

A new approach to English for speakers of other languages [ESOL]

This agenda is important as learning and speaking English is the key to people finding employment, progressing in their jobs, helping their children, improving community cohesion and participating in the wider community.

As a consequence of the ESOL consultation in 2008 the Government acknowledges that local areas must have the maximum flexibility in defining priorities for their ESOL provision.

Due to finite funding the Government has removed automatic fee remissions.

Employers have a role in contributing to the cost of ESOL provision particularly where they recruit directly from abroad but this must be matched by high quality provision which meets the needs of the workplace.

The ESOL provision should be considered alongside improving employability skills in 'Skills for Life, Changing Lives' and the steps to improve adult literacy, language and numeracy skills.

In May 2009, 'A new approach to English for speakers of other languages' was published and charged LAs with ensuring that ESOL played a more effective role in supporting community cohesion and social integration alongside economic vibrancy of a local area.

The key element of the new approach is to give the LA the lead and more influence on their ESOL services, providers and their priority customers groups which will be aligned with other locally agreed targets. Local co-ordination and prioritization of funds is expected to lead to better use of limited funds and engage currently excluded learners. English language skills have an impact on the cost of a variety of services from health, housing, schools and unemployment.

LAs have to prepare a rational for ESOL priorities and a plan by December 2009. There are 3 stages to this, 1. Assess Local area ESOL need, 2. Work with partners to identify local ESOL priorities, 3. Agree a Local area ESOL Action Plan.

Clearly, this agenda has an impact on levels of worklessness in some areas of Devon and I will contact DCC to find out where we are with this work.

The wider skills landscape is changing. The Skills Funding Agency [SFA] and Young People's Learning Agency [YPLA] will take over from the Learning and Skills Council [LSC] and the SFA will be responsible for the ESOL budget as part of their responsibility for funding FE colleges and other providers from April 2010. The Regional Development Agency [RDA] will have a strategic skills role and Government Offices [GO] are responsible for local area agreements and will make sure regional and local priorities align.