

ESOL SCREENING GUIDANCE

Introduction

This screening pack has been developed primarily for non-ESOL specialists, such as volunteers working to support learners, or providers of non-educational services, who wish **to understand better the learning needs of adult speakers of other languages who are at the very beginning stages of learning English, and/or who may have basic literacy needs.**

Background

Research undertaken as part of the development of this pack suggests that at the early stages of learning English, there are a range of learner profiles. These learners often attend 'pre-Entry' or Entry Level 1 ESOL classes (see below for further information about these levels). However, with no formal definition of 'pre-Entry' ESOL, use of the term and its interpretation by ESOL providers and other organisations working to support people with ESOL needs can vary. Research with ESOL providers and practitioners suggests that basic literacy needs are a defining feature within the different profiles of learners at the early stages of learning English. **This pack aims to help non-specialists identify those learners who are working at ESOL Entry Level 1, and those who are 'new to ESOL' and may require further support with basic literacy.**

Who should use this screening pack?

Intended users of the tool and this guidance include:

- volunteers working to support people with ESOL needs in a range of roles, including as conversation partners, speaking buddies or mentors,
- people delivering refugee resettlement services,
- others providing public services to people with English language needs in a range of sectors, for example in Job Centres, local authority services and the National Health Service.

In cases of uncertainty about a person's English language learning needs, it is best to consult an appropriately trained ESOL practitioner, who will be able to carry out a full assessment of the person's learning needs.

These materials can also be used by ESOL practitioners as part of a provider's ESOL initial assessment procedure, for example to help the placement of learners into general Entry Level 1 or more specialist basic literacy provision.

What does the pack contain?

The screening pack consists of:

- Interview questions
- Reading and writing tasks
- Screening record sheet
- Learner profiles

The screening pack sits alongside other resources developed to support teachers and others working with learners who are new to ESOL, including teaching and learning materials and effective practice guidance.

What is ESOL?

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) is the term used in the UK for English language provision for adults who do not have English as their first language and who are learning English. ESOL provision is for adults living and working in the UK.

Who are ESOL learners?

Adults with ESOL needs (sometimes referred to as second language learners or bilingual learners¹), may come from one of four broad groups:

- People from settled communities already living in Britain who still need to develop their English skills, e.g. from the Asian sub-continent and Hong Kong.
- Spouses, partners and dependents of British or European Union citizens who have come to join their family and settle in the UK from all parts of the world.
- Migrant workers, many from EU countries, who come to the UK for better job opportunities or better paid work.
- Refugees and asylum seekers². Some may have had higher education and professional jobs whereas others may have suffered a disrupted education due to war and unrest.

What is 'screening' in an ESOL context?

Screening is a preliminary stage in identifying whether an adult has a language or literacy learning need. If a need is identified, the individual should be referred to an ESOL provider for an Initial Assessment (IA) - a more detailed assessment of their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills, carried out by an ESOL specialist.

¹ This is a simplification as demographics show an increasing population of bilingual and multilingual people. Cities, and London in particular, show increasing superdiversity or extreme language diversity. See Simpson et al (2008, NRDC).

² An asylum seeker is someone who has arrived in a country and asked for asylum, and is awaiting a decision on whether they have been granted refugee status. Asylum seekers do not have the same rights and entitlements as refugees, including for English language provision.

IA identifies the person's ESOL levels in each skill so they can be referred to an ESOL programme at the right level.

What type of ESOL provision is there?

There are many different kinds of ESOL provision in the UK, both formal and informal, and the possibilities vary from place to place. Some local areas operate an ESOL 'hub' to provide a 'one-stop shop' website and information about ESOL courses in the area, and, in some cases, co-ordinate ESOL assessments and referrals to local providers. There are also other models of coordination such as government-funded regional ESOL coordinators who have mapped local ESOL provision and can advise on suitable courses.

You are likely to find the majority of formal ESOL courses at Further Education colleges, training providers and adult education centres, although some colleges and adult education services may also run graded or mixed-level community-based ESOL provision. Informal English language provision at local community centres tends to be run by a range of voluntary and faith organisations. Some projects are able to provide befrienders and volunteers to support the learners.

