

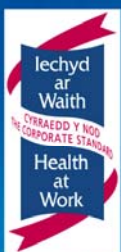


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Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

# How effective is provision for learners aged 16 to 19 years with English language acquisition needs?



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL  
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



JULY 2009

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## Introduction

- 1 Discussions within the Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Ministerial Advisory Group, the Minority Ethnic Achievement Local Education Authority (MEALEA) network and the ESOL Task and Finish Group have indicated a need to develop a clearer understanding of approaches in relation to identifying and addressing English language acquisition needs.
- 2 The purpose of this remit is to seek to gauge the level of need in relation to English language acquisition for learners aged 16 to 19 years who are in education and training.
- 3 The report focuses on learners from ethnic minority backgrounds for whom English is an additional or second language. It considers the needs of this particular group of learners and examines the way in which they are supported with their studies. It identifies and highlights issues to be addressed or gaps to be filled.
- 4 Four sectors were selected for samples; further education colleges, sixth form colleges, sixth forms and work-based learning. Evidence is also taken from 14-19 networks, Careers Wales and local authority education services (LAES).

## Background

### Definitions

- 5 English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), English as an additional language (EAL) and English as a foreign language are three very different methods of teaching English language skills.
- 6 For the purpose of this survey, the following definitions have been used:
- EAL is the method used exclusively by schools. The EAL method imparts social and academic English language skills. Progress is monitored by referencing a five-stage model beginning with a child being 'new to English' to the last stage of full fluency when the pupil is able to operate across the curriculum to a level of competence equivalent to that of a pupil who uses English as their first language and without the need for EAL support;
  - ESOL is the language tuition nearly all post-16 providers use for learners who have moved to an English-speaking country for purposes other than academic study. They may speak limited or no English;
  - English as a foreign language (EFL) is the tuition method used in non-English speaking countries or in the UK when the learner's purpose for study is to improve their English as an academic subject; and
  - English language acquisition needs is the term used throughout this report to refer to all learners who have potential or actual English language acquisition needs. It is a collective term for learners in either ESOL support or EAL provision.

### Identification of basic skills needs

- 7 Since July 2005, providers have been required to assess the basic skills needs of all learners in DCELLs funded provision. The requirement applies to all learners on entry to courses of five hours or more per week that lead to an accredited qualification. Providers are required to meet, or to provide the learner with the opportunity to meet, any identified basic skills needs<sup>1</sup>.
- 8 Basic Skills are defined as "The ability to read, write and speak in English or Welsh, and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress both in work and in society"<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 'Basic Skills Policy, Screening and Assessment Guidance for Learning Providers' (ELWa, July 2005)

<sup>2</sup> 'Words Talk – Numbers Count' (Welsh Assembly Government, April 2005)

- 9 Nearly all post-16 providers use one of two assessment tools for the identification of basic skills needs:
- the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) Initial Assessment; and
  - the West Nottinghamshire College 'basic and key SKILLBUILDER (BKSB) Initial Assessment'<sup>3</sup>.
- 10 ESOL providers use a variety of initial assessment tools. Research conducted on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government by GHK Consulting Ltd finds that most providers are using an initial assessment at the outset of a course. However, these are often informal assessments rather than consistent testing<sup>4</sup>. Estyn inspection reports also record either no initial assessment or inconsistent use of initial assessment. ESOL initial assessment tools currently in use do not provide a nationally consistent method of testing.

### **Basic Skills Strategy for Wales**

- 11 Speakers of Other Languages are a priority group within the National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales, 'Words Talk, Numbers Count'. The strategy delivery plan includes aims to enhance the support of ESOL learners "to ensure that no-one is prevented from playing a full part in society by a lack of basic English or Welsh language skills". There is no specific objective within the strategy to address the needs of learners with English language acquisition needs. However the strategy does include the following two objectives:
- improve the effectiveness of post-16 dedicated basic skills learning provision; and
  - improve the effectiveness of embedded basic skills support for post-16 learners.

