishing to become long-term UK residents (the right to free movement means that EU migrants are exempt from this requirement, unless they are applying for naturalisation as UK citizens). In 2009, points began to be awarded for English language ability under the new points-based immigration system for non-EEA migrants. In 2010, a language requirement (A1 level on the CEFR) was introduced for spouses or partners. The level required for those looking to settle was set at B1 on the CEFR in 2013, and the option for migrants with low English ability to take ESOL and citizenship classes instead of the Life in the UK test was abolished.

Meanwhile, funding for the adult skills budget has been steadily decreasing, with implications for access to ESOL. The adult skills budget, which funds most ESOL, has decreased from around £2.8 billion in 2008, to £2.2 billion in 2014, and is forecast to drop to about £2 billion in 2015. ESOL funding on the main Skills for Life programme has declined from approximately £210 million in 2008 to £130 million in 2013.⁶ In a survey of ESOL providers, 66 per cent attributed waiting lists to a lack of government funding.

Why is ESOL important?

It is taken for granted that command of English is advantageous for migrants. This instinct is correct, but in taking it as read policy discussion has neglected the specific benefits of ESOL for individuals and society at large. Even those championing migrant language teaching and learning have tended to neglect the wider social benefits of migrants knowing English, tending towards a broader, rights-based approach. For instance, in the

midst of proposed government cuts in 2010–11, the campaign group Action for ESOL wrote in their ESOL Manifesto that the opportunity to learn the common language of the community in which you live and work is a human right.⁷ However true, this sort of claim is insufficient for the prevailing political climate. The squeeze on public spending and living standards has contributed to scepticism about state support for any group perceived as not ‘paying in’ to the system. Immigrants are one such group. A more robust and evidenced argument of the benefits of ESOL is required.

In this report, we adopt a capabilities approach akin to that put forward by philosopher Amartya Sen. The idea is to consider the major freedoms and abilities required for individuals to reach their potential. Accordingly, we ask, ‘What are migrants capable of and how can English (or ESOL) help them reach their potential?’ Our argument is that the English language is an essential capability for getting ahead in English society. This capabilities approach acknowledges the place of people who come here as spouses, and retired people who may never enter the workplace and live predominantly within their family or a monolingual community, but who nevertheless need to be able to interact with speakers of other languages, at least in a limited way.

Speaking English is a key means by which migrants can develop their personal assets – first, in soft measures like confidence and empowerment – which in turn leads to increased education and labour market capabilities for many. This increases the likelihood of integration overall. Finally, while initial benefits accrue to the migrant, in aggregate, society as a whole collects dividends when the linguistic and skills bases of its migrant population are ‘unlocked’.

Everyday capabilities and aspiration

One of the overlooked benefits of learning ESOL is a boost in everyday capabilities. English is also an essential factor in migrants perceiving themselves, and being perceived, as part of wider society. Migrants we spoke to in the course of this research

reported a significant gain in their sense of control over their lives and a sense of purpose from ESOL learning. These so-called ‘soft skills’ are a prerequisite for a successful – aspirational – transition in a new society, and need to be recognised in any cost-benefit analysis of ESOL provision and learning. One ESOL learner said,

It makes my life easier, I talk to people... I can deal with officials... I can go to the doctor... I learn new things, I can read books and newspapers, I can listen to the news, I have contact with other people.⁸

Various surveys have asked English learners how they benefit from being able to speak English. Everyday capability aspects are regularly cited, including:

- improving official and formal communication like filling out government forms and accessing government services
- improving shopping and informal public interactions
- the ability to learn new things
- the ability to undertake daily tasks like paying bills
- being more engaged and having more effective parental skills
- general increased confidence and independence⁹

It is common for migrants’ children to have better English skills than their parents and for them to be more confident speaking English than their parents’ first language. This also applies to migrants who are children when they arrive. ESOL learners in our focus groups, overwhelmingly women, said that ESOL helped them interact with their children and support them at school, for example by talking to teachers and helping with homework. A mother said: ‘I have problem speaking with my son because I don’t understand many things and I cannot help him.’ Building on the success of programmes such as Ocean Maths, which delivers school-based numeracy skills workshops for parents and children together,¹⁰ the Greater London Authority (GLA) is currently exploring the potential for school-based (adult) ESOL to engage parents.

Learners in our focus groups commented on their fear of embarrassment, which acted for some as an incentive to learn, and for others as a deterrent to trying. One woman told us, ‘Most people are scared to speak English, they are shy; from my experience I was very shy [I] don’t want to be laughed at.’ Those we spoke to described how simply talking to the bus driver had the potential to turn into public embarrassment and confusion. Learners therefore felt that ESOL learning gave them more confidence and self-esteem in general public settings. Furthermore, there is a big difference in the self-esteem attached to the societal role of ‘student’ as opposed to that of ‘immigrant’; hence, even the fact of learning, before any improvement was realised, tended to affect feelings of self-worth.

An initiative that is exploring teaching English through drama techniques is addressing aspects of everyday capabilities (see case study 1).

Case study 1 FaithAction: Creative English

FaithAction: Creative English is a programme that uses improvised drama techniques to build confidence in using the English language. A soap opera runs through sessions and learners take on the role of fictional characters. The script contains everyday functional language helping learners develop their skills for practical experiences while engaging with one another in a creative, enjoyable atmosphere.

Despite having been in existence for only half a year, Creative English is producing positive results already. An example comes from a learner who had not been out of her house for two years as she was always too frightened to leave her home without her husband; she is now engaging in her community by taking her child to the park and going to the shop. Around half the learners are female Muslims who are not literate in their first language and who are not currently in work.

Self-determination and safety

The evidence suggests that we should not ignore the cumulative impact of ‘everyday’ confidence and self-determination. This is something students experience as a strong incentive *to learn*, and as a tangible outcome *of learning*. At the opposite end of the spectrum from the everyday, self-determination may on occasion lead to improved safety and a wholesale improvement in life chances. For example, one study cites the experience of a Pakistani woman acknowledging that learning English helped her gain the confidence to stand up to her abusive partner.¹¹ Although it is obviously important not to sensationalise, stereotype or overstate the frequency with which such practices occur, English language ability needs to be considered in the context of individuals’ (especially women’s and children’s) safety – for example, by agencies encouraging communities to speak out about issues such as female genital mutilation and human trafficking.

The same applies to the risk of labour exploitation. Migrant workers with a poor level of English may be at greater risk of exploitation by employers because they are often unaware of their rights under UK law. A study of Eastern European agency workers in Doncaster found that the majority of agency workers in the survey had no employment contract and were unaware of the terms and conditions of their employment.¹² A UK report into ESOL and the workplace concluded that ESOL helps migrant workers reduce their vulnerability to exploitation by improving their communication skills and therefore their awareness of their rights and responsibilities.¹³

Health capabilities

English proficiency is related to migrants’ state of health. Knowledge of English affects the ability of migrants to navigate the healthcare system, impacting on their access to healthcare and the quality of their experience. Where patients are unwilling or unable to access primary care, they are more likely to need more resource-intensive secondary care later.

A recent project is trying to tackle this issue by organising volunteer speaking clubs, as described in case study 2.

Case study 2 Speaking English with Confidence

Around 750 volunteers lead a network of informal conversational language clubs in 15 priority London Boroughs. Speaking English with Confidence (SpEC) is investing in its volunteers by providing a training course, which could lead to the level 3 Award in Learning Support. Thus, the prospects of volunteers and learners are enhanced.

There is a demand from ESOL learners and local service providers for improving people's English confidence to enhance the individual's ability to integrate within the community outside their immediate family and ethnic group. This is well illustrated by a GP's surgery in Lambeth, which has offered space to the SpEC programme's conversational classes because many of their patients need support to develop their English skills in order to use the surgery effectively.

Census data show that those with low proficiency in English are more likely to report worse health than those proficient in English (of the people who said their English was poor, 65 per cent reported good health compared with 88 per cent of those with high English proficiency).¹⁴ Those who report lower proficiency in English are likely to be educated to a lower level and on a lower income, which are both correlates with poor health outcomes. However, improving migrants' English language capabilities could play a useful part in improving migrant health outcomes through prevention and early intervention and maintaining more positive relationships with medical practitioners. This is very important considering that GPs increasingly have a 'gatekeeping' role with regard to other support services – referring to food banks and social housing, for example. Migrants most in need who cannot speak to a GP confidently when they first recognise they require medical assistance may later require substantial medical intervention, which could have been prevented had they been able to express themselves earlier.

This UK picture is confirmed elsewhere. A US study summarises the evidence linking poor English proficiency and healthcare:

*Persons who have limited English proficiency are less likely to have a regular source of primary care and are less likely to receive preventive care. They also are less satisfied with the care that they do receive, are more likely to report overall problems with care, and may be at increased risk of experiencing medical errors.*¹⁵

Although the UK has a different healthcare system from that in the USA, this evidence still suggests that having a poor level of English serves as a barrier to registering with a doctor, and therefore accessing healthcare.

A 2002 Commonwealth Fund study looked at the relationship between English proficiency among Hispanics and their healthcare in the USA. Spanish-speaking Hispanics were much more likely to describe their health as ‘poor’ or merely ‘fair’ (31 per cent) than English-speaking Hispanics (12 per cent), and were more likely to be uninsured, at 54 per cent and 22 per cent respectively. Even controlling for education and poverty, access to and quality of healthcare were still reportedly worse among the Spanish-speaking than the English-speaking group. For instance, 66 per cent of uninsured Spanish-speaking Hispanics had no regular doctor, compared with 46 per cent of English-speaking Hispanics, and the number reporting ‘a great deal of trust and confidence’ in their doctor was 16 per cent lower (56 per cent compared with 72). Overall, the non-English-speaking group scored worse on measures including frequency of care, having a doctor, understanding medical instructions on medicines, and patient–provider communication.

Participants in our focus groups commonly said that having ESOL helped with medical issues and most agreed that knowing ESOL would help with prevention or early intervention:

Speaking English is much easier in any situation, in public transport, neighbours, going to the doctor, or going to the hospital urgently.

In health, it is really important to be able to explain what is happening to you.

This reflects an American poll of patients by the Asian Health Service in which 58 per cent of respondents said that they

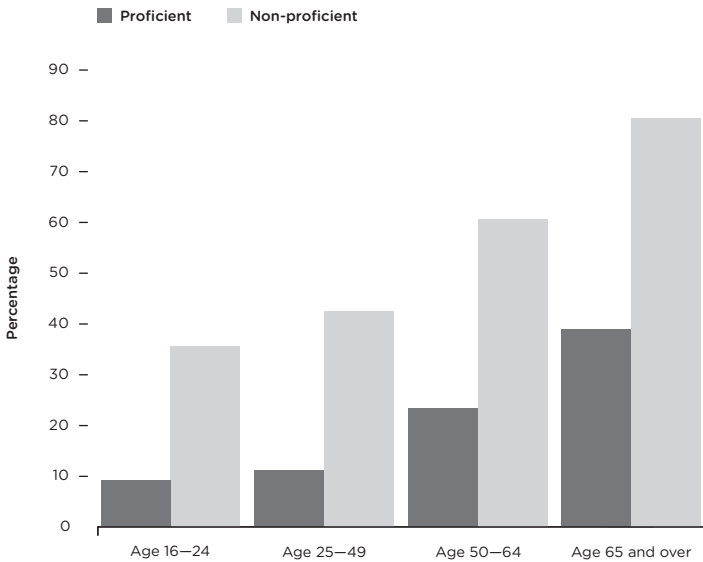
would not see a physician if interpreting services were not available.¹⁶ Research by Demos with Pakistani women in the north east of England confirmed this: women reported that they did not have a choice of when to go to the GP, and often had to wait longer than white British patients, because when they could go was dictated by availability of interpreters.¹⁷ When the Government is increasingly trying to deliver choice within primary care, this is a clear source of inequality. Furthermore, when there is no interpreter available, family members may be called on to translate, although this is contrary to NHS good practice guidelines. Using family members as translators has a potential impact on reporting of more sensitive issues like women's health, sexual health, mental health and domestic violence. There is a strong argument, to which we will return later, that money cut from providing materials in translation (whether from local authority or NHS budgets) should be diverted towards ESOL provision, thereby tackling the root of the issue and not the symptom.