Which ESOL provision will be best for a 'New to ESOL' learner with basic literacy needs?

It is important to have up-to-date information about which ESOL programmes are available in your area, any eligibility criteria they may have, and which courses have vacancies. Choosing the best course or conversation practice for learners will also depend on their individual circumstances and availability. It could be:

- a formal 'Pre-Entry' ESOL course at a local FE college, adult education centre or training provider – in some cases, learners may be offered places within Entry Level 1 classes
- an informal mixed level ESOL community class (local authority or voluntary sector)
- a family learning class
- an informal course run by a voluntary sector provider e.g. community groups, churches, mosques, etc.
- a volunteer ESOL teacher/supporter or befriender.

In order to decide on the most suitable provision for the learner, it is important to consider personal factors such as:

- the learner's motivation, commitment and ambitions
- the learner's availability, work or other commitments (i.e. times they can attend class)
- the learner's gender (e.g. whether single-sex class is required)
- travel requirements (distance and transport, including costs)

- childcare requirements (creche or childminder, including costs)
- health conditions which may affect attendance.

In some cases, where possible, speak to the learner's case worker or a family member to find out more about their personal circumstances, to help identify the best ESOL provision for them.

Eligibility for ESOL programmes and funding, including any requirements to contribute towards course costs, varies depending on an adult's status and which funding source a provider is using. It is advisable to check as far as possible whether a learner meets the provider's eligibility criteria before the learner attends an appointment or joins a class, in order to avoid disappointment and wasting people's time. In some areas, local ESOL 'hubs' will be able to provide an overview of the kinds of provision available, and the associated eligibility criteria.

The Adult Education Budget Funding Rules are published for each academic year on the gov.uk website and set out the eligibility criteria for Education and Skills Funding Agency funded ESOL provision (e.g. in Further Education colleges and Adult Community Learning services). Adults in England are eligible for fully-funded ESOL provision through the Adult Education Budget if they are unemployed and looking for work. All other AEB-eligible learners are co-funded with the Government contributing 50% of the course cost.

Many ESOL providers use their discretion to set lower fees, particularly for those on non-work-related benefits. Asylum seekers aged 19 or over become eligible for a 50% contribution to the course cost when they have been legally in the UK for longer than six months and are awaiting a decision on their asylum claim or have failed in their claim but have been granted support under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Also, refugees on the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) programme are entitled to receive an extra 12 hours a week of tuition, for up to 6 months, in addition to any ESOL provided by local authorities³.

Not all ESOL providers are ESFA funded and many ESOL providers make use of multiple funding streams, so it is always advisable to check with local providers regarding their ESOL offer.

³ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7905/CBP-7905.pdf>

What are the ESOL levels?

ESOL levels are based on the National Standards for Adult Literacy. There are five levels: Entry Level 1 (E1); Entry Level 2 (E2); Entry Level 3 (E3); Level 1 (L1); Level 2 (L2).

'Pre-Entry' Level learning needs are described within Entry Level 1 of the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum. However, the term 'pre-Entry' is often used by providers to distinguish language and literacy needs at the very early stages of Entry Level 1. Research undertaken for this project suggests that many ESOL practitioners are uncomfortable with this term⁴, so we have used the term '**new to ESOL**', to reflect that learners are just starting to learn English language and literacy skills.

What are the profiles of learners within Entry Level 1 ESOL?

At **Entry Level 1** ESOL, adults may have had some formal learning in their country of origin and may have learned a little English, including reading and writing at a basic level. However, they struggle to understand English spoken at natural speed and find it very difficult to express themselves. They may be able to understand and give some very basic information about themselves, read their name and address and write some basic personal information or a few short, simple sentences. Someone who has lived in the UK for a while may have 'picked up' spoken English informally and can communicate fairly well at a basic level, but they may not be able to read very much and probably cannot write more than their name and address. These learners have a 'spiky profile', i.e. their skills are at different levels.

Very often adults at this level may never have been to school or may have had interrupted education. This makes it very difficult for them to access or benefit from an ESOL Entry 1 course as they do not have enough language, literacy and/or study skills to cope with the curriculum and achieve a qualification.

