

English language provision and language assessment for low-skilled and unemployed migrants.

Recommendations for good practice at NQF levels 1-3 in ETBs



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Foreword

Irish society is becoming increasingly diverse with migrants from a range of cultural, social and educational backgrounds coming to live in Ireland. Developing English language skills is vital in enabling non-English speaking migrants and their families to fully participate in all spheres of Irish life. While many migrants coming to Ireland are well educated and skilled, there is also a significant number of migrants with lower standards of education who require English Language tuition.

Goal two of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 focusses on Active Inclusion and includes the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, one element of which is to provide a clear policy for the provision of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) for low-skilled and unemployed migrants and to assess language competency level on entry of ESOL learners to ETB provision.

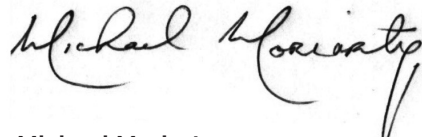
We are pleased to introduce this report, developed by ETBI and SOLAS, which outlines recommendations for good practice in ESOL provision. This report focusses on low-skilled and unemployed migrants, and together with its recommendations, provides a solid foundation to inform decision making on ESOL provision at levels 1-3 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Developed following a comprehensive stakeholder consultation and research process, the report highlights existing good practice in ESOL and the strong commitment across ETBs to provide flexible and responsive learning options to migrants whose first language is not English.

The continued good work of ETBs and others is of huge importance in assisting non-English speaking migrants to develop the language skills needed to participate fully in Irish life. We trust that this review, and the work that will follow on from this report and its recommendations, will serve to benefit every learner who attends ESOL provision.



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Introduction

Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration.

Efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society.

Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union

The review was carried out by the author in conjunction with Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) at the request of SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority. Its aim was to examine current English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) practice in ETB programmes at NFQ levels 1-3, including Adult Literacy and Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) programmes, with specific emphasis on low skilled and unemployed migrants. Fee paying provision was excluded.

The objectives of the review were as follows:

- To respond to commitments in the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-19 in relation to ESOL provision, as part of the national Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.
- To inform the development of future policy in relation to ETB ESOL provision, with particular emphasis on low-skilled and unemployed migrants.
- To provide a basis for further work in relation to national guidelines for ESOL provision, including initial assessment of language competency.

Key areas to be included:

- A desk based analysis of existing research into English Language policy and provision at both national and international levels.
- An analysis of existing quantitative statistical administrative data.
- A detailed survey of all ETBs, to establish the actual statistical position in relation to ESOL, as well as information on recruitment, assessment, provision, accreditation and staffing.
- A consultation process with ETB stakeholder representatives from all ETBs, as well as other national stakeholders.
- Recommendations for inclusion in national guidelines for ETB ESOL provision.

Rationale for Review and Research Background

Introduction

Publicly funded ESOL provision for adults has been developing in Ireland on a broad scale since the mid-1990s. It has developed in an incremental manner, drawing on the expertise of many organisations and individuals. Demand for provision has increased steadily, with a range of target groups seeking tuition. Initially established to respond to a need for language provision for asylum seekers, it has expanded in line with the dramatic changes that have taken place in the structure of Irish society, with large numbers of immigrant communities, both settled and transient, throughout the country: “a society that for so long had been homogeneous diversified ethnically and linguistically” (O’Mahony and McMahon, 2008).



Policy Background

ESOL may be simply defined as "English language provision for adult speakers of other languages" (NIACE, 2006). NIACE noted this as a broad and inclusive definition that embraces the fact that ESOL has to meet the needs of diverse learners who want English language for different purposes and at different levels. Provision in Ireland is seen as distinct from EFL (English as a Foreign Language) which is usually delivered in private language schools, on a fee paying basis, to students who have come to study English for a limited amount of time for academic or employment purposes, and who have generally already studied English in their country of origin.

ESOL provision is generally referenced as meeting the English language tuition needs of migrants who have come to live in Ireland, with reference to the specific contexts relevant to their personal, community and vocational needs, as well as to their academic needs.

In the absence of a national ESOL strategy, ESOL provision has developed organically, on a part-time basis, dependent on the initiative of ETB providers, and in response to demands at local level. In 2000 *The White Paper on Adult Education* set the context for the rapid development of ESOL provision in Ireland in the years prior to its publication. Inter-culturalism was highlighted as one of 3 principles underpinning policy and practice in adult education.¹

The *White Paper's* recommendations specified asylum seekers' eligibility and allowed for VEC adult literacy programmes to provide English language tuition free of charge. However, what was intended to be a temporary response to an emerging problem became a permanent response by default (O'Mahony and McMahon, 2008).

Demand for ESOL provision greatly increased from 2004 on with the arrival of migrants from the EU accession states. In response, some ETBs developed ESOL protocols or policies and established ESOL as a separate curriculum area. ESOL co-ordinators with specific language teaching experience managed the work outside the adult literacy programme, but as part of the broader local adult education service team.

Provision for refugees took a different course with full-time courses, first through 'Integrate Ireland Language and Training' (established by Trinity College in 1999) then in the VEC sector with the Adult Refugee Programme (ARP), coordinated through Co. Dublin VEC which provided full time (20 hours per week) tuition for one year to refugees across the country. The ARP ended in 2012 but a new initiative is now in place under the Refugee Protection Programme.

Submissions from the Further Education sector to the consultation process for the DES *Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015* stressed the need for coherence of service provision, particularly in relation to equity of access for migrants.

The SOLAS FET Strategy 2014-19 was published in 2014 following the dissolution of Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and FÁS (An Foras Áiseanna Saothair, the Training and Employment Authority) and the creation of 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and a Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) to provide funding and strategic oversight to the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The overall aim of the Strategy is to develop a world-class integrated system of further education and training in Ireland, which will promote economic development, meet the needs of all citizens and create high quality portable skills for learners. Active Inclusion is one of the FET Strategy's five high level strategic goals and it makes specific reference to the adult literacy and numeracy strategy, including a commitment to provide "a clear policy for ESOL provision, with priority to low-skilled and unemployed migrants. "The development of assessment processes to assess language levels on entry of ESOL learners to ETB provision is also included as an objective. The FET Strategy document notes that "ESOL classes are provided across the country (in ETBs) to meet the needs of learners who may be highly educated with professional and skilled backgrounds...However there are

¹ Interculturalism: "the need to frame educational policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population as opposed to a uniform one, and the development of curricula, materials, training and in-service, modes of assessment and delivery methods which accept such diversity as the norm."

also a significant number of learners who are learning English who may have missed out on formal education in their country of origin and who lack the basic literacy skills to participate fully and benefit from 'standard' English language classes" (p. 145). *The SOLAS 2017 FET Services Plan* reflects the aims, objectives and goals of the FET Strategy, while considering changes in the current economic climate and government policy in relation to education and training. A number of key policy areas remain priorities for FET. These include a focus on long-term unemployment, new approaches to systematic performance-based evaluation and funding, advances in FET data infrastructure, analysis and research, and finally the implementation of the Professional Development Strategy for all FET staff.

Integration Policy

There has been significant attention paid to integration policy in recent years due to the increased flow of migrants and refugees to the European Union. The *Commission Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals* (June 2016) underlines that education and training are among the most powerful tools for integration, as they provide the gateway to employment and social inclusion. "Language integration programmes should be provided at the earliest stage possible after arrival, adapted to each person's linguistic competence needs, and combining language learning with learning of other skills and competences or work experiences."

The upskilling of low-skilled and low-qualified migrants is also included in the New Skills Agenda for Europe. The 'Skills Guarantee' - renamed '*Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*' - aims to help adults acquire minimum levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards an upper secondary qualification or equivalent.

At Irish policy level, the *ESRI's Monitoring Report on Integration* (2016) compared the skills of immigrants with those of the native born population, using data from the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences (PIAAC). The ESRI report demonstrated that immigrants' skill levels are first and foremost influenced by proficiency in English. Foreign born, foreign language speakers were found to have lower skills scores on average in the areas of literacy and numeracy, despite their high levels of education. The report notes that "Given these findings, and the well-established role of language in integration more generally, the ongoing lack of a clearly defined strategy for English language provision for adults is problematic." (ESRI 2016, p.116). The report also noted that spending figures on existing English-language training were not available at that time.

The *Migrant Integration Strategy* (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017) sets out the Government's commitment to the promotion of migrant integration as a "key part of Ireland's renewal and as an underpinning principle of Irish society" (DJE 2017, p. 2). The Strategy highlights that "migrants [should] have language skills sufficient to enable them to participate in economic life and in wider society" (Ibid, p. 10). The document provides a framework for a range of actions to support migrants to participate fully in Irish life, including actions relating to adult education and training; SOLAS should ensure that ETBs offer language provision to meet migrants' needs, including the needs of the unemployed. The need for more intensive language provision linked to the workplace is also mentioned, as well as the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)², to promote transparency in relation to assessment and progression.

² The CEFR is discussed in more detail later in this section.

Why should Ireland invest in English Language Provision?

Census data from 2002 and onwards show a continuing sharp increase in the percentage of the population born outside Ireland. The proportion of the population which is non-Irish rose from 5.6% in 2002 to 10% in 2006 and 12% in 2011. More than 100,000 persons from over 170 countries have become Irish citizens since citizenship ceremonies were introduced in 2011 (Department of Justice and Equality 2017).

In 2012, Ireland had one of the highest percentages of foreign-born residents among EU Member States at 15 per cent. This figure has since risen to 17.3% (Census 2016). Eurostat statistics show that apart from Luxembourg and Cyprus, in 2015 Ireland had the highest proportion of residents born in other EU Member States at 10%. While immigration declined during the recession, it has again started to increase, particularly among non EU groups (ESRI, 2016).

Many commentators stress the importance of the English language for successful integration: "There can be little argument about the importance of ESOL to the life chances of individual learners and to supporting the valuable contribution they make to social, economic and cultural life" (NIACE 2006). The OECD 2008 *Economic Survey of Ireland*, in discussing the impact of migration, notes that "knowing the language is crucial for successful integration... key to social cohesion, active participation in society and key to understanding and accepting national culture."

There are clear links between English language proficiency, disadvantage, social exclusion and deprivation. A recent study into poverty and ethnicity in Wales found that English language skills influence "access to services, people's confidence, their ability to help their children to flourish in school and their social networks" (Holtom et al 2013).

Irish Literature Review

A number of research studies on ESOL provision in Ireland and other English speaking jurisdictions provide useful references against which to benchmark a review of ETB ESOL provision.³

Irish policy and research papers relating to English language provision initially focused primarily on the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, as they constituted the main target groups requesting tuition from the late 1990s. The *White Paper on Adult Education* was followed in 2002 by a *Research Study on Asylum Seekers* (Ward, 2002), commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) through City of Dublin VEC and Co. Dublin VEC and in 2003 by *Guidelines on ESOL provision* (National Adult Literacy Agency).

The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) also published a number of short position papers between 2001 and 2005. Sheridan (2015) notes the human rights based approach to ESOL teaching and learning set out in these documents. Pressure to respond to the growing demand for ESOL provision prompted the publication of two reports in 2008, both urging the development of a national ESOL strategy: the first produced by the IVEA and the second commissioned by DES and the Office of the Minister for Integration (OMI) (Howarth Consulting Ireland, 2008).

The IVEA report included a survey of VECs in relation to current ESOL practice and perceived impediments, at both second and further education levels. The survey highlighted concerns around key areas such as lack of training, lack of materials, inadequate funding, no dedicated ESOL budget and poor coordination.

The Howarth Review also surveyed both public and private ESOL providers. The report emphasised the scale of unmet need for language provision and documented a number of jurisdictions that had already put in place comprehensive policies and frameworks, of which a majority had facilitated the provision of subsidised or free language tuition regimes. The review stressed that many immigrants were not maximizing their earning potential because of their low standard of English and that parents' English Language

³ This overview incorporates ESOL policy statements and evaluations but does not address research on second language acquisition or English language teaching and learning.

competence could also lead to enhanced educational opportunities for 'second generation' immigrants. It concluded that there was a robust case for the development of a formalised English language training system and framework for legally resident immigrants in Ireland.

The recommendations of these reports overlapped. They included the establishment of a national support structure to devise and implement a national ESOL strategy. Its remit would include responsibility for providing advice and disseminating best practice in relation to curriculum, resources and assessment. It was recommended that ESOL coordinators at VEC/ETB level should be appointed to work in cooperation with a national coordinator.

"English Language competence of A2/NFQ Level 3 equivalent should be the accepted standard at which the student has a 'functional competence' in the English Language, as set out in the CEFR." (Howarth 2008). The report went on to say that provision of publicly funded tuition should be increased (5,000 additional 'places'). Employers should be involved in the provision process and classroom tuition should be complemented by e-learning.

Sheridan (2015) notes that due to the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent economic recession, the full strategic intents of government, IVEA and other stakeholders in ESOL have not been implemented. "A significant casualty in relation to ESOL is the demise of the proposed development of a national English language training policy."

International Research Studies

A number of other jurisdictions provide useful insights against which to benchmark a review of Irish language provision for migrants. Key issues raised by policy and research studies from the United Kingdom, other EU and OECD Member States, the Council of Europe, Canada and Australia are reported below.

Language Standards or Benchmarks

Frameworks specific to language acquisition have been developed in Australia and Canada as well as by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Unit. These benchmarks operate alongside, but independently of, other national qualifications frameworks and underpin curriculum, assessment and accreditation frameworks.

In Canada, eligible students must be assessed under the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment (CLBA) scheme which indicates the amount of training the student needs to achieve designated outcomes. The CLBA scheme provides 'a detailed framework of reference for learning, teaching, programming and assessing adult ESOL in Canada, a national standard for planning second language curricula for a variety of contexts and a common yardstick for assessing outcomes'.⁴ The extremely detailed CLB Assessment schemes aim to test a speaker's communicative competence in three areas: listening and speaking, reading and writing.

In Australia, the ISLPR (International Second Language Proficiency Ratings) is a scale that describes the development of second or foreign language proficiency in adolescent and adult learners. More precisely, it is a set of four subscales for the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. These subscales trace the development of the target language from 0 (no ability to communicate in the target language) to 5 (indistinguishable from a native speaker of the same sociocultural background). The ISLPR is used for three purposes: assessing the proficiency of individual learners, research and policy-making and providing a framework for language curriculum development (Wylie 2010).

In Europe, the CEFR provides a system for defining levels of proficiency to measure language learners' progress. Launched in 2001 and now available in almost 40 languages, the CEFR is used throughout Europe and also in other parts of the world. The Council of Europe stresses that the CEFR is a framework of reference, not a normative

⁴ www.language.ca

instrument. The CEFR defines proficiency in six ascending levels arranged in three bands (A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2 in relation to three kinds of language activity: reception (listening and reading), production (speaking and writing) and interaction (spoken and written). The contexts in which language is used (social, vocational, academic) are also differentiated (Council of Europe Language Policy Unit, 2001).