Educational capabilities

Possessing a command of English has a pronounced relationship with educational progression. In a Demos focus group, one Polish student now attending a British university noted that going to university would not have been possible if she had not learned English. A major survey of ESOL learners by BIS found that 27 per cent of ESOL learners went on to further learning, 90 per cent of learners said they had become more enthusiastic about learning and 80 per cent said they now had a clearer idea of what they wanted to do in their lives.¹⁸

We can get some further clues to the linkage between English and qualifications by looking at 2011 census data, although it is important to note that it is not a direct linkage, and other factors – like prior education levels – are likely in play. Excluding native English speakers, those without English proficiency (self-reporting poor or very poor levels of English) were three times more likely to report having no educational qualifications (42 per cent) than those with high proficiency

Figure 1 **Non-native English speakers without qualifications by level of English proficiency and age group (%)**



Source: 2011 Census

(self-reporting good or very good English levels).¹⁹ Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of people who say they have no qualifications by age and English proficiency. The prior relationship between proficiency and qualifications holds across age groups, suggesting that English proficiency is an important factor in educational opportunities. However, we also need to keep in mind that a third of migrants in the UK have a post-school qualification.²⁰

Labour market capabilities

Similar to the picture in education, labour market capabilities are related to English proficiency. Crudely put, high English

Table 1 **English proficiency and economic activity**

	High proficiency (%)	Low proficiency (%)	Gap
Employment rate	65.4	48.3	-17.1
Unemployment rate	9.5	12.3	2.8
Economic inactivity	27.7	44.8	17.1

Source: 2011 Census

proficiency (self-reporting good or very good English levels) is related to better labour market outcomes – better employment rates, better representation in more prestige and knowledge-based occupations, and better pay – than low English proficiency (self-reporting poor or very poor English levels).

Table 1 compares high and low proficiency English speakers (excluding native speakers) by economic activity at the time of the 2011 census. The former are more likely to have higher employment rates, lower unemployment rates, and lower rates of economic inactivity than the latter.²¹

Taken together, these measures point to English being a key capability for accessing the labour market, but English is likely to be just one of many factors. For example, migrants are more likely than non-migrants to be in income poverty, so we need to be careful about assertions that English proficiency is a singular cause of labour market outcomes.²² Nevertheless, there is a very real correlation between English and labour market access. One study found that fluency in English improves the chances of employment by 22 per cent.²³ Another study looked at the children of adult migrants and showed that the odds of a pupil with English as an Additional Language claiming free school meals (a poverty indicator) are 1.7 times higher than for a pupil who is identical in all other respects but has English as their first language.²⁴

Where table 1 looked at access to the labour market, this next section looks at those who are employed. English proficiency is related to occupation and income. Table 2 is based on 2011 census data and shows that non-native English speakers

Table 2 Occupation type and level of English proficiency

Occupation	Main language was English (%)	High proficiency (%)	Low proficiency (%)
Managerial	10.9	8.6	4.0
Professional	17.7	17.1	3.5
Technical	13.2	9.0	2.5
Administrative	11.9	7.3	2.6
Skilled trades	11.4	10.0	21.1
Caring and leisure	9.5	9.9	5.9
Sales	8.5	8.5	5.3
Machine operatives	6.8	10.3	16.9
Elementary	10.1	19.2	38.2

Source: 2011 Census

with a good command of English are three times more likely to work in higher professional jobs than those who struggle with English. Furthermore, if we add together the skilled trades, machines operatives and elementary positions together (emboldened), we can see that those who possess a low level of English are about twice as likely (76.2 per cent compared with 39.5 per cent) to work in these occupations than those with a high English proficiency.²⁵

Taking the average annual income (2013) across skilled trades, machine operatives and elementary occupations, 76.2 per cent of people employed without a good command of English will earn on average, £21,819 compared with 39.5 per cent of those with good English ability.²⁶ At the other end of the scale – managerial and professional positions – 25.7 per cent of people with a good level of English earn on average £38,130 annually, compared with just 7.5 per cent of those with low English levels who earn this amount.

Evidence from the USA shows that improvements in English skills contribute to the closing of the native-immigrant wage gap by around 18 per cent for males and around 10 per cent for females.²⁷ UK evidence shows that the native-immigrant wage gap attributable to English as an additional language is about 26 percentage points for males and 22 points for females.²⁸

A Demos focus group illustrated that migrants closely link English proficiency and the job market. Asked why she was motivated to learn English, one participant said that it was ‘to speak the language properly, to communicate better, to get a better job and a better life’.

Integration

Parallel to the improvements in capabilities, ESOL has the potential to increase integration. In a report to the Migration Advisory Committee, the exercise of quantifying integration was defined as ‘understanding the trajectories of first (and second) generation immigrant performance in a range of economic and social spheres (employment, housing, health, social interaction, marriage and so on)... measured in hard and soft ways’.²⁹ In this report, our focus is narrower – on ‘linguistic’ integration, in the sense of possessing the linguistic capability to join British life and society, and of not being linguistically isolated from others. It refers both to the potential and the reality of communicating effectively in English.

Migrants with poor levels of English can struggle to access the culture and social relationships offered by the host country and the majority population. Evidence suggests that knowledge of the host language increases the chances of ‘cross contact’ with people from other cultures and ethnicities. A 2007 study of migrants’ lives beyond the workplace surveyed 600 migrants working in the UK. It found that English proficiency had a relationship with spending leisure time with British-born people. Depending on their English proficiency, those who said they spent none of their leisure time with Britons varied as follows: fluent (21 per cent); adequate (39 per cent); basic (50 per cent); none (71 per cent).³⁰ In other words, the more a migrant knows English, the more likely they are to spend leisure time with British born people. Another study measured the social return on investment of ESOL learning. Although the authors caution that the results are merely ‘illustrative’, they concluded that for every one pound spent, the social return, including integration benefits, was three pounds.³¹

Demos focus group participants revealed that a common motivation for English learning was to be able to interact easily with (English-speaking) others, as the following quotations demonstrate:

I would like to speak in English like an English person, I wouldn't like for people not to understand me properly.

From my experience with other parents at my son's nursery, when I speak and they realise my English is not perfect they don't want to speak to me later on, especially from English mothers.

However, there is likely a two-way process here: migrants both learn English faster and interact more with natives by continued native-immigrant exposure. This was illustrated by a third participant, who explained that she had picked English up naturally: 'At work and other places, I have to talk to people all the time so eventually I've been speaking better'.

An English-speaking workforce

Occasionally, it may be possible for migrant workers to learn English language and literacy on site – or elsewhere, but with employer support. This is becoming less common, as BIS has now withdrawn funding for all workplace-based adult skills provision. Where such initiatives exist, they are often the result of partnerships between trade unions, employers and ESOL providers. Course content is usually work-specific, covering for example health and safety, but there is flexibility. Scotland in particular has well-established guidance on ESOL in the workplace.³²

Workplace-based ESOL has been shown to improve workplace relations, communication, health and safety compliance and productivity. A UK report found that employers reported better communication, cohesiveness, teamwork and improved retention rates because of workplace ESOL. The learners themselves reported enhanced employability, better confidence and self-esteem, and greater

awareness of workplace rights.³³ The Union Learning Funding reports on a trial of workplace ESOL in one UK company with a high proportion of Polish employees. The company's productivity increased by 20 per cent because ESOL allowed workers to unlock their skills base, and provided greater levels of promotions including in high skilled positions, better workplace cohesion, greater health and safety compliance, and fewer disciplinary citations.³⁴

Health and safety are of paramount importance in this regard. Some of the most dangerous workplaces – building sites and factories, for example – are also those that are most reliant on low-waged migrant labour. A study by the Health and Safety Executive found that migrant workers are exposed to added risk in large part because of their lack of knowledge of health and safety and cultural differences. The report specifically pinpointed language:

*For some migrant workers with limited or no English, training in health and safety is not effectively communicated and such workers may remain ignorant of basic health and safety procedures, such as what to do in the event of a fire, or where the main exit routes are.*³⁵

Unlocking migrant potential

We have argued that ESOL should be viewed in the context of capabilities. What is needed – and what we have begun to sketch out in this chapter – is a better understanding of how ESOL can be used to ‘unlock’, or to help migrants develop, the capabilities to navigate life in the UK. Yet this is not just a case of *individual* benefits for migrants. These aforementioned benefits – capabilities and integration – pay dividends at societal level.

We must avoid falling into the trap of espousing a ‘deficit model’ when it comes to ESOL – of seeing migrants who do not speak English as a problem to be fixed. Not only does this ignore and devalue the many assets that migrants bring with them (the assets that ESOL helps unlock), it also promotes a sticking-plaster mentality of short-term solutions.

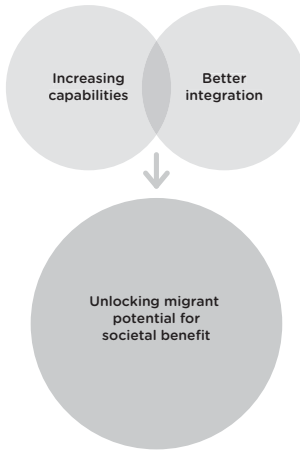
It is right that English should be prioritised as the common language of the UK, but in a globalised world we need to play the long (and the ‘broad’) game, leveraging the potential of migrants’ skills and linguistic abilities. Given the many positive aspects associated with knowing multiple languages, it makes sense to recognise that using languages other than English is valuable.

It is worth briefly referencing the evidence base for the benefits of knowing multiple languages:

- Multilinguals show greater creative and cognitive abilities than monolinguals³⁶
- Some evidence shows business opportunities are lost because of language deficits³⁷
- Multilingualism is related to the reduction and delay of the onset of dementia³⁸
- Multilinguals are better at multitasking³⁹
- Multilinguals and those who learn another language are better and faster at learning new things⁴⁰
- Foreign language learners and multilinguals are more tolerant and accepting of difference and ambiguity thus making integration less of a challenge⁴¹
- Multilinguals have more foreign friends and participate more in cultural activities⁴²

British people, and particularly those who employ migrants, should therefore be encouraged to appreciate individuals’ linguistic and cultural resources. More could be done to see migrants as language teachers, as well as language learners. This could be achieved through informal skills exchanges, encouraging higher level English learners to mentor lower level ones (perhaps in the workplace), or through more formal arrangements – for example, a scheme on the model of one in New Zealand to ‘fast-track’ talented learners into qualifying as specialist EAL teaching assistants or ESOL teachers. A well-functioning ESOL system ought also to go some way to addressing the unsupportable wastage of migrants’ qualifications – the doctors, nurses and engineers working as cleaners and minicab drivers, or not working at all.

Figure 2 **The potential benefits of a changed ESOL policy**



Migrants' capabilities are not surplus to requirements; they answer to economic needs that the home-grown population is particularly bad at fulfilling. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages recently stated that the UK could lose an estimated £48 billion a year because of language and cultural ignorance.⁴³ A 2012 CBI report reinforces this view: 72 per cent of businesses said they valued foreign language skills among their employees while 68 per cent reported they were not satisfied with young people's foreign language skills in the UK.⁴⁴ Demographic projections show that the ethnic minority population of the UK is set to rise to between 25 and 43 per cent by 2056.⁴⁵ With the right systems in place to unlock potential, we ought to be able to recognise our growing foreign-born population as a national cultural and economic resource. Figure 2 summarises our argument so far.

In short, we must be clear about the many benefits society as a whole stands to gain from a well thought out ESOL policy. The next two chapters examine where ESOL policy stands at the moment, and what needs to change so that these gains can be realised.

1 A brief history of ESOL policy: from integration to employment, via skills

The original responsibility for English language training for migrants lay with the Home Office, as it does today in other European countries including France and Germany. Under Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966, funding for learning was provided ‘in consequence of... substantial numbers of immigrants from the Commonwealth whose language or customs differ from those of the community’.⁴⁶ ESOL thus began under the banner of integration.

