

Funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Provision

Summary and Recommendations

In the financial year 2018-19 the Scottish Funding Council, in discussion with Education Scotland and Scottish Government, changed the funding model for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision with no consultation with local authorities, colleges or third sector delivery partners. COSLA has been working with local authorities and Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland (CLDMS) to assess the impact of these changes.

Our ongoing work to support local authorities to deliver ESOL and implement the [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 – 2022](#) has demonstrated that ESOL classes provided by local authorities are uniquely positioned to flexibly meet the needs of refugees and migrants. However, it is clear that the new model of provision is at odds with not only the New Scots Strategy, but also the national ESOL strategy, [Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015 – 2020](#) (PDF) and poses significant challenges to delivering learner-centred ESOL classes that meet the varied needs of our communities.

This paper invites the Board to:

- i. Note our concerns regarding the current model of provision for ESOL;
- ii. Note that the Community Wellbeing Spokesperson will raise these concerns during a forthcoming meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government; and
- iii. Agree that the Community Wellbeing Spokesperson should follow up her initial discussion with the Cabinet Secretary with a letter requesting further dialogue, a revised model of provision, improved guidance, and sufficient funding to support the delivery of local authority-led ESOL.

References

Previous reports on ESOL provision:

- None

Peter Broomfield
Policy Officer
Migration, Population & Diversity Team
peter@cosla.gov.uk

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Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to inform the Board of the new funding model for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in financial year 2018-19 that has been introduced by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in discussion with Scottish Government and Education Scotland.
2. The paper intends to raise awareness of our ongoing discussions with local authorities and Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland (CLDMS) to measure the impact that this is having on the delivery of ESOL that meets the needs of migrants and refugees across Scotland. It also makes some recommendations as to the best way forward in this regard.

Current COSLA Position

3. COSLA's ESOL Coordinator, funded by the Home Office, has been working closely with local authorities to help develop infrastructure, encourage regional working, and support councils to deliver the ESOL requirements of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Refugee Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS).
4. Additional Home Office funding for ESOL for SVPRS has been made available to Local Authorities to a) overcome barriers to participation in mainstream provision; b) develop infrastructure such as staff training and resources; and c) commission bespoke services in areas with high demand or lack of suitable provision. A separate childcare fund has significantly aided women to participate.
5. This Home Office funding has better enabled Scottish local authorities to meet the needs of resettled Syrian refugees in their communities, guaranteeing a minimum of 8+ hours of ESOL a week to help their integration. This is not guaranteed to other refugees and migrants who are outwith the scheme and dependent on mainstream provision alone.
6. The ESOL Coordinator's work on the SVPRS has not been in isolation and has contributed to wider work around developing the infrastructure of ESOL in Scotland, and overcoming barriers to participation, particularly via two key national strategies – *Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy 2015 – 2020* and the *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 – 2022*. Both strategies place significant importance on the role of ESOL in helping newly arrived migrants and refugees to gain sufficient English language skills to integrate and operate successfully in their communities.
7. To meet the learning and integration needs of migrants, a variety of ESOL options are necessary. Further and higher education institutions are a key component in this, providing greater opportunities into training and employment. However, many migrants, and refugees in particular, face barriers to attending formal accredited learning. For example, they may: lack the confidence to attend college; have experienced trauma; have mental health issues, high health care needs, or medical appointments to attend;

have little or no confidence in a learning environment; have less regular lifestyles; or have little financial means to travel far.

8. Our work has demonstrated that ESOL classes provided by local authorities are uniquely positioned to flexibly meet the needs of people in these types of circumstance. Local authority ESOL classes offer the flexibility of approach in terms of location, course content and scheduling that is best suited to the lifestyles of many refugees. They are also provided in conjunction with wrap-around services such as childcare, which makes attendance possible for some who would be otherwise excluded, while the variety of class types on offer ensures that various barriers to participation can be overcome.
9. In addition, local authorities have continued to provide this key service in spite of increasing financial cuts and limited resources. This is in recognition of the wider benefits that ESOL classes provide, in terms of reducing social isolation, increasing opportunities for community integration and helping people towards employment or meaningful volunteering. Members should note that UK Government has recently announced £6m funding for community-based ESOL in England, while the new arrangements in Scotland seem to have reduced the amount of funding for these types of approaches.

What is changing?

10. Between financial years 2012 and 2017 a fund of £1.45 million was made available to fund local authority ESOL. This was allocated by Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), while colleges continued to provide traditional ESOL classes from their core teaching funds.
11. In the financial year 2018-19, following discussion between SFC, Education Scotland and Scottish Government, but without any discussion with local authorities, a new funding model was implemented. This rolled the £1.45 million into colleges' core teaching funds for subsequent allocation to local authorities.
12. COSLA has been engaging with CPPs, Adult Learning Managers, ESOL coordinators and CLD Managers regarding the implications of the new funding model and guidelines for local authorities. To date, 21 local authorities have raised concerns about the new model. These concerns fall under 3 broad themes:
 - i. a lack of dialogue and consultation with local authorities and a lack of accountability for delivery;
 - ii. the new funding model is inflexible to the way that local authorities operate to meet the needs of their communities and has implications for learners as a consequence; and
 - iii. there is a lack of clarity in the funding guidance and additional bureaucracy inherent in the new model.

