

NEW TO ESOL AND NEW TO LITERACY LEARNING

Research to support the development of resources for practitioners working with learners new to ESOL and new to literacy

Learning and Work Institute, May 2019



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises research conducted by Learning and Work Institute (L&W) for a project commissioned by the Education and Training Foundation to provide support to English for Other Languages (ESOL) practitioners working with learners at 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1. L&W is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

Learning English, particularly at the lower proficiency levels, has great strategic importance for community cohesion, inclusion and unlocking individual potential. There is a growing demand for ESOL provision at pre-Entry and Entry Level 1 and a recognition that teaching these learners is a specialism that requires considerable expertise.

The report includes a review of relevant research and policy documents, and the analysis of qualitative research with professional ESOL practitioners and volunteers supporting English language learning and insight from a number of interviews directly with learners, including refugees.

Key Findings

L&W's practitioner research, which included an online survey and focus groups, identified a number of barriers faced by ESOL learners at 'pre-Entry' level and a range of challenges for practitioners and others working with this cohort of learners. Barriers faced by learners, highlighted by practitioners and reinforced by learner interviews, include:

- A lack of experience of formal education and literacy, often linked to low levels of confidence to engage in learning
- Physical and mental ill health, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers¹ experiencing trauma, and possible undeclared or undiagnosed learning difficulties, affecting learners' readiness and ability to learn
- A lack of opportunity to practise English outside the classroom
- Caring responsibilities acting as a barrier to participation in learning and regular attendance, particularly for women who tend to take on childcare responsibilities
- Irregular and insecure employment affecting the ability to participate regularly in learning

Given the barriers faced by learners, ESOL practitioners also identified a number of key challenges in day-to-day practice: These included:

- A lack of clarity regarding the definition of 'pre-Entry' ESOL, with many practitioners rejecting this terminology
- Differentiation for the range of learning needs in a typical 'pre-Entry' class, including for those with limited study skills and little experience of literacy
- A lack of professional learning and development opportunities specific to 'pre-Entry' ESOL,

¹ Asylum seekers currently become eligible for a 50% contribution to the cost of AEB funded English language provision if they have waited for an asylum decision for longer than 6 months through no fault of their own.

for example on differentiation and the appropriate use of phonics

- A shortage of high quality, attractive and flexible teaching and learning materials suitable for use with adult learners at this level, to support the development of functional language skills in day to day settings, and the development of basic literacy skills

The resources developed on the basis of this research aim to help tackle some of the key issues identified by practitioners. For example, practitioners reported that preparation for 'pre-Entry' classes was time consuming, due to the need for a high level of differentiation. The materials developed in this project include time-saving templates, and differentiation suggestions in every unit.

More widely, this report makes a number of recommendations for policymakers, the Education and Training Foundation, and ESOL providers.

Recommendations for policy

- Policymakers should consider boosting the availability of appropriate and flexible funding for models of 'pre-Entry' ESOL provision which support progression.
- Policymakers should ensure that resourcing for ESOL also addresses practical barriers to learning, and includes provision for appropriate learning support.
- Policymakers should give due consideration to 'pre-Entry' ESOL in any wider review of the relevant national standards for ESOL, and in relation to ESOL teacher training.

Recommendations for ETF

- ETF should develop further, accessible opportunities for professional learning and development for ESOL practitioners working with 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 learners, including in the appropriate use of phonics with ESOL learners.
- ETF should consider supporting ESOL practitioners with further teaching and learning resources for 'pre-Entry' ESOL, including digital resources.

Recommendations for providers

- Providers should ensure the availability of appropriate professional learning and development opportunities for ESOL practitioners working with learners at 'pre-Entry' level, and for non-specialist staff in support roles.
- Providers should develop their partnership working local to support professional learning and development, as well as to facilitate access to 'pre-Entry' ESOL provision.
- Providers should make full use of the available funding streams to support 'pre-Entry' ESOL provision, including the option to deliver non-accredited 'pre-Entry' ESOL through the Adult Education Budget.

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INTRODUCTION

Project overview

This report summarises the research stage of a project commissioned and funded by the Education and Training Foundation on behalf of the Department for Education and the Home Office. The project was delivered by Learning and Work Institute (L&W), in partnership with Learning Unlimited (LU).

L&W is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. LU is a community social enterprise with expertise in both the delivery of and training in 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 ESOL.

The aim of the project was to provide support for ESOL practitioners working with 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 learners. The project had two strands and five main objectives:

Strand 1 – Research

- Conduct survey and focus groups with practitioners and volunteers across the sector to understand what support they need in the delivery of 'pre-Entry' ESOL provision
- Create 10 profiles of Entry Level ESOL learners which can be used by practitioners to tailor provision and identify specific needs.

Strand 2 – Resource development

- Develop a paper-based screening tool for 'pre-Entry'/ Entry Level 1 learners that can be used by non-specialists to assess learners at first contact
- Develop an effective practice guide for use by ESOL practitioners
- Develop a suite of teaching and learning materials for use by practitioners at pre-Entry level.

The final stage of the project was to disseminate the project outputs through two national events.

Effective ESOL provision underpins equality of opportunity and supports greater community cohesion across England and the UK. There are clear links between poor English-language proficiency and social exclusion. Equally, good literacy skills are essential to shaping a thriving society ready for the challenges of a globalised world. The recent published Integrated Communities Strategy green paper (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, 2018a) outlines its vision for building strong integrated communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Effective English language provision is identified as an integral part of this strategy.

As part of this English language provision, there is growing demand for provision at 'pre-Entry' Level. This is linked in part to the needs of re-settled refugees who arrive through the UK's resettlement schemes. 'Pre-Entry' provision is currently the focus of a number of initiatives in the learning and skills sector and beyond. As well as 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 ESOL provision delivered in Further Education (FE) colleges and Adult Community Learning (ACL) settings, MHCLG has funded community-based English language provision since 2013, aimed at 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 learning needs, and the Home Office and Department for Education have invested additional resources to boost English language learning for resettled refugees at all levels including pre-entry.

There is recognition that there is a growing need to support practitioners involved in the delivery of 'pre-Entry' ESOL. Teaching ESOL at the lower levels is a particular specialism within ESOL and requires highly skilled practitioners to deliver effective teaching and learning, for learners who often have the greatest personal and learning needs. However, as discussed in this report the support available to these practitioners in terms of resources, training and guidance is currently limited.

We acknowledge that the term 'pre-Entry' is contested and considered inappropriate by some practitioners. However, it is used here in relation to the work we were commissioned to undertake and in recognition of its widespread usage within the sector. The use of the term is discussed further in our analysis of the focus groups. In the outputs of this project we use the terms new to ESOL and new to literacy learning in preference to 'pre-Entry'.

This report details the findings of the first strand of the research. It includes a review of relevant research and policy documents and the analysis of qualitative research with professional and volunteer ESOL practitioners. This research has now been used to inform the development of the resources detailed in the second strand.