Although extensively referenced by ESOL practitioners, there is currently no provision in Ireland for relating curricula and English as a Second Language awards offered through the NMQ to the CEFR.

Where does Language Provision for Migrants Sit?

In Ireland part-time ETB ESOL provision for asylum seekers and migrant workers has been associated with the ETB adult literacy programme, although a number of ETBs have made separate administrative arrangements for ESOL. In England and Wales, language provision has also been firmly embedded within a broader basic skills infrastructure, entitled the 'Skills for Life' initiative and encompassing literacy, language and numeracy. However, a KPMG review in 2005 recommended identifying ESOL as a separate area in all local authority plans, with individual key performance targets. Other jurisdictions such as Scotland, Australia and Canada and most recently Wales have established separate strategies for English language provision. Recent English policy reports have also recommended identifying ESOL as a separate policy area in Further and Community Education.⁵ This approach considers ESOL as a distinct element of provision relating to social inclusion, as it has elements of both basic skill and foreign language learning. However, standards, pedagogy, assessment and awards are regarded as specific to English language education.

Organisational Infrastructure

As detailed in the Howarth Report, a number of jurisdictions have set up formal systems of administration for language tuition, accreditation of teachers, curriculum and assessment. Subsidised or free language tuition is provided, up to a specified level of competency. Many have also developed broad curricula for language courses. These initiatives are supported by a centralised support service at national level.

Case Study: Scotland

The Scottish ESOL Strategy, first published in 2007 and updated in 2015, provides a good example of a comprehensive infrastructure, nationally coordinated but with detailed actions at local level⁶. It places a strong emphasis on the provision of ESOL for 'new Scots' as a mechanism for both economic development and active citizenship, with five guiding principles of inclusion, diversity, quality, achievement and progression. Shifting demographics are cited as a challenge to the roll out of a national strategy and so the Scottish Executive established a national panel in order to lead out on policy and make changes as necessary, while monitoring roll out. Crucially local adult learning providers were designated to work in collaboration with the national panel. An implementation plan with detailed specified actions was published after the initial policy document and a further implementation plan is pending. Provision is offered in both colleges and community locations. Impact reports are also published. The 2007 plan has resulted in the publication of an ESOL Initial Assessment Guide, an Adult ESOL Curriculum Framework, Professional Development Awards and a professional development framework. Scotland's curriculum is different in conception and principle to that in England and Wales, and avoids some of the problems that have attracted criticism there, such as being too prescriptive and too skills-based.⁷ (The framework is currently being revised). The Scottish Qualifications Authority has also ratified a suite of qualifications for learners which come under the same framework as mainstream Scottish education and are mapped to the CEFR. The most advanced level is called Higher and prepares learners for entry to university. The assessment tool is also mapped to the CEFR.

⁵ NIACE 2006, NATECLA 2016, Paget and Stevenson 2014, and Foster and Bolton 2017

⁶ See Education Scotland, *Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland's ESOL Strategy, 2015-2020*

⁷ Simpson, J., 'English Language Learning in Britain', p.209

Key findings from Scottish progress⁸ reports:

While noting continuing unmet demand, the latest impact report documents a high number of successful learning programmes across different sectors. It is noted that local providers are increasingly making contributions to strategic objectives in the national ESOL strategy as well as meeting their local objectives.

Demand for provision, funding and eligibility criteria

The literature documents the difficulties in estimating the potential need for language provision for migrants and the impact of funding restrictions on their access to tuition. A research report used as the basis for the development of the Welsh ESOL Strategy (2014), highlights the challenges in estimating both the supply and demand for ESOL provision "ranging from individual mobility on entry to a country to mismatches between data monitoring and reporting cycles. The influence of in-migration from the EU Accession States from 2004 onwards illustrates the dynamic nature of ESOL need" (Welsh Assembly 2010).

In Germany, the massive influx of migrants in 2015 placed severe pressure on the integration and language courses offered by the German government (600 hours up to level B1 on the CEFR, with an additional 300 hours if immigrants fail the test). A sharp reduction in the quality of teaching staff was reported and waiting lists lengthened considerably. However, the state's response has been to increase both the number of courses on offer and the levels to which tuition is offered. B2 courses with a stronger focus on the professional world have been offered since summer 2016. C1 courses are in the planning process. "In short, the entire system is currently undergoing an accelerated reboot."⁹ In the Netherlands migrants are provided with 600 hours tuition to reach A2 level.

In contrast, the Australian Migrant Education Program (AMEP) while also offering generous provision (510 hours of free tuition) for English language provision, exercises a rigorous screening system for migrants within their country of origin (Williams and Williams, 2007).

In England, funding for ESOL was reduced from 2010 due to austerity measures (Simpson 2015, p.209) and more limited categories of people (unemployed) now have access to free tuition. Other students are subject to co-funding measures. However a high level report on integration commissioned by the then Prime Minister David Cameron in 2015, urged increased funding for language provision, particularly at community level: "A shared language is fundamental to integrated societies."¹⁰ Two further reports from the UK outline the impact of restriction of eligibility criteria for ESOL training on migrants in low paid employment and urge the development of a greater range of tuition options, including on-line learning, and work based learning.¹¹

In Ireland, the Howarth report while recommending provision of free tuition up to an agreed minimum level of competency (A2) also recommended a system of tax relief for those not eligible for free tuition. De Cuyper and Garibay (2013) note a wide variation in proficiency levels funded: in some cases the proficiency level is differentiated depending on the education level of learners.

Duration of provision

How many hours should a language course last? De Cuyper and Garibay (2013) note that there is little research about the minimal duration of a language course needed to effect increased proficiency. In Canada substantial gains in language proficiency were found after 1,000 hours, but a separate study showed positive impacts on the employment of refugees in Sweden after 300 to 500 hours.

⁸ Education Scotland, ESOL Impact Report 2015-2016.

⁹ Karsten SchneiderVerbandsdirektor, Verband der Volkshochschulen des Saarlandes : Evidence presented at European Basic Skills Network Meeting, Luxembourg 2017.

¹⁰ House of Commons Briefing Paper on ESOL, 2017

¹¹ Braddel et al, Migrants in Low Paid Work and NIACE 2010 for Greater London Authority.

In Australia the AMEP objectives note that there had been an expectation in the past that the programme should be able to equip AMEP clients with 'functional English' in 510 hours of tuition.' It notes that this 'expectation is unattainable and unrealistic' considering the low level of English language skills of many AMEP clients. It notes that a more accurate description of what the programme aims to deliver is: 'preliminary English skills in a specific settlement context' through English language tuition (Acil Allen Consulting, 2015). Schellekens (2011) conducted a review of relevant research and concluded: "Literature is scarce on the length of time needed to acquire another language, not least because learners show great variety in the progress that they make. What we can say is that language learning is a time-consuming business." Schellekens references an Australian longitudinal study of college data indicating that "it takes on average 1,765 hours of learning for learners (including a proportion of learners with no literacy skills in the first language) to progress from pure beginner level, to the point where they can undertake study of another subject or take on a job with routine communication requirements." A further study from the Center for Applied Linguistics in the United States (2003) found that "it would take 500-1,000 hours of instruction for an adult who is literate in their native language, but has not had prior English instruction to reach the level of being able to satisfy basic needs, survive on the job, and have limited interaction in English." A 2010 evaluation of the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programme by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, found that the number of hours spent in LINC made a considerable difference and a more significant impact was realized as more time was spent in LINC classes: "by the time students reach 1000 hours the gains attributable to LINC rise markedly." (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010).

Based on these research studies, the effectiveness of relatively short courses of less than 200 hours duration must be questioned: much longer tuition times are needed to achieve progress in terms of language competency and the length of time will vary for individual learners. Modular programmes could provide an opportunity to offer learners access to increased amounts of tuition while allowing for a range of programme types adjusted to learners' needs.

Language Competency Requirements for Citizenship

A number of EU countries have mandatory language policies for non-EU immigrants and immigrants receiving welfare payments, and the Howarth report emphasised the linking of a defined standard of competence in the first language of the country concerned to applications for permanent residency or citizenship. This is, of course, not directly analogous to Ireland's situation where the majority of immigrants are of EU origin and cannot be mandated to undertake English Language Tuition.

The surveys carried out among member states by the Council of Europe's Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants project reveal a widespread tendency to increase the language requirements that migrants must meet as a precondition for residence or citizenship. However the Council's report underlines that more research is needed to determine whether this has had a positive or a negative impact on integration (Council of Europe Language Policy Unit, 2017).

The introduction of civics and language tests for those seeking citizenship was to be examined by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service during 2017 as part of the current Irish Migrant Integration Strategy.

Section One Conclusions and Recommendations

Publicly funded ESOL provision in Ireland has developed in the absence of any overall national strategy or policy initiative. The research documents analysed here provide important findings for Irish Further Education and Training policy:

- Integration policies at both European and Irish levels stress the importance of intercultural awareness and language tuition for migrants.
- Many countries have put in place national strategies for ESOL provision with specific objectives. Such strategies include subsidised or free language tuition regimes for specific target groups.
- Jurisdictions that provide free tuition do this as a general principle to at least A2 or in some cases B1 level on the CEFR. While the number of hours calculated for a beginner to reach basic competency varies, the effectiveness of short courses of less than 200 hours duration must be questioned.
- A number of jurisdictions have developed language frameworks specific to second language acquisition to underpin assessment, curriculum and accreditation systems.
- A number of EU Member States have mandatory language policies for non-EU migrants or migrants applying for citizenship, with clear links between language courses and the integration of migrants into the workplace.

Recommendations

1. *ESOL is primarily concerned with the provision of English language tuition and should be recognised as a distinct area of expertise. ESOL standards, pedagogy, assessment and awards should be specific to English language education.*
2. *A national framework for publicly funded ESOL provision for adults should be devised, within the broader context of the Further Education and Training Strategy.*
3. *The national ESOL framework should include specific actions in relation to provision, assessment and accreditation, curriculum and materials development and staff development. More detailed recommendations in relation to these issues are set out below.*
4. *An Advisory Committee should be convened at national level by SOLAS to support the implementation of the actions specified in the national framework for publicly funded ESOL, in collaboration with ETBs. In parallel, ETBs should lead the implementation of actions at local level.*
5. *Funding for ESOL provision should be prioritised: however the dynamic nature of migration implies the need for on-going monitoring of take up of provision.*

ESOL Learners

Introduction

As outlined in Section One, SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, published the FET Strategy in 2014 with an emphasis on increased participation, completion and attainment in relation to adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy was developed as part of the FET Strategy and was referenced in the Further Education and Training Act 2013. The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy incorporates elements relating to ESOL provision: the objective being to provide a clear policy for ESOL with priority to low-skilled and unemployed migrants. ESOL learners' language competency levels on entry was also to be assessed. This section gives an overview of the characteristics of the current ETB ESOL learner cohort, with reference to data from the research survey, statistical returns and Census 2016. It also discusses demand for ESOL provision.



ESOL Learners' Background

The survey conducted as part of this review did not request information on ESOL learners' nationality or their ethnic background. However during the consultation process, providers reported on the wide diversity of learners, in terms of ethnic background, nationality, educational achievement, literacy levels and resident status. The ETB FET service provides for asylum seekers and refugees, EU and non EU economic migrants, as well as people from more settled communities who may be resident in the country for some time, or those joining family members.

The heterogeneous nature of ESOL learner cohorts is noted frequently in the literature "learners of ESOL represent a spectrum of people living, often side-by-side, in post-colonial societies in a time of globalization." (Cooke and Simpson, 2008). Many reports testify to the extraordinary multiplicity of backgrounds, previous levels of education and current circumstances of ESOL learners. "What is particularly apparent in ESOL classrooms is the wide range of backgrounds, life experiences and levels of education of the learners. While many ESOL learners have had no basic education in their home country and often have low literacy levels in their mother tongue or specific learning difficulties, others are professionals with successful careers" (Mallows 2006). While this diversity may be obvious at one level, ESOL learners are often categorized as 'one group'. However, responding to learners' diverse needs, experiences and aspirations "is an essential part of the work of ESOL teachers and a major challenge to curriculum planning" (Cooke and Simpson 2008).

The 2016 Census (Central Statistics Office, 2016) provides some insight into the makeup of immigrant communities in Ireland: In April 2016, there were 535,475 resident non-Irish nationals of over 200 different nationalities. However, a very small number of these nationalities accounted for the majority of persons in this group, with the top 10 nationalities accounting for 69% of the total. The top 11 to 20 nationalities accounted for a further 14 per cent of all non-Irish nationals.

The largest national group was Polish with 122,515 people resident in the state, followed by UK, Lithuanian, Romanian, Latvian and Brazilian nationals. While the number of non-Irish nationals fell for the first time between 2011 and 2016, this may in part be explained by the rise in the number of those with dual Irish nationality. CSO statistics (April 2016) also show net inward migration to Ireland for the year to April 2016 for the first time since 2009.

Number of ETB ESOL Participants

An analysis of the survey returns conducted for this review showed the total number of ESOL participants for 2015 at 15,110. There were high numbers of people participating in ESOL provision in all the major cities: 55.4% of participants were located in 6 ETBs in the cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway. However significant numbers were found in all ETBs. 37% of ESOL learners were men and 63% were women.

Table 1: ESOL Participants by ETB¹²

No	ETB	Male Participants	Female Participants	Total Participants	% of total
1.	Dublin Dun Laoghaire	511	1277	1788	11.8%
2	City of Dublin	743	1006	1749	11.5%
3	Louth Meath	610	897	1507	9.9%
4	Limerick Clare	430	896	1326	8.7%
5	Waterford Wexford	435	820	1255	8.3%
6	Galway Roscommon	505	699	1204	7.9%
7	Cork	373	730	1103	7.2%
8	Kildare Wicklow	385	693	1078	7.1%
9	Longford Westmeath	249	457	706	4.7%
10	Laois Offaly	276	389	665	4.4%
11	Mayo Sligo Leitrim	262	386	648	4.2%
12	Cavan Monaghan	190	387	577	3.8%
13	Tipperary	223	341	564	3.7%
14	Kerry	272	201	473	3.1%
15	Kilkenny Carlow	91	166	257	1.7%
16	Donegal	68	142	210	1.3%
	TOTALS	5623	9487	15,110	

The 2015 ETB annual administrative return to SOLAS/DES for ESOL programmes funded through the ALCES budget recorded a total of **11,712** participants, **4,427** male and **7,285** female.

The discrepancy between the survey results and administrative returns is accounted for by the fact that the survey asked providers to return the total number of all ESOL learners in the ETB, not just those administered by the Adult Literacy programme.

A review of 2016 ETB administrative returns to the DES for ESOL indicate a figure of 13,096, an increase on the figure reported for 2015. This follows a request from SOLAS to ETBs to record all ESOL participants, regardless of funding programme, on one report. The *SOLAS 2017 FET Services Plan* records a total of 14,458 planned ESOL beneficiaries for 2017. The survey conducted for this research indicates that ESOL participants are currently still being reported through various programmes, making it difficult to analyse the scale of uptake of provision. Further analysis of the distribution of ESOL learners across various ETB programmes is contained in Section Three.