Provision was informal with a mix of voluntary organisations, activists and local education authority providers trying to meet the demand. This arrangement continued more or less unchanged until the late 1990s when, following sustained lobbying by ESOL stakeholders, migrant English language learning was swept up in the call for a wider shakeup of adult skills. *A Fresh Start – The Moser Report* (1999) typified the political concern about the declining standards of adult literacy and numeracy at this time.⁴⁷ Problematically, ESOL was in a sense an afterthought to the adult literacy drive, which made up the bulk of the focus.

The DfEE report *Breaking the Language Barriers* (2000) followed shortly after *A Fresh Start*, and specifically looked at ESOL as a core adult skill with a view to increasing labour market participation.⁴⁸ Concerns about social cohesion were a further motivation; these were salient after the riots in northern English towns, and the Cattle Report (2001) was explicit about the importance of English to social cohesion.⁴⁹

This culminated in the publication, in 2001, of New Labour’s Skills for Life Strategy.⁵⁰ The Strategy provided an organising framework based on qualifications and, alongside adult literacy and numeracy, ESOL was for the first time

benchmarked against national standards. ESOL was now managed centrally through the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum. ESOL teachers were required to be qualified, and students expected to gain a qualification from the national curriculum. Thus, with net migration of between 150,000 and 250,000 people per year,⁵¹ funding tripled (between 2001 and 2008) to £300 million⁵² and national enrolments rose (between 2001 and 2006) from around 150,000 to 500,000.⁵³ Moreover, ESOL provision was extended to many who needed it, with relaxed eligibility criteria.

In short, under New Labour, funding expansion – coupled with a social cohesion agenda and loose eligibility criteria – had drastically increased access to ESOL for learners while driving up professionalisation (in standards, curriculum and teaching) of the industry; we note how this has now began to reverse in chapter 2.

Skills for Life was criticised for narrowly defining English language as a skill and thus tying ESOL to an employment and skills agenda.⁵⁴ Centring on literacy and numeracy as an engine for economic growth, the Leitch Review of Skills in 2006 reinforced a labour market focus still further.⁵⁵

In 2007, in response to increased immigration and, consequently, student numbers, the Labour Government restricted ESOL fee remission to a needs-based eligibility criterion. In 2009 the central position of ESOL within Skills for Life was ended in favour of the new approach to ESOL.⁵⁶ According to this, provision was increasingly coordinated at the local level, yet as claimed by at least one review, later cuts to local government hampered local authorities' ability to meet demand effectively.⁵⁷ Only those on means-tested benefits and non-working dependants now qualified for access to fully funded ESOL classes.⁵⁸ Funding for ESOL, literacy and numeracy in the workplace was removed because the number of funded hours was so low as to be ineffective.⁵⁹

The Coalition Government has further streamlined fully government funded ESOL courses to those on active benefits⁶⁰ (essentially job seekers) in 2011/12, which reflects the current precedence of the employability agenda, contrasting with

Labour's relatively more generous entitlement criteria.⁶¹ FE colleges are given leeway to waive fees for those who are on inactive benefits (eg Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit, Income Support and Working Tax Credit) but the colleges have to show the training is related to finding work, and this comes out of their existing budget (which is a disincentive).

A recent review of ESOL policy in the UK concluded:

*At policy level ESOL students are viewed in terms of how they can become more economically productive. Predictably, with ESOL students positioned as migrant workers needing English to contribute to the economy, ESOL provision increasingly orients towards short, modular, employability-focused courses.*⁶²

Further confirming this, from April 2014, Jobcentre Plus customers deemed to have poor English skills are referred to ESOL providers for further assessment and training.⁶³ In addition, funding by results for providers through DWP's work programme is based on learners getting employment after a course of ESOL learning. This encourages very short courses with the aim of shuttling learners on – an accusation, incidentally, that applies equally to other client groups within the work programme.⁶⁴

As eligibility criteria are tightening, the government is reducing funding for adult skills, with a knock-on effect on ESOL provision. Demos issued a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to the Skills Funding Agency, asking it to set out the amount of funding it had contributed annually towards ESOL provision from 2008 to 2014, compared with its contribution to the overall adult skills budget. The figures are set out in table 3.

The figures show that, following a trough in 2010/11, both budgets slightly increased in 2012/13, though they have not returned to 2008/9 levels. Furthermore, ESOL funding has taken a bigger year-on-year funding cut than the Adult Skills Budget as a whole.

Overall, non-ESOL aspects such as employability, literacy and numeracy have suffered a cut of only 5.56 per cent,

Table 3 **Skills Funding Agency funding estimates of ESOL in England, 2008/09–2012/13 (Demos FOI request)**

Academic year	Adult Skills Budget notional funding (£ million)	of which ESOL notional funding (£ million)	ESOL as a proportion of Adult Skills Budget (%)
2008/09	2,786	212.3	7.62
2009/10	2,741	204.7	7.47
2010/11	2,448	168.6	6.89
2011/12	2,458	118.7	4.83
2012/13	2,631	128.3	4.88

compared with a 39.57 per cent hit for ESOL. Forecasts to 2015 show a 25 per cent decrease in the FE resources budget and a 19 per cent reduction in the total Adult Skills Budget over the next two years (2014/15 and 2015/16).⁶⁵

These budget cuts have affected participation: demand for ESOL is outstripping supply. A survey found that 80 per cent of providers had waiting lists – sometimes of up to 1,000 students – and 66 per cent cited the lack of government funding as the main reason for this.⁶⁶ On the main Skills for Life Programme, ESOL participation dropped to around 150,000 in 2011/12 from about 288,000 in 2005/06. On another route, Adult English and Maths ESOL participation went from about 188,000 students in 2008/09 to 146,000 in 2011/12.

The supply–demand mismatch is just one indicator that the current system is not increasing English language capabilities among immigrants as well as it could. Further illustrating this, of the 348 councils in England and Wales, 91 have a ward in which at least 5 per cent of the population rates themselves as having poor English ability.⁶⁷ Many of the migrants in our focus groups had themselves been (or knew others who had been) living in the UK for over a decade, yet spoke limited English: ‘My dad is here 14 years and he doesn’t speak English at all. He can only say hello and introduce himself.’

The current system is not fit for purpose or for future demand – but neither was the expansive (and expensive)

approach initially trialled by Labour, which suffered from an arguably inefficient funding allocation that raised questions about value for taxpayers' money.

This all suggests we need to rethink how to make our ESOL policies work more effectively, for migrants as well as for the national interest. To this end the next chapter explores in more detail some of the core deficiencies in ESOL policy.

2 What needs to change?

Introduction

As we saw in the last chapter, the history of ESOL in England has been one of slow professionalisation in qualifications, curriculum and provision. Yet we still do not have an effective approach to meeting demand (or need) for migrant English language learning. Nor, more worryingly, are we much nearer to a coherent overall strategy for ESOL. In contrast, Wales recently published an ESOL strategy on the back of a prior review, which concluded that there was inadequate ESOL provision, under-qualified staff, lack of planning, and patchy quality.⁶⁸

In England, confusion persists at government level about what outcomes are desired and how they can be measured. We argued in the introduction that ESOL learners' needs are *our* needs, too; unlocking migrants' potential has a long-term, wider societal benefit – saving costs to the public purse in welfare and health, adding a skills boost to the economy, and creating a better integrated, more socially cohesive Britain.

There is a tendency for debates about ESOL to converge narrowly on issues of funding and access, but there is a broader range of challenges to be considered if the system is to be improved. Some relate to specific but important aspects of learners' experience, while others are ideological in nature, and demand a change of attitude on the part of decision-makers. Both kinds of challenge are outlined in this chapter.

Government: strategy and information gaps

Strategy and responsibility

England does not have a national ESOL strategy. This was consistently highlighted by participants in our expert and practitioner workshops as a driver of the weaknesses in the

existing system. As discussed in the previous section, it took the publication of *Breaking the Language Barriers* in 2000 – written by a working group put together in the wake of the Moser Report (1999) – to stimulate organisation of ESOL at government level.⁶⁹ Since then, lucid, long-term government thinking has not been evident.

For instance, there is no consensus on the desired levels of English that people with different skills and background need to achieve (and for what purposes), which feeds into the more general lack of clarity on the aims and outcomes for England's ESOL policy. Experts pointed to international examples such as Scotland, France and Australia, where migrant language learning is overseen by a single department, and underpinned by a comprehensive national strategy. We will see in chapter 3 that there is evidence that this is more effective than where provision is left to regional authorities, as in (for instance) Italy and Spain.

As discussed in chapter 1, migrant English language learning sits at the intersection of a number of pathways, all of which relate to different departmental agendas. While the Home Office is concerned with citizenship and immigration, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is responsible for integration. Both the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) consider ESOL from an employment perspective, with BIS taking a wider view of English ability as a skill on a par with adult literacy and numeracy. That is before considering any potential role for others, such as the Department of Health (DH) – an agency that, as we have argued in chapter 1, should have a significant interest in ESOL.

There is also disjuncture between local provision and central government. *A New Approach to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)* (2009) was designed to push ESOL provision and responsibility to the local authority level, and was generally acknowledged by practitioners to be a good idea in principle, but it was not followed up by additional funding, rendering it unworkable in reality.⁷⁰

In his 2012 guidance, '50 ways to save', DCLG minister Eric Pickles advised local authorities to stop spending money on

translating documents into foreign languages – a practice he claimed had cost councils £100 million in 2006.⁷¹ Pickles made this recommendation on the grounds that translating documents ‘undermine[d] community cohesion by encourag[ing] segregation’.⁷² While this has an incentivising rationale – remove translation support and more people will be forced to learn English – it is silent on the fact that current demand for migrant language learning is outstripping supply. An improved ESOL system is not a short- or medium-term solution to the need for translation. Even in the long term, it is unrealistic to assume that *no one* will need or benefit from translated documents. However, ESOL is surely part of the solution. If the aim is truly to reduce segregation and improve cohesion, local authorities ought to follow through by putting any money saved in this way back into ESOL – perhaps on a matched funding basis from DCLG itself.

Understanding needs

Apart from the rudimentary statistics published by BIS and SFA, there is little systematic monitoring at the central government level of ESOL provision, funding, teaching quality or student outcomes across different programmes. There is also no systematic local government data being collected and published about ESOL learning. This effectively means that the Government does not know the impact, or the value for money, of its budget spend on ESOL.

As ESOL receives public funding and is largely delivered through FE colleges (which are also publicly funded), we ought to demand greater accountability for how money is spent. At present, it is regularly left to surveys by professional bodies like NATECLA to judge the scale of need for ESOL. There have been reports in the media recently about students being allowed to cheat on English tests for visas; it is not unreasonable to suggest that these are directly related to the current lack of oversight and monitoring.⁷³ Better government monitoring would address public concerns (which the aforementioned reports show are not unfounded) about wastage through fraud,

enable funds to be targeted towards areas of need, and facilitate an understanding of the wider costs and benefits of ESOL.

Moreover, it is important to be able to establish the scale of the underlying need for ESOL, as opposed to manifest demand. The latter is more easily evidenced, through student numbers and waiting lists. However, considering that the 2011 census showed about 850,000 people self-reporting low levels of English, and the number of funded ESOL learners on Skills for Life at around 150,000, there is a large discrepancy in numbers that points to a significant 'hidden' need. Community outreach work and partnerships with the third sector are the best ways to uncover those who may need to learn English yet have been so far unable to.

Quality of teaching and quality of provision

Experts Demos consulted consistently highlighted quality of provision as an important issue. One interviewee said that 'historically providers and Ofsted have rated ESOL, literacy and numeracy as low'. A 2008 Ofsted report commented that only around half of the college provision and a fifth of adult and community learning provision was judged by institutional inspections to be good or outstanding. It specifically pointed to teaching quality: 'Quality improvement processes did not ensure consistently good standards of teaching and learning.'⁷⁴

ESOL is provided in a variety of forms, in a mix that varies within regions and around the country. FE colleges are the most common, but by no means the only, providers. According to BIS participation statistics, 67 per cent of government funded Skills for Life ESOL provision was through FE colleges in 2011/12. Private or voluntary and community-run centres also make up more than one-quarter of provision (27 per cent). While all learners will be taught from the core ESOL curriculum, that fact alone is insufficient to guarantee quality across settings. (Indeed, as we saw earlier, the flexibility of the curriculum is welcomed by practitioners.) While acknowledging that both high and low quality teaching may be offered by providers of kinds, experts we spoke to cautioned that there was a risk of private providers

being motivated by commercial more than educational considerations. Particularly in this funding environment, both the government and the individual learner need to know they are getting value for the money and time they spend on learning English. Currently, this is not always the case.