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The research stage of this project took place between December 2018 and February 2019. The first stage was a review of relevant research and policy documents, along with a scoping review of existing teaching and learning materials and training resources targeted to 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 ESOL provision.

L&W then undertook qualitative research with ESOL managers and teachers, as well as volunteers in teaching and non-teaching roles. An initial online survey to register expressions of interest in the project received 332 responses, and of these, 233 responded to a question about the challenges they had experienced and what they wanted the project to address. The survey participants were then invited to attend focus groups.

The survey and focus group participants generally had a high level of expertise and extensive experience of teaching 'pre-Entry' and Entry 1 learners with FE, ACL, voluntary sectors and refugee support organisations all well represented. The well attended focus groups and high survey response rate are suggestive of the level of interest this project has generated.

Five face-to-face semi-structured focus groups with a total of 42 participants were held in three locations. To enhance the reach and opportunities to participate, four online focus groups were also held. These were attended by a total of 13 volunteers and practitioners. Participants were asked about their definition of 'pre-Entry' ESOL, their perceptions of the challenges for practitioners and the barriers for learners, their views of existing training and resources and their suggestions for the development of new training and resources. The survey responses and focus group responses were analysed separately but are reported together as many of the same themes emerged. The responses were used to inform the development of the effective practice guide, teaching and learning materials and screening tool.

The survey participants were then invited to give feedback on a draft of the teaching and learning materials, and 206 participants were sent one of five topics to review using an online survey. We received 34 responses which we reviewed and fed into the final version of the resources and the effective practice guidance.

The final stage of the research was interviews with 23 ESOL learners, including refugees. These were used to inform learner profiles, which are published separately and so not reported on here. These interviews echoed and illuminated the practitioner research. Learners identified barriers to their learning such as childcare, a lack of confidence and not being able to find suitable provision. They expressed frustration at slow progress and emphasised the importance of repetition and an approach tailored to their individual needs. They also valued their ESOL learning as leading to outcomes such as improved employment prospects, social integration, health, and wellbeing.

RAPID REVIEW

Introduction

This section of the report reviews recent research and policy documents and sets out the key issues and challenges for providers and practitioners in the delivery of ESOL provision, specifically at 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1. We first consider the various structural and personal challenges of 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level ESOL for learners and providers and then look at the ways identified in the literature to overcome these barriers considering strategy, funding and availability, modes of delivery, meeting learners needs, motivating learners, and overcoming other barriers.

Current challenges

Strategy, mapping and funding

The Integrated Communities action plan (MHCLG, 2018a) announced the development of an ESOL strategy for England, bringing England in line with Wales and Scotland, where established national strategies or policies are in place. This has been welcomed in the ESOL sector and seen as contributing to a better understanding of the scale of need, the quality of provision and accessible information for potential learners. At present, challenges of co-ordination and strategy persist. In particular, up to date mapping of local ESOL provision and progression routes is scant. This makes it difficult to get an accurate understanding of ESOL provision within a region, to signpost to existing provision, or to engage with local providers to overcome barriers or increase provision (Maddocks, 2018).

ESOL has also been subject to variations both in terms of funding and the context of its delivery. Between 2009/10 and 2015/16, real levels of funding via the Adult Education Budget have fallen each year (except 2012/13), an overall reduction in funding of 60%.² A lack of stable ESOL funding has impacted on learner progression and the development of a strategic approach to promoting ESOL. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration (2017) assert that the current ESOL funding system is failing some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society (APPG, 2017).

Refugee Action report that refugees can wait up to two years for English lessons, and that the average provider waiting list contained over 700 people (Refugee Action, 2017). Accessing ESOL support early can help people make greater, faster progress while waiting to access support can damage confidence and make it more difficult to take the first steps (MHCLG, 2018a).

The current funding system has the potential to create perverse incentives, which, may disadvantage learners at both the lowest levels, such as 'pre-Entry' ESOL and Entry Level 1. For example, the focus on funding on qualifications achievement incentivises providers to enrol learners closest to achieving qualifications and who can progress through the levels more quickly, which may work against the interests of those at lower levels requiring more time to progress (Paget and

² House of Commons Library (2017), *Adult ESOL in England* Briefing Paper No. 7905

Stevenson, 2014). In the context of falling participation and delivery volumes linked to reduced funding, the proportion of ESOL provision delivered at Entry Level is largely unchanged in recent years³. However, where providers have developed their ESOL offers to include more accredited provision, higher level provision and/or employability focused programmes, this may result in local shortages of provision suitable for pre-Entry or basic learning needs.

Research has identified high levels of demand for ESOL provision at the lower Entry and 'pre-Entry' levels, and that this provision is frequently oversubscribed, highlighting a need for capacity building at this level (Stevenson et al, 2017a). The Integrated Communities Strategy Green paper identified that over half of providers reported that they struggled to meet demand for 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level ESOL (MHCLG, 2018a). L&W's report on Mapping ESOL Provision in Greater London found that over half of providers, rising to two thirds of colleges, reported struggling to meet demand at 'pre-Entry' and Entry Levels, with this type of provision most frequently identified as being over-subscribed (Stevenson et al, 2017a).

From April 2019, responsibility for the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in eight local areas has been devolved to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) so they can determine and fund local priorities (MHCLG, 2018a). This funding is for people over the age of 19 for courses delivered in further education colleges and community education settings. It includes funding for ESOL at all levels from 'pre-Entry' up to and including Level 2. However, in both devolved and non-devolved areas, providers ultimately decide, within their AEB allocations, how much ESOL to offer, including the types of course, levels and the mix of accredited and non-accredited provision, and it can be challenging to address often competing demands between ESOL and other, non-ESOL learning, such as adult basic skills, within a provider's AEB allocation (L&W, 2018).

Accreditation and achievement

'Pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 ESOL provision is delivered in FE colleges and Adult Community Learning (ACL) settings, with 'pre-Entry' provision almost always delivered as non-accredited, non-regulated learning (L&W, 2018b). Research by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) for adult literacy and numeracy, undertaken for AoC (2013), suggests that for learners at the lowest levels of skills, particularly those with little or no educational background, there is a need to make it possible to mark achievement in a longer, slower process, through smaller steps in qualifications or by finding ways to fund a 'slow track'. It is, of course, a concern that new and very small 'stand-alone' units of assessment may bring considerable levels of administration and registration fees (AoC, 2013). Nonetheless, one of the AoC's (2013) three recommendations was that funding and qualification structures should find ways that learners with high levels of need are able to mark their achievements in smaller steps, and that this is particularly pertinent for Entry Level 1.

Diversity of learner needs

Learners requiring 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 ESOL may present with a diverse range of needs, including the need for basic literacy, the impact of trauma and wider issues such as isolation, as well as financial, health and family problems. (COSLA, 2017). Disabilities and/or mental health issues can also present barriers to engaging with ESOL provision (Stevenson, 2017; Maddocks, 2018).