¹² Source: ESOL Research Survey

Demand for ESOL Provision

During the consultation process, all 16 ETBs reported high demand for provision, particularly those ETBs located in large urban conurbations. All ETBs reported referrals from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Survey responses noted waiting lists: these may be closed because of lack of capacity. Many ETBs reported that demand for provision had increased during 2015/16: increased demand came from employers, from Home School Community Liaison Coordinators, as well as from individual applicants.

Census 2016 provides data illustrating the potential demand for ESOL provision: a question on foreign languages covered how well those who spoke another language at home could speak English. Ability was broken down into four categories - 'very well', 'well', 'not well' and 'not at all'. Of the 612,018 people who spoke another language at home, 86,608 people (14.2%) indicated that they spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all'.

The table¹³ below presents the data for the persons from this group aged over 18:

Table 2: Ability to speak English by age group

Age Group	Total	Ability to speak English – not well	Ability to speak English – not at all	Overall % with language difficulty
Young adults 19-24	45,839	4,413	369	10.4%
Aged 25-64	365,887	48,829	5,102	14.7%
Older people over 65	12,303	1,564	905	20%
TOTALS	424,029	54,806	6,376	14.4%

The table shows that 54,806 people aged 19 or over responded that they could not speak English well, with a further 6,376 stating they could not speak English at all. 10.4% of young adults aged 19-24, 14.7% of adults aged 25-64 and 20% of older adults reported difficulties with spoken English¹⁴.

Census 2016 reported that among adults aged 45-64, Lithuanian nationals had the highest proportion who could not speak English well or at all (22.2%), followed by Latvians, Romanians, Brazilians and Polish with higher than average rates of inability to speak English well.¹⁵

A study by Gazzola (2017) using data from Eurostat's Adult Education Survey found that less than 50% of migrants in Ireland declared that they knew English "at good or proficient level".¹⁶

While Census 16 reports that 80% of migrants who arrived in Ireland in 1996 or before indicated that they spoke English very well, of those who arrived in 2015 only 44.4% spoke English very well, while nearly one in five (19.1%) could not speak English well or at all.

The figures underline the scale of the challenge facing the public English Language service: based on the survey conducted with ETBs, 46,072 or 75% of those who reported poor English skills are estimated to be not availing of English Language provision through publicly funded FET provision. While these levels are based on self-report, researchers have concluded that "on average self-reported language knowledge provides a relatively good proxy for migrants' proficiency in the host-country language" because those that report lower language skills also score less favourably on other integration indicators (Damas de Matos and Liebig, 2014).

¹³ Source: CSO: Census 2016 Chapter 5 Diversity, Table 5.7.

¹⁴ The Howarth Report (2008) had estimated a figure of 76,000, based on ESRI research.

¹⁵ Census 2016 Chapter 7 Migration and Diversity

¹⁶ The study found that good and very good language skills were associated with a better occupational status, both for EU and for non-EU migrants across 17 Member States. Generally speaking, good and very good skills in the official language(s) of the host country were more frequent among those who have a better employment status, both for EU and non-EU migrants.

Levels of Language Competency on Entry to ETB ESOL Provision

Data on language competency levels is collected and stored in all 16 ETBs. Assessments may be stored in hard copy only or filed on-line, using 'Salespulse' or a specific on-line assessment tool site. In some cases the assessment results are stored in hard copy along with the registration form.

ETBs were requested to provide data on the types of provision ESOL applicants required, classified by language competency level on entry. Language competency levels were classified using the CEFR (A1-A2, B1-B2 and C1-C2). A detailed definition of the CEFR levels is contained in Appendix One. Literacy for ESOL was defined as relating to those applicants with literacy difficulties in their mother tongue.

Reported language competency levels vary considerably between ETBs. In 8 ETBs over 70% of entrants are reported as being at beginner level (A1-A2) but 1 ETB reports beginners' enrolments at 21%. 7 ETBs report over 30% of entrants at intermediate level (B1-B2). 7 ETBs reported no entrants at advanced (C1-C2) levels, while the percentage reported for 'literacy for ESOL' varied between 0% and 24%.

Overall average or mean national figures are as follows:

- Beginner (A1-A2) 62.6% (median score of 62.5%)
- Intermediate (B1-B2) 23.5% (median score of 22.5%)
- Advanced (C1-C2) 6.06% (median score of 2.5%)
- Literacy for ESOL 7.75% (median score of 5%)

Table 3: Reported Language Competency Levels on Entry to ESOL provision¹⁷

ETB	Beginner Level (A1-A2)	Intermediate (B1-B2)	Advanced (C1-C2)	Literacy for ESOL
1	100%	0%	0%	0%
2	88%	0%	0%	12%
3	83%	14%	3%	0%
4	75%	25%	0%	0%
5	75%	15%	0%	10%
6	71%	17%	12%	0%
7	70%	20%	0%	10%
8	70%	20%	5%	5%
9	55%	20%	0%	25%
10	55%	30%	10%	5%
11	55%	30%	10%	5%
12	51%	42%	0%	7%
13	51%	45%	2%	2%
14	42%	32%	11%	15%
15	40%	30%	6%	24%
16	21%	37%	38%	4%

¹⁷ Source: ESOL Research Survey

The wide variations in language competency levels reported may indicate differing interpretations of the CEFR and applicants' competencies. Assessment is discussed in more detail in Section Four.

ESOL Literacy

ETB providers reported varied percentages of ESOL literacy learners (between 0% and 24%). The definition of 'ESOL literacy' is complex and contested. Some commentators and researchers argue that an ESOL literacy student is anyone who is not literate in their first language. Others assert that the definition relates to those who lack a certain level of education in their first language (Centre for Literacy Quebec, 2008). Cooke and Simpson (2008) clarify that researchers distinguish "between those students with some foundational literacy in a primary or expert language and those with none. Those with some expert language literacy are viewed as having skills to transfer on to literacy in their new language."

Cooke and Simpson highlight that progress may be slower among those with no skills to transfer and that ESOL literacy students are better served in separate provision. However because of resource constraints the two sets of learners may be placed in the same class. "While individualised approaches to teaching and learning may address the issue, the drop-out rate may be high for those not literate in their first language."

English language specialists argue that lack of competency in reading and writing in English usually references a language teaching issue, not a literacy issue, for many students whose first language is not English. Pedagogical issues including those relating to ESOL literacy learners and ESOL learners who are literate in their first language are beyond the scope of this review.¹⁸ However, with the recognition that language teaching is a separate area of expertise, there is a need for a clear definition of 'ESOL literacy' and a parallel recognition that ESOL students with no literacy in their mother tongue require tutors with specific skills, knowledge and competences.

ESOL Learners: Target Group, Age, Economic and Education Profiles

A number of data headings in the ESOL administrative returns for 2015 and 2016 provide an insight into the degree to which the programme is meeting social inclusion and labour market activation indicators. These include participants' target group profile, as well as age and economic and educational status on entry to programmes.

In 2015 56% of ESOL participants were migrant workers and less than 10% were refugees and asylum seekers. Data were not returned on the heading 'target group' for a third of participants.

Table 4: ESOL Participants – Target Group 2015¹⁹

Target Group	Number	Percentage
Refugee	587	5.13%
Asylum Seeker	522	4.5%
Migrant Worker	6,506	56%
Other	3,823	33.4%

¹⁸ The topic is explored in detail in a NRDC study *The Right Course? An exploratory study of Learner Placement Practices in ESOL and Literacy*, Baynham et al. (2008)

¹⁹ Source: ETB ESOL Administrative Returns 2015

In 2016 migrant workers' participation increased to 61% of the cohort, while refugees and asylum seekers increased to 13.8%. The percentage of participants returned with no target group category decreased to 24%.

Table 5: ESOL Participants – Target Group 2016²⁰

Target Group	Number	Percentage
Refugee	994	7.5%
Asylum Seeker	832	6.3%
Migrant Worker	8,006	61%
Other	3,264	24%

Age of ESOL participants

In 2015, the large majority of ESOL participants (81%) were aged 25-64. 7.3% of ESOL participants were aged between 16 and 24. Older adults aged over 65 represented only 0.79% of the cohort.

Table 6: Age of ESOL participants 2015²¹

Age 2015	Number	Percentage
16-24	878	7.3%
25-64	10,741	81%
65 and over	93	0.79%
TOTAL	11,712	

In 2016, the percentage of young adults decreased to 6.98% and older adults aged over 65 increased marginally to 1.1%. The percentage of adults aged 24-64 increased to 91.9%.

Table 7: Age of ESOL participants 2016²²

Age 2016	Number	Percentage
16-24	916	6.9%
25-64	12,037	91.9%
65 and over	143	1.1%
TOTAL	13,096	

These profiles match data relating to migrants' age in Census 2016: nearly half of all non-Irish nationals were aged between 25 and 42, compared with less than a quarter of Irish nationals. The percentage of non-Irish nationals aged over 65 was also much lower than that for Irish nationals. However the CSO's analysis of age structures of non-Irish national groups reveals a recurring pattern of "stable populations slowly ageing."²³

²⁰ Source: ETB ESOL Administrative Returns 2016

²¹ Source: ETB ESOL Administrative Returns 2015

²² Source: ETB ESOL Administrative Returns 2016

²³ Census 2016 Chapter 7 Migration and Diversity

Employment Status

Census 2016 reported that non-Irish national participation in the labour market remains strong at 73.9%, with a higher labour force participation rate than their Irish counterparts. The comparable rate for Irish nationals was 59.5% in 2016. Census 2016 also reported that the unemployment rate for non-Irish nationals was nearly 3% higher than for Irish nationals (12.5%), standing at 15.4%. The lower educated had higher unemployment rates. The *SOLAS 2017 FET Services Plan* notes the improved economic outlook for Ireland and the expansion of employment opportunities, but underlines that the long-term unemployed constitute more than half of the total unemployed, with groups within the labour force who would benefit from more targeted FET provision.

In 2015, 58% of ETB ESOL participants were unemployed, of whom 26% were long term unemployed.

Table 8: Employment status 2015²⁴

Employment Status	Male	Female	Total	% of total
UN < 1 year	1,658	2,181	3,839	32%
LT UN > 1 year	1,219	1,854	3,073	26%
Employed	945	1,832	2,777	23%
Not in LM	608	1,394	2,002	17%
TOTALS	4,430	7,261	11,691	

In 2016, the percentage of long-term unemployed participants decreased to 21% while the percentage of employed participants remained stable at 23%.

Table 9: Employment Status 2016²⁵

Employment Status	Male	Female	Total	% of total
UN < 1 year	1,821	2,919	4,740	36%
LT UN > 1 year	1,120	1,665	2,785	21%
Employed	1,083	1,976	3,059	23%
Not in LM	872	1,640	2,512	19%
TOTALS	4,896	8,200	13,096	

The ESRI *2016 Monitoring Report on Integration*, in assessing the extent to which immigrants have shared in the economic recovery concludes that the evidence is mixed: "Most of the gains in employment have accrued to Irish nationals" and notes that unemployment is higher among immigrants than among natives in Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe. "Targeted labour market and education programmes that focus on providing equal employment opportunities, and offer retraining, education, and language and cultural supports, are important for ensuring that immigrants have an equal chance to participate in the labour market." Noting as an issue of particular concern the high unemployment and low employment rate among African nationals, the report recommends further detailed research. There are currently no statistics available on ETB ESOL participants' ethnic or national status but these data fields are now included in the PLSS Learner Database.

²⁴ Source: ETB ESOL Administrative Returns 2015

²⁵ Source: ETB ESOL Administrative Returns 2016

Educational Status on Entry

Census 2016 showed that non-Irish nationals are more highly educated than Irish nationals.²⁶ 29.5% of Irish nationals (who had completed their education) were educated to lower secondary level at most, while the rate for non-Irish nationals was 12%. However the Census also noted variations within the non-Irish group, with nationals from Latvia, Lithuania and Romania having the lowest rates of those with a third level degree or higher.

55% of ESOL participants in the 2015 administrative returns had upper second level education or above. Some providers reported during the consultation process that there may be difficulties in relation to self-reported education levels, or finding equivalences in the Irish system. Some providers noted that there had been an increase in applicants with lower qualifications, which they attributed to the employment situation: higher qualified migrants would find it easier to find work. However this observation is not confirmed by statistics relating to education status for 2016.

Table 10: Education Status 2015²⁷

Education Status	Male	Female	Total	% of total
No formal education	190	338	528	4.5%
Primary	584	697	1281	10.9%
Lower Second Level	1,331	2,101	3,432	29.4%
Upper Second Level	1,756	2,707	4,463	38.2%
QQI Level 6 or equivalent	551	1,406	1,957	16.7%
TOTALS	4,412	7,249	11,661	

In 2016, the percentage of ESOL participants with upper second level or above increased to 61.7%. The percentage of those with equivalent qualifications to QQI Level 6 or above decreased slightly to 14.9%.

Table 11: Education Status 2016²⁸

Education Status	Male	Female	Total	% of total
No formal education	231	390	621	4.7%
Primary	649	752	1,401	10.6%
Lower Second Level	1,183	1,792	2,975	22.7%
Upper Second Level	2,286	3,851	6,137	46.8%
QQI Level 6 or equivalent	547	1,415	1,962	14.9%
TOTALS	4,896	8,200	13,096	

It is not currently possible to correlate ETB data relating to education status and English language proficiency of ETB participants. However, the 2016 *Integration Monitor* explored the size of the immigrant-native skills gap in Ireland using PIAAC data on literacy, numeracy and problem solving. The study found that the immigrant-native skills gap is mainly driven by English language proficiency: "Today's migration flows in Ireland are characterised by higher levels of education. Despite this, due to limited English language proficiency among some immigrants, Irish-born adults are found to have higher average literacy and numeracy scores than immigrant adults."

²⁶ However the age profile of non-Irish nationals differs from the general population, with fewer younger and older persons and this impacts on the overall level of education.

²⁷ Source: ETB Administrative Returns 2015

²⁸ Source: ETB ESOL Administrative Returns 2016

Damas de Matos and Liebig (2014) in a review of immigrants' qualifications and their labour market value in both Europe and the United States conclude that "There is strong evidence that immigrants get lower returns to education than natives in terms of employment, occupational matching and earnings." Noting patterns in migration towards the higher qualified, the authors continue: "Foreign qualifications have a much lower value in the labour market than domestic ones" but that this appears to be due to the "lower language mastery of some migrants – those who report mastery of the host country's language do not tend to report over qualification in relation to employment."

PLSS Learner Database

To date there have been limited statistical data relating to ESOL learners available at national level. This data, as outlined above, relates mainly to age, education levels and employment status and collection methods presented limit opportunities for data analysis. The Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) National Learner Database has been developed by SOLAS in cooperation with ETBs as part of Strategic Goal Four of the FET Strategy, which is that FET provision will be planned and funded on the basis of objective analysis of needs, and evidence of social and economic impact. The PLSS Learner Database will allow learner records to be collected from application, enrolment and course completion, to course outcomes, progression to further study, employment, unemployment or inactivity. It has been implemented for all FET provision from 2017; current data fields include economic status and social welfare benefits, education and training attainment, ethnic and cultural background. The PLSS Learner Database will provide more accurate data in relation to learners and enable a detailed and robust analysis of participation, programme completion and attainment.

