

New Approach to ESOL

**Held on Friday 11th December 2009, 2pm
County Hall (Sargant Room), Exeter**

Present:

Name	Organisation
Andrew Lightfoot (Chair)	Devon County Council / Devon Economic Partnership
Annie Raine	Devon County Council Adult and Community Learning
Bob Mycock	Exeter College
Charlie Dorr	Equality South West
Clare Henry	
Caroline Romijn	Exeter College
Daniel Baillyes	Devon Economic Partnership Administrator
David Wright	Devon County Council (Hate and Prejudice Crime Prevention Officer)
Ian Hobbs	Devon County Council
Jenny Milligan	Government Office South West
John Demeger	South Devon College
John Tempest	Learning and Skills Council
John Willis	Continuing Professional Development
Paul Dingle	A4E

Apologies:

Name	Organisation
Ellie Bray	Petroc
Tony Skeel	Learning and Skills Council
Craig Marshall	TPN

1. Welcome / Introductions

Andrew thanked all those present for attending. The purpose of the meeting would be to gather together stakeholders in ESOL, in the light of the government's new proposals, to see how we can work together to achieve more and how to fill any possible gaps in provision. The agenda sent around was only a starting point, and would be flexible to meet needs as they arose.

2. Feedback on Regional Seminar on 17 November

Following introductions, Andrew asked John Willis to feedback to the group discussion from the NIACE seminar.

John brought to the attention of the group a number of documents that were attached to the agenda, including his report from the seminar discussed here.

If you would like a copy of the documents, please contact Daniel.

All Local Authorities were written to (letter attached to agenda) asking that they devise new strategies for ESOL in their areas to meet the needs of those most disadvantaged, as currently providers were mainly meeting the needs of those who could afford to pay (nationally). Given the demand, and static funding, Local Authorities, including Devon County Council, have been asked to consult with

partner organisations and to put together an action plan, by Christmas, on how this could be done.

Bristol has been acting as a pathfinder, though they are only a little ahead of us having started in late May 2009. They intended to put their Action Plan in by Christmas, however, we would be submitting a statement, rather than simply a list of priorities. Local Authorities unable to submit full Action Plans by this Christmas are required (asked) to do so by next Christmas.

John thanked Andrew for convening as broad a group as possible from the start, unlike Bristol who gathered partners together over a longer period of time.

The primary discussion in Bristol concerned the question of whether the picture of traditional communities being excluded was real or not. This was not quite seen in Devon, but some unmet needs do clearly exist. For instance, if childcare were provided more often, then provision for settled communities could be expanded.

3. Involvement / Issues and Concerns

Although not on the agenda, Andrew asked that we go around the table and introduce a) our interest in ESOL and b) any issues and concerns that needed to be raised.

Clare:

Works on outreach projects delivered towards women in refugee families in Exeter and beyond. It mainly serves Afghan and Romanian communities. There are two main issues to be tackled:

1. Funding – it is getting harder and harder to access;
2. Childcare is always an issue

John Willis:

Two main issues:

1. Those who can't produce the evidence for fee remission for whatever reason;
2. Migrants working for small employers where internal work provision is unviable, and who don't / won't provide external provision.

Annie:

Annie is involved in running a variety of fully accredited courses and family learning ESOL classes. However, the number of attendees has decreased with the introduction of fees. The effective provision of ESOL is limited by funding and geography of Devon. The two issues Annie hoped to be addressed were:

1. In order to prevent duplication, Annie hopes to get an idea of what happens where and when.
2. Would like to see a wide range of services brought together to ensure needs are met e.g. health, police etc.

Bob:

Exeter College is a large ESOL provider. Bob also reported to the meeting that he had commissioned a small survey of those students studying ESOL to determine whether needs were being met. ESOL provided for locally settled refugees and minority groups.

Bob also identified as a priority group the spouses of those groups (not refugees) who have to wait a year for provision.

Bob helpfully pointed towards the example of Leicester in terms of the community cohesion focus integrated into the new approach to ESOL. In Leicester, different communities learn together to bring about cohesion, rather than targeting individual groups to achieve the same end.

Caroline:

Over the past 6-7 years ESOL provision has increased. There are a few issues to be raised:

1. People in low paid shift work have problems with attendance.
2. Echoing similar sentiments across the table, childcare was also pinpointed as an example of where change was needed if priority groups were to be reached.

Caroline also reported that the College has already embraced aspects of the New Approach. Financial support, for instance, is available to asylum seekers and refugees.

David:

David works as the Hate and Prejudice Crime Prevention Officer for Devon County Council. He spends much of his time with minority groups and English language is a continual problem.

A number of issues were brought out:

1. Childcare (a common theme)
2. Finance since the introduction of fees (social pressures may prevent the take-up of hardship funds)
3. Eligibility (the spouses of students, for example)
4. Echoing Caroline, David pointed to the example of restaurant workers who face tough pressures on their time, with only a narrow gap for learning between shifts.