Learner needs are diverse, as 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 ESOL learners range from those who

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/further-education-and-skills-statistical-first-release-sf>

are highly educated and proficient learners tackling a new language, to those who have had little or no experience of schooling and are not literate in their own languages. This contributes to very different patterns in the type and intensity of learning needed for success. The diversity of ESOL learners is also unevenly spread across providers (Stevenson et al, 2017a; AoC, 2013).

COSLA (2017) found that many refugee learners present with first language literacy issues. Many refugees resettled through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) arrived with very low levels of English and often have limited literacy in their first language (L&W, 2018b). A significant number of these learners were considered to require more basic learning support than existing ESOL provision in some areas might ordinarily provide. In Yorkshire and Humber, levels of English and overall literacy for this cohort on arrival in the UK were lower than anticipated and many were still at 'pre-Entry' level after 12 months, prompting an increased focus on basic literacy.

The diversity of ESOL learners poses unique challenges to the UK's qualification and funding systems which use an 'average learner' as a starting point for planning new qualifications and an 'average' time taken as a basis for calculating funding. In fact, the 'average' ESOL learner may not exist at all.

Suitability of provision

Less formal provision can be more appropriate to those who are assessed at 'pre-Entry' Level 1 ESOL and therefore, existing formal ESOL provision may not be suitable for these learners (L&W, 2018b). Demos noted that individual providers try hard to meet the needs of learners from unregulated and discretionary sources of funding, but this may not be a sustainable solution (Paget and Stevenson, 2014). While informal learning may be appropriate, COSLA (2017) noted that it could also present difficulties of misconception. Some refugee learners were not used to informal learning, and were at times suspicious of it, found it difficult, or felt it lacked credibility.

The number of study hours available to learners is often cited by providers, and learners, to be an issue. However, it is important to note that there is no robust evidence to suggest an optimum number of hours for learners at 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1. There may be drawbacks to provision with very limited study hours, but also to provision which is very intensive – although both models may suit some individual learners, or some kinds of learning needs. It is also important to consider the frequency of contact, which may be more significant than the total number of hours. A 2016 randomised controlled trial (RCT), conducted by L&W for MHCLG, of an 11-week 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 intervention found that three sessions a week was conducive to English language learning and social integration, but it was also a challenge for some people to attend with such frequency. Many participants were women with children, and caring responsibilities were cited as the main reason for low attendance among some classes (MHCLG, 2018b).

In the London area, the hours and intensity of ESOL provision average 5.5 hours per week, although there is some evidence that provision in inner London boroughs tends to offer a slightly higher number of learning hours per week (Stevenson et al, 2017a). This was considered by Syrian Resettlement co-ordinators and stakeholders to be insufficient to support refugees' urgent need to learn English upon resettlement. The Home Office funding instructions for the specify that refugees resettled through the scheme should receive a minimum of 8 hours per week for the first twelve months or until they reach Entry Level 3 (whichever comes first). Research in the West Midlands noted that ESOL provision tended to be in daytimes during the week, and that additional flexibility in the timings of classes or enrolment (e.g. weekend provision) could also be beneficial (L&W, 2018a).

The journey from 'zero'

The journey from 'zero' to achieving at Entry Level 1 is far greater for an ESOL learner than for a learner progressing to Entry Level 1 literacy in their first language. A 'pre-Entry' ESOL learner has to start from the beginning in all four skills - speaking, listening, reading and writing. This is reflected in the size of the ESOL curriculum, which is nearly three times as large as that for literacy (AoC, 2013). As a result, evidence from providers shows that they require ways to measure and mark learner achievements in smaller steps than is offered by the current qualification patterns (AoC, 2013). There is also a demand for single mode qualifications: separate assessments for the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. This is particularly in response to frustrations where the 'spiky profile' of learners prevents them achieving in areas of strength while they work to bring other areas up to the same level. For example, some learners may gain no achievement (other than Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) in a given year in which they could easily have achieved in reading but were a fair way behind in writing skills.

Within the VPRS, it has been noted that some people have very little 'English awareness'. This means that, unlike new arrivals from some parts of the world, there is little about English that they know already. This can include, for example, little awareness of the alphabet and script, few or no English words in common use as loan words in their first language, and little exposure to television or the Internet in English. Given the overlaps between language and culture, this means there may be the scope for many misunderstandings in daily experience. These issues may well arise in the setting of a language class and learners may require additional support from teachers and others to make sense of their experiences.

Learners' expectations of how rapidly they can expect to progress is also an issue. Especially for those learners least familiar with education, tutors need to bear in mind that learners may become de-motivated and frustrated if they take longer than they expect to become fluent. Recognising progress small stages and encouraging people to see how much they are able to do with the English they have may be helpful approaches (L&W, 2018b). COSLA (2017) also noted that sometimes, refugees' expectations of ESOL provision and the role of tutors were unrealistic. Learners could become frustrated about their perceived slow progress. Some learners underestimated the extent to which poor literacy can act as a barrier for an aspirational employment pathway.

'Pre-Entry' ESOL as a specialism

Teaching ESOL at 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 is often viewed by ESOL practitioners as a particular specialism that requires highly skilled teachers to deliver effective teaching and learning to those who often have the greatest personal and learning needs. Even trained and experienced ESOL teachers might not have much experience in working with 'pre-Entry' learners, and particularly not learners with little prior experience of education or very low levels of basic skills. Furthermore, teaching basic literacy may not be included in initial teacher training for ESOL teachers (L&W, 2018b). Programmes for 'pre-Entry' Level ESOL often require combinations of trained ESOL practitioners, working with volunteers supporting language learning, in a range of roles which include teaching assistants, language buddies, language champions and mentors. It will be key to engage with, and cater for, a diverse range of settings, and provide support for practitioners and others to work effectively together to deliver high quality learning opportunities.

Childcare

Childcare that is accessible, appropriate and affordable is one of the biggest barriers to accessing

ESOL, especially for women as they tend to be the primary carer in a family unit (Stevenson, 2017; Maddocks, 2018; Mackey, 2018). A survey mapping ESOL provision in the West Midlands found that while childcare was the most common type of additional support provided to learners, it was available in less than half of providers (L&W, 2018a).

However, even with additional funding the ESOL regional Coordinator for Yorkshire and the Humber (Maddocks, 2018) noted that challenges regarding childcare can still arise. She found that some women simply do not want to learn at all when their baby is very young. Others have been open to learning but do not feel able to take up the offer of childcare, for example where past experience of trauma means that they prefer to stay with their child. In such cases, they have been offered informal learning settings where they can have their babies with them. Another childcare barrier related to gender/equality, where some men were unwilling/lacking in confidence to undertake childcare, as this had not been their role previously (Maddocks, 2018).