One interviewee with experience as an inspector commented on some of the variations in quality:

Aspects such as the quality of teaching and learning, the degree of stretch and challenge, pace, the focus on feedback on the learners' own language use and optimising learning opportunities require improvement (and behind these, the quality of teacher training).

Compounding the problem is the fact that, since 2013, the requirement has been removed for FE ESOL teachers in the UK to have (or be working towards) a recognised subject-specific teaching qualification.⁷⁵ The level of qualification is left to the discretion of the college principals in hiring teachers. Those we spoke to were understandably concerned about the potential effect of this on the quality of teaching.

Over and above the trend towards deprofessionalisation, some practitioners pointed to the high number of part-time ESOL teachers and the widespread (and growing) use of zero hours contracts as factors likely to work against a stable, knowledgeable teaching profession.

Furthermore, variation between courses might be tolerable if there were a proper ESOL 'market' operating (if learners actually had a choice of where to learn). In practice, they do not have such a choice for various reasons – a simple lack of provision near to them, waiting lists, travel barriers and, most importantly, the fact that they are often ill informed (as many in our focus groups said they were).

Ideally, there needs to be provision of nationally defined courses and qualifications designed for pre-service training and in-service (lifelong) development so that we can be sure that providers of different types are aiming at the same language goals and using the same teaching performance standards. This is important for the taxpayer to get value for money; even more

importantly, we need to ensure that learners themselves are properly served.

Monitoring outcomes

As is the case with needs, outcomes for ESOL learners are not routinely measured in any meaningful way. The current system measures participation and achievement at entry level, level 1 and level 2, and by ethnicity. Post-study outcomes are not collected, which is a crucial indicator to assess how well the system serves learners and wider society. Also, national student surveys are not collected or published; again, this is a missed opportunity for feedback and adaptation.

The effectiveness of provision might be measured by meaningful standards of learning; learners' achievement over time and post-learning outcomes; and the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching. For example, the Government is being more transparent about school pupils' destinations and there should be greater clarity over ESOL so that providers are transparent and accountable.⁷⁶ Also, a regular national survey could be implemented to get feedback on students' needs, performance and satisfaction, which would enable more granular and targeted feedback. In this regard, the UK could learn from New Zealand's Longitudinal Immigrant Survey (LisNZ), which collects outcomes data that feed back into how ESOL is delivered, and is funded by a levy on migrants (see chapter 3).

Providing information

Another common theme among learners and industry representatives in our research was the dearth of basic information for learners. Many we spoke to said that they initially struggled to find out where ESOL courses were, what funding they were entitled to or what the costs were, and the most appropriate courses to take – let alone whether they offered a recognised certification. This is a significant barrier to getting more learners to access ESOL.

ESOL provision around the country is highly variable in quantity, quality and nature. Some local authorities have a dedicated organisational body that acts as a hub that advises learners, connects them with providers, and tracks their learning progress and outcomes. Two examples are the Hackney ESOL Advice Service and the Migrant English Support Hub (MESH) in Leeds (case studies 3 and 4).

Case study 3 Hackney ESOL Advice Service

Hackney's integrated local educational authority, the Learning Trust, realised that poorly organised ESOL provision was resulting in inefficient delivery and missed learning opportunities. In response, it set up the ESOL Advice Service. Regular, free ESOL advice sessions are held across the borough, where English proficiency levels are determined and learners are connected to appropriate providers. Learners' journeys are also tracked with a purpose-built database, and the Learning Trust uses this data to assess local need and continuously improve the effectiveness of learner-provider matches. Providers have forged partnerships with community organisations, allowing them to create courses that meet learners' specific needs – for example people with children.

Case study 4 Migrant English Support Hub (MESH), Leeds

As in Hackney, in Leeds, fragmented ESOL provision was felt to be inhibiting participation and progression. MESH provides a 'one stop shop' for adult migrants and advisers to find up-to-date information about ESOL in Leeds, including information such as class type, locality, times of lessons, costs and crèche provision. The organisers hope that by supporting coordination of provision, they can reduce some of the pressure on, and the costs of, interpreting and translation services, and deliver a higher quality service to the city's migrant learners.

The project is managed by the Refugee Education, Training Advice Service (RETAS) in partnership with other stakeholders including Leeds City Council, the University of

Leeds, Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network (LASSN) and provider representatives.

Qualifications and funding: contradictions and inefficiency

The current ESOL system does not serve providers or migrants as well as it should because the qualifications and funding framework is riddled with problematic assumptions and inefficiencies.

Access: migrants in work miss out

Our focus groups with students revealed that the cost of courses is one of the biggest barriers to learning. They are thus prohibited either from starting to learn or from continuing their learning to higher levels.

Many who are in low paid work (and are thus ineligible for full remission) simply cannot afford even the subsidised price of ESOL classes, which is normally between £400 and £1,000 per year depending on the mode of study. According to the most recent Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, the average gross annual salary for caring, leisure and other services (sectors in which migrants are most likely to be employed) is £17,000.⁷⁷ This is just £800 above the minimum income standard – enough money to maintain a socially acceptable quality of life – as calculated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.⁷⁸ One focus group participant said:

[I]t's expensive for someone that works 10 hours a day, 5 or 6 days a week; they can only afford basic life and haven't got the extra money to pay for things [like ESOL provision].

The situation can be compounded by eligibility for other benefits being dependent on employment status or a very low income. Under the 'two-year-olds' offer', for example, early years provision is provided free to those earning under £16,190.⁷⁹

Migrants with young children who earn anywhere above this most likely have to find the money not only for 50 per cent of their ESOL course costs, but also for childcare that allows them to attend classes.

Another example of short-termism is the removal of workplace ESOL funding. Given the evidence of the benefits of such provision, this is a major missed opportunity. Many migrants are likely to work in low-wage labour, surrounded by other migrants. This means their English levels are likely to stagnate after they learn the required ‘scripts’ to get by in the workplace. One focus group participant said that the men she knew only ‘learn the English for work and that’s all: spanner, hammer, [and] nails’. In other words, just getting into work is no guarantee of learning English.

A focus group member pointed to the ways in which her employer helped her learn more English:

When I came I could talk to people in English but my writing level was low and I wasn't comfortable with my English. I was in an admin job working in English. It was my boss that suggested that I can go to university, better my English, earn a qualification and get another job which is a little bit better. The job would be at the same employer but [a] better position with better money. He helped me by finding out all the information, but I paid for the course.

Overall, these funding eligibility criteria are myopic; they serve neither the individual learner nor the wider economy. ESOL is being used to achieve only bare minimum employment outcomes, and not to support people’s aspirations for longer-term, sustainable economic activity. One objection is around British taxpayer contributions to ESOL, which improve the employment prospects of migrants and therefore encourage job competition. However, if migrants do not receive help with ESOL there will still be a cost to the taxpayer. People in low-paid work are still supported by the DWP (eg through working tax credits) and thus they are still a cost to the state. A more ambitious system would aim to get people out of low-paid work

entirely, reducing long-term costs in the round and in the long term. ESOL support alone will not achieve this, but it is one achievable piece of the puzzle.

Workplace learning

The workplace is one of the best places for migrants to interact with others and potentially a good place to use English. A GLA study recommended there should be more guidance for employers willing to facilitate English classes, guidance for migrants to form self-study groups in the workplace, and workplace sponsorship and awareness schemes for employers, and that ESOL should be made part of continued professional development.⁸⁰ Other options might extend to ‘ESOL flexi-time’, which would enable workers to integrate lessons into their working lives more easily. There should be more workplace learning, with costs shared by employers, the state and workers, which would accrue personal, labour market and societal benefits in the long term.

Perverse incentives

Over and above questions of the level and distribution of funding, the current system is severely affected by perverse incentives. Because of the way the qualifications system is structured, providers are encouraged to focus on those closest to achieving qualifications and, accordingly, on students who have higher starting English capabilities because they can pass them through to the next qualification quicker, and therefore achieve funded learning aims and maintain student success rates. This works against the lowest level of learners, those at pre-entry level, because they take longer to learn and require more funding.

Courses provided to those on benefits tend to be short term; according to BIS, 68 per cent of benefits-related entry level and level 1 ‘learning aims’ lasted between 31 and 180 days.⁸¹ In light of the evidence about the length of time it takes to progress in a second language (explored in more detail later), the utility of these short courses is questionable.

In addition, there are some discrepancies concerning the differences between the funding rationales for other adult courses and ESOL. Many ESOL qualifications are cofunded by the government and the learner, but functional skills qualifications, for example, remain fully funded. Some providers are enrolling students on functional skills courses, which are inappropriate for many low-level ESOL learners. Therefore, student pathways are being determined by eligibility for funding and not language learning needs.

Not serving low or high-level learners effectively

One quirk of the funding and qualifications system is that providers are forced to enrol students on unregulated ‘learning aims’ to compensate for the mismatch between qualifications, funding and actual learning speed. In other words, slower learners are enrolled on ‘internal aims’. Further, the current system stipulates that students have to be enrolled at a level which is higher than they currently possess. While this works for most, providers voiced concern that some students experience this as a big jump, which risks reducing their motivation to learn.

Within this framework, low-level students are hard to cater for because of their very low ‘pre-entry’ level English. They take more time to get up to speed and many colleges are reluctant to take them on. They are often put onto teaching that is not based on a national qualification until providers are sure they will complete a qualification within a given time-frame (usually one year). According to ESOL providers, the SFA has not taken this into account in its proposed funding rules (which is related to listed national qualifications and discussed in the next section). Furthermore, formal, classroom-based learning may not be the most helpful initial strategy for those learners starting from the lowest base.

Yet there is also a problem at the higher levels, because most government funding and therefore learning provision is allocated to lower level learners, with fewer high level learning opportunities. This raises questions as to how far we want our ESOL learners to progress, because learners who possess higher

levels of English are more likely to be in work, so state support for their ESOL learning is reduced and they have less time to learn. We need to consider how we will adjust to a trend towards considerable numbers of students who arrive with Entry Level 3 and above or already have tertiary qualifications.

The future is not brighter

Proposed changes to ESOL government funding through Skills for Life, mooted in 2013, require qualifications to be listed on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Where funding was previously made available per hour actually spent learning, the new system means that funding is benchmarked to a fixed number of learning hours per qualification. ESOL providers claim this new arrangement fails to take into account the diversity of learners and overestimates the speed of learning; therefore, many learners are not allocated enough funded learning hours to make meaningful progress.

The new system is scaled towards a hypothetical ‘average’ learner. Inevitably, therefore, some learners need more hours and some fewer, but those who need more – the ones starting from the lowest level – are disadvantaged from the start. Indeed, some question whether it allocates enough hours for *anybody* to achieve their qualification. Prior to enrolment on an official, qualification-related track, many learners have already spent some time on an unofficial, unregulated track. Any such prior learning was not taken into account in setting the benchmark learning hours for each qualification, so that the fixed hours may well underestimate the actual time that even the ‘average’ learner takes.⁸²

It should be noted that the SFA has continued transitional funding and qualifications arrangements until the end of 2014, mitigating many of the potentially negative effects.⁸³ Providers currently do their best to make up the shortfall through using discretionary learner support funding, and by putting students on unregulated hours. This solution points to a fundamental deficiency in the ESOL system: qualifications and funding do

not match the realities and needs of many English learners that *most require support*.