As skills at Entry 1 level reflect zero English up to being able to understand, say, read and write some basic, familiar information, Entry Level 1 is often subdivided into three sub-levels: '**Emerging**', '**Consolidating**' and '**Established**'⁵. However, even the 'emerging' sub-level reflects a significant language learning journey, so learners '**new to ESOL**' - often referred to as 'pre-Entry' level – are at the very earliest stage of 'emerging' within Entry Level 1 ESOL.

⁴ For more information about the terminology, standards and levels, see the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum <https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf1194>

⁵

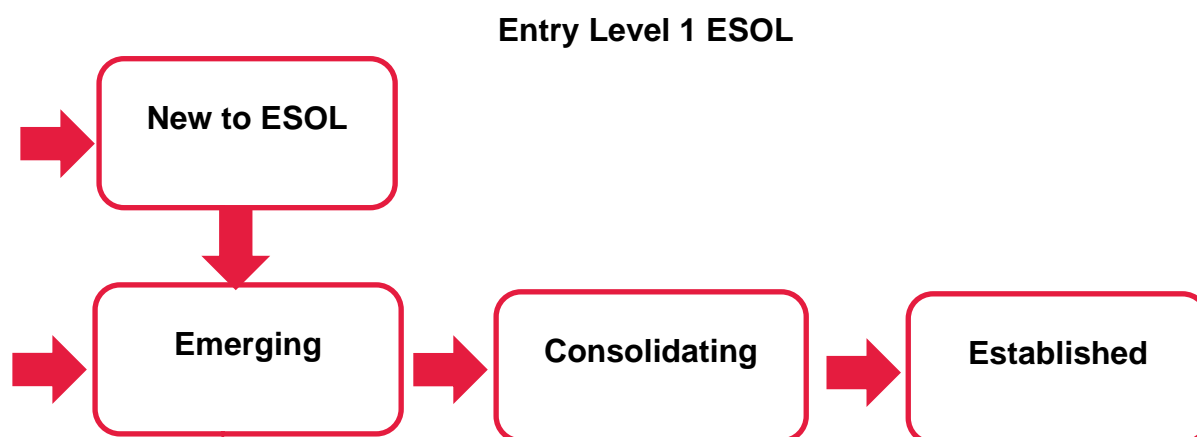
Emerging: the learner shows little or no evidence of having skills in this area

Consolidating: the learner has some skills in this area, but they are not yet secure.

Established: the learner does not appear to have any problems with skills in this area.

(from *Tutor Instruction Manual, ESOL Diagnostic Assessment Materials, Skills for Life strategy* <https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf2387>.)

What distinguishes '**New to ESOL**' learners is that they may not know any words at all in English or maybe just a few, and, importantly, they may not be able to read or write at all in English or their main language, or can just read or write a few letters or a few common words. Some adults at this level may be able to read and write a little in another script but are learning the Roman script for the first time



How can I identify if an adult is 'New to ESOL'?

Assessing an adult's language/literacy level is not an easy task for a non-ESOL specialist. Look through the Learner Profiles - descriptions of real ESOL learners, some with writing samples – to get an idea of the kinds of learners you might meet at this level. The Screening interview questions should also help you as there are descriptions of the type of language and literacy expected at each level, and examples of typical responses.

By asking a few simple questions and observing responses you can immediately get a sense of whether someone understands any English at all. Then by using simple reading and writing tasks, you can get a good idea of whether someone has literacy skills in English or not.

How do I use the screening tool?

1. Familiarise yourself with the questions and tasks before starting the interview.
2. Introduce yourself.
3. Explain that you are going to ask some questions, and then ask the interviewee to read and write a little, to find out about their levels in English.
4. Use the **Interview questions** and **Reading and Writing tasks**. Work through the questions and tasks one at a time, listening carefully to the individual's responses and observing how they cope with the reading and writing tasks.