Section Two Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey conducted as part of this review reveals a higher number of ESOL participants than previously reported through ESOL administrative returns: a majority of these participants are of working age and are migrant workers with upper second level education or above. Over fifty percent are unemployed, but the 2016 administrative returns report the proportion of long-term unemployed participants as reducing. Based on Census 2016 data, it is not currently feasible for the ETB ESOL service to respond to the needs of all adult migrants with language difficulties.

Reported levels of language competency on entry vary widely between ETBs, as well as differences in the percentages of ESOL literacy entrants reported. The *2016 ESRI Integration Monitor's* analysis documents the disadvantage experienced by migrants in relation to skill levels due to lack of language proficiency and highlights the need to address the English language skills of the migrant population in Ireland. At present it is not possible to correlate data relating to language competency, education levels and economic status, but the implementation of the PLSS learner data base will facilitate a greatly enhanced level of data analysis relating to ESOL participants.

Recommendations

1. *As previously recommended by both the IVEA and Howarth Reports, additional resources will be required to respond to the language learning needs of a higher proportion of Ireland's migrant population.*
2. *Consideration should be given to the optimal deployment of the PLSS to enable the correlation of data relating to language competency, education levels, ethnic background and economic status.*
3. *Professional development programmes for ETB staff involved in the delivery of ESOL programmes should address the current wide variations in CEFR levels reported in relation to ESOL learners' language competency levels on entry.*
4. *There should be a clear definition of 'ESOL Literacy' devised as part of national guidelines and professional development programmes should address this issue.*

Provision and Curriculum

Introduction

All ETBs provide English language provision for migrants across a range of programmes including adult literacy, BTEI and community education. There is currently no overall national policy or strategy document relating specifically to ESOL provision, although some ETBs have developed internal protocols. Although English language provision is offered across both part-time and full-time ETB programmes, there are no guidelines for provision outside the adult literacy programme.

This section provides information on recruitment and enrolment procedures, features of current ETB ESOL provision patterns, and persistence and progression, based on responses from providers. The issues raised are referenced against evidence from research literature.



Recruitment

Students are recruited from a range of sources: based on survey responses, all 16 ETBs recruit students from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and 15 by word of mouth. 14 ETBs receive ESOL referrals from employers.

Table 12: Recruitment Channels²⁹

Recruitment Channels	No. of ETBs
Referrals from within ETB	14
Links to NGOs and community groups	13
Employers	14
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection	16
Other external agencies	13
Word of mouth	15
Other ³⁰	8

As reported in Section 2, just under 60% of ESOL participants recruited through the Adult Literacy programme were unemployed. ETBs work in close cooperation with local DEASP offices, receiving referrals and providing suitable provision to meet the needs of unemployed migrants.

An interagency framework between the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and ETBs was agreed and circulated in April 2016. The framework allows for cooperation and structured links in relation to services for unemployed people and other socially excluded groups in the context of Pathways to Work. The framework details organisational and local liaison arrangements between the DEASP and ETBs.

The protocol identifies the steps in the course referral process: individuals are to be facilitated to participate in FET programmes that are most appropriate to their needs from the PLSS course calendar. Courses should assist in the removal of barriers which prevent jobseekers' progression into employment or further education and training opportunities.

The protocol specifies that the DEASP should place suitable clients on FET course applicant lists as appropriate, but also takes cognisance of the length of waiting lists, and acknowledges that ETBs should implement appropriate steps around closing course registration where relevant.

The protocol also stipulates that FET course profiles should indicate the appropriate proficiency of English language skills needed and that DEASP Case Officers should adhere to the learner profile eligibility criteria requirements. Where possible, the DEASP should endeavour to ascertain clients' English language competency levels. If language issues are evident, clients should be referred to the appropriate ESOL assessment and learning intervention through the Adult Education Service.

Some providers did report pressure from the DEASP, SEETEC and Turas Nua (who deliver the Jobpath and Welcome to Work employability and skills programmes) to recruit migrants for English language provision, regardless of the availability of places and in some cases these agencies' prioritisation of placement in employment over education had resulted in learners leaving tuition early. It was also reported that some applicants do not take up tuition when clarification is provided on the relatively limited amount of hours available.

A number of ETBs also reported being pressurised by students to provide letters for the DEASP confirming class attendance, as well as those without PPS numbers requesting provision (these requests are generally refused with advice to first attend the local Social Welfare Office to obtain a PPS number, which is needed for enrolment on the PLSS database).

²⁹ Source: ESOL Research Survey

³⁰ Other sources included HSCL coordinators, Department of Justice and Equality and Equality projects, HSE, advertising in local press and social media, Local Area Partnerships, ETB website

Programme Enrolments and Eligibility Criteria

Survey responses indicate that 73% of ESOL students are enrolled through the Adult Literacy programme. 12% are enrolled through BTEI and 6% are enrolled through Community Education.

Table 13: Programme enrolments for ESOL³¹

Programme	Total number of enrolments	% of overall total
Adult Literacy	11,155	73%
ITABE	16	0.1%
Skills for Work	243	1.6%
Community Education	858	5.6%
Back to Education Initiative	1,862	12.3%
Other*	961	6.3%
TOTAL enrolments	15,095	

*PLC, VTOS, Cooperation Hours

ETBs differ in the amount of ESOL provision organised outside the adult literacy programme: the difference varies from 0% to 62%

Table 14: Percentage of ESOL provision organised outside the adult literacy programme³²

ETB	% provision outside the adult literacy programme
Dublin Dun Laoghaire	62%
Waterford Wexford	61%
Limerick Clare	42%
Cork	36%
Dublin City	25%
Tipperary	23%
Kerry	22%
Kildare Wicklow	20%
Mayo Sligo Leitrim	10%
Cavan Monaghan	10%
Kilkenny Carlow	8%
Laois Offaly	8%
Donegal	0%
Galway Roscommon	0%
Louth Meath	0%
Longford Westmeath	0%

³¹ Source: ESOL Research Survey

³² Source: ESOL Research Survey

ETBs with large urban populations (Dublin, Cork, Waterford, and Limerick) offer a significant percentage of ESOL provision through a range of other programmes, mainly BTEI and Community Education. However some rural ETBs also provide significant percentages of provision outside the literacy programme (Tipperary, Kerry).

Based on 2015 ETB administrative returns for both ESOL and Adult Literacy, ETBs also differ as to the overall proportion of ESOL students recruited, relative to enrolments for adult literacy provision. ESOL enrolments as a percentage of combined ESOL and adult literacy enrolments vary from 11% to 36%.³³

14 ETBs prioritise places in ESOL classes based on level of competency in English. The remaining 2 assign places on a first come first served basis. Students are assigned to groups based on initial assessment level in all 16 ETBs, but with 3 ETBs also specifying that mixed ability groups are also used.

Providers reported a wide range of students presenting for tuition, including highly educated applicants and those with low levels of skills and education. It was felt that there is sometimes a difficulty in assessing self-reported education levels. A significant number of practitioners requested further guidance on eligibility criteria for provision, including protocols for referring those who are deemed to fall outside the eligibility criteria included in the Adult Literacy Operational Guidelines, and for asylum seekers.³⁴ This guidance is needed to deal with applicants such as those with high income levels (or their spouses), au pairs and illegal migrants.³⁵ In some cases ESOL admission policies have been developed by individual ETBs. The diversity of eligibility criteria attached to various programmes further complicates the planning and delivery of ESOL provision.

³³ Existing guidelines indicate that decisions on the allocation of hours for ESOL provision should take account of the learning needs of the wider local community, with an appropriate balance maintained between literacy provision and English language provision, reflecting the local population, using the Small Area Population statistics (SAPS) published as part of Census 2011.

³⁴ DES Guidelines 2017: Asylum seekers who do not have an entitlement to work are entitled to free access to adult literacy and English language education. The Department of Education and Skills provides for English language training for adult immigrants (English for Speakers of Other Languages, ESOL) through the adult literacy budget. Some ESOL tuition is also funded through the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) Programme. Refugees coming to Ireland as part of a Resettlement Programme are provided with education services through programmes such as the Adult Literacy and BTEI programmes. In 2015 the decision was taken on a pilot basis to provide students in the asylum protection system with access to the student support scheme to ensure that they could continue their education. Following a review of the scheme last year, a decision was made to continue the scheme for 2016/17. Under the scheme, students in the asylum protection system who meet certain criteria, including completion of the Leaving certificate and at least five academic years in the Irish school system and who have been accepted on an approved Post Leaving Certificate course or on an approved undergraduate course, are eligible to supports under the current Student Grant scheme on the same basis as EU applicants. In addition to the above, on 22 November 2017 the Irish government decided to opt in to the Recast Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU) which set out in law the rights of asylum-seekers while they await a decision on their application. Under the EU directive applicants for asylum can access the labour market no later than nine months from the date when their application for international protection was lodged.

³⁵ Adult Literacy Operational Guidelines: "Providers are requested to focus provision on priority target groups to whom tuition should be offered to a level of functional competency only (A2 on the Common European Framework of References for Languages, or NFQ Level 3). Resources should be focused on the most disadvantaged ESOL learners, who are at risk of social exclusion because of very poor English language skills and who may also have literacy needs. Priority target groups are defined as asylum seekers and low-income EU immigrant or migrant workers and unemployed EU migrants."

Range and Type of Provision

During the consultation process providers emphasised the complexity of the management of ESOL provision. This was due to a number of factors, including high demand, a mobile population in some cases and piecemeal growth with no national guidelines. The diversity of the Irish migrant population as detailed in Section Two indicates that there can be no 'one size fits all' template for ESOL provision. As with overall enrolments, survey responses demonstrate that the number of ESOL tuition and coordination hours, course duration, number of groups and locations varies widely between ETBs. It was emphasised by some that setting realistic objectives with students is challenging and that with increased demand it is a challenge to respond to applicants' expectations within the resources available. A number of ETBs reported on the challenges of managing long waiting lists, with on-going or very regular interview schedules. However others have adopted a policy of 'closed' lists, or of managing referrals through a specific range of agencies. In these cases interviews take place only prior to commencement of new groups, on a termly basis. A variety of provision models is needed to reflect the varied needs of students: most provision takes place during the day, but some ETBs are now providing more evening provision to cater for higher numbers at work.³⁶

14 ETBs provided feedback in relation to the number of paid tutor contact hours. As with enrolments, the number of tuition hours varies widely, with 5 ETBs providing over 5,000 tuition hours during 2015. The average or mean number of hours was 2,900. The number of paid coordination hours recorded varied considerably and calculated as a percentage of total tuition hours for each ETB, the percentage varies from 4% to 41%.

The majority of ETBs provide ESOL tuition of less than 100 hours duration per annum. 13 ETBs provided responses to the question on average duration of provision and this varied widely from 24 to 272 hours. The overall national average, based on responses from 13 ETBs is 80 hours, (60 hours is the median). It was reported that less intensive provision (2-4 hours per week) means that progress is slow. Many ESOL students do not have an opportunity to use English outside class, an issue noted in research reports (Schellekens, 2001).³⁷

50% of ETBs have some, very limited ESOL provision delivered by volunteer tutors, but their use would appear to be the exception rather than the rule. Criteria for assigning volunteers related mainly to addressing the learning needs of students with basic literacy issues.

The percentage of accredited provision also varies widely, ranging from 0% to 100%. Accreditation is discussed in more detail in Section Four.

Adult Refugee Programme

Currently adult programme refugees have access to an initial 8 week language training and orientation programme in a number of ETBs for a period of 8 weeks under the resettlement strand of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. Following resettlement in the community, a full language and training programme is put in place by the ETB for up to 20 hours per week, for a period of one year. It was noted that unlike the former Adult Refugee Programme, there is currently no support at national level for ETBs offering language provision as part of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. One ETB reported that there is particular difficulty for those refugee learners progressing from a 12 month intensive programme to provision of only two hours weekly.

³⁶ In Glasgow where unmet demand has been consistently high, a unique system has been developed where all partner providers are using a Single Access Register to record any new people looking to access ESOL courses within the city. Education Scotland's 2015-6 Impact Report provides an analysis of the main reasons for 'unmet demand': as well as lack of capacity these include provision timetables, class levels and location.

³⁷ Failte Isteach is a community project organised by Third Age, involving predominantly older volunteers offering migrants conversational English classes which take place in many locations throughout Ireland. The Council of Europe has published a document on the use of volunteers to assist migrants' language skills (Krumm 2017). The document stresses that while volunteers may play a vital role in assisting migrants, their task is not to try and replicate the role of a trained language teacher and undertake formal teaching.

Duration of Provision

Despite the short duration of much ESOL provision, there is a welcome trend towards the provision of more intensive tuition away from the norm of 2-4 hours per week, and it was felt that the revised Adult Literacy Guidelines in 2013 had provided a remit to make changes in this regard. The SOLAS 2015 FARR return notes 6 ETBs who were increasing intensive provision to facilitate ESOL students' progression to higher level FET courses, or as a response to requests from the DEASP. It was noted that intensive provision is also important for students at lower levels. Some ETBs now provide at least 6 hours per week, with specific groups receiving up to 10 hours over a short time frame. However, a number of requests were made for guidelines on appropriate tuition models, particularly with regard to more intensive tuition for students progressing to higher level courses, with some ETBs reporting that they did not have sufficient funding to deliver more intensive provision and that a replica 'ITABE' model for ESOL should be established. Specific initiatives include collaboration with training services to offer more intensive, vocationally focused programmes incorporating employability skills.

In 2008 the Howarth Report recommended a figure of 200 hours tuition over a period of one year to reach A2 competence on the CEFR. However as detailed in Section One, the research that does exist indicates that in general much longer tuition times are needed to achieve progress in terms of language competency, and the length of time varies for individual learners. The average Irish tuition model compares poorly with provision offered in other EU Member States (600 hours in Germany and the Netherlands for example). Modular programmes could provide an opportunity to offer learners access to increased amounts of tuition, while allowing for a range of programme types adjusted to learners' needs.

Curriculum Development and Technology-Enhanced Learning

10 ETBs gave responses in the survey in relation to their ESOL curriculum. The main curriculum sources were cited as English language textbooks and materials, as well as award specifications and the UK Skills for Life curriculum. The text books used are generally published by internationally recognised language teaching companies and organisations, including the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge; these syllabi are benchmarked against the CEFR and it was felt that they provide clarity on structure.

While two respondents said that they had designed their own in-house curriculum, many practitioners highlighted the lack of any Irish ESOL curriculum framework as a considerable impediment to effective practice. It was felt that a common curricular framework would deliver consistency in relation to the CEFR, setting out key skills and competences, as well as supporting appropriate assessment and accreditation. As the migrant population is reported by practitioners as relatively mobile, a common framework would also facilitate learning and persistence if learners moved from one ETB to another. Learners and learning contexts differ widely, so a series of templates relevant to these different contexts (vocational, family, community) and referenced to the CEFR bands would be most appropriate.