Most practitioners report broad satisfaction with the current ESOL curriculum; they see it as allowing providers a reasonable amount of freedom to tailor learning to students' needs, but there is some debate about the literacy standards that underpin the curriculum. This is important because all ESOL qualifications are matched to these standards. An Association of Colleges report recommended that the national literacy standards should be reviewed, on the grounds that they do not work well for low-level learners (the bulk of learners) and that 'the revision process should draw on the expertise in language assessment of ESOL AOs (awarding organisations) and the experience of ESOL providers in preparing learners for assessment'.⁸⁴

Many people, including Dr Nick Saville, advocate applying the CEFR – a language framework designed to provide a common basis for languages (syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations and textbooks), which is already used by the Home Office to assess language ability – to ESOL. Because the CEFR has been designed specifically to assess second language competence, it is thought to offer a preferable (more coherent, robust and tailored) alternative to the current standards frameworks, which were originally based on assessment of literacy among native English speakers. As one interviewee explained, the UK is already in a minority in *not* using the CEFR:

All of Europe, most of the Middle East, all Latin America, much of Asia, China and increasingly even US states rely upon the CEFR to underpin their language education and to measure student learning outcomes... It would be odd, to say the least, if the only developed nation that doesn't use this international standard internally to measure its success in language learning and teaching were the UK.

The argument is that having a framework that is matched to global standards, and potentially an ESOL curriculum that is appropriately matched to the framework, would bring the UK in

line with global best practice.⁸⁵ Further, having a robust and agreed framework underpinning ESOL enables there to be a common understanding around language levels – something we can all agree on and work with – which should prove more efficient and workable in the long term. Finally, having a common framework that integrates languages other than English signifies the value of multilingual skills.⁸⁶

One size does not fit all: towards a sensible system

The preceding section has highlighted some of the major problems in the current ESOL system. This section points to an underlying driver of many of the problems: an overriding assumption that one size fits all. This relates to assumptions around learning, payment for ESOL, and the current either/or mentality surrounding formal and informal learning.

Shared responsibility is the key to sustainability

Fragmentation at government level has contributed to general confusion about the intended aims and outcomes of ESOL. In the absence of clarity about where the benefits accrue, learners have suffered the consequences of a lack of consensus at the top about who should pick up the tab for ESOL. Many industry bodies understandably advocate government-funded ESOL lessons. However, this is not feasible in the current political and cultural climate because of fiscal austerity and hardening public sentiment around immigration. There needs to be a shift towards a shared responsibility model with students, government and employers contributing to the bill. This will satisfy a ‘contributory principle’ of public services: newcomers buying into the system, which will gain wider acceptance than a more generous government support model.

An obvious challenge for making the contributory principle work in practice is that many English learners – particularly those with the greatest needs – are cash-poor. Alternative and innovative ways for learners to share funding responsibility should therefore be a priority for exploration – for example,

schemes such as time-banking (where a learner agrees to spend a certain number of hours supporting a learner at a lower level, in exchange for funded learning hours), or a ‘student loan’ or deferred payment system.

By way of illustration, Talking Together aims to create a network of ‘viral volunteers’, which shows that shared responsibility does not necessarily have to involve money (case study 5).

Case study 5 TimeBank: Talking Together

Talking Together provides a form of viral volunteering which allows a large number of learners to be reached. TimeBank is a national volunteering charity and this project uses locally trained community volunteers who are trained over an intense three-day induction. Part of the longer-term sustainability strategy of the programme is for the experienced volunteers to recruit and train new volunteers, thus creating a rolling programme. Local community members – particularly from where the classes take place – can become volunteers should their English be suitable, thereby motivating current learners and providing them with aspirational examples.

The programme caters to the community of people who are ‘sub-ESOL’ and are not ready for formal ESOL classes with a particular focus on Somali, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. What is innovative about Talking Together is their partnership with small grassroots agencies to find learners. Dave Conroy (Birmingham Programme Manager) says ‘Because the project is embedded in the local community we are able to find people of most need, who might not have sufficient language or confidence to attend ESOL classes as they are currently delivered.’

Integrating formal and informal learning

Throughout this chapter, we have noted several barriers to learning, including cost, time (and timings) and lack of information. However, not all barriers are practical, nor are they

the result of faults in the system. Our focus groups with migrants revealed that fear, embarrassment and lack of confidence also play an important part. Migrants may be reticent to embark on English learning:

[P]eople are afraid to approach learning English because they think they won't learn it. They have no confidence in themselves to learn English.

We also heard that migrants were afraid of attempting to use English publicly, particularly with native speakers. As a result they risk missing out on opportunities to practise and develop their skills in context.

Learners need to be able to consolidate their learning outside the classroom. There is an existing volunteer and community network and a consensus from people we spoke to that there are very good initiatives under way. However, provision is sporadic and varied depending on place. The challenge is to link formal and informal learning in meaningful ways. One interviewee highlighted the potential of integrating the two approaches by observing that 'all the things to do with language are to do with not only knowledge but with use, so the formal and the informal have to come together because if it's just the formal it doesn't provide you [with] the use, and if you run out of opportunities to reflect on what you're doing, you stop making any progress and you might plateau'.

Learners with lower levels of prior educational attainment are less likely than peers with secondary or tertiary qualifications to possess well-developed independent learning strategies such as self-organised study groups, self-study with textbooks and self-testing. As a result, it is difficult for them to make the most effective use of learning strategies on leaving the classroom. Considering that most of a student's time is not spent in the classroom, this is a large impediment to efficiency. Also, although social segregation is declining overall, most people have fewer interactions across social and ethnic boundaries than the area in which they live suggests they should.⁸⁷ In other words, living in an ethnically diverse area is no guarantee that 'cross-contact' will occur on any significant level. English

learners might therefore find that precious opportunities to use English are rare.

The Tinder Foundation has a ‘blended learning’ approach, which combines online and offline learning, as well as formal and informal learning (case study 6).

Case study 6 Tinder Foundation: English My Way

The Tinder Foundation’s English My Way 24-week programme is partnered with BBC Learning English and the British Council and is designed to support those who have little or no English in their efforts to better integrate within their local communities.

English My Way uses online learning alongside tutor-led sessions and more informal ‘learning circles’ delivered in local community centres. The online self-learning aspect provides an additional learning channel that is complemented by the community centre sessions, which are led by one qualified ESOL teacher and experienced volunteers. Sustainability and aspirational learning are aims: at least 800 learners progress to being advocates for the programme within their communities, thus incentivising greater learner motivation and heightened awareness within the community.

Personalisation and responsiveness

UK ESOL learners are not a homogenous group. In contrast with countries such as New Zealand, which can largely ‘pick and choose’ its migrants based on their qualification and skills levels, or even France, whose colonial heritage means a high proportion of immigrants have a Francophone background, the UK has a more mixed intake. The system has to cater for the many who are functionally illiterate in their first language (henceforth ‘L1’) as well as the significant number of migrants who arrive with a tertiary qualification (a third of the UK’s foreign-born population⁸⁸). This knowledge, combined with a host of practical and circumstantial variables, and their aspirations for learning, determines each individual’s English-learning trajectory

– what they should learn, how they learn, and how quickly they learn. Practitioners report that the current ESOL ‘system’ is insufficiently flexible to deal with different learners’ needs.

UK estimates suggest that it takes an average learner around 200 hours of teaching to move up one level, so a student starting at entry 1 takes between 400 and 600 hours to get to entry 3 (B1).⁸⁹ An Australian estimate came to the figure of 1,765 hours for a learner with no English and a very low level of education to become independent in English. If the learner did four hours of studying per week, this would take around 14 years.

This depends on a number of learner factors like age, education, proficiency in their L1, and the distance between the L1 and L2 in linguistic aspects like scripts and style. A recent report by the Association of Colleges makes that point that ‘the “average” ESOL learner, someone who is midway between the extremes, may not exist at all’.⁹⁰ A practical example of this is if a provider has the majority of their learners starting from a low level; in this situation, the ‘average’ is simply not a useful benchmark.

The current system applies the same aims and expectations to all migrants. These are set unrealistically high. Analysis by Cambridge Assessment shows that migrants who reach the highest levels on the CEFR – especially in literacy, which is more demanding than speaking or listening – are those who possess higher cognitive academic skills. Indeed, these are skills that much of the native English speaking population does not possess.

Timing of classes and tiredness are additional participation barriers for those in work. English learners are likely to be employed in physically demanding roles – for example as construction or care workers – impacting, understandably, on their motivation to learn. Some learners at our focus groups had husbands who didn’t attend ESOL themselves. As they explained: ‘Time is an issue, after 10 hours’ work it’s impossible [to learn English]’.

Case study 7 shows how personalisation and technology can be used to reach pre-entry level students and encourage them to engage in their community.

Case study 7 E3: English through social, economic and community action

E3's solution to English language teaching for those below entry-level standard gives students the power to learn where and when they want by using digital technology to teach a three-level English language curriculum, alongside face-to-face social, economic and community-based activities. This flexible approach involves learners receiving a tablet preloaded with video lessons and interactive content that they can use anytime, anywhere. The programme challenges the traditional method of English language teaching because it prioritises practical language and community activity over grammar and other traditional building blocks.

These students also have the opportunity to share learning and practice methods via social media tools. This goes further as friendships, conversation groups and voluntary experiences in the community can be coordinated within E3's social media platforms. Encouraging interaction with the community is the main aim of this as E3 attempts to overcome the separation endured by some of the capital's most isolated individuals within five of its priority boroughs.

More weight needs to be given to learners' own aims and expectations, as well as their capabilities. Individuals' goals vary. For instance, an elderly dependant will have different economic, social and therefore English aims than a young worker – even setting aside their different learning capacities.

A recent report highlights the need for slow- and fast-track learning streams:

for learning at the lowest levels of skills, particularly those with little or no educational background, there is a need to make it possible to make achievement in a longer, slower process, through smaller steps in qualifications or by finding ways to fund a 'slow track'.⁹¹

Similar to the British Council website and the ESOL Nexus porthole, there could be scope for a national online system of

ESOL learning for those at higher English levels. This would enable millions of migrants who have prior learning in their own language to make progress in English at very low cost, and in a manner convenient to their life and work schedules. This will not be suitable for all migrants, but would provide support for a large proportion of them.

As far as possible, funding should follow the learner and be responsive to their needs. It makes more sense for the Government to pay a larger proportion of the bill at the lower levels where learners are likely to require more support, as opposed to higher levels of learning where learners are more likely to be in work, settled and have established support networks. In other words, a greater sensitivity to individual needs – through needs assessment and consideration of intended learning trajectories – would serve learners’ needs better, ease waiting lists, and could potentially save some of the costs currently incurred where learners are allocated to inappropriate courses.

One of the essential tasks of this process would be to distinguish between learners who require intensive ‘top up’ courses and/or who could benefit from free community courses or online study, in addition to those who stand to gain most from long-term exam-based study. The German system offers some lessons here. German migrants undergo an initial assessment to determine the most appropriate from a range of course types and levels, based on their existing skills. In contrast to the UK system, where providers risk a penalty if they move learners between courses, there is inbuilt flexibility for German learners to switch, skip or repeat modules. Norway has a similar system, with an initial test.⁹²

Dr Nick Saville at Cambridge English Language Assessment refers to the metaphor of a ‘learning ladder’ – a sort of supported learning journey:

We’ve always argued that if you can match the language provision in terms of lessons or support with appropriate measurement which impacts positively on learning, you can achieve the goal of integration – what you’re interested in – by bringing people out, by giving them language skills and engaging them in the community very positively. The learning orientation of

assessment, where you've set a learning goal, where you've set realistic ambitions – effectively you can use this as a ladder you can take people up from one step to another; then you can address the issue of what communication for what purpose and for what context. If you just say, 'Well, here's a level you have to get to', then that ladder is an impossible task. You have to see it as a progression where the goals over time are realistically set, which brings people into education as learners, not just categorised as migrants. You can set them the right challenges, and most of the time you find people are very willing to take them up.

This offers one potential route out of the current deficit model, in which learners are identified by their lack of English and seen (as migrants too often are) as 'a problem to be solved'. Rather, the 'learning ladder' approach serves to work with the grain of learners' existing assets and ambitions, and unlock their potential.

Conclusion

Three intersecting factors contribute to ESOL being an unwieldy policy area:

- While colleges are doing their best to tailor their courses to migrant needs, government policy is insensitive to the wildly different learner profiles.
- Related to this, language takes many years to master, so short-term dividends are hard to quantify, which feeds into an unwillingness to think carefully about the underlying aims, outcomes and cost-benefit arguments around ESOL.
- Government-funded provision is understandably concerned with ESOL outcomes like getting learners off benefits and into work where they have to shoulder more of the payment burden. This rationale is coherent but presumes that once a learner is in work she or he automatically speaks better English.