Gender

The Yorkshire and Humber ESOL Regional Co-ordinator's 2017 – 18 report (Maddocks, 2018) noted that cultural issues relating to gender continue to be a barrier to ESOL provision for some women. For example, one provider reported women in mixed classes, who were better at English than their husbands, holding back to avoid 'embarrassing' the men. Some women also stated their husbands would 'not allow' them to go to class. These barriers have been addressed by offering single sex classes if needed and by project workers providing additional group briefings and one to one support to resettled men and women, regarding their rights and responsibilities in the UK, domestic abuse, controlling behaviour and gender equality, to help both the resettled men and women adapt to their new life in the UK. (Maddocks, 2018).

Overcoming barriers

National strategy and co-ordinated provision

Issues in national strategy for ESOL and local co-ordination of provision have a disproportionate effect on 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 learners, as they are most likely to be new learners trying to access provision for the first time. At the national level, a more strategic approach – as recommended by a number of recent reports (Paget and Stevenson, 2014; Refugee Action, 2017) and backed by sector representative organisations such as NATECLA - could help to establish expectations about the importance of provision at these levels, and remove disincentives and barriers for providers in offering a range of provision at these levels. At the local level, Paget and Stevenson (2014) suggest some of the ways in which local authorities could better co-ordinate ESOL provision, including 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 ESOL, through statutory requirements for ESOL hubs and needs assessments for new migrants, to help address issues in demand and suitability of provision. In particular, reform should ensure that any new framework captures learners' needs and progress and does not present barriers to learners at both the highest and the lowest ends of the spectrum.

Funding for 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level ESOL

Generally, learner demand, as reported by providers in a range of recent research (e.g. Refugee Action 2017, L&W 2017, 2018), is predominantly at 'pre-Entry' and Entry Levels and this is often oversubscribed. This suggests a need for capacity building at this level. Research by L&W (2017) found that while there is a considerable amount of ESOL provision delivered in London, capacity is affected by the availability of stable and sustained funding. This affects the ability of learners, including refugees, to access the provision they need. If current levels and programmes of funding are not increased or sustained, new and more diverse sources of investment may need to be

identified (but also co-ordinated) to support the delivery and development of ESOL provision in areas of high demand (Stevenson et al, 2017a).

Funding a flexible and tailored 'pre-Entry' ESOL offer

Within available AEB ESOL funding, 'pre-Entry' ESOL is not part of some providers' ESOL offer. This may be because the demand for it is not recognised or prioritised in relation to the need to provide other ESOL levels, or due to misunderstanding that AEB funding cannot or should not be used for non-accredited learning for 'pre-Entry' ESOL. Where this is the case, it is important that providers engage in a dialogue with local stakeholders, such as refugee resettlement organisations, to consider the local needs and how these can be met. This dialogue needs to be at an appropriate level; senior management level support may be needed if ESOL curriculum managers are unaware of options for funding 'pre-Entry' ESOL, or if the provider has made a strategic decision only to offer accredited learning (L&W, 2018b).

Different eligibility criteria for different Government programmes can make it challenging to offer a consistent and holistic provision to learners. For example, the MHCLG Integrated Communities English Language Programme targets people who may have lived in this country for a number of years without taking successful steps to improve their English speaking and listening skills. The provision looks to support people not in employment and not actively seeking employment at this stage (i.e. those not generally eligible for other types of fully funded support to learn English), potentially making it more challenging for providers to create progression routes between different kinds of provision.

AEB ESOL providers can claim extra funding support for learners who progress slowly and need more hours in order to achieve a 'regulated' or 'non-regulated' qualification. This can support the inclusion of learners with some 'pre-Entry' level ESOL needs. For example, within regulated learning, this extra funding can be used to provide additional hours for ESOL learners who have low literacy skills to enable them to achieve a qualification. Providers can also access AEB funding to provide learner support to individuals who are furthest from learning and/or work and who may need additional support to overcome certain barriers to engaging or continuing in learning. For example, it can be used to meet the cost of travel or childcare.

Learning support is also available to meet the cost of making reasonable adjustments, as part of the Equality Act 2010, for learners who have an identified learning difficulty or disability, to achieve their learning goal. Both Learning Support and Learner Support can be used for learners at 'pre-Entry' ESOL level, but this can be limited as there are competing demands on these funds and certain needs, such as learning difficulties and disabilities, are prioritised (L&W, 2018b).

'Pre-Entry' and Entry Level expertise

There are measures that can enhance providers' expertise in providing courses at 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1. These include opportunities for practitioners to undertake professional development, such as teaching basic literacy skills to adults as this specialist area is not always covered in ESOL teacher training (Stevenson et al, 2017a). Some resources to assist in developing expertise and capacity are identified in the accompanying review of ESOL teaching and learning materials.

Accurate assessment of learner needs

Accurate screening and initial assessments (IA) tools are a critical part of understanding of English language learning needs at all levels. An initial screening is used to identify an ESOL need while an initial assessment then identifies the level of proficiency. A screening can be carried out by a non specialist while an IA needs to be conducted by a trained practitioner. They can then advise an

appropriate level of English programme and, if the learner has wider learning needs, how those needs might be met. This can help to focus learning and/or support on a particular skill or specific needs to enable progression from pre- entry level (L&W, 2018b). This helps to set people off in the right direction and to prevent later misunderstandings or learners becoming disheartened and demotivated through having their expectations raised unrealistically. Just as important is the dialogue which takes place around an initial assessment which can help to reassure learners with little or no experience of formal education or encourage those who are lacking confidence to learn. This process is therefore particularly important for new arrivals at the 'pre-Entry' level (L&W, 2018b).

Consideration must be given as to how to best provide initial assessments and advice or guidance to someone with very low English language skills. Engaging interpreters and other support people is essential to assist this process. Individual, rather than group, assessments can be more effective at this level, as learners' unfamiliarity with the process, and stigma associated with the lack of literacy in particular, may obscure their actual needs. The assessor and any related advice should remain impartial and refer to the most suitable provider, not just into the programmes and classes which they have available. A partnership or hub approach across providers can work effectively here (L&W, 2018b).

AoC (2013) suggested that the following information could be collected to assess whether a learner should be placed on a fast or slow track to a qualification. There is a clear overlap here with assessing whether a learner is 'pre-Entry' or Entry Level 1.

- Snapshot of current skill levels
- Highest level of qualifications achieved if any
- Number of years' schooling undertaken (particularly important for those who have no qualifications or may have had only a couple of years' education at most in their country of origin)
- Number of hours a person has available to focus on their learning (providers have found this to be useful in determining when learners are ready to go forward for assessment)
- Length of time in the UK (or in an English-speaking environment).

Meeting diverse needs

'Pre-Entry' Level and Entry Level 1 ESOL should be provided in a range of curriculum and delivery models including college and community-based schemes (APPG, 2017). The MHCLG Community Based English Language Programme, and the Integrated Communities English Language Programme funded community based ESOL most often ran by small local voluntary and community groups who may already be known to potential participants. This model may offer a bridge for those learners who are not ready to access formal and college-based provisions. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration (2017) has suggested that learners who might benefit from this form of provision should be able to access these programmes for as long as needed rather than for the completion of a single course.