Jenny:

Wants a regional approach to ESOL, making sure provision is targeted. Also, as ESF (European Social Fund) Manager, Jenny pointed to the ESF refresh taking place at the moment which looks to fund gaps (e.g. the childcare issue). ESF money could be used in the future towards ESOL, but it would have to be in areas of greatest impact.

John Tempest:

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| 1. Funding | The LSC spends approximately £4.5m across the region – fees should allow additional ESOL – though this would require planning to make sure priority groups are targeted. |
| 2. Priorities | John made it clear to the meeting that in deciding upon priority groups, ethnicity should not be considered a suitable criterion. Decisions need to be totally defensible. |
| 3. Best Practice | Good practice out of the Bristol Pathfinder – the manner in which research was undertaken, with evidence of objectivity. Key performance indicators from the |

government assessment were engaged with – this process did not take place in isolation.

Charlie:

Raised the suggestion that there may be interest in combining English language with more employer based training. Moreover, there is a concern that ESOL funding is aimed at level 3 or above, when demand may be for lower level skills. Time also needs to be taken to assess which other minority groups, except for Poles, need to be reached.

Paul:

Issues concerned with ensuring continuity into work by providing support post-qualification to ensure sustainability.

John Demeger:

Referring to the Leicester example provided by Bob, John argued that delivery would have been easier there than in Devon simply because the proportion of ethnic minorities living there is so much greater. In Devon, the problem may be that certain groups are being missed simply because they are more hidden.

John noted that there has been an influx of Thais into Torbay recently. Although there are good links with Local Authorities, there does not appear to be so with ESOL. There was, however, an excellent worklessness group in Torbay, which may provide a model to follow.

There is a demand for ESOL, and the college has responded. However, the demand does not appear to have been recognised in social housing etc. This new approach does appear to be an improvement.

Another point John raised concerned probation. Despite the need for ESOL in prison (120 foreign nationals in Dartmoor for instance) ESOL does not seem to be provided – why is that?

Ian:

As a newcomer to the process, Ian had three main questions:

1. What is the balance between formal and informal provision? How does it work?
2. How does the money flow? How does it arrive at formal and informal providers once it leaves the LSC? How are current priorities decided upon? Do we need to pull levers to get change? If so, what are they?
 - John Tempest argued that levers would not be needed. If evidence is provided of new priority groups, providers will follow suit.
3. Is it a duty on Local Authorities to initiate change? Do those invited to the meeting even want the council involved? Partners may have already built up settled links which work fine and don't want that disrupted.
 - Jenny argued that there is a clear role for Local Authority involvement and that a partnership would be of value. David agreed with this view.

Andrew:

Andrew went through the reasons for his involvement as Head of Regeneration at Devon County Council:

1. Partly this was due to the new local assessment duty imposed in Local Authorities and the need for evidence.
2. To comply with the terms of the Future Jobs Fund and to put together a Work and Skills Strategy – this, again, will need evidence.
3. Moreover, Andrew also manages the Devon Economic Partnership which includes the Devon Worklessness Forum and Productive Skills 4 Devon (PS4D), where there are links to be made.

4. Mapping

Andrew raised the issue of mapping the current provision of ESOL and its demand. This began on the back of the survey conducted by Exeter College. A number of other sources of information were identified:

- The LSC has good data on ESOL providers, but only for those involved in formal provision that the LSC funds.
 - Petroc and South Devon Colleges could conduct a similar survey to Exeter College. Caroline suggested an extra question for the survey: 'are there any other members of your family that do not come?'
- Action (Bob): Send a copy of the survey used in Exeter College to John Demeger for use in South Devon, and Ellie Bray (Petroc)**
- The Community Safety Map could also be used. David Wright pointed out that there is an enormous amount of information out there to be utilised.
 - Charlie suggested that the Trade Unions may be a good source of information.
 - Both Bob and Caroline could gather information from the informal providers.

Ian argued that the first job is to pull all the sources of information together.

Action (All): Before the next meeting all information is to be collated and shared with each other. Send to Daniel who will distribute.

Action (John Tempest): Send the spreadsheet containing data based on post code areas to Ian who will place the information on a map.

At the next meeting this information will be discussed to inform decisions concerning priority groups for ESOL provision.

Current Provision

A number of points were raised in discussion:

- Bristol found that men were underrepresented in ESOL.
- The workplace may be the only place to reach some people, but some (not all) employers may stand in the way.
- Funding is restricted according to government regulation (John T) – Ian suggested that perhaps the answer would be, rather than Local Authorities getting involved, for government to simply relax funding requirements?

Action (All): Please bring to our attention any further links that can be explored.

Action (John Willis): To update Petroc and City College on this meeting.

6. Date of Next Meeting

To be decided by email as the date agreed at the meeting (12 February, 2pm) clashes with another meeting.