These three factors have one solution in common: it needs to be recognised that learning English is a complicated long-term project. The aim should be to foster long-term learning

partnerships rather than the short-term triage model currently in vogue.

Chapter 3 looks at international models of ESOL provision and draws out some policy lessons for England. In the final chapter we set out our recommendations, which address many of the deficiencies discussed in this chapter.

3 An international review of host language learning policy and practice

Our review focuses on five EU countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain) and one non-EU country (New Zealand). It is important to acknowledge from the outset that there is wide variation within this sample, and that what works in one country may not be feasible, appropriate or effective in another. We believe that examining international practice can still yield valuable lessons for the UK, offering potential solutions to the problems identified in previous chapters.

Introduction

Arrangements for migrants to learn the language of their host country (henceforth, ‘host language’) vary according to a great many factors. Much of this difference can be accounted for by the characteristics of immigration and of immigrants themselves (eg country of origin, educational attainment, likely prior exposure to the host language), but alongside this there are a number of country-specific influences. Some are historical; thus we find that historic trade arrangements between nations, relationships with former colonies, or the presence of an indigenous minority population can all shape present policy and practice.

Other influences are political in nature; a country’s (or a ruling party’s) attitude towards immigration, integration and multiculturalism correlates with the relative strictness of host language speaking requirements, the extent of provision of opportunities for host language learning, and the cost of these to the user. Indeed, policy on host language learning may be used more or less explicitly as a form of political messaging.

In all EU countries for which data were available, there was a trend towards stricter language requirements for entry and/or

obtaining citizenship, and reduced funding for language learning support. This was most likely the combined effect of Europe-wide pressures: the drive to reduce public spending, the unprecedented level of youth unemployment (which has grown at a faster rate than adult unemployment since before the recession, and has not yet entered recovery),⁹³ and the increased concern among the European electorate about immigration and integration.

Context: country comparison

Figures 3–5 provide a rough illustration of the scale of immigration and the relative employment rates for the UK and comparator countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and New Zealand) for which data were available. The aim is to demonstrate the immigration context that forms the backdrop for the policy and practice described in the rest of the chapter.

Figure 3 shows the relative proportions of the native and foreign-born population for the six EU countries (no data were available for New Zealand).

Figure 4 compares migrant in-flows for the five years 2007–2011 (the most recent year for which data are available) for all seven countries.

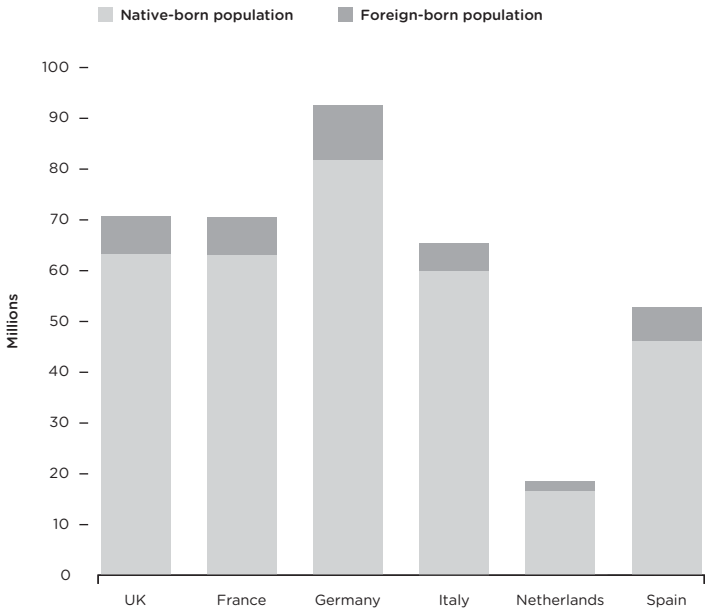
Figure 5 illustrates the employment rate for natives and immigrants (latest, 2011, figures).

France

Arguably, the relatively high French language proficiency among its immigrants allows France to continue to insist on the use of French in a way that would not be tolerable or practicable in countries with a more mixed linguistic intake.

A large proportion of immigrants to France arrive already able to speak the language – some 74 per cent of adult immigrants report a good command of French,⁹⁴ mainly because of the migrant profile: 29.8 per cent of migrants come from the francophone Maghreb (North Africa).⁹⁵ At the same time, France

Figure 3 The proportion of native and foreign-born population for six EU countries, 2011

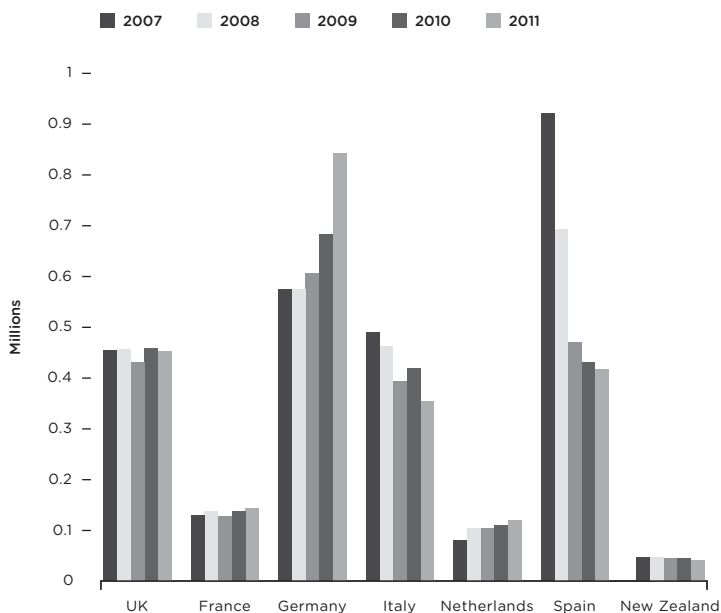


Source: OECD⁹⁶

has stringent rules about the exclusive use of French that mark it out from other countries. The 1994 Toubon Law enshrined the status of French as the exclusive language of the Republic, and made its use obligatory. The law has come under criticism from other EU members.

As elsewhere in Europe, French immigration laws are becoming stricter; between 2006 and 2011, six laws were reportedly passed which restricted access to citizenship,⁹⁷ although some (for instance the centre-right UMP party) criticise what they see as an ‘expansionist’ approach to the number of naturalisations, on the grounds that this ‘lowers the bar’ for integration.⁹⁸ From 2007, the Government required existing and

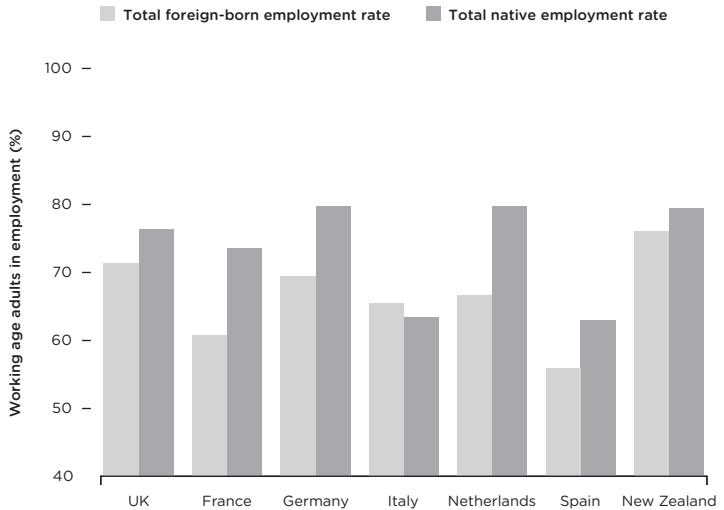
Figure 4 **Migrant in-flows for six European countries and New Zealand, 2007–2011**



Source: OECD⁹⁹

new long-term immigrants to sign a *contrat d'accueil et d'intégration* (CAI) ('Welcome and Integration Contract'), including a written and oral French test. All signatories receive six hours of mandatory civic training (on French values and political process), a 1–6 hour information session on life in France and, if they do not reach the required level on the language test, up to 400 hours of mandatory French language classes at the level dictated by their test results. Classes take place over one year, after which learners sit an exam to obtain a *diplôme initial de langue française* (DILF).¹⁰⁰ This training, and the naturalisation programme as a whole, are funded from the 'integration budget', which in 2012 stood at €71.63 million.¹⁰¹

Figure 5 **The employment rate for natives and immigrants in six European countries and New Zealand, 2011**



Source: OECD¹⁰²

The migrants' rights organisation France Terre D'Asile has called for pre-naturalisation training to have more robust language and vocational elements, to improve integration and labour market outcomes.¹⁰³ Immigrants (particularly men) with higher levels of qualification tend to find it harder to integrate into the labour market than those with lower levels, who 'catch up' relatively more quickly with their French-born peers in age and education.¹⁰⁴ This is in sharp contrast to the UK, where the employment gap (though smaller than in France) decreases with level of qualification, with language ability likely a significant mediating factor.¹⁰⁵

Germany

In 2013, there were an estimated 1,226,000 new arrivals in Germany – a 13 per cent increase on the previous year, and the highest level (for gross and net immigration) for 20 years.¹⁰⁶ According to the 2011 Census, Turks form the largest immigrant group in Germany, at 1.5 million people (24.4 per cent of immigrants). The next largest groups are Italians, Poles, Greeks and Croats.¹⁰⁷

Following the Immigration Act 2005, German language courses became mandatory for all new immigrants during their first two years of residence, and for unemployed immigrants of more than two years' residence.¹⁰⁸ In 2012, these two groups accounted for 38.6 per cent and 24.5 per cent of participants, respectively. EU citizens and immigrants of longer standing who have low levels of German may also attend courses voluntarily. This last group accounts for some 35.5 per cent of all participants.¹⁰⁹ A single Federal Office for Migration and Refugees now provides funding for courses, regulates their structure and content, and administers the rules on who should attend.

Course organisers administer an initial 'placement test', and assign learners accordingly to classes that suit their individual knowledge, skills and learning pace. Learners have the option to switch, skip or repeat sections. Learners with specific requirements can attend specialised courses, such as women's, parent and youth courses, 'catch-up' and intensive courses, and courses with a literacy component, designed for people who lack functional literacy in German, their first language, or both.¹¹⁰ Nearly one in five (17.7 per cent) of integration courses offered include a literacy element.¹¹¹ Part-time, evening and weekend courses are all available.¹¹²

The basic course comprises a pre-course ('orientation') of 45 lessons, followed by a further 900 lessons.¹¹³ There is a small self-funding element; students contribute €1.20 per lesson (2012 figures), though exemptions are available. This adds up to 25 hours of full-time teaching time per week over 6 months – hence 660 hours, at a cost to the user of €792.¹¹⁴ Courses aim to advance learners to the A2 level of language proficiency.¹¹⁵ Students can then continue with a more detailed, follow-on course, leading

eventually to registration to take the final (written and oral) ‘Zertifikat Deutsch’ examination.¹¹⁶

In 2007, the German Ministry of the Interior commissioned an independent evaluation of the integration courses introduced as part of the 2005 Act. The report that followed found that the new system constituted ‘a significant qualitative improvement’ of the integration policy – in particular, through rectifying “deficits and gaps” in the former system, and integrating coexisting instruments into ‘a single comprehensive approach’.¹¹⁷

Case study 8 describes the German language requirements for spouses of Turkish immigrants.

Case study 8 German language requirements for spouses of Turkish immigrants

At the time of writing (August 2014), the European Court of Justice had just ruled that it is unlawful for Germany to require the spouses of Turkish immigrants to demonstrate command of German as a condition of obtaining a visa, citing a ‘standstill’ clause in a 1973 association agreement between the two countries that prohibited future restrictions on free movement.¹¹⁸ There is a long-standing link between Turkey and Germany, dating primarily from a labour trade negotiated in the 1960s, when the Turkish Republic supplied labourers to meet the demand precipitated by the German Wirtschaftswunder (‘Economic Miracle’).