In the refugee resettlement context, improving the relevance of the content of ESOL provision to resettled refugees has also been identified as a helpful approach, for example to ensure that language learning supports local orientation and includes 'survival English' needed immediately on arrival, as these topics may already have been covered if a learner joins mid-course. Harnessing the complementary role of informal learning and non-formal ESOL provision could support this (Stevenson, 2017).

Some of the activities offered to refugees and other ESOL learners which can help with a range of learning and support needs associated with 'pre-Entry' include:

- Organised sessions where people work in small groups in a community setting, where some formal work also takes place, and learners may be grouped by level of English; an organised curriculum is followed, which is graded.
- English conversation clubs
- Volunteer-led groups - walks around town/city/place - getting to know the place and the language
- Language teaching based on immediate and daily needs
- One to one support through mentoring / befriending or other local community
- Involvement
- Local community groups, including faith groups.

(L&W, 2018b).

Research suggests there would be a benefit in developing an intermediate offer, for learners who have participated in this form of provision but aren't yet ready to progress to Entry Level 1. This offer would cultivate self-confidence amongst participants and bridge the gap between informal provision and accredited learning. A number of ESOL experts have suggested that this intermediate offer should be a 'blended programme' including elements of community-based and classroom-based learning (APPG, 2017).

There is then a need for flexible support. L&W's literature review and interviews with organisations working with refugees identified that many had low literacy and required 'pre-Entry' level provision. Flexibility of learning hours and appropriate content is also needed, as well as appreciation of and support for wider issues faced by many refugees (Stevenson et al, 2017a).

Mental health issues were identified as a barrier to ESOL for some learners, such as refugees (Stevenson et al, 2017a). With this in mind, the ESOL Regional Coordinator in the North West recommended a networking event for organisations and VPRS ESOL providers to meet to develop and share teaching resources around mental health that would be suitable for ESOL learners, and to develop a signposting tool for ESOL learners and organisations to use that could direct learners to support with mental health issues (Mackey, 2018)

Meaningful context and trackable progress

Learners often want to focus on the kinds of language skills that they need for immediate use in their everyday lives. Although the four key skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing are integrated in real life, and often in teaching and learning activities, many learners progress at different rates within these skills. With new learners, and particularly those who do not have prior experience of schooling, it is important to base the language learning on aspects where learners can gain a sense of progress as quickly as possible. For example, a learner with basic literacy needs may be able to make more rapid progress in speaking and listening skills, whilst reading and writing skills are likely to take longer to learn. Learning the language in meaningful contexts is vital. For example, approaches that develop language skills in simple, but realistic everyday situations are likely to be more effective than formal tuition in grammar, particularly at 'pre-Entry' level. It is also helpful if learners can access 'pre-Entry' provision with providers that offer progression opportunities as this can be a motivating factor (L&W, 2018b).

Informal and non-formal provision⁴

Evidence from providers in London suggest that informal and non-formal activities, often provided by community-based organisations, can support formal ESOL provision in a number of ways. Non-formal classes, informal conversation clubs, and speaking buddies can increase the opportunities for ESOL learners to interact in English and provide opportunities to practise their skills. Non-formal family learning provision draws on people's desire to be actively engaged and involved in their children's education as a key motivation for learning English. Increasing opportunities to learn in different ways is important given that reductions in funding, and the restricted learning hours available within ESOL qualifications, have resulted in the provision of formal courses which offer relatively few learning hours per week. However, informal approaches to ESOL provision, such as conversation classes, should be viewed as complementary to formal classes, and not as a replacement for them. For instance, less formal provision can help supplement the content of formal classes by offering language learning which is tailored to the immediate orientation and familiarisation needs of learners e.g. for everyday purposes and local orientation (Stevenson et al, 2017a). Research suggests that high quality English language learning opportunities are essential at an early stage of resettlement, as people with good language skills in the early stages of their resettlement are likely to report increased contact with the wider British population at a later point in time. Conversely, people with high levels of contact with the wider population following arrival do not always experience an increase in language proficiency after one or two years (Collyer *et al*, 2018).

The APPG on Social Integration (2017) and Paget and Stevenson (2014) also call for increased provision of non-formal language learning schemes which enable people to practice their English through conversing with members of their host community. They highlight the Danish example of Language Cafes. Potential examples include 'conversation clubs' or cooking classes bringing together newcomers and members of the settled population and encouraging more volunteers into programmes both to serve as teaching assistants within formal ESOL courses and to participate in non-formal schemes. In Utrecht, the Netherlands, The DUO project pairs recent migrants with citizens to provide opportunities for informal language learning and cultural integration (Paget and Stevenson, 2014).

Maddocks reported that where available, women who do not feel comfortable leaving their babies when they are young, were offered one-to-one English in the home. In Yorkshire and Humber, this was only available through the local voluntary sector e.g. Leeds Asylum Seeker Support Network (LASSN) in Leeds and Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English (SAVTE) in Sheffield. This flexible, client-centred approach, together with other methods of informal learning, was felt to be appropriate, allowing women with babies support to learn English. This provision can

⁴ 'Informal' learning' takes place where new knowledge and skills are acquired in the course of participating in activities which may not have an explicit learning objective, for example through participation in everyday activities and interactions with others. 'Non-formal' learning refers to a wide spectrum of organised learning activities, which often (but not always) take place outside the formal education system and are usually non-accredited. Its characteristics vary – for example, non-accredited Adult Education Budget pre-Entry provision in FE colleges is may be considered non-formal, but is likely to retain many similarities with formal ESOL. For example, a structured curriculum and quality assurance through the Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) process. Non-formal pre-Entry ESOL in other settings may adopt a different approaches to the curriculum and quality assurance. Terminology is not always understood or used consistently, so it may not be possible to infer exactly what kind of provision is being referred to in some reports, particularly given the wide spectrum of activities that this covers.

also cater for those who are unable to attend classes due to learning needs, health conditions or disabilities.

Adequate and appropriate childcare

ESOL providers and refugee support organisations consistently identify childcare-related issues as a barrier to learners accessing provision. This includes the provision of crèche and other childcare services, and also the need for providers to have sufficient capacity to offer classes at times which fit with parents' childcare commitments and the school day. Reductions in ESOL funding have often affected providers' ability to offer childcare (and other support) alongside classes, so any additional investment in ESOL should include further support for childcare. There is also the potential for more co-ordinated approaches to ESOL planning to support this, for example in matching learners to provision with the appropriate facilities and through partnership working where ESOL providers offer classes at venues where childcare is available (Stevenson et al, 2017a).

Digital language learning

Advances in digital technology are already transforming the manner in which migrants across the UK are interacting with language learning materials, but ESOL programmes often fail to reflect this. There is potential for massive open online courses (MOOCs) and mobile learning apps to support migrants with some English to develop their language skills. Facebook and other forms of social media have potential to provide more opportunities for interactive learning, as does adapting ESOL programme curriculums to both make use of these platforms as common reference points. Digitalisation could allow for more migrants to benefit from the personalisation of language learning materials and enable the growth of the social support networks which have been shown to improve learning outcomes. For this potential to be realised, programme providers, technology firms and academics will need to collaborate on the development of new approaches. Manchester Adult Education, who offer learners participating in their Talk English initiatives access to a 'pre-Entry' digital course and app, are an example of good practice in this area (APPG, 2017).