A curriculum framework would be enhanced by blended learning and e-learning to support classroom tuition. 13 ETBs incorporate ICT into ESOL provision and 3 ETBs answered that ICT was not used as part of provision. In 2016 SOLAS published a strategy for Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) in Further Education and Training (2016-2019). The Strategy aims to build on existing capacity and good practice, as well as expanding access to FET for those who need flexible learning opportunities.

A research report conducted for the European Commission (Driessen et al 2011) concluded that ICT has significant potential for second language acquisition which has not yet been exploited. With such technologies, learners are not restricted to classroom tuition and can follow personalised learning paths, with opportunities for repetition if materials are relevant and stimulating. The report recommended the establishment of more clearly stated and coordinated policies in the area of ICT for adult second language acquisition. An Irish research report on blended learning also concluded that ICT provided an opportunity to extend learning time outside the classroom and offered an

accessible resource to learners at convenient times (NALA 2014). The actions outlined in the SOLAS TEL Strategy will potentially be of benefit to ESOL pedagogy and curriculum development, as well as expanding learners' access to provision.³⁸ As learning contexts in Further Education and Training differ widely, nationally emerging ESOL curricula should take account of the fact that provision may take place in community settings without access to technology or Wi-Fi.

Work Related Provision

The lack of effective English skills is an important obstacle for migrants accessing the labour market or progressing within it. Work-focused provision is needed for the unemployed, focussing on employability, but evidence from research literature as well as that presented by ETB providers indicates that workplace based ESOL for those already in work is also needed.

The National Skills Strategy (2016) emphasised the importance of the FET sector being sufficiently responsive to the needs of employers and individuals, and ensuring that provision is geared towards courses that provide successful outcomes for learners. An OECD 2017 study of integration of refugees into the German Labour Market highlighted an employer survey which found that half of all participating employers require good German language skills for even low-skilled jobs. Other reports have also documented that language proficiency of the host country is the factor that most determines labour market participation and the type of employment accessed by migrants.³⁹

De Cuyper and Garibay (2013) found a clear link between language proficiency and labour market position but concluded that there was no automatic link between language courses and integration to the labour market. They highlighted the importance of developing language learning opportunities outside traditional classrooms.

A research review of workplace ESOL (Roberts, 2003) outlined a number of benefits for both workers and employers. These included increased employment opportunities and language skills, cost savings and more flexibility. However Roberts' review also summarised other research which shows that more English does not usually lead to better jobs since these usually require much higher levels of education.

Bradell and Sjösvärd (2017) in a study of the care sector in Sweden found that work itself offered no guarantee of language learning, but could provide opportunities for language development and presented the best learning option for some migrants. The project studied used non-formal and informal learning, embedded into workplace routines and requiring no external funding. Engagement from managers was found to be key to individual progress.

ESOL provision which contains content relating to employability skills is particularly appropriate for long-term unemployed migrants: for these learners language is one element to be addressed to enable them to successfully enter employment. However short-term solutions which prioritise work placement over attainment of language competency are counterproductive: programmes should be holistic and allow for progression and attainment of certified outcomes. Elements of such programmes should include occupational English language, ICT, employability skills, and advice and guidance. There is potential for development of national templates for such courses under any initiatives taken in relation to an ESOL curriculum framework. Existing good practice in ETBs relating to employability skills should be documented and disseminated.

Currently there are some opportunities for the provision of workplace education for migrants through the Skills for Work programme, a national initiative aimed at providing training opportunities to help employees deal with the basic skills demands of the workplace. The initiative is delivered by ETBs across the country. The aim is not to duplicate other ETB ESOL provision and courses include Workplace Language Support Courses,

³⁸ The TEL Strategy consultation process identified four interconnected areas for development: programme design, learning content, continuous professional development and the technology infrastructure. ETBs are benchmarking their existing TEL practices against identified good practice in order to develop individual action plans (SOLAS, 2017, FET Services Plan).

³⁹ See Schellekens 2001, Bloch, 2002, Tanay and Peschner 2016

with a focus on improving employees' communication skills. The courses are themed to workplace vocabulary and material relevant to the specific sector, and include listening and speaking as well as reading and writing. The programme is offered on company premises where possible. Programmes are delivered in three phases with up to 98 hours tuition in total. Participants may be released from work to participate, or in some cases employees are released for 50% of course time. Courses have been delivered in the pharmaceutical, horticultural and food sectors and it is planned to develop provision for the retail sector. The overall course duration is short and it is not feasible to expect that migrants will progress their language competency levels to any substantial degree in this timeframe. However it is also acknowledged that workplace provision presents challenges in relation to employers' willingness and ability to release employees for substantial periods of time.

Following the conclusion of the consultation process relating to the National Training Fund, consideration could be given to increasing allocations for workplace ESOL training.

Social Inclusion

A number of survey respondents stressed that ESOL is important for social integration at a broader level and should not be solely labour market driven. The literature underlines that language skills are essential to enable migrants to find employment, but also to access public services, make informed choices, understand their rights and responsibilities and participate as citizens in the life of their communities.⁴⁰ Research undertaken for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found a strong correlation between English language skills and positive attitudes to the indigenous population and low levels of discrimination (Robinson and Reeve 2006). Doyle (2016) describes an interesting approach to Irish ESOL provision that involves language learning inside and outside the classroom, as well as collaboration and cooperation with Irish learners: this enables students to access the language skills and confidence needed to become more involved in their local communities.

A Council of Europe report on language integration policies concluded that "approaches which separate language classes from the other dimensions of integration are far less likely to succeed than integrated approaches that embed language learning in the workplace, or some other participatory context, ensuring that the language of the host society is part of the linguistic repertoire that the adult migrant deploys in daily life" (Council of Europe, 2014).

A survey conducted as part of research undertaken by the Immigrant Council of Ireland (O'Connor, A. and Ciribuco, A., 2017) provides an insight into the attitudes of a sample of migrants with respect to English language learning. Those migrants interviewed as part of the survey considered learning English as open-ended: most reported having learnt English at school in their country of birth or as adults in English language provision in Ireland. Some respondents felt that the "real" English was learned through continuous contact with members of Irish society, and that they considered this process to be ongoing. Informal learning of the language through watching movies, television, listening to music, reading books / newspapers, taking internet classes via Skype speaking with Irish friends were also mentioned by respondents, along with working in a place where everyone was using English.

The report recommended the provision of English language classes for all levels and in all educational contexts, with regular spending reviews and that attention should be paid to how language provision in Ireland is perceived by migrants and how services need to evolve. The report also recommended that community language initiatives such as Fáilte Isteach should be encouraged and expanded.

Increased demand from Home School Community Liaison Coordinators for ESOL focused family learning programmes was noted in Section Two. Such programmes targeting parents whose first language is not English offer another opportunity for ETBs to recruit adults who might not otherwise avail of provision.

⁴⁰ NIACE, 2006, McNair, 2009

Programme Evaluation

All 16 ETBs have systems in place for the evaluation of ESOL provision: in some cases processes relate exclusively to Quality Assurance Frameworks, in other cases specific procedures relating to ESOL are in place. These processes include mid and end of course evaluations, as well as annual reviews. Provision is evaluated in relation to inputs, certification rates and progression. In some cases, ESOL coordinators identify and respond to CPD needs in the context of specific ESOL policies. A minority of ETBs have conducted internal ESOL reviews resulting in written policies.

Persistence and Progression

Erratic attendance and drop out were mentioned at several consultation meetings. Moving away and changes in seasonal employment patterns were given as two reasons for learners leaving provision. However, providers also noted the emergence of more stable communities, with children settled in schools and grandparents joining families. Some ETBs have developed attendance protocols.

The issue of persistence is discussed in the literature (Kambouri 1996). This research report conducted for the Basic Skills Agency in London found that "there was a high level of student movement to and from classes in ESOL programmes. Approximately a quarter of students in any one year dropped out. Drop out included students who moved from the area, who left for personal reasons and who were dissatisfied with provision. Drop out from non-intensive courses was greater than from intensive courses." The research reported that more students from intensive courses reached their goals than those from non-intensive courses. 38% of students in intensive courses reported reaching the desired level of progress compared to 14% of those in non-intensive courses. Based on this evidence, more intensive modular courses should be used to increase motivation to achieve and complete programmes.

Providers reported the main progression routes for ESOL students were to other ETB programmes, with the majority progressing to BTEI, VTOS and PLC programmes. 6 ETBs reported progression to fee paying ESOL provision but none reported progression to private language schools. Other progression routes included third level, the adult literacy programme, employment, and other ESOL providers grant aided by ETB. 1 ETB specified that QQI Level 3 ESOL award is a minimum requirement for participation on other ETB courses.

Table 15: Progression routes⁴¹

Progression Routes	No. of ETBs
BTEI	14
VTOS	14
PLC	12
Fee paying ESOL provision	6
Private language school provision	0
Other	8

The PLSS Learner database will facilitate the tracking of ESOL learners to establish a more accurate picture of programme outcomes. The *SOLAS Strategic Pilot Initiative Report (2017)* gives details of a feasibility test to investigate outcomes 12 months after course completion. Outcomes were measured in relation to welfare benefit claims, employment or enrolments in further education and training, using data sets from the Central Statistics Office. The success of the feasibility test indicates the possibility of accurate tracking of all learners, including ESOL learners.

⁴¹ Source: ESOL Research Survey

Integrated Provision

ETB staff emphasised that language students should be offered an opportunity to integrate with other FET provision for broader learning opportunities and many ESOL students are very motivated to move into these courses. However, concern was expressed at a number of meetings in relation to recruitment of migrants for other ETB programmes, including those at NFQ Level 5, with no or inadequate assessment of language competency levels. Some ETBs provide vocational programmes at NFQ Level 5 with separate ESOL support, but it was emphasised by some that language competency levels should be higher than the subject level. Some feedback indicated that B2 on the CEFR should be seen as the minimum requirement for entry into full-time Level 4 and 5 courses. Guidelines exist in relation to higher education and foundation programmes for international students, but there are currently none for entry to further education programmes.⁴²

The importance of offering integrated ESOL opportunities is illustrated in a report conducted on behalf of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills in London (Cerqua and Urwin 2016). An analysis of labour market returns from 2002-2012 for individuals achieving qualifications at Level 2 (Irish NFQ Level 4 equivalent), and below in English and Maths, including ESOL, was undertaken using further education individual learner data and a longitudinal study by the Department of Work and Pensions. The authors analysed earnings, employment probability and the probability of being on active benefits for students achieving their learning aim, relative to those who had the same learning aim but did not achieve.

Level One (Irish NFQ Level 3 equivalent) ESOL qualifications, when studied alongside higher level vocational qualifications, produced significant earnings benefits for achievers. There were also statistically significant impacts and earnings returns for ESOL learners who achieved qualifications at Entry Level (Irish NFQ Levels 1 and 2 equivalent), and Levels One and Two (Irish NFQ Levels 3 and 4 equivalent). This research illustrates the crucial importance of providing structured English language supports for migrants within vocational programmes, as well as the need to put in place policy frameworks to enable learners to persist and succeed.

Integrating or embedding ESOL with vocational courses could be an effective and motivating approach to responding to the needs of those seeking work. It would appear that this approach is still underdeveloped in Ireland and criteria should be developed for entry to such courses. Training for teachers of vocational subjects should be enhanced. Research (Roberts et al 2005) indicates that the most effective means of ensuring that language needs are effectively addressed is the involvement of a specialist language teacher in supporting design and delivery of language support. SOLAS commissioned research on integrating literacy may shed further light on this topic. Also relevant is the temporary interim measure for access to the labour market, which the Irish Government introduced on February 9th 2018. This temporary interim measure refers to the possibility of access to FET programmes, with an employment, vocational or workplace-training component, for eligible international protection applicants.

⁴² QQI Awards Standards for Pre-Higher Education Foundation Awards for International Students (2015). "The minimum expected language learning **outcome** on the Level 5 Specific Purpose Certificate in International Foundation Studies is CEFR B2+." "This is the level of language competence that is generally considered to be the **minimum** requirement for success (all other things being equal) in a higher education programme." B2+ is the minimum expected level of English language competence for learners completing foundation programmes, not the required level of English for entry to such programmes."

Strategic Planning

There has been very limited guidance provided to ETBs in relation to the range and type of ESOL provision they offer; this relates mainly to the levels to which language provision should be provided. An application process for the planning and funding and reporting of all ETB Further Education programmes (Funding Allocations Requests and Reporting system - FARR), which includes quantitative, qualitative and financial data was introduced by SOLAS in 2015. The FARR system is now integrated with the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS). Data available through the FARR database is collated and presented in the annual FET Services Plan and includes overviews of inputs, outputs and outcomes for FET learners. The 2018 Planning and Funding Parameters for ETBs include a requirement to identify and set out local and regional targets, in support of national targets set out for the FET sector. Planning and Funding Parameters also require ETBs to take account of national skills and employment policies and local development and community plans. The process will facilitate a more strategic planning approach to ESOL provision which also takes account of the learning needs of the broader local community. Strategic planning at local ETB level should also have regard for all ESOL provision in the local area, including that offered by community providers.

Section Three Conclusions and Recommendations

ESOL learners are recruited from a range of sources, with all ETBs receiving referrals from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Currently ESOL provision is offered through a range of ETB programmes and is of relatively short duration, but there is a trend towards more intensive models. There are only limited guidelines in relation to provision models, eligibility criteria and priority target groups. There are currently no curricular frameworks to support teaching and learning in English language education in Ireland and there is potential to further develop integrated language provision with mainstream vocational programmes and in the workplace. Policy initiatives and guidelines in relation to ESOL provision and curriculum should be accompanied by the development of a designated ESOL framework in all ETBs, incorporating all existing provision.