In addition, the Court ruled that the German conditions requiring a spouse to have successfully completed a language test above A1 level before she or he can enter the country violated the EU directive on the right to family reunification. The German Government, which has criticised the ruling, argued that it had a social purpose in upholding language requirements – preventing marriages of convenience and forced marriages, and facilitating integration.¹¹⁹

Italy

The 2011 Census in Italy placed the foreign-born Italian population at just over 5 million,¹²⁰ with other estimates suggesting as many as 5.4 million.¹²¹ Countries of origin are varied; in 2011, Romanians accounted for more than a quarter of immigrants (1.1 million) – twice the number of the next largest group (Albanians). Morocco, China and Ukraine were also represented.¹²² Italy has one of the lowest shares of highly educated migrants among OECD countries. In 2007, only 12.2 per cent had had any tertiary education; only Austria and Poland have a lower proportion, with 11.3 per cent and 11.9 per cent respectively.¹²³

Research has shown that returns on education for migrants (in earnings) are consistently lower than for natives, and remain so over time.¹²⁴ The financial crisis has actually improved employment outcomes for immigrants, whose employment rate from 2008 to 2012 has increased in absolute and relative terms. Migrants now account for 10 per cent of the total employed population – ascribed in part to increased demand for low-skilled jobs not traditionally performed by Italians.¹²⁵ In line with this, what wage progression there is tends to occur *within*, rather than *between* occupations, implying there is a glass ceiling effect where migrants are locked out of higher occupations.¹²⁶

The trend has been towards decreased funding for social integration, with the Italian media reporting a 76.3 per cent decrease in 2011 compared with 2008.¹²⁷ Also in 2011, language learning was for the first time linked to residency permits, within a credit-based system; migrants start with 16 credits and are given two years to meet a target of 30.¹²⁸ Non-EU immigrants aged between 14 and 65 (who are not refugees) who are seeking a long-term residency permit must pass a language test to level A2 of the CEFR within 2 months of their arrival in Italy.¹²⁹

While there is no national policy on language learning, in 2008 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies instituted a programme aimed at promoting language learning among immigrants. Called *Certifica il tuo Italiano* ('Certify your Italian'), the programme is fully funded by the Ministry and free to attend. Delivered by specially trained teachers, courses aim to improve not only language proficiency but also social, cultural

and linguistic integration. Courses are delivered via the network of state adult education schools, the Centri Territoriali Permanenti (CTP), of which in 2011 there were 540 in the country. As of 2012, eight of Italy's 20 regions and one autonomous province had joined the programme.¹³⁰

Netherlands

In the Netherlands, other EU nationals constitute the largest non-Dutch ethnic group, followed by Indonesian, Turkish, Surinamese, Moroccan and Caribbean minorities.¹³¹ In 2008/09, free movements within the EU accounted for 60 per cent of entrants; the rest were those moving for work (8.9 per cent), to join family (22.2 per cent) and for humanitarian reasons (8.6 per cent).¹³²

Figure 5 shows that the Netherlands has one of the largest native-migrant employment gaps. In recent years, this has been narrowing slightly for men, with employment rates for foreign-born men increasing faster than for native men during the recession, and increasing very slightly for women.¹³³ In 2006, the migration-sceptic organisation Focus Migration reported that a high proportion of Turks and Moroccans – ‘almost 30 per cent’ – received social security benefits, suggesting marked employment barriers for this group.¹³⁴ By contrast, immigrants from the former colony of Suriname can be expected to have better familiarity with Dutch language and culture – perhaps accounting for their absence from this social security statistic.¹³⁵

The Netherlands provides the clearest example of the link between language learning provision and policy, and shifting government attitudes to immigration and integration. Shortly after the practice of *inburgering* – becoming an integrated citizen – was first introduced in 1994,¹³⁶ a law was passed (in 1998) providing for 600 hours of mandatory, government-funded classes in ‘language and societal orientation’, applicable to all immigrants except students and temporary workers.¹³⁷ In 2004 following the centre-right cabinet’s official rejection of the ideal of a ‘multicultural society’,¹³⁸ integration has been made a formal, legal obligation.¹³⁹ Successive laws have sought to restrict

entry for non-EU migrants and stepped up integration requirements for migrants already settled in the country.

The amended Civic Integration Act 2013 required new entrants to the country to arrange and fund their own efforts at integration, including the civic integration exam and the state exam in Dutch as a second language (introduced in 2007). For those without the personal means to fund this, there is entitlement to a loan, which varies according to the immigration category (eg a maximum of €5,000 for family reunification, and €10,000 for successful asylum seekers, who are also permitted to spend some of this on a literacy course).¹⁴⁰ Since 2014, all state finance for *inburgering* has been withdrawn, leaving immigrants with full responsibility for funding a process whose outcomes are obligatory. There is some evidence of cities and regions supplying funding (often conditional on learners being in receipt of certain social security benefits), but this is at the region's discretion.¹⁴¹

Interestingly, Utrecht offers perhaps the leading example in Europe of a definition of multilingualism that extends to languages spoken by non-EU migrants, and is the polar opposite of the UK's (and the Netherlands' own) 'deficit model' (case study 9).

Case study 9 Utrecht: a whole-city multilingual approach

In 2011, 95 per cent of Utrecht residents were able to use more than one language.¹⁴² Compare this with the recent finding by the APPG on Modern Languages that just 9 per cent of UK 15-year-olds are competent in their first foreign language beyond a basic level, compared with 42 per cent in 14 countries.¹⁴³ The multilingual ethos is found across the age range, and applies equally to EU citizens and migrants. One of the city's primary schools provides an extra year of education for immigrant children who have not yet attained a good command of Dutch. The internationale kopklas is delivered in both Dutch and the children's first language, by bilingual teachers.

The city also offers preparatory classes for migrants planning to take the obligatory integration test. Teachers who

are bilingual in different languages are hired according to demand, reflecting a belief that being able to use one's first language when learning a second can enhance successful learning. This is supplemented by informal approaches – for instance, the DUO mentoring project pairs migrants with resident Utrechters; the two meet regularly, speeding the learner's progress with both Dutch language and cultural integration.¹⁴⁴

Spain

Spain's foreign-born population has remained relatively static over the past couple of years of its national economic crisis. The largest numbers of arrivals were from Romania (28,280 arrivals in 2012), Morocco (23,408) and the UK (16,569). Nonetheless, a sharp downturn in arrivals from Romania in 2012 (44.4 per cent less than 2011) was the main contributing factor to the negative migratory balance in 2012 (for the third time in three years). The figure for foreign-born people migrants arriving in Spain in 2012 was 16.1 per cent less than the previous year.¹⁴⁵

Immigrants to Spain are drawn from a smaller pool of countries than those going to other EU member states, most coming from countries in Latin America, Western and Eastern Europe, and Morocco. Indeed, 80 per cent of immigrants come from 20 countries, and 60 per cent from just 10 countries. Many immigrants come from Spanish-speaking countries.¹⁴⁶

Research shows that higher educational attainment is associated with a higher level of proficiency in spoken Spanish, though this effect is truer of men than women; those who have had a period of study in Spain are also likely to have better facility in Spanish. Knowledge of another Romance language (eg French, Italian, Romanian or Portuguese) is also a predictor of better Spanish ability. Country of origin has a similar – and no doubt related – effect, with Western European immigrants faring better than immigrants from the Maghreb, Asia, Eastern Europe and Sub Saharan Africa. Again, this is more pronounced for men than women, but remains statistically significant for women of Maghrebian and Asian origin. Notably, the presence of children

in a household is a predictor of poorer Spanish ability for women – most likely because it reduces the chances and/or extent of participation in the labour force, which is both an incentive to learn, and a means of learning, a host language.¹⁴⁷

There is no national language learning policy for immigrants, but it is important to note the tendency for heavy devolution of educational policy to regional authorities. Policies are variable and may be quite distinctive, especially in areas such as Catalonia, which have two official languages.¹⁴⁸

New Zealand

Unsurprisingly, New Zealand has a very different immigrant profile from the European countries explored so far in this chapter. The country operates a points-based system for allocating visas, with points weighted heavily towards skills and language ability. The largest inflow, accounting for nearly a third (32.2 per cent) of immigrants, is from the UK and Republic of Ireland, followed by North Asia, the Pacific region, South Africa and South Asia.¹⁴⁹ This is reflected in a high level of English language ability among migrants. In a survey of over 7,000 migrants aged 16 plus, who had been approved for residence two years previously, 86.5 per cent reported a high level of English ability.¹⁵⁰

New Zealand's Maori heritage is a further, unique driver of its attitude towards host language learning; there are various policy targets concerning the promotion of linguistic diversity, and of equality of opportunity for learning English and Maori.¹⁵¹

A strikingly high proportion of migrants – 94.9 per cent – are active in the labour force.¹⁵² A 2008 report found that despite an initial native-immigrant employment gap of 20 per cent (and a wage gap of \$10–15,000), there was significant levelling of outcomes after around 15 years of residence in New Zealand, with comparable employment rates and a difference in income that was halved for men and eliminated for women.¹⁵³ English language ability is a significant predictor of employment; rates vary from 76.9 per cent for migrants reporting English as the

language they spoke best, compared with 45.2 per cent for those with self-rated moderate or poor ability.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, English ability was a better predictor of employment outcomes than skill level for some groups; skilled secondary migrants (of any English ability) had a 61.4 per cent employment rate and a 7.7 per cent seeking work rate, whereas family partner migrants who spoke English best had a 78 per cent employment rate and 2.7 per cent seeking work rate.¹⁵⁵

Applicants for New Zealand residency are required to meet a minimum standard of English language, and to complete health and character tests.¹⁵⁶ Partners of skilled migrants and any dependent children over 18 must meet the same requirements as the principal applicant. Where families of skilled or business migrants do not have the required level of English proficiency, they are required to pre-purchase English language tuition (costing up to \$6,650) to be taken up on arrival in the country. No formal requirements are imposed on those with a student or work visa, with this responsibility devolved to higher education institutions and employers, respectively.¹⁵⁷

Most migrants are charged a migrant levy (\$310 in 2013) when granted residence. This funds integration programmes, language classes, translation and research into migration – including, notably, the Longitudinal Immigrant Survey (LisNZ). In 2012/13, the levy provided \$6.5 million, of which some \$0.8 million went on ESOL (plus a further \$2.5 million for ESOL in schools – the equivalent of UK ‘EAL’).¹⁵⁸ ESOL is thus free to users who are primary applicants. Intensive literacy and numeracy (ILN) targeted ESOL is designed for migrants who want to learn English but are pre-literate (level 1 ESOL and equivalent).¹⁵⁹ Free ESOL information resources and advisory services are available, while migrants can undergo a free assessment by a specialist adviser, who can recommend them an appropriate course. There are also grants available to help people with bilingual language skills to undertake study to become ESOL tutors.¹⁶⁰ The LisNZ survey and the follow-up qualitative ‘Five Years on Study’ (which uses a sample drawn from the LisNZ) have been used to identify groups that should be particularly encouraged to access ESOL – identifying North

Asian skilled migrants as among the most likely to rate their ability as lower six months after gaining residence.¹⁶¹

Conclusion

It is beyond the remit of this research to draw any conclusions about the relationship between provision of opportunities for host language learning and employment, integration and other outcomes in the sample countries. However, we know the scale of the challenge in the UK, and have evidence that English ability makes a significant contribution to it. Here, based on the international evidence, we suggest some approaches that the UK might fruitfully consider.

Broad definition of multilingualism: an asset-based approach

- *New Zealand and Utrecht*: Policy is underpinned by a respect for multilingualism. In contrast with the EU, which explicitly protects and celebrates diversity among ‘native’ EU languages *as distinct from* migrant languages, New Zealand’s definition does not discriminate.
- *New Zealand*: grants system for bilingual learners to become ESOL tutors themselves.

High profile, comprehensive national strategy or policy

- *New Zealand*: The need to provide English learning opportunities for those with Maori as a first language (and vice versa) situates ESOL higher up the policy agenda, alongside issues of access, rights and diversity.
- *Germany*: Positive findings from the independent evaluation of the new, more coherent integration system indicate that learners gain from reduced fragmentation at a national level.