However, the potential for harnessing the power of digital language learning should not be overstated as there are likely to be barriers related to learners' confidence and skills in using technology, particularly for those with low literacy skills. With little experience of using technology, they may be resistant or unable to use it for learning. There may also be the challenge of learners lacking access to technology, either their own or through their provider. Hence, while the integration of mobile and handheld learning is important for ESOL, and providers should encourage learners to use their own technology, this should not be an expectation or requirement of learners. In addition, the wider benefits of ESOL classes, such as community integration and peer support may be overlooked when focusing on technology (L&W, 2016). A more appropriate method may be to blend digital elements with other 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level interventions ESOL.

This rapid review of research, policy and practice documents highlights the challenges and barriers experienced by ESOL providers and practitioners. It is notable that many of the themes discussed in this review also emerge from the practitioner research discussed below. However, missing from this review is detailed discussion of the kind of 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 teaching and learning materials and support that practitioners want. The following section of analysis therefore adds context and practitioner perspective to the existing literature as well as this specific information about resources.

SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Introduction and overview

This section of the report details the findings from the first two stages of the qualitative research; an online survey followed by focus groups with ESOL practitioners and volunteers. A thematic analysis was conducted with the emerging themes organised into the key areas of defining 'pre-Entry', training available for 'pre-Entry' teachers, barriers for ESOL learners, challenges for ESOL teachers and suggestions for CPD and resources.

Definitions of 'pre-Entry'

'Pre-Entry' sits within the Entry Level 1 ESOL curriculum in terms of learning needs, but as part of AEB there is funding available for separate 'pre-Entry' learning aims. The term is widely used in the sector; however, its use is contested. A significant minority of survey and focus group participants were unhappy about the use of the term 'pre-Entry'. This was due to the term's origins in a curriculum framework designed for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, creating a risk of reinforcing a misconception that low English language proficiency is in itself a learning difficulty or disability (whilst recognising that some learners may have low English language proficiency *and* a learning difficulty or disability). It was also pointed out that the term is not well understood by external agencies and service providers, and a relatively advanced lexical item, is not suitable for the proficiency level of the learners it attempts to describe. Several participants emphasised they would never tell learners they were 'pre-Entry'. Suggested alternatives included *emerging*, *start up* and *starters*.

There was general agreement about the kind of learners that participants would classify as 'pre-Entry'. An important element of this was that both 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 were umbrella terms containing within them a wide range of learners. Individual 'pre-Entry' learners were also described as having 'spiky' profiles, for example good speaking skills but little or no skills in writing.

One element of being a 'pre-Entry' learner was having no knowledge or previous exposure to English. However, definitions were connected to learners' ability to progress as well as their existing knowledge. 'Pre-Entry' learners were often those who needed to work on phonics and letter recognition before they could develop more advanced writing skills.

"Being able to make marks on paper... because they can't do that, they find it really difficult to recognise sounds in relation to the written marks on the paper." ESOL tutor

A lack of literacy in any language was identified as one of the most common reasons for this difficulty in reading and writing English. Connected to this was learners with very little or no formal schooling and with this a lack of study skills. There were, however, also other learners who were literate and educated but in a language that did not use a Roman script.

It is possible that 'pre-Entry' ESOL learners may also have additional barriers to learning due to learning difficulties, and mental or physical health conditions or disabilities. However, this should not be interpreted as suggesting that having 'pre-Entry' ESOL learning needs is in itself a learning difficulty, health condition or disability. Age was also a factor with older learners seen as likely to progress more slowly.

Participants identified that people who were not ESOL specialists did not understand the term 'pre-Entry'.

"A lack of broader awareness amongst provider staff about what an ESOL learner is (including what an entry level ESOL learner is) also contributes to learners being wrongly placed or being inappropriately referred. This is why a definition of 'pre-Entry' and Entry level ESOL will be helpful"

ESOL tutor

This included a lack of understanding about both the kind of learner that needed to be placed in 'pre-Entry' and about the kind of progress that 'pre-Entry' learners could be expected to make.

Training for 'pre-Entry' ESOL teachers

There was widespread agreement from both survey respondents and focus group participants that there was lack of training on how to teach 'pre-Entry' ESOL learners both within initial teacher training schemes and as part of professional development.

"There isn't anything available that would specifically address the needs of people who are going to be teaching pre-ESOL absolute beginners... there is a very significant need for something which will complement the CELTA or, indeed, the TEFL Academy or some of the other Level 5 qualifications that are around." ESOL tutor

A small number of participants had attended training; Learning Unlimited, Assentis were mentioned as providers as well as a MOOC run by Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LLESLA). However, the vast majority had received no training and were not aware of any training. This was raised as an issue in all the focus groups and by several survey participants. There were issues about the availability of training but also about participants having the time to attend training and the funding to pay for it.

Central to the need for the training was the widely held perception that teaching 'pre-Entry' learners was very challenging and that ESOL teachers had a corresponding urgent need for support.

"I have seen this with my team, it is very physically draining and I think sometimes, from a resilience point of view I feel that anything around how to make this easier on yourself, and how to deliver this in a way which is not so physically investing for you as a teacher." ESOL tutor

This perception of 'pre-Entry' ESOL as very demanding in terms of time, energy and practitioner skillset was one of the most resonant findings across the focus groups.

Barriers for ESOL learners

Participants identified a number of barriers, both structural and personal, experienced by 'pre-Entry' learners, some of which were directly related to the characteristics of being a 'pre-Entry' learner.

Learners' limited experiences of education in general and literacy, in particular, was identified as a barrier in all the focus groups and by several survey participants.

"They're afraid of educational establishments, they haven't been to school before, they've got a complete lack of confidence in themselves". ESOL tutor

Learners' mental and physical health conditions and disabilities were also a barrier. This included severe trauma experienced by those seeking asylum as well as learning difficulties that were often undeclared or undiagnosed.

Participants in several focus groups identified a lack of opportunity to practise English outside the classroom as a barrier for many learners.

"'Pre-Entry', the fact that they have so little English probably means that they have very limited opportunities to develop their English outside the classroom too." ESOL tutor

However, this lack of opportunity was also because some learners were seen as socially isolated or living in communities where they did not have the opportunity to practise English.

Caring responsibilities, including childcare was another identified barrier particularly for women mentioned by several survey participants and in nearly all focus groups.

"That can affect women, they can't go until... they've got the childcare sorted, it could be years. It could be when the child starts school before they can start going to classes." ESOL tutor

This meant that women could be resident in the UK for many years before engaging in a sustained programme to learn English.