Recommendations

- 1. There is a need for a designated ESOL framework in each ETB, incorporating all existing provision and managed and coordinated across the ETB. More detailed guidelines on provision models, eligibility criteria and priority target groups, as well as guidance on coordination hours should be devised at national level, for application in all ETBs.*
- 2. A variety of provision models is needed to reflect the varied needs of students and programmes should be developed in modular format. Research demonstrates that more intensive programmes are associated with better outcomes and provision should meet minimum duration criteria of at least 200 hours per year.*
- 3. As a general rule, places in ESOL classes should be allocated based on level of competency in English, with priority to applicants below level A2 on the CEFR. However a proportion of tuition hours should be dedicated to more intensive provision to facilitate students' progression to other FET programmes.*
- 4. Eligibility criteria for all ESOL provision should be clarified: asylum seekers, low-income EU immigrant or migrant workers and unemployed EU migrants should be prioritised, but guidelines in relation to learners applying for higher level provision needed to access mainstream FET courses should also be provided.*
- 5. Strategic planning for ESOL at local ETB level should take account of national skills and employment policies, as well as local development and community plans.*

6. *Vocational ESOL programmes with a focus on employment skills should also allow for progression to mainstream FET courses and attainment of certified outcomes. ETBs should also provide programmes that meet social inclusion objectives, including family learning and community focused provision. Blended learning and e-learning should be used to support classroom provision.*
7. *A national ETB ESOL policy should address issues relating to the development of a curriculum framework which should include effective models relating to learning for vocational, family and community contexts and contain approaches using ICT. The curriculum support process should also address full-time provision for programme refugees.*
8. *Guidelines relating to minimum levels of language competence needed for entry to both part-time and full-time FET provision should be developed. FET course profiles and enrolment criteria should indicate the appropriate English language proficiency, so that there is standardised access to all FET provision across all ETBs.*
9. *Consideration should be given to increasing allocations for workplace ESOL provision as part of any future initiatives around workforce development.*
10. *Approaches to the integration of ESOL provision into part-time and full-time FET programmes should be developed: any initiatives should take account of the outcomes of the current research project on integrating literacy.*

Assessment and Accreditation

Introduction

It is generally accepted that there are three stages to assessment in the teaching and learning cycle: initial, formative and summative. This section deals primarily with issues raised in relation to initial and summative assessment or accreditation.

There are currently no standardised initial assessment systems for ETB ESOL learners. A number of reports have signalled the need for change in relation to both initial assessment and accreditation. The Howarth report noted that "Language competence testing approaches within jurisdictions are generally standardised to maintain the integrity of the system." Other reports (IVEA 2008) have emphasised the need for appropriate assessment to ensure effective service delivery. The DES Adult Literacy Review (2013) drew attention to the need for standardised and appropriate assessment techniques, which would take into account international best practice in language teaching and draw on the CEFR. Finally the FET Strategy (2014) recommended the assessment of language competency on entry of ESOL learners to ETB provision.



Survey Responses on ESOL Initial Assessment

Survey and consultation responses indicate current assessment practices in ETBs vary: both informal and formal approaches to assessment are used, as well as a wide variety of tools. 13 ETBs always assess ESOL learners on entry; in the remaining 3 ETBs, learners are assessed in the majority of cases. A number of ETBs have developed 'in-house' assessment systems, based on a variety of published resources: these are listed in the table below. 2 ETBs still use an informal approach to assessment, whereas a formal approach is used in some cases in the remaining 14.

A variety of approaches may also be used within one ETB, reflecting different practices in former VECs but also reflecting the type of enrolment event. Some ETBs carry out standardised assessments at advertised enrolment days. 'Drop in' enrolments may be conducted in a more informal manner.

Informal approaches may encompass:

- An interview with graded visual, reading, and writing tasks; the student's ability to progress through the specified task indicates their level.
- A brief interview with completion of the registration form, which provides an indication of language and/or literacy level.
- Open conversation.
- Use of the registration form as a basis for conversation to ascertain level of engagement, willingness to participate and conversational competence.
- Participants are given reading and writing tasks in accordance with level detected through initial conversation.

Formal approaches were reported as follows:

- Course applicants are given graded assessments linked to the CEFR according to their language ability.
- Some assessment tools are designed In-house. In all cases these tools are aligned to the CEFR. The skills assessed would appear to vary: in some cases listening and speaking, reading comprehension and writing are assessed. In other cases only reading, writing and spelling are assessed.
- In one case the in-house tool is used for screening only.

Table 16: Published ESOL Assessment tools used by ETBs⁴³

Name of tool	Number of ETBs
Oxford Quick Placement Test	6
UK ESOL Skills for Life Assessment Tool	2
BKSB On Line Assessment	3 (1 pilot)
ESOL Scotland Assessment Framework	3
Straightforward Quick Placement and Diagnostic Test	1
EDEXCEL ESOL Assessment	1
English Jet On Line Test	1

In addition to language assessments, some ETBs are in the process of developing interview material and entry criteria for subject specific courses such as Healthcare, Childcare, and Business Studies.

Assessments are carried out by ESOL coordinators, Adult Literacy Organisers, tutors and resource workers:

⁴³ Source: ESOL Research Survey

Table 17: ESOL Assessment – Staffing⁴⁴

Staff Member	Number of responses
ALO	10
ESOL Coordinator	10
Tutor/Resource Worker	14
Other (please specify)	3

15 ETBs reference assessment outcomes against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: 5 of these ETBs also reference assessment outcomes against the NFQ. 1 ETB only references assessment outcomes against the NFQ.

Formative Assessment

Given the time and resource constraints placed on ETB ESOL providers, formative assessment assumes an important role in the teaching and learning cycle. All ETBs have structured formative assessment processes in place. In some cases the preparation for formal external accreditation and awards is used as a framework. In others, formative assessment is integrated into the teaching and learning process through verbal and written feedback. Tutor assignments, portfolio creation, structured exercises and role play are also used, with feedback given to learners. However, these practices may not be standardised across the ETB.

Initial Assessment Issues Raised during Consultation Process

Providers strongly emphasised the need for more standardised approaches in relation to initial and formative assessment for ESOL. The need for a new tool was raised by a number of respondents, with most focus placed on the need for guidance on best practice. It was stressed that as the ESOL student population is very mobile, there needs to be coordination and consistency across the country. It was felt that the CEFR may not be consistently understood across the ETB sector and a professional development process in relation to its application to assessment practice is most urgent: such a process would ensure that there are common understandings of levels: with such a heterogeneous student cohort, assessment is crucial for identifying learning needs and appropriate placement of learners. This professional development process was considered to be more important than the development of a "one size fits all" tool by a majority of those consulted.

ETBs differ in their focus on the skills of speaking and listening, reading and writing. While there was consensus that ideally all four skills should be assessed, in some cases the focus is on assessment of speaking and writing only, because of time constraints and staffing limitations, particularly at the beginning of terms. It was emphasised that more complex assessment processes require dedicated staffing and resources. Practice also varies in relation to the frequency with which assessment is carried out: in some cases this is once per term only. In other cases assessment is carried out every month, or weekly or even 'on demand'. It was also suggested that there was a need for a national template for student registration that can be adapted to local needs.

Initial assessment should provide a broad picture of learners' existing skills to enable appropriate placement in provision. The Council of Europe (2014) suggests that language providers should take care that tasks used for initial or formative assessments are valid and reliable. While the majority of ETBs referenced the CEFR in their responses, not all the published tools listed above are clearly referenced against this framework. For example, the primary reference for levels or standards in both the UK Skills for Life Assessment Tool and the BKSB tool are the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy (which also include listening and speaking skills), used in England and Wales from Entry Level to Level 2.

⁴⁴ Source: as above

In contrast, the Scottish ESOL Assessment Pack relates outcomes of the initial assessment tasks to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) ESOL levels, which are derived from the CEFR. The Oxford Quick Placement Test is also clearly aligned to the CEFR.

Schellekens (2011) queries English government policy regarding the use of a single framework to accredit English Language skills of both native speakers and migrants. Her criticism is based on research on language learning and teaching methodology.⁴⁵ Schellekens demonstrates that the English national standards and curriculum do not adequately reflect the learning trajectory of second language speakers and concludes that skills of vocabulary, grammar and lexical segmentation are affected. "Their claim to validity for second language speakers, i.e. that test scores give an accurate reflection of the candidates' true level of language skills, really is problematic." Schellekens also queries the reliability of such assessments and advocates the development of standards and assessments that do reflect the learning trajectory of second language speakers and which promote effective learning.

A review of the most commonly used assessment tools in ETBs was conducted and this is detailed in Appendix Two. It is considered that the most pressing need in relation to assessment is not the development of a new tool, but the implementation of a professional development process, whereby ETB ESOL practitioners are given the opportunity to review assessment procedures and outcomes, based on tasks developed to conform to CEFR descriptors. This process could then facilitate the development of national protocols for ESOL initial assessment to be adopted by all ETBs.

Accreditation

In Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe, there is growing emphasis on learning outcomes leading to formal, external awards. The FET Strategy emphasises the importance of providing learners with accredited outcomes to programmes: qualifications provide affirmation and recognition of added value and progression. They are important for ESOL learners, because they may provide proof of language competency to potential employers and further and higher education providers. Many providers commented on the importance to learners of gaining awards, but there was little evidence presented that the current QQI awards in English as a Second Language (ESL) have any currency or recognition outside the ETB sector. This view was presented strongly at all consultation meetings.

Accreditation data from survey

All 16 ETBs provide accreditation through QQI and 12 ETBs assess gains in language proficiency at the end of all ESOL courses. 3 ETBs also use Cambridge exams and 2 provide access to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

12 ETBs provided data in relation to the numbers of ESOL learners who achieved certification in 2015. A total of 3,192 participants were recorded as having achieved certification which represents 21% of the total cohort of 15,095. However the median is 16%. Furthermore, the level of certification achieved, expressed as a percentage of total enrolments reported in the survey varied widely between the 12 ETBs, from 0% to 67%.

QQI data on awards achieved in English as a Second Language in ETB centres in 2015 showed that a total of 2,143 awards were achieved, of which 1,181 were at Level 3, with 625 at level 4, a further 316 awards at level 5 and 21 at level 6. QQI data shows that the number of ESOL awards achieved in individual ETBs in 2015 differed substantially, from a total of 6 to 603.

As not all ETBs gave responses to the question on accreditation as part of the survey it is not possible to compare ETB data with that obtained from QQI. However the apparent discrepancy may be explained by the fact that ESOL students are also entered for Communications awards at Level 2, ICT at Levels 2 and 3, as well as Junior and Leaving Certificate exams. Currently low levels of accreditation may refer to the lack of suitability of the existing awards.

⁴⁵ While one set of standards was created to cover literacy and communication skills of both native English and second language speakers, they are underpinned by separate curricula.

Accreditation Issues Raised during Consultation Process

The majority of practitioners view internationally recognised English Language exams such as Cambridge as having a higher status, as they are felt to reflect the learning needs of language students more accurately than national awards accredited through QQI. However ETBs reported that they are not able to access these international examinations for cost reasons.

In terms of ESOL, QQI's role is to set award standards and validate programmes. QQI is in the process of reviewing a range of award standards, to include those related to languages including ESOL. In parallel, QQI is currently researching the potential linkages if any, between the CEFR and the National Qualifications Framework, with the objective of better supporting providers in the development and delivery of language programmes.

Providers reported dissatisfaction with the current QQI Awards in English as a Second Language, despite the validation of programmes written and adapted to the needs of ESOL learners by the Further Education Support Service and individual ETBs. In general terms the awards were deemed as 'unfit for purpose' and requests were made by representatives from the large majority of ETBs for new awards which would be clearly aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference proficiency bands. Many expressed frustration at the lack of progress in the review of QQI ESOL awards. Specific points raised were as follows:

- The overall suitability of the awards: awards are identical for all languages and providers considered that the learning outcomes demonstrate that they were designed as an award for those undertaking a hobby course as a visitor or tourist, rather than needing the language for navigating everyday life as a resident of that country. Alternative awards offered by Cambridge (Cambridge English: Key (KET) at A2 level or Cambridge English Preliminary (PET) at B1) were considered far more appropriate. One ETB has developed its own internal replacement because of the prohibitive costs relating to Cambridge exams: these internal exams are used as milestones to encourage progression. City and Guilds language exams were also suggested as an alternative to QQI awards.
- Alignment to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: practitioners requested clarity in relation to the alignment or mapping of the Common European Framework to the National Framework of Qualifications.⁴⁶ As language specifications in the awards are neither clearly defined nor explicitly aligned to the CEFR it was felt that this creates confusion amongst learners, tutors and employers as no one is sure to which language levels the QQI awards equate. Employers and higher education providers do not recognise QQI language awards to the same extent as they recognise international awards such as those from Cambridge or IELTS. Most ETBs now recruit tutors with CELTA qualifications or equivalent, and this qualification uses the CEFR extensively in its training and makes no reference to the NFQ. It was reported that this results in difficulties in informing students, standardising courses and determining the levels of English required to progress to other Further Education and Training courses; language teachers, and ETBs as a whole, should know what language (functions, grammar) needs to be mastered at each level. Finally, students need to be informed of the exact level of their course and their own English level.
- Availability of awards for beginner students: there are no English as a Second Language awards at Levels 1 and 2. In some instances Level 2 awards in reading and writing, as well as listening and speaking, have been adapted for ESOL students. While it was felt that the awards in reading and writing are not inappropriate, some of the learning outcomes for listening and speaking are too advanced for ESOL learners. It was felt that new awards at Level 1 and 2 that are appropriate for language learners should be devised.

⁴⁶ In making recommendations for state funding of English Language Tuition in 2008, the Howarth Review suggested an alignment of the NFQ to CEFR: "ELT up to A2 level of competence (equivalent to FETAC Level 3) should be state funded." This was subsequently used to set a benchmark in the Adult Literacy Guidelines issued by the DES in 2013. However, other jurisdictions have benchmarked the CEFR against varying levels of their own qualifications frameworks.

- Learning Outcomes at Levels 3 and 4: Level 3 and Level 4 awards are very similar in terms of general learning outcomes and the wording of the Learning Outcomes (and therefore the indicative standard) at Level 3 and Level 4 are not discernibly different enough from each other to suggest a clear progression, nor are they robust enough to indicate the necessary functional and grammatical language to support the learning outcomes. There is however a clear difference between Level 3 and 4 in terms of the assessment tasks.
- Assessment Techniques: it was felt that the skills demonstration at Level 3 involves generally formulaic transactional dialogues and this creates difficulties for progression to Level 4. Some submissions stressed that the current assessment techniques involving portfolio preparation and skills demonstration are inappropriate for language learning and should be replaced by formal proficiency tests. Other submissions noted that it is possible for language students to gain accreditation through QQI and be accepted on a FET course without ever having done a listening test.
- Mixed ability levels: the award structure and specified learning outcomes do not take into account that migrant language learners quite often have different levels of ability in their receptive as against their productive skills, or in communicative ability compared to accuracy. It was felt there was a need for a suite of awards (e.g. speaking and listening, reading, writing) from Level 2 upwards which would cater for such 'spiky' profiles, while allowing those with a more even distribution of skills the possibility of following a course which integrated the modules. A modular approach might also overcome the challenge of delivering a course leading to certification when the number of course hours are limited, e.g. for non-intensive courses delivered on a 3-4 hour per week basis over the 33 week academic year. This approach would also allow those learners who move to new locations to gain certification rather than abandoning a course half way through.
- Continuous Professional Development: it was felt that there is a need for training in relation to awards standards and assessment of folders.

Section Four Conclusions and Recommendations

Approaches to initial assessment for ESOL learners vary: Most, though not all, ETBs always assess ESOL learners on entry and in some cases informal approaches are used. Not all assessment tools used are referenced against the CEFR. It is considered that the most pressing need is not the development of a new tool, but the implementation of a professional development process, whereby ETB ESOL practitioners are given the opportunity to review assessment procedures and outcomes, based on tasks developed to conform to CEFR descriptors. This would enhance understanding of CEFR levels and ensure a uniformity of approach across the country. In relation to accreditation, providers urgently requested new awards that would reflect CEFR levels and meet students' needs more appropriately.