Initial assessment and specialised courses

- *Germany*: Initial ‘placement test’ to determine the most appropriate course of study for learners, based on their prior knowledge and skills (their ‘assets’) and likely learning pace. There is inbuilt flexibility, which allows students to change to more appropriate modules or courses.
- *Germany*: A variety of courses are available that cater for different learner needs and circumstances (eg women’s courses, parent and youth courses, part-time and evening courses, courses with or without a literacy element).

Learners’ contributions to costs

- *Germany*: Learners make a small contribution to the cost of language courses. UK-based practitioners whom Demos consulted reported a tendency for learners who funded their courses, in full or in part, to be more engaged.

Incorporating informal learning

- *Utrecht*: The DUO project pairs recent migrants with citizens to provide opportunities for informal language learning and cultural integration.

Data collection and use

- *New Zealand*: A longitudinal survey of migrants (LisNZ), funded from the Migrant Levy, is used to monitor migrant outcomes. Data from the survey are used to inform targeting of ESOL provision.

4 Conclusion and recommendations

It is important for migrants to be able to use English effectively. That is almost a truism, and – as the British Social Attitudes Survey shows – it is something on which 95 per cent of us agree.¹⁶² What is less often articulated is *why*. This report has argued that this lack of clarity has contributed to an ESOL system that is unfit for purpose, and certainly unfit to meet future demand.

Having a good command of English is associated with a host of advantages, which extend far beyond the labour market outcomes that dictate the current, narrow ESOL policy remit. These range from so-called ‘soft’ outcomes such as independence, confidence and self-determination, to more tangible benefits such as better access to healthcare and education (and hence better health and better qualifications).

Yet it is not just individuals who stand to gain; unlocking migrants’ potential will result in widespread and long-term benefits to society as a whole. Over and above the savings to the public purse in welfare and health that will result from enabling migrants to navigate life in the UK better, and the desirability of a better integrated, more socially cohesive society, an English-speaking – or rather *bilingual* – migrant workforce can bring a significant skills boost to the economy.

Current ESOL policy suffers from fragmentation, lack of clarity about the aims and intended outcomes of learning, and the tendency to take a short-term view. This report advocates a rethink of ESOL policy, which will make it work more effectively for migrants as well as for the national interest. To this end, we offer below a number of recommendations for policy makers and providers, which draw on evidence gathered from UK best practice and international evidence, academic and practice experts, and ESOL teachers and learners themselves.

Recommendations

- 1 *Demos calls on parties across the political spectrum to include in their manifesto in the run-up to the 2015 general election a commitment to a national strategy for ESOL.* This strategy will ensure that England functions at the same level as Scotland and Wales, and should:
 - *include short-, medium- and long-term plans for change,* acknowledging (as we do in this report) that, while it is a long road to creating a system that is fit for purpose and for future demand, some changes will need to be prioritised over others; for example, there ought to be mechanisms in place to better understand the full spectrum of unmet needs before these can be effectively met
 - *have clearly defined aims with a wider scope than the current, single-track focus on employment;* Demos welcomes the current DCLG open competition for community-based English language learning.¹⁶³ However, more – and, crucially, more sustainable – cross-departmental input is needed if we are to ensure that the potential benefits to health, integration, social cohesion and autonomy are fully realised
 - *provide for the establishment of dedicated groups such as an APPG, ESOL provider umbrella body, and national champion,* with specific responsibility for raising awareness of ESOL, supporting local authorities, providers and other stakeholders to make the transition to the new strategy, and sharing best practice to improve quality of provision
 - *commit to the collection of cost-benefit data* on ESOL across a range of (cross-departmental) outcomes; where cross-departmental initiatives occur, these should not simply be time-limited funding pots for innovations which, once tried, do not go anywhere; there should be clear plans to move from ‘pathfinder’ schemes that prove effective to more sustainable programmes and funding streams
- 2 *BIS should consult on extending FE advanced learning loans to ESOL level 2 and below.* Since advanced learning loans were introduced in 2013 for adult skills at levels 3 and 4, uptake has exceeded government expectations.¹⁶⁴ BIS has recently launched a

consultation on extending these loans to lower levels. The proposals under consideration exclude ESOL, without any explanation. As course costs are a significant barrier to accessing ESOL, and the evidence that learner contributions increase learner engagement, loans seem to have potential for widening participation among migrants. Crucially, repayment thresholds would have to be set at a level that is workable and based on evidence of likely labour market trajectories. We therefore recommend that any such change should be made in conjunction with the data collection envisaged in recommendation 6 below.

3 *Employers should be encouraged to contribute towards the cost of, or otherwise support, ESOL learning for employees.* The national strategy (see recommendation 1) should include a programme of education for employers about the benefits to health and safety, productivity, cohesion and reduced staff turnover of promoting English language learning in the workplace, in addition to the benefits of hiring multilingual employees. BIS should reintroduce funding for workplace-based ESOL, but employers should also be encouraged to provide non-financial support, such as mentoring schemes, shifts that mix proficient and non-proficient English speakers, and allowing flexible working where employees wish to attend classroom-based ESOL. Funding streams that incentivise employer support for English learning should be explored (see recommendation 4, below, for one example).

4 Demos backs NIACE in *calling for the introduction of personal skills accounts combining government-, employer- and learner-funding*.¹⁶⁵ We envisage these as being specifically for ESOL learners, and capable of being spent (only) on any of the full range of local ESOL learning opportunities. NIACE suggests that these accounts could operate like pensions in having an auto-enrolment element, and the added incentive of tax exemptions for employer and learner contributions. We propose, further, that:

- *the Government should provide matched funding for employer contributions*

- *accounts should be administered in the form of a prepaid card for user convenience, to assist monitoring, and to avoid fraud or mitigate suspicion of fraud*
 - *there should be alternative, non-financial ways for learners to earn 'credits', for example by mentoring less advanced learners, or by volunteering in the community – a form of 'time-banking' scheme*
- 5 *There should be a statutory requirement for local authorities to maintain an ESOL 'hub' website with information on how to access learning (including informal opportunities such as mentoring and volunteering), how courses are funded, and details of local courses and providers; where possible this should include Ofsted evaluations of the quality of ESOL provision in the local area. Websites should include a facility for learners to rate and provide feedback on learning opportunities. This would be similar in purpose and scope to the 'local offer', which local authorities are required to publish from September 2014 under the Children and Families Bill 2013, and which sets out local provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.*¹⁶⁶
- 6 *There should be a statutory requirement on local authorities to carry out a needs assessment specifically for migrants.* A strategic assessment of migrant needs (SAMN) would encompass the full range of potential migrant needs, including housing, employment, health, education and so on. This need not involve a significant new data collection burden; the bulk of the data will already be available in other strategies collected by the council (eg the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, health inequalities data, housing strategy, etc). ESOL providers would feed into the SAMN by supplying data on participation and monitoring information (including, where possible, learner destinations). Finally, there would be a link with the learner ratings gathered through the 'hub' website. The SAMN would therefore allow a comparison of demand and latent (unmet) need, which would inform local targeting of ESOL in the future. It would also permit the local

authority to track how changes in ESOL provision were related to wider outcomes (eg health inequalities) at a local level.

- 7 *If local authorities stop spending money on the translation of documents into foreign languages, savings should be ploughed back into ESOL provision.* As part of his 2012 guidance to local authorities, ‘50 ways to save’, DCLG minister Eric Pickles recommended that local authorities stop spending money on translating documents into foreign languages. If the aim is to reduce segregation and improve cohesion, local authorities ought to follow through by putting any money saved in this way back into ESOL – perhaps on a matched funding basis from DCLG itself.
- 8 *FE colleges should be contracted by the local authority to carry out formal and transferable initial needs assessments.* This would result in referral to one of the full range of local learning opportunities, including pre-ESOL courses and informal opportunities such as volunteering. Providers should receive funding for carrying out the needs assessment itself, to incentivise them to make appropriate referrals without regard for the likelihood of the learner achieving a qualification. Furthermore, under the current arrangement, providers can be penalised if they move learners between courses. There should be greater flexibility (as in the German system) for learners to move between courses as deemed appropriate.
- 9 *The Government should consult awarding organisations and providers about how to reform the current ESOL standards and national framework, as well as how to improve the overall quality of ESOL provision.* There is widespread agreement that the current national framework creates perverse funding incentives, and fails adequately to capture learners’ needs and progress. This has an adverse effect on learners at both the highest and the lowest ends of the spectrum. This imbalance also makes little economic sense, as the SFA is forced continually to support FE colleges from its limited pot for so-called ‘non-regulated’ provision. Clearly, a more realistic framework is needed. Adopting the

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is a promising option, as it is tailored specifically to language acquisition and adopting it would bring the UK in line with most other developed countries and make it easier to benchmark and talk about levels of language ability.

¹⁰ *BIS and providers should look at ways of combining formal and informal or non-formal learning.* Classroom-based learning delivered by qualified teachers is central to the way in which ESOL is provided and funded. However, learners spend most of their time outside the classroom – and they may do so in environments where they do not have many natural opportunities to practise English. Notwithstanding the need to ensure there is access to high quality, formal learning, more should be done to leverage informal learning opportunities from within existing volunteer and community networks. Wider learning from civil society should be considered – for example, arrangements like mentoring (as in the Utrecht DUO project) and time banking. Finally, informal learning opportunities should be broadly defined; as anyone will know who has learned a second language, migrant or not, there are significant gains to be had in linguistic and cultural competence from activities that have nothing to do with language.

¹¹ *BIS should work with providers to develop ‘fast-track’ pathways into employment where talented ESOL learners can use their bilingual skills.* Similar to the New Zealand model, which enables learners to become ESOL teachers, this initiative would support learners into paid employment where their first language skills were a recognised asset – for example, as EAL teaching assistants or learning support assistants, or ESOL teachers. This would most likely involve apprenticeship-style partnerships with employers. Providers could be incentivised to identify a quota of candidates for this scheme from among their learners, in much the same way as schools are judged on their identification of and provision for ‘gifted and talented’ pupils.

Appendix 1 Language levels and national standards

Table 4 shows how ESOL qualifications are matched to the National Qualifications Framework and the Common European Framework of Reference; however, many of the experts we spoke to question the equivalencies between the ESOL Curriculum and the Common European Framework of Reference.¹⁶⁷

Table 4 Comparison of the ESOL Core Curriculum qualifications with the National Qualifications Framework and the CEFR

ESOL Core Curriculum	National Qualifications Framework	CEFR
Level 2	Level 2 (eg GCSE A*-C)	C1
Level 1	Level 1	B2
Entry 3	Entry level	B1
Entry 2		A2
Entry 1		A1

Appendix 2 CEFR levels

Table 5 shows the language descriptors for the CEFR levels.

Table 5 **Language descriptors for CEFR levels**

Proficient user	<p>C2 Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.</p> <p>C1 Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</p>
Independent user	<p>B2 Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</p>

Table 5 **Language descriptors for CEFR levels *continued***

Independent user <i>continued</i>	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
.....		
Basic user	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (eg very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Source: Council of Europe¹⁶⁸

Notes

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- 17 Unpublished Demos research for Wakefield Council.
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CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

The English language is vitally important to the capabilities and integration of migrants who wish to build a successful future in the UK. However, in the last Census around 850,000 migrants reported that they could not speak English well or at all. This is partly due to current policy – delivered chiefly through the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) framework – which suffers from fragmentation, a lack of clarity and a short-termist approach.

Based on interviews, focus groups, FOI requests and a review of international evidence, this report investigates the state of ESOL provision in England, and how it compares with other countries. It uncovers a number of issues with the system, including disincentives to find employment while studying, and the fact that funding from government has reduced by 40 per cent in the past five years, despite the large waiting lists around the country. It concludes that ESOL in England is not functioning as well as it could, especially considering the demand associated with demographic projections.

On Speaking Terms recommends a number of ways to improve the system. It identifies funding as a key stumbling block, and so suggests that student-style loans are provided and that employers and local authorities do more to support ESOL. A coherent national strategy would ensure that this vital policy area remains on the agenda, and so the report calls on all parties to include one in their forthcoming manifestos. These changes would help to unlock migrant capabilities, save costs to public services in the long term and promote a more integrated and socially cohesive society.

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