Financial problems and issues with irregular and insecure work, difficulty claiming benefits and difficulty paying for classes were other associated barriers.

A lack of confidence, embarrassment about a lack of literacy and a lack of motivation were identified as personal barriers, and these can be seen as arising from many of the issues discussed above. These were connected to issues around learners' expectations about their progression and their perceptions of their failure to progress.

Equally poor attendance was also seen as a barrier to learning but again this was the outcome of many of the other challenges that learners face. Participants saw that the barriers experienced by learners were connected and interlinked. It was therefore often not only difficult for tutors to address barriers to learning but also to identify what the underlying cause of barriers were.

Challenges for ESOL teachers

The question of how to differentiate effectively due to the varied nature of 'pre-Entry' and Entry 1 learners was identified as the key challenge across the focus groups and surveys.

"You'll have three people in the class who are complete beginners, don't understand what your instructions are, you'll have three at the other end getting on with it and the ones in the middle. So how do you have the time to meet all their needs as well?" ESOL tutor

Most teachers did not have any additional support, for example from a teaching assistant or learning support worker, in the classroom and found it difficult to meet the needs of such diverse learners.

Many of the other challenges related to the complex barriers experienced by learners. This was particularly the case with asylum seekers and refugees, some of whom experienced trauma. Teachers found it difficult to work with the challenges posed by trauma and there was a lack of adequate or appropriate services they could be referred to. Where services existed, learners did not have adequate English to access them.

A particular concern for practitioners was undiagnosed or undeclared learning difficulties; particularly problems with language processing and memory. Practitioners found it difficult to know whether learners had a specific learning difficulty or whether there were other factors that were a barrier to learning.

"It's really hard to tell the difference between somebody who's maybe depressed and never had any education and somebody who's got dyslexia." ESOL tutor

They also did not feel they had received sufficient training to support learners who had problems with issues such as language processing.

Another reported challenge was that many 'pre-Entry' learners had not yet developed study skills as their previous experiences of education were limited. This meant that these had to be taught in addition to teaching the language and that learners found it hard to work independently. This was

seen as time and energy intensive.

Participants also felt there were challenges due to the nature of 'pre-Entry' ESOL provision. Some practitioners felt that the low number of hours and short courses meant that learners did not receive enough input to progress in a timely manner. There were also wider issues around progression and a lack of flexible funding.

"We have to be really realistic that it doesn't fit an academic timetable...It might take you 18 months before you settle in and you feel comfortable and you're not looking over your shoulder all the time and can actually concentrate in class, but if nobody gives you that 18 months, you're never going to get anywhere." ESOL tutor

Practitioners felt that many 'pre-Entry' learners could not then progress within the expected time frames. As part of this some reported feeling pressure from institutions and funding bodies as their learners were not progressing as expected.

Further identified challenges were the lack of training and resources and these are discussed in the following sections.

Existing resources and strategies

A wide range of approaches and strategies were recommended as well as many specific resources. In general, an integrated rather than skills-based approach was favoured. Many participants identified teaching functional language as a central concern.

A learner centred approach which drew on learners' existing knowledge and skills was identified as useful by several participants who made suggestions such as drawing on learners' existing linguistic knowledge and using stories from learners' lives.

"Wherever possible, nothing beats resources produced in response to learners' individual needs".
ESOL tutor

Several participants commented that it was difficult to find existing resources and a directory of teaching materials and CPD opportunities would be invaluable.

The suggestions for resources and training are discussed below. Other issues included were the value of volunteers who could support teachers in the classroom. Some participants also felt that some 'pre-Entry' learners needed one-to-one tuition as their needs could not be met in the classroom. The importance of having access to other appropriate services where learners could be referred to, for example for help with finances, benefits, counselling, their children's schooling was also emphasised by participants.

Suggestions for training

The need for professional development was identified in all the focus groups and by many survey respondents and a range of specific suggestions were made.

Many wanted face to face training but there were also suggestions for online resources as more practical and easier to access. These requests included videos of excellent lessons, webinars, podcasts and instruction videos. Networking opportunities whether face to face or through online forums were also seen as important for many participants.

Specific training needs were identified relating to the challenges discussed above with differentiation and literacy, particularly phonics, seen as the most important.

"Most tutors are not confident enough teaching phonics to adults. The only literature available is

stuff produced for schools and you can see the resources that are out there are childish... So, I think, you know, the sector is crying out for phonics at 'pre-Entry' level." ESOL tutor

Suggestions for resources

Focus group and survey respondents highlighted a lack of suitable teaching and learning materials for teachers of 'pre-Entry' ESOL and made detailed suggestions for these resources.

Many respondents said that they spent considerable time preparing their own materials to suit the needs of the learners in their classes.

"There are very few materials available for illiterate refugees and this means I need to develop all worksheets and materials myself for my class which takes up a lot of time." ESOL tutor

Participants made requests for a range of topics such as making and answering phone calls, talking about household accidents, making requests, family, work & jobs, food & diet, places in town and materials to help learners to handle the literature sent to them from hospitals, Jobcentre Plus, GPs, dentists, banks, and schools. There were also several requests for high quality graded readers for adults.

Practitioners also requested content to help with the implementation of legal and regulatory requirements made of learning providers, such as enrolment and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) declarations, the Public Sector Equalities Duty and PREVENT. However, it was noted that the complexity of these topics meant that the language level required to comprehend them was difficult to translate into activities suitable for 'pre-Entry' learners.

Beyond this, several important general principles about the kinds of materials wanted were established. There was a need for resources suitable for adults rather than children particularly for phonics. These resources also needed to be culturally appropriate as well as UK based. For example, the Council of Europe material was identified as useful but not tailored enough to a UK context.

Participants identified a lack of high-quality attractive resources that were motivating and ideally humorous. Visual resources such as picture stories, flashcards, vocabulary items were one of the most frequent kinds of resources requested with again the need for them to be culturally relevant to learners.

There was an urgent need for resources that would help with differentiation. This was raised in all the focus groups. Materials needed to be flexible enough to adapt and use with mixed ability groups with corresponding extension and consolidation activities.

There was also a significant need for resources that could be easily adapted by the teacher to include local rather than generic information. This was related to the need for a learner centred approach discussed above.

Another request made across the groups was for resources that could be recycled, adapted and re-used.

"You've got to keep coming back to it and a month later when you want to look back at fruit and remind them, you don't want to be using the same resource." ESOL tutor

Listening materials were requested more than resources for the other skills. The existing resources

were described as poor quality and outdated. It was also seen as more difficult for teachers to produce these themselves.

Some participants also wanted resources that could be used with a minimum of photocopying to keep costs low but also for environmental reasons.

Digital resources were seen as important by some participants, particularly where they could be used with mobile phones.

“There is a wider belief that technology is not appropriate for lower levels [but] this is something that needs to be integrated in new resources. Integration needs to be in the form of mobile technology as many classes are not based in IT rooms and learners struggle to navigate college IT procedures.”