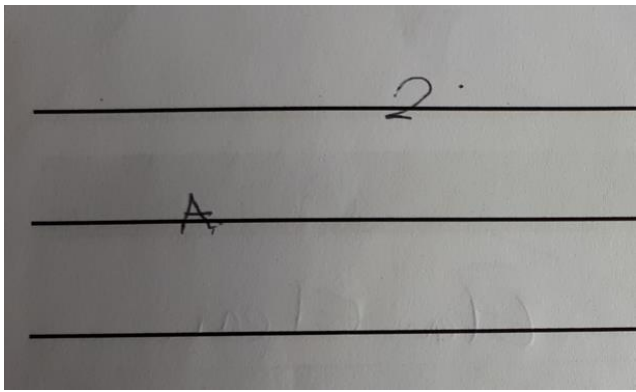
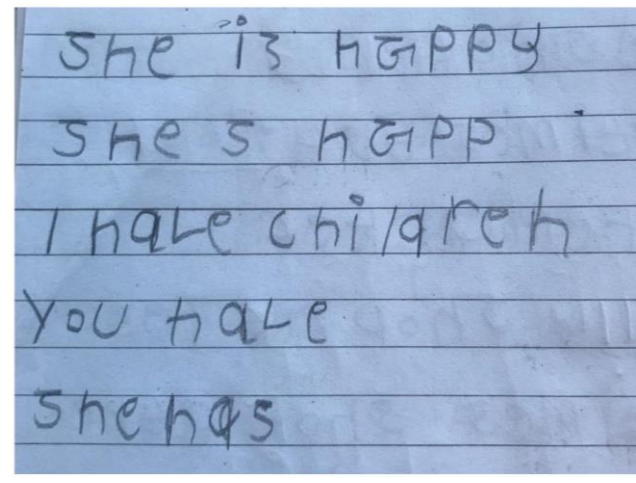
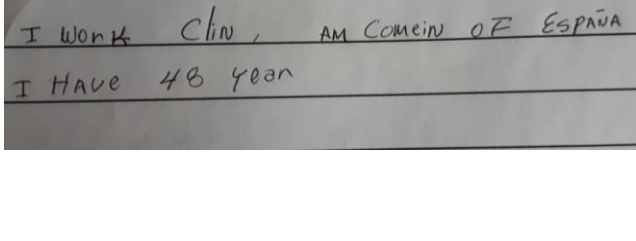
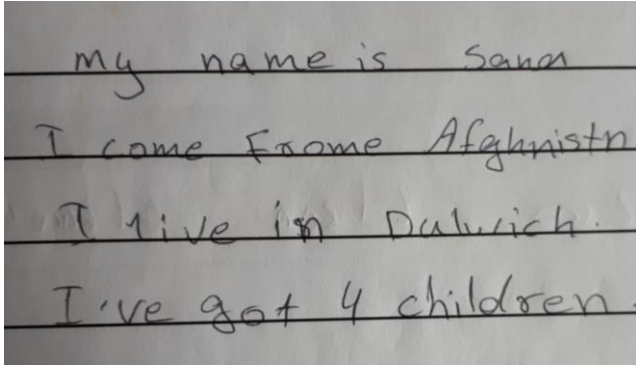
Use the writing exemplars below to help identify whether writing level is: **New to ESOL, Emerging, Consolidating** or **Established**. Note responses on the **Screening record sheet**.

5. If the individual doesn't appear to understand a question straight away and/or doesn't reply, or replies with a wrong answer, repeat the question more slowly and **wait** for them to answer. If you have repeated the question and the individual still doesn't appear to understand, try re-phrasing the question. For example, '*Do you have a job?*' could be re-phrased as '*Are you working?*'.
6. As soon as it is clear that the interviewee is a new ESOL learner in a particular skill, it is important to stop the questions for that skill and move on to the next stage of the screening process. Persisting when someone doesn't understand, or is unable to do the task, can be very demoralising and embarrassing.
7. Record the screening assessment outcome on the **Screening record sheet**. Include notes to clarify each section, if applicable and helpful.
8. If in doubt, ask an ESOL specialist or refer the individual for a full Initial Assessment.

Useful communication strategies

- Be aware of the different cultural backgrounds of the learners. For example, handshaking between men and women in Muslim culture is not customary. Nodding doesn't always mean 'Yes' (in some cultures it means 'No!')
- Be aware that an individual can give a false impression of their abilities – shyness, anxiety and worry may limit how much someone is prepared to respond and say in a new and unfamiliar situation. It is important to put people at ease as far as possible and to try to create a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere.
- Speak clearly (and slow down your speech a little if you usually speak very quickly). Use short, simple sentences and avoid very informal language or slang.
- Use yourself as an example, e.g. *My name's xx. What's your name?*
- Listen carefully – s/he may be saying the right word but pronouncing it wrongly. If you don't understand, ask him/her to repeat it or write down the word.
- Be aware that the adult may be used to hearing a different accent.
- Be sensitive to how frustrating it can be to try to communicate with someone in a different language! Imagine how you would feel if you were working in another country and couldn't speak the language or read or write in the script.
- Be aware that asking '*Do you understand?*', '*Is that OK?*' or '*Is that clear?*' are not necessarily useful ways to check if someone has understood. The person may think they have understood when, in fact, they haven't - or they may say 'Yes' to be polite as they do not want to cause offence.

**Examples of ESOL Entry 1 writing levels:
New to ESOL, Emerging, Consolidating, Established**

	<p>New to ESOL (Absolute beginner/start of Entry 1)</p> <p>This person wanted to write: <i>I have 2 children. My name is Amina.</i></p> <p>This person is a new reader/writer and is still learning how to form letters and numbers and write on the line. They are unable to write or copy words.</p>
	<p>Emerging Entry Level 1 ESOL (Start of Entry 1)</p> <p>This person can write or copy a few words and very short sentences. She is still learning the formation of some letters and to write on the line.</p>
	<p>Consolidating Entry Level 1 ESOL</p> <p>This person can write a few very short simple sentences on the line. Although there are mistakes, and writing is mostly in upper case, the reader can understand.</p>
	<p>Established Entry Level 1 ESOL</p> <p>This person can write several short simple sentences on a familiar topic. Their letter formation is clear and they write on the line. Their spelling is generally good and they are mostly using capital letters and full stops correctly.</p>

Adult ESOL Core Curriculum ESOL Entry Level 1

Learners New to ESOL (with basic literacy needs)

At this level, a learner has very limited or no English. They may (or may not) be able to say their name or understand and reply to a very simple question. For example, the learner:

- may have no or very limited literacy in any language
- may not be able to understand basic information, notices and instructions
- may not be able to write their name and say/write their address
- may have no knowledge of the Roman alphabet and numbers
- may be unfamiliar with the names and sounds of letters of the alphabet
- may be unable to form letters and numbers, or write on the line with spacing between words
- may be able to copy some words and numbers in English
- may be unfamiliar with learning environments and language related to learning.

At ESOL Entry Level 1

Speaking and listening: At this level, a learner is expected to understand simple requests, instructions and information and speak to communicate basic information on familiar topics. For example, the learner:

- can exchange greetings and answer simple questions
- can say very simple sentences but these are often ungrammatical, e.g. *'I long time live London', 'I get bus come here', 'I want a job'*
- can talk about home, family and daily routine to a limited extent, e.g. *'I'm married, I have two children', 'she is 6 years and she have black hair', 'I work cleaner.'*
- can talk about jobs to a limited extent, e.g. *'I was teacher in my country.'*

Reading and writing: At this level, a learner is expected to be able to read some common, familiar words and the alphabet, and read and write a short text. For example, the learner

- can recognise a limited number of words, signs and symbols, e.g. *Stop. Closed. No smoking.*
- can read a simple text on a familiar topic, e.g. *'My name is Amina. I come from Somalia.'*
- can recognise and understand the function of punctuation (full stops and capital letters)
- tries to decode simple, regular words, e.g. uses phonics to sound out *c – a – t = cat*
- can identify the letters of the alphabet (upper and lower case)
- can form the letters of the alphabet (upper and lower case)
- can write familiar words and a simple sentence, with full stop and capital letter
- can use phonics to help spell key words
- can use spelling strategies to help spell key words.