Lack of consultation and accountability

13. Local authorities were not consulted before the new model was put in place. Under the previous model, all decisions regarding allocation of funds were accountable to the CPP and linked into Single Outcome Agreements, whereas there is no clarity as to how the current mechanism will be compatible with the new Local Outcome Improvement Plans. As such, there is no apparent mechanism to ensure funds are allocated where they are most needed.
14. There is also no transparency regarding how the SFC has allocated funds to colleges, with many local authorities reporting they are in receipt of significantly less than previous years. This is felt particularly acutely in remote and rural local authorities, where there are often greater barriers to participation to overcome. For example, Highland Council has seen a reduction in funding from £93,702 to £35,568; Orkney from £11,000 to

£4,000; and Shetland from £24,000 to £9,000. It is certain that this will inhibit service delivery.

Inflexible model of provision

15. It is also clear that the funding that colleges have allocated to local authorities is based on an inflexible model of provision. This tends to focus on the number of credits that are taught in line with college criteria, with examined classes prioritised for credits and only a limited amount of funding going towards non-accredited ESOL. It is very hard to reconcile this with local authorities' frameworks and delivery of community-based ESOL which is focused primarily on the needs of the learner rather than on accreditation and examination results.
16. As mentioned above, local authorities are uniquely placed to deliver a varied selection of classes that meet individual needs. This includes mother and child ESOL classes to increase women's participation; ESOL for social integration of refugees; and ESOL for IT and driving. A number of local authorities have mentioned that this type of provision does not comply with the more rigid college criteria and is ineligible for funding. As a result, provision has been cancelled and has disadvantaged many; not least women, the vulnerable and those with higher support needs.
17. Another issue is that payment of funding is often dependent on a minimum of 25% attendance and is paid per capita. Again, this disadvantages remote and rural areas where small classes are an unavoidable feature and it is difficult to achieve sufficient numbers of students to draw down sufficient funding to cover costs. This also disregards the fact that local authority ESOL is designed to be flexible to learners' attendance needs, for example due to shift work or issues like lack of confidence or health needs.
18. When payment is in arrears and dependant on the criteria above, local authorities are left to provide services without the secure knowledge that they'll receive funding for it. This also prevents them from funding provision by third sector partners who do not have the resources to deliver classes without front loaded funding.

Lack of clear guidance and additional bureaucracy

19. A lack of clarity within the guidelines associated with the new model of provision has meant that colleges are uncertain, and in some cases unaware, of their obligations to work with local authorities to meet the demand for ESOL. It has also led to colleges and local authorities having to implement the new approach to the best of their understanding, only to be advised, in some instances, that their assumptions have been incorrect.
20. There is also a significant new administrative burden for local authorities to deal with. Funding agreements written by colleges oblige local authorities to register all learners with the college and the SQA which is burdensome and perceived to be offloading colleges' administration requirements. In some cases, local authorities have been asked to take on the colleges' duties to check immigration status. The impact of having to overhaul and restructure syllabuses to meet college criteria, often having recruited staff and made a financial outlay on resources based on previous approaches, cannot be underestimated either.

Proposed COSLA Position

21. COSLA Migration, Population and Diversity Team has attempted to seek a resolution to the concerns raised by local authorities on several occasions, primarily by seeking to relay and discuss these concerns with Education Scotland. Most recently, COSLA was represented at a stakeholders meeting with Scottish Government, SFC, Education Scotland, CLDMS and colleges in November 2018.

22. However to date there has been little recognition of the various issues that have been raised. The Community Wellbeing Spokesperson will therefore highlight our concerns with the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Aileen Campbell MSP, during a meeting due to take place on 11th December. A verbal update on that discussion will be provided at the Board meeting.
23. Further to discussion within the Board, it is proposed that the Community Wellbeing Spokesperson follows up on her meeting with the Cabinet Secretary, with a letter requesting that meaningful dialogue takes place, involving COSLA, CLDMS, Scottish Government and SFC, in order to address and resolve the current challenges. Specifically, it is suggested that the letter highlights the need to:
 - i. Revisit the current model of provision;
 - ii. Develop new guidance in partnership with local authorities; and
 - iii. Ensure that sufficient funding is provided to support the important work that local authorities undertake in this regard.

Conclusion

24. Local authority-led ESOL plays a crucial role in the integration of migrants and refugees into our communities. It helps to reduce isolation, creates stronger communities, and assists people towards employment and better social integration. However, there are significant concerns that the current model of ESOL provision inhibits local authorities' efforts to undertake this work.
25. The Board is asked to note and discuss the issues raised in this paper and agree the specific recommendation outlined in paragraph 23, above.

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