ESOL tutor

This was connected to wanting resources that learners could use at home; it was felt that digital resources could be the best way to achieve this. However, there were some concerns expressed about the use of social media and digital technologies with ESOL learners in relation to privacy, data protection and e-safety.

Some survey and focus group participants wanted a syllabus or curriculum as well as high quality resources as they felt that a more structured approach was needed. The need for materials that could be dipped in and out of was also raised as an issue.

“How do you design a sequence of materials that, in this kind of spiral syllabus, that would work and I know that there’s a model called the Crisis Classroom model that talks about resources in terms of being a patchwork rather than a ladder and how do you get progress but also not work with the assumption that you’ll see the same group of learners every class over the course of a term?”

ESOL tutor

This was related to the need for materials that could demonstrate learners they were making progress despite the barriers discussed above such as poor attendance and limited study skills.

Volunteer and practitioner perspective

Two of the focus groups were composed mainly of volunteers rather than qualified practitioners. We found that there were no significant differences between the two groups in their discussion of challenges, barriers and the suggestions they made. However, the language and terminology they used to discuss their own practice and their perceptions of their learners was different. This has been considered in the development of resources. Several of the volunteers who participated in our research were qualified teachers but not ESOL specialists. It is therefore worth considering what training and resources can be developed that bridges this gap so the experience of these volunteers can be utilised most effectively.

How the findings have been used

The ESOL practitioners who participated in this research have a wealth of experience and expertise in the delivery of ‘pre-Entry’ ESOL. The views collected here have added significant value to the project and the rich findings have been used to inform the development of teaching materials and the effective practice guide. In particular, the lack of tailored existing guidance and training; the need for differentiation, adaptable resources, repetition, ways to mark progress and free-standing units have all been acted upon. Other suggestions for online resources and apps for smartphones were not achievable within the constraints of this project. However, opportunities for learners to use their own or shared devices have been built into the materials.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of the research findings feed directly into the approach taken to the development of the teaching materials, screening tool and effective practice guide. However, there are other findings that are more relevant to a wider audience, such as policymakers, sector stakeholders and providers. These are centred round the challenges of 'pre-Entry' ESOL teaching and the availability of support.

Recommendations for policy

- **Policymakers should consider boosting the availability of appropriate and flexible funding for models of 'pre-Entry' ESOL provision which support progression.**

The need for flexible models of funding and progression emerged as a key concern for practitioners. This should include ensuring that eligibility criteria support access to provision, adequate recognition of the time needed to progress and acquire basic literacy skills, and the support required for learners with low literacy beyond 'pre-Entry' ESOL. It was strongly felt that the funding system does not adequately support the needs of 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 ESOL learners in terms of progression. For example, the funded delivery hours attached to ESOL qualifications may be insufficient for those with additional literacy needs, and whilst there are ways to increase flexibility, providers are faced with challenging decisions about the allocation of resources within their overall budget which may mean that more resource-intensive delivery models are not prioritised. Connected to this was the suggestion of additional investment in alternative modes of delivery for those learners who may not be ready for formal learning, provided that this offers high quality teaching and learning which develops a foundation for further progression.

- **Policymakers should ensure that resourcing for ESOL also addresses practical barriers to learning, and includes provision for appropriate learning support.**

Practitioners also identified a need to remove barriers to learning such as the availability of childcare, ensure sufficient resourcing to provide additional support with learning difficulties and disabilities, and for capital investment to boost the availability of technology to support teaching and learning.

- **Policymakers should give due consideration to 'pre-Entry' ESOL in any wider review of the relevant national standards for ESOL and ESOL teacher training.**

Some practitioners requested a curriculum for 'pre-Entry' ESOL. However, as these learning needs are already recognised within Entry Level 1 of the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum, it may be more appropriate to consider this as part of any wider review of the current ESOL standards and framework, rather than as an addition to the existing curriculum. Practitioners also suggested that providers of Initial Teacher Training for ESOL should include a focus on teaching lower levels and basic literacy skills.

Recommendations for ETF

- **ETF should develop further, accessible opportunities for professional learning and development for ESOL practitioners working with 'pre-Entry' and Entry Level 1 learners, including in the appropriate use of phonics with ESOL learners.**

Practitioners identified an urgent need for training to support them in their delivery of ESOL to 'pre-Entry' learners. Consideration needs to be given to the appropriate delivery mode of this training as part of professional development. Practitioners suggested that online training was easier to access but they clearly also valued the opportunity to meet face to face with colleagues to share their experiences.

The teaching and learning resources developed as part of this project could be supported by a "Train the trainer" session on how to deliver them effectively. These could be delivered as a series of regional events to ensure that they are accessible, cost effective and generate maximum impact.

There were other development areas where practitioners identified they needed further support. These included training in adult literacy, in particular phonics tailored for adult ESOL learners. Consideration needs to be given as to the level of training required. The focus groups identified that while many ESOL teachers had a high level of expertise gained through experience rather than formal training, there were others newer to teaching or volunteers who needed introductory level training on how to meet the learning needs of 'pre-Entry' learners.

- **ETF should consider supporting ESOL practitioners with further teaching and learning resources for 'pre-Entry' ESOL, including digital resources.**

The development of resources through this project were warmly welcomed, but it is clear there is an appetite for further resources for 'pre-Entry' learners. Online resources that could be accessed by learners with very low levels of English were the most clearly identified need. The importance of resources that could be used on smart phones was central to this. Listening materials were also requested and these would be a valuable addition to the resources developed as part of this project.

Recommendations for providers

- **Providers should ensure the availability of appropriate professional learning and development opportunities for ESOL practitioners working with learners at 'pre-Entry' level, and for non-specialist staff in support roles.**

Providers need to support ESOL tutors who are involved in delivering 'pre-Entry' ESOL. This could involve arranging internal training and networking opportunities but also supporting tutors to attend external training opportunities. Providers should also provide training and awareness raising opportunities for staff who are not ESOL specialists but who regularly work with ESOL learners (for example, administrative staff) so they are informed about the particular needs of 'pre-Entry' learners.

There also a need for the further development of teaching and learning resources suitable for 'pre-Entry' learners. It may be useful to do this at a local level, so it is tailored to learners' needs and experiences. This requires ensuring that practitioners have sufficient opportunities to create and share resources as part of their professional learning and development.

- **Providers should develop their partnership working local to support professional learning and development, as well as to facilitate access to 'pre-Entry' ESOL provision.**

Partnership working between ESOL providers at a local level, for example through hubs or other local networks, could be beneficial in providing a space where teaching and learning materials, assessments and training opportunities could be shared between a network of providers. As part of the Integrated Communities action plan, L&W has published resources to support local partnership

working in ESOL (L&W, 2019).

- **Providers should make full use of the available funding streams to support ‘pre-Entry’ ESOL provision.**

Providers should ensure that they are fully utilising existing funding streams, for example, by using the flexibilities within the Adult Education Budget to offer ‘pre-Entry’ ESOL as non-regulated (non-accredited) learning.

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