Recommendations

1. *The development of a new assessment tool is not recommended at this point.*
2. *All ETBs should put in place a structured process for formal assessment of language competency when learners enter provision.*
3. *A structured professional development programme on assessment should be initiated for all ETBs with reference to assessment tools that clearly reference the CEFR. Assessment procedures and outcomes should be reviewed, based on tasks developed to conform to CEFR descriptors.*
4. *National protocols for ESOL initial assessment should be developed: assessment procedures and outcomes should be reviewed, based on tasks which conform to CEFR descriptors.*
5. *The review of the English as a Second Language award at Level 3 is welcome and should be expedited. Possible equivalencies between the NFQ and the CEFR should be explored and new awards that assess learners' levels of competence with reference to the CEFR, as well as the NFQ, should be developed by QQI in collaboration with English language practitioners.*

Staffing

Introduction

Research points to the crucial importance of a suitably trained workforce for publicly funded English language provision. The “ESOL Effective Practice Study” conducted as part of the UK Government’s Skills for Life Strategy observed and analysed 40 ESOL classes comprising a cohort of approximately 500 students. The researchers concluded that teacher expertise and vision were the most important resources for effective ESOL practice and both initial teacher training and CPD needed to reflect this by putting teaching and learning processes at the heart of teacher education policy development. (Baynham et al 2007). This finding is reflected in the report’s recommendations: “Our study shows that there is therefore no magic bullet for effective ESOL practice. The major resource that can make or hinder the most promising methodology or initiative is the expertise and professionalism of ESOL teachers. This professionalism draws on both subject and subject-teaching knowledge and CPD that encourages an interpretive and reflective stance on teaching and learning.” Cooke and Simpson (2008) also stress the importance of ESOL teachers being grounded in research and practice in relation to second language acquisition.



The SOLAS Professional Development Strategy 2017-19 aims to build on existing good practice in relation to CPD and to develop a professional development framework for ETBs, reflecting the link made in the overarching FET Strategy (2014-2019), between professional development and the quality of education and training provided. A consultation process with practitioners as part of the Professional Development Strategy's preparation reported high levels of participation and engagement with professional development activities, but also clear evidence of wide-ranging development needs and of significant barriers to accessing sufficient and appropriate professional development opportunities. Barriers cited included cost, location, working patterns and lack of availability. Evidence also pointed to the fact that much of current CPD activity was self-directed and reactive to day to day operational circumstances. The strategy lays out a framework for national structures to ensure that such activities are coordinated, quality assured and strategically focused.

A national steering group to oversee strategic oversight of developments has been established as part of the Professional Development Strategy and a number of priority development areas identified. These include working with and supporting FET learners, vocational upskilling and reskilling, employer engagement, quality assurance, technology enhanced learning, information and communications technology and leadership and management development. All of these priority areas are potentially relevant to ESOL practitioners.

Current ESOL Staffing Levels in ETBs

Table 18: ETB ESOL Teaching Staff⁴⁷

Full time Staff	Part time staff
22	334

Survey responses indicate that 4 ETBs have ESOL tutors working on a full-time basis: 22 staff in total, of whom 16 work in 1 ETB. These 16 staff includes 2 from Cooperation Hours (a legacy project) and 14 employed in Colleges of Further Education. However it is not clear from the response if these 14 staff provide ESOL tuition on a full-time basis. There were 334 part-time staff reported across all 16 ETBs.

Table 19: ESOL Coordination in ETBs⁴⁸

Coordination responsibility	Full time	Part time
ESOL coordinator	3	3
ALO with ESOL responsibility	2	9

8 ETBs reported that they had a separate ESOL coordinator who may or may not report to the ALO; in two of these ETBs, the full-time ESOL coordination post was held by an Adult Literacy Organiser. In the remaining 8, the Adult Literacy Organiser carried out coordination work for ESOL, in addition to other duties. 5 ETBs said that the ESOL coordinator worked on a full-time basis.

In some ETBs where the ALO is reported as having overall responsibility for ESOL, it would appear that there are also resource workers with designated coordination hours.

⁴⁷ Source: ESOL Research Survey

⁴⁸ Source: as above

Staff Qualifications

10 ETBs require staff to hold degree plus an ACELS/DES recognised qualification in English Language Teaching such as CELT or CELTA. 4 require a range of other English language teaching qualifications, including WIT modules and TEFL or TESOL certificates and 2 ETBs did not name specific requirements.

ACELS

The Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services (ACELS)⁴⁹ requirements for teaching English in the recognised English language teaching sector (private language schools), state that a teacher is required to hold an NQF level 7 (ordinary bachelor degree or equivalent) and a recognised English Language Education award, including the Certificate in English Language Teaching (CELT).⁵⁰ QQI has also published awards standards for teaching English as a Foreign Language at NQF Levels 6–9.⁵¹

Staffing Issues Raised during Consultation Process

The lack of a specific staffing structure for ESOL was highlighted by a majority of ETBs as part of survey responses and also during the consultation meetings. It was noted that more coherent staffing structures were necessary to ensure integrated models of provision across the entire ETB. It was felt strongly that ESOL should be established as a distinct strand within the Adult Education Service, as opposed to being part of the adult literacy programme, and that full time coordinators were needed to provide this service. The public service embargo was cited by several respondents as having inhibited the development of appropriate staffing structures. An evaluation of ESOL provision in Scottish Colleges (2014) confirms the effectiveness of a dedicated member of staff who acts as a single point of contact to support learners.

While the large majority of ETBs now employ staff with ACELS recognised qualifications, it was noted that there were some legacy issues in relation to some ESOL staff with no or inadequate qualifications.

It was considered that all ESOL teaching staff should have a specialist ESOL teaching qualification and that clear guidelines on qualification requirements for teaching staff should be circulated to ETBs.

Continuous Professional Development for ESOL

15 ETBs offer ESOL tutors access to CPD but not all local training relates specifically to language teaching. ESOL training includes intercultural awareness, active citizenship, specific language awareness training for VTOS teachers and general issues relating to language teaching and assessment. Difficulties in providing training for part-time staff because of contractual issues were mentioned. 5 ETBs listed NALA ESOL in-service events. NALA provides support for ESOL through an annual conference for practitioners

⁴⁹ The Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services (ACELS) is a legacy function of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). ACELS is currently the national body responsible for the development and management of an inspection/ recognition scheme for English Language Teaching organisations (ELTOs) nationally.

⁵⁰ A framework for the recognition of English Language Teaching qualification awards offered in Ireland was established in 2000. The certificate standards were upgraded in 2007 to bring them in line with international norms and to meet the increasingly diverse needs of English Language learning sector in Ireland: these changes resulted in a rebranded certificate called CELT, which replaced the Initial TEFL Certificate

The following are the awards recognised by ACELS:

- Certificate in English Language Teaching (CELT): All successful trainees who are awarded this certificate are eligible to work in all Department of Education and Skills recognised English language schools in Ireland.
- Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA)
- Trinity ESOL
- NUI English Language Education Certificate

Online ELE qualifications and 11 ELE qualifications are not recognised by ACELS for teaching English in the recognised ELE sector in Ireland

⁵¹ <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/English%20Language%20Teaching%20-%20Award%20Standards%202014.pdf>

to highlight specific aspects of good practice, as well as on-going provision of materials and resources through their website. The Further Education Support Service (FESS) has also made available ESOL resources on their website devised by practitioners.⁵² It was felt that there was a need for a dedicated and structured national CPD programme to be provided for all ESOL staff which should include an organised induction system for newly recruited staff.

Local Planning

7 ETBs have drafted, or are in the process of drafting, ESOL policies within the broader framework of the ETB's FET Services Plan. The need for one ESOL framework within each ETB managed by a coordinator was raised by a majority of respondents to this survey question. The challenge of developing and coordinating unified ESOL policies and procedures across the entire organisation's services (e.g. Adult Education Service, Further Education Colleges, Prison Education Service, specialist services for separated children and homeless people, services to asylum seekers and programme refugees) was underlined by a number of ETBs.

Section Five Conclusions and Recommendations

Research concludes that teacher expertise is the most important resource for effective ESOL practice. While the majority of ESOL staff hold appropriate qualifications, there is no overall staffing structure or guidelines on coordination. Staff highlighted the need for a national policy in relation to coordination structures for ESOL provision and a specific professional development strategy for ESOL practitioners.

Recommendations

1. *ETB ESOL coordination and teaching staff should hold appropriate English language teaching qualifications, as set out by ACELS.*
2. *The CPD processes outlined in earlier sections should be undertaken within the broader context of the SOLAS Professional Development Strategy. They are as follows:*
 - A professional development process that addresses definitions of ESOL literacy and approaches to working with ESOL literacy learners;
 - Curriculum development frameworks to include effective models for vocational, family and community learning contexts, as well as approaches using ICT. Full-time provision for programme refugees should be included in these frameworks;
 - A professional development programme on assessment with reference to tools that are clearly referenced to the CEFR. The programme should address the current wide variations in CEFR levels reported in relation to ESOL learners' language competency levels on entry.

⁵² <http://www.fess.ie/resource-library/subject-specific-resources#Level3>

Conclusions and Summary of Recommendations

Publicly funded ESOL provision in Ireland has developed in the absence of any overall national strategy or policy initiative. The research documents analysed in this report provide important findings for Irish Further Education and Training Policy:

- Integration policies at both European and Irish levels stress the importance of language tuition for migrants.
- Many countries have put in place national strategies for ESOL provision with specific objectives. Such strategies include subsidised or free language tuition regimes for specific target groups.
- Jurisdictions that provide free tuition do this as a general principle to at least A2 or in some cases B1 level on the CEFR. While the number of hours calculated for a beginner to reach basic competency varies, the effectiveness of short courses of less than 200 hours duration must be questioned.
- A number of jurisdictions have developed language frameworks specific to second language acquisition to underpin assessment, curriculum and accreditation systems.
- A number of EU Member States have mandatory language policies for non-EU migrants or migrants applying for citizenship, with clear links between language courses and the integration of migrants into the workplace.

The survey conducted as part of this review reveals a higher number of ESOL participants than previously reported through the ESOL administrative returns: a majority of these participants are of working age and are migrant workers with upper second-level education or above. Over fifty percent are unemployed, but the proportion of long-term unemployed participants appears to be reducing. Based on Census 2016 data, it is not currently feasible for the ETB ESOL service to respond to the needs of all adult migrants with language difficulties on a no-charge basis.

Reported levels of language competency on entry to ESOL courses vary widely between ETBs, and there are also significant differences between ETBs in the reported percentages of ESOL literacy entrants. The 2016 ESRI Integration Monitor's analysis highlights the disadvantage that migrants experience due to their lack of language proficiency and emphasises the need to address the English language skills of the migrant population in Ireland. The implementation of the PLSS learner data base will enable a greatly enhanced level of data analysis relating to ESOL participants.

ESOL learners are recruited from a range of sources, with all ETBs receiving referrals from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Currently ESOL provision is offered through a range of ETB programmes and is of relatively short duration, but there is a trend towards more intensive models. There are only limited guidelines regarding provision models, eligibility criteria and priority target groups. There are currently no curricular frameworks to support teaching and learning in English language education in Ireland, and there is potential to further develop integrated language provision with other vocational programmes and in the workplace. Policy initiatives and guidelines in relation to ESOL provision and curriculum should be accompanied by the development of a designated ESOL framework in all ETBs, incorporating all existing provision and managed and coordinated across the ETB.

Approaches to initial assessment for ESOL learners vary: Most, though not all, ETBs always assess ESOL learners on entry and in some cases informal approaches are used. Not all assessment tools used are referenced against the CEFR. It is considered that the most pressing need is not the development of a new tool, but the implementation of a professional development process, whereby ETB ESOL practitioners are given the opportunity to review assessment procedures and outcomes, based on tasks developed to conform to CEFR descriptors. This would enhance understanding of CEFR levels and ensure a uniformity of approach across the country. In relation to accreditation, providers urgently requested new awards that would reflect CEFR levels as well as the NFQ, and meet students' needs more appropriately.

Research concludes that teacher expertise is the most important resource for effective ESOL practice. While the majority of ESOL staff hold appropriate qualifications, there is no overall staffing structure or guidelines on coordination. Staff highlighted the need for a national policy in relation to coordination structures for ESOL provision and a specific professional development strategy for ESOL practitioners.

The following summary of this reports' recommendations contains all recommendations arising from the preceding sections and arranges these in a thematic format which will aid implementation. An overarching general recommendation refers to the establishment of an Advisory Committee which will guide the work of implementation, while ETBs will be responsible for progressing recommendations at the local level.

1. General Recommendations

- 1.1 ESOL is primarily concerned with the provision of English language tuition and should be recognised as a distinct area of expertise. ESOL standards, pedagogy, assessment and awards should be specific to English language education.*
- 1.2 As previously recommended by both the IVEA and Howarth Reports, additional resources will be required to respond to the language learning needs of a higher proportion of Ireland's migrant population.*
- 1.3 A national framework for publicly funded ESOL should be devised, within the broader context of the Further Education and Training Strategy. The national framework should include specific actions in relation to provision, assessment and accreditation, curriculum and materials development and staff development.*
- 1.4 An Advisory Committee should be convened at national level by SOLAS to support the implementation of the actions specified in the national framework for publicly funded ESOL, in collaboration with ETBs. In parallel, ETBs should lead the implementation of actions at local level.*
- 1.5 There is a need for a designated ESOL framework in each ETB, incorporating all existing provision, which would be managed and coordinated across the ETB. More detailed guidelines on eligibility criteria, priority target groups and provision models, as well as guidance on coordination hours should be devised at national level as part of the national ESOL framework, for application in all ETBs.*

2. Recommendations for Funding and Eligibility Criteria

- 2.1 Funding for ESOL provision should be prioritised: however the dynamic nature of migration implies the need for on-going monitoring of the take up of provision.*
- 2.2 Eligibility criteria for all ETB ESOL provision should be clarified: asylum seekers, refugees, low-income EU immigrant or migrant workers, unemployed EU migrants and learners with only basic education or low levels of English should be prioritised, but guidelines in relation to learners applying for higher level provision needed to access other FET courses should also be provided.*
- 2.3 Places in ESOL classes should be allocated based on level of competency in English, with priority to applicants below level A2 on the CEFR. Tuition hours at higher levels should also be offered to a specific proportion of learners, to facilitate progression to mainstream FET.*

3. Recommendations for Assessment

- 3.1 The development of a new assessment tool is not recommended at this point.*
- 3.2 A national protocol for ESOL initial assessment should be developed: assessment procedures and outcomes should be reviewed, based on tasks which conform to CEFR descriptors.*
- 3.3 All ETBs should put in place a structured process for formal assessment of language competency when learners enter provision.*
- 3.4 A structured professional development programme on assessment is needed, with reference to assessment tools that clearly reference the CEFR. The Scottish ESOL Assessment Tool could be adapted for this purpose.*
- 3.5 There should be a clear definition of 'ESOL literacy' devised as part of the national protocol for ESOL assessment and the professional development programme on assessment should address this issue.*

- 3.6 *Consideration to be given to optimal deployment of the PLSS to enable the correlation of data relating to language competency, education levels, ethnic background and economic status.*
- 3.7 *Language entry criteria and structured interview material for all FET courses should be devised at national level for use in all ETBs.*

4. Recommendations for Curriculum Development and Programmes

- 4.1 *A variety of provision models is needed to reflect the varied needs of students and programmes should be developed in modular format. Research demonstrates that more intensive programmes are associated with better outcomes and provision should meet minimum duration criteria of at least 200 hours per year.*
- 4.2 *The curriculum framework devised as part of the national ESOL framework should be aligned to the CEFR and include models for a variety of programmes relating to learning for vocational, family and community contexts, with approaches using ICT. The framework should also address full-time provision for refugees.*
- 4.3 *Vocational preparation programmes with focus on employment skills should allow for progress to other FET courses and attainment of certified outcomes.*
- 4.4 *Guidelines for integration of ESOL provision into part-time and full-time FET programmes should be developed, with reference to the outcomes of the current research project on integration.*
- 4.5 *Consideration should be given to increasing allocations for workplace ESOL provision, as part of any future initiatives around workforce development.*
- 4.6 *Strategic planning for ESOL at local ETB level should take account of national skills and employment policies, as well as local development and community plans.*

5. Recommendations for accreditation

- 5.1 *The review of the English as a Second Language award at Level 3 is welcome, and should be expedited. Possible equivalencies between the NFQ and the CEFR should be explored. New awards that assess learners' levels of competence with reference to the CEFR, as well as the NFQ, should be developed by QQI in collaboration with English language practitioners. The Advisory Committee, when convened, should support QQI and other relevant parties as they collaborate to determine new award standards and develop English language awards to meet these standards.*

6. Recommendations for staffing

- 6.1 *ETB ESOL coordination and teaching staff should hold appropriate English language teaching qualifications, as set out by ACELS.*
- 6.2 *The CPD processes outlined in earlier sections should be undertaken within the broader context of the SOLAS Professional Development Strategy. They are as follows:*
- *A professional development process that addresses definitions of ESOL literacy and approaches to working with ESOL literacy learners*
 - *Curriculum development frameworks to include effective models for vocational, family and community learning contexts, as well as approaches using ICT. Full-time provision for programme refugees should be included in these frameworks*
 - *A professional development programme on assessment with reference to tools that clearly reference the CEFR. The programme should address the current wide variations in CEFR levels reported in relation to ESOL learners' language competency levels on entry*

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Appendix One Copy of ETB Survey

ETBI ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Review 2016

This review is being undertaken to inform and develop policy in relation to ETB ESOL provision, with particular emphasis on low-skilled and unemployed migrants.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your cooperation is very much appreciated.

Please take note of the following points before you begin to complete the survey:

- All data provided should relate to 2015.
- The data you provide will be used in conjunction with 2015 annual statistical returns already submitted to SOLAS by ETBs.
- The main focus of this review is on provision for low skilled and unemployed migrants.
- Answer all questions, even if you can only provide a limited response.
- Submit only one return per ETB.

1. Name of ETB

ETB:

Contact Name:

Email:

Telephone:

2. Please provide the total number of people who participated in SOLAS funded English Language provision (ESOL) in 2015 in your ETB. Do not include ESOL participants in fee paying provision.

Please include ESOL funded through:

- Adult Literacy Programme
- BTEI
- ITABE
- Skills for Work
- Community Education
- Youthreach
- VTOS
- PLC

Do not count people more than once if they participated in more than one course. A person who enrolled prior to 2015 but who was continuing in 2015 should be included:

- Male participants
- Female participants
- Total number of participants

3. What are the programmes from which you financed ESOL tuition in 2015 (please tick any that apply)

- Adult Literacy
- ITABE
- Skills for Work
- Community Education
- Back to Education Initiative
- Other (please specify)

4. How many participants did you enrol for ESOL provision under each of the following programmes in 2015?

- Adult Literacy
- ITABE
- Skills for Work
- Community Education
- Back to Education Initiative
- Other (Please Specify)

5. Are ESOL learners assessed on entry, prior to enrolment in provision?

- Always
- In majority of cases
- Never

6. Assessment: do you use:

- An informal approach to assessment
- Formal assessment tool

Please give details including names of tools used, if any.

7. Who carries out the initial assessment?

- ALO
- ESOL Coordinator
- Tutor/Resource Worker
- Other (please specify)

8. Is the assessment referenced against?

- NFQ
- CEFR

9. Do you collect & store data on the language competency level on entry of ESOL participants?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please give details

10. What types of provision do ESOL applicants require?

Please specify the approximate percentages of applicants at each level on entry:

- Beginner (less than A2) - for A2 definition please see below)⁵³
- Intermediate (less than B2 - for B2 definition please see below)⁵⁴
- Advanced (less than C2 - for C2 definition please see below)⁵⁵
- Literacy for ESOL (for students with literacy difficulties in their mother tongue)

11. How are ESOL learners assigned to groups?

- By level based on initial assessment
- Mixed ability group

12. Please list the total number of SOLAS funded paid tutor hours delivered for ESOL provision in 2015:

13. Please list the total number of SOLAS funded paid coordination hours delivered for ESOL provision in 2015:

14. Please provide details on the following:

- The number of locations where your ETB delivers ESOL
- The total number of ESOL groups in your ETB
- The average duration in hours of ESOL provision in your ETB
- The number of ESOL groups in your ETB proceeding to accreditation

15. Do you use volunteer tutors to deliver ESOL provision?

- Yes
- No

If yes please state the number of volunteers in your ETB who deliver ESOL

16. Please specify criteria used in your ETB for assigning ESOL learners to 1:1 tuition with volunteer

17. Does your ETB use a specific curriculum for ESOL provision?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please provide details

18. Is ICT incorporated into ESOL provision?

- Yes
- No

⁵³ A2: Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

⁵⁴ B2: Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

⁵⁵ C2: Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

19. How do you recruit ESOL students? Tick any that apply

- Referrals from within ETB
- Links to NGOs and community groups
- Employers
- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- Other external agencies
- Word of mouth
- Other (please specify)

20. How are places assigned in ESOL classes?

- Level of competency in English
- First come, first served basis

**21. Please select the progression routes you offer to ESOL students:
Tick any that apply**

- BTEI
- VTOS
- PLC
- Fee paying ESOL provision
- Private language school provision
- Other (please specify)

22. Please describe the formative assessment process you use in ESOL provision

23. Does your ETB assess gains in language proficiency at the end of all ESOL courses?

- Yes
- No

24. What is the accrediting body which provides certification for your ETB's ESOL learners?

25. Please give the total number of your ETB's ESOL learners who achieved certification in 2015:

- Male
- Female

26. Number of tutors providing ESOL in your ETB?

- Full time
- Part time

27. Please provide details of the qualification your ETB requires for tutors delivering group ESOL tuition.

28. Do you provide CPD for ESOL tutors?

- Yes
- No

If yes please give details

29. Who is responsible for the coordination/management of ESOL provision in your ETB?

- ALO
- Separate ESOL coordinator

30. Does the person coordinating/managing ESOL provision in your ETB do this work full -time?

- Yes
- No

31. Is there a specific plan for ESOL provision within the broader framework of your ETB's FET service plan?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please give details

32. What systems are in place for the evaluation of ESOL provision in your ETB? Please give details

33. What do you consider to be the key challenges in the organization of ESOL provision in your ETB at present?

34. Are there any other issues you wish to bring to our attention?

Appendix Two Assessment Tools

The 4 formal tools most commonly used within ETBs were reviewed. The tools were as follows:

- Scottish ESOL Assessment Tool
- BKSBS ESOL Assessment
- Oxford Quick Placement Test
- Skills for Life ESOL Assessment

The Cambridge English Placement Test was also reviewed.

Scottish ESOL Assessment Tool (2010)

The tool was commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2010 as part of the Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland to support practitioners to undertake initial assessment with learners. Its aim is to standardise initial assessment approaches and to ensure that learners are placed in appropriate provision. The published guide emphasises that providers adopt the principles, approaches and levels within the guide and adapt assessment materials to suit initial assessment within their organisation. The guide specifies that the assessment should be carried out by a qualified ESOL teacher. The materials are designed to assess learners from ESOL literacy beginners to entry to vocational and academic courses. All publicly funded ESOL providers are required to use the tool.

The guide contains materials to assess all four skills: speaking; listening; reading and writing. Speaking and listening are assessed through a learner interview. Reading is assessed through a series of texts that gradually increase in difficulty. Writing is assessed through a short written task, with marking criteria included. The pack contains guidance on administration of the materials, as well as video exemplars and instructions for use on an individual basis with learners or on a group basis. The levels are matched against the Scottish Qualifications Framework, as well as the CEFR. The introduction outlines effective practice, with an emphasis on staff qualifications and sensitivity to learners presenting for assessment.

Scottish Assessment Tool Summary

Name	ESOL Initial Assessment Pack
Development	Scottish Government
Skills assessed	Speaking, listening, reading, writing
Alignment	SCQF and CEFR
Levels	All – tutor may select appropriate assessment tasks based on interview
Administration	Detailed instructions included. Pro-formas may be downloaded
System for analysis and reporting	Pro-formas included
Limitations	Amount of time needed to assess all four skills may be a factor
Cost	Free to download – if adapted should liaise with Scottish Education Department
Recommendation	Assessment of all four skills, all levels catered for, mapped to CEFR, easily adapted to Ireland, administratively feasible for large numbers of applicants. Recommend trial in some more ETBs in conjunction with CPD

BKSB ESOL Initial Assessment

The BKSB ESOL Initial Assessment tool was developed by an English company and assesses reading, writing and listening. The assessments are made available on-line and are interactive and self-marking, with immediate feedback to the learner, on completion of the test. A paper based resource to enable assessment of speaking skills is also provided.

The assessments are mapped to the English ESOL core curriculum and will assess a learner's level from Pre-Entry to Level 2 on the English NQF. Support material states that the assessment will also map to the equivalent levels in IELTS, CEFR and TOEIC but this was not evident from the trial.

Initial Assessments are followed by more detailed Diagnostic Assessments at the appropriate levels in reading and writing. The diagnostics provide a percentage score and produce an interactive Individual Learning Plan (ILP), which highlights skill gaps and directs a learner to the appropriate learning resources.

BKSB assessment packages are sold through a 12 month licence, based on the approximate number of learners that will be using the assessments and resources.

BKSB ESOL Assessment Summary

Name	BKSB ESOL on-line assessment
Development	BKSB company
Skills Assessed	Listening, reading, writing. Support material states that "Paper based resource and marking grid supplied for assessment of speaking skills."
Alignment	English NQF
Levels	Entry levels – Level 2. The assessments are adaptive: multiple choice format
Administration	Tutor support included on website
System for analysis and reporting	Generates reports
Limitations	<p>May present cultural barriers (accents, use of English currency etc.). Alignment to CEFR not evident from trial – clarification requested.</p> <p>Lengthy to administer. Not suitable for beginner applicants. More suitable for applicants who have reasonable level of spoken English. Need for support in relation to IT interface.</p>
Cost	Cost per student on a 12 month licence basis, reduces with number enrolled
Recommendation	Not recommended: on-line material does not assess speaking, also lengthy assessment process. The tool's primary alignment is to the English NQF. Cost implications would be considerable if used in all ETBs.

Oxford Quick Placement Test

The Quick Placement Test is a test of English language proficiency developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL. The pen and paper version has two parallel versions, takes 30 minutes to administer and tests reading and grammar. All the questions are in multiple choice format and answer sheets may be corrected with overlays provided. The test consists of two parts: the second part is taken only by higher ability students who have managed to complete part one without problems. It is advised that administrators should combine the test score with other forms of assessment such as speaking and writing skills. Administrators' notes clearly link test scores to the CEFR levels. The test has been validated in 20 countries. An on line version is also available: this is adaptive.

Name	Oxford Quick Placement Test
Development	Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge
Skills assessed	Reading and grammar: multiple choice format
Alignment	CEFR
Levels	All levels on CEFR
Administration	Pen and paper test (on line version is available).
System for analysis and reporting	Paper version easily marked with 'overlay'
Limitations	Not suitable for beginner students. Does not include test of speaking, writing or listening.
Cost	Paper version free to download. Cost of on-line version not known.
Recommendation	The paper version of the assessment tool is already being used in a number of ETBs. Aligned to CEFR. Does not assess speaking and listening. Useful for placement of more advanced learners but not suitable for beginners.

Skills for Life ESOL Assessment

These assessment materials were developed as part of the English Skills for Life initiative in 2001. There are a range of diagnostic assessment tasks for ESOL on the 'Excellence Gateway' website. The initial assessment tasks do not seem to be available at this point. There are comprehensive support materials available which reference the Skills for Life ESOL curriculum. The assessments involve listening comprehension and writing. The audio tapes for listening comprehension may still be downloaded. All the assessments are referenced against the English National Qualifications Framework: there is no reference to the CEFR.

Name	Skills for Life ESOL Assessment
Development	English Government as part of Skills for Life Strategy
Skills assessed	Reading, writing, listening
Alignment	English NQF and Skills for Life Literacy Standards
Levels	Entry Levels and Levels 1 & 2
Administration	Detailed tutor's manual, with assessment materials – may be downloaded
System for analysis and reporting	Tutor materials included
Limitations	Difficult to access (material is archived). Not referenced against CEFR
Cost	Free to download
Recommendation	Not recommended as not aligned to CEFR

Cambridge English Placement Test

Cambridge English Placement Test is an on-line assessment that takes 30-40 minutes. It assesses reading and listening skills, as well as language knowledge. It is adaptive, so adjusts to the student's level as the test progresses. The results are clearly aligned to the CEFR. It costs €10 per student but the cost reduces with higher enrolments. It is currently being used in Youthreach and Colleges of Further Education as well as some schools in one ETB. The test would not be suitable for applicants with no computer skills or beginners without considerable administrative support. As with the Oxford Quick Placement Test it would be useful for assessing students applying for mainstream FET courses. It generates immediate results, therefore reducing the administrative burden on staff.

Name	Cambridge English Placement Test
Development	University of Cambridge
Skills assessed	Listening, reading.
Alignment	CEFR
Levels	All levels on CEFR
Administration	Staff supervision needed.
System for analysis and reporting	Results generated immediately
Limitations	Would not be suitable for beginner students with no IT skills
Cost	€10 per student, the cost reduces with enrolment of larger numbers
Recommendation	Very thorough assessment but not recommended for cost reasons.

List of Acronyms

AfL	Assessment for Learning
ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
CEFRL	Common European Framework of References for Languages
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
FARR	Funding Allocations Requests and Reporting
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILP	Individual Learner Plan
ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachas Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna