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<sup>3</sup> Post 16 Basic Skills Provision – Basic Skills Initial Assessment, Support and Monitoring Systems (Estyn publication, September 2006)

<sup>4</sup> 'Review of ESOL in Wales' (Welsh Assembly Government, Department for Children, Education, Lifelong learning and Skills. Report submitted by GHK Limited, October 2008)

## Main findings

- 12 The provision for the education of learners from ethnic minority backgrounds who have English language acquisition needs lacks a clear national strategic lead to bring together the various agencies and government departments working with these groups. The Ethnic Minority and Child Protection Branch in the Support for Learners Division holds the policy lead for EAL. Basic Skills Cymru in the Lifelong Learning and Providers Division holds the policy lead for ESOL.<sup>5</sup> The support for learners aged 16 to 19 years falls into the remits of both these divisions. There is no consistency in learners' experiences due to a lack of cohesion between the two divisions.
- 13 The provision to support learners who have language acquisition needs lacks cohesion and a clear strategic plan at national level. In most cases teachers and learners feel the pre-16 support and support in higher education is structured and effective. However, support for 16 to 19-year-old learners is unstructured and lacks a clear, national focus and evaluation to inform future improvement planning.
- 14 The precise number of learners with English language acquisition needs is unknown. LLWR does not have the capacity to extract information on these learners. Providers are not always aware of the number of these learners within their institutions and management information systems do not easily provide the data. Providers do not have a clear indication of the scale of need to inform effective planning.
- 15 There is no specialist lead officer to drive planning forward in relation to learners with English language acquisition needs. The need for a more enhanced ESOL provision was identified as a focus for the The National Support Project for Basic Skills Agency. A Development Advisory group is in place to take forward the recommendations. However, the focus of this group is on discrete provision rather than on learner support provision. Providers have no clear lead in forming local strategic documents for support of learners with English language acquisition needs.
- 16 Further education colleges rely too much on ESOL provision to provide support for learners with English language acquisition needs. The focus of ESOL provision is on addressing the needs of part-time learners in community learning. ESOL provision does not have a suitable structure to meet the needs of learners on mainstream courses.
- 17 Providers in all sectors have no formal policy or action plan in place for addressing the needs of these learners. In a majority of cases, providers offer the learners inappropriate general literacy support and a minority of providers attempt to address their needs through ad hoc initiatives on an individual basis. There is no consistent monitoring or evaluation across Wales of the success of these initiatives.

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<sup>5</sup> The Lifelong Learning and Providers Division leads on some aspects of policy for ESOL. Within LLPD, Basic Skills Cymru as the basic skills policy branch oversees delivery of the national basic skills strategy for Wales, Words Talk Numbers Count. The strategy supports attainment in literacy, numeracy and ESOL up to and including Level 1 as defined in the national Qualifications Framework.



- 18 The quality of provision for learners with English language acquisition needs varies between providers and sectors. There is no consistency between providers from similar institutions and there is a greater divide between further education provision and school provision.
- 19 There is a disparity in funding for learners with English language acquisition needs between school provision and further education/work-based learning providers. The current funding structure leads to an inequality of educational support between the sectors. This impacts adversely on learners' experiences, attainment and progression.
- 20 There is little or no local or national planning or evaluation of learners' transition from one learning level to another (for example between GCSE and AS level). Key partners do not help learners to understand the level of support they can expect from various providers. This impedes the learners' ability to make informed decisions about their learning.
- 21 Communication between key partners is weak and information about a learner's previous support and English language ability does not transfer with them between providers.
- 22 The links between EAL support, ESOL support and higher education support are poor. There is no connection between the planning of support for learners in each transition stage. This means that both teachers and learners are unable to build on previous learning experiences. For many learners this results in a dip in their knowledge and confidence, and their ability to use and transfer English language skills.
- 23 A minority of Children and Young People's Partnerships (CYPP) have begun to develop shared information protocols for learners with English language acquisition needs. However, the protocols are not yet robust enough to ensure that information about learners' English language acquisition needs informs the planning of their learning at key transition points.
- 24 There is no common initial assessment tool in use across Wales. In the best cases within further education provision, learners attend an initial assessment within an ESOL department. In a few cases the assessment is robust and detailed and carried out by qualified ESOL teachers. Initial assessment varies between providers and in many institutions the assessment is informal, lacks structure and does not provide sufficient information to inform the planning of learning support.
- 25 Many providers are using inappropriate literacy assessments for learners with English language acquisition needs. This is particularly the case in training providers and work-based learning. This results in learners being turned away from courses by providers or being offered courses at a level below their academic ability.
- 26 In a minority of institutions, learners who fail to meet the initial assessment standards for their chosen course of study attend a 12-month English language course within the ESOL department before reapplying the next year. However, in nearly all providers, ESOL provision does not meet the needs of learners who require a vocational or academic understanding of English for advanced educational courses.

- 27 Front line teaching staff are not equipped with the skills to support, develop and enhance learners with English language acquisition needs. There are very low numbers of qualified support staff for these learners and a majority of learners fail to keep up with the pace of lessons.
- 28 Learners and teachers identify that learning coaches and mentors are effective in supporting learners to adapt to new stages of learning. However, there are few mentors available and very few with relevant qualifications to assist these learners effectively with their academic study.
- 29 There is little robust information about the destinations of learners with English language acquisition needs. Very few progress successfully to work-based learning unless they have a level of English language which enables them to cope with the training. There is no data for the learners who fail to access further study and no data on the proportion of those who drop out of courses prematurely.

## Recommendations

### **The Welsh Assembly Government should:**

- R1 establish a national strategic lead for learners with English language acquisition needs;
- R2 develop a strategic plan with clear objectives and priorities for the support of learners who have English language acquisition needs;
- R3 appoint a specialist officer for the implementation of these objectives and priorities;
- R4 review the funding structure across all sectors for the support of learners with English language acquisition needs to ensure there is parity between providers and to provide a continuum of provision between EAL, ESOL and HE support;
- R5 review and reshape the structure of ESOL provision to improve the relevance of the courses to all learners with English language acquisition needs in further education colleges and training providers;
- R6 develop and implement robust initial assessment to establish learners' needs; and
- R7 collect and analyse data to monitor the impact of provision effectively and to inform future development.

### **Providers should:**

- R8 improve the skills of front line teachers to support learners with English language acquisition needs;
- R9 strengthen the resources to ensure there are sufficient specialist qualified support staff to meet learner needs; and
- R10 develop mentoring skills for peers, learning coaches, employers, youth services and Careers Wales staff.

### **Children and Young People's Partnerships should:**

- R11 develop a policy for sharing information effectively between key partners;
- R12 evaluate and improve transition planning for learners with English language acquisition needs;
- R13 ensure that Careers Wales destination surveys identify the progression of this group of learners; and
- R14 develop and implement a strategy to ensure that vulnerable learners receive targeted support.

## Management of the provision

- 30 While provision for both pre-16 learners and post-19 learners is effective, the provision for learners in the age range of 16 to 19 years, where there is an overlap of Government Divisional leads, is weak and disjointed. At a strategic level, two separate Welsh Assembly Government divisions lead the provision for learners aged 16 to 19 years with English language acquisition needs. The Ethnic Minority and Child Protection Branch in the Support for Learners Division holds the policy lead for EAL. Basic Skills Cymru in the Lifelong Learning and Providers Division holds the policy lead for ESOL.
- 31 Provision for learners aged 16 to 19 years with English language acquisition needs lacks a clear, national, strategic plan. Government departments and agencies responsible for learners with English language acquisition needs do not have a clear structure for developing and monitoring cohesive provision. The lack of measures for effective evaluation prevents a clear focus for future planning and improvement of the services to learners.
- 32 Data systems across all sectors are unable to identify accurately the number of learners aged 16 to 19 years with English language acquisition needs. Schools are currently updating management information systems to include information on the progress of pupils through the five stages of EAL learning. This information will be collated as part of PLASC (Pupil Level Annual School Census). However, in most cases, this is currently in the early stages. LLWR data does not have the capacity to extract the information needed to assess or evaluate the scale of need. Many providers are not aware of the number of learners needing language support within their own institutions and most management information systems do not easily provide the data. Lack of data on the number of learners with English language acquisition needs hinders effective planning at national, Welsh Assembly Government department and provider level.
- 33 The current structure of ESOL provision does not effectively meet the needs of learners on main stream courses. Nearly all further education colleges rely heavily on the ESOL model of support to address the development of language skills for learners with English language acquisition needs. However, the focus of ESOL provision is on addressing the social English needs of part-time learners within community provision.
- 34 There is no specialist lead officer to drive planning forward across the sectors within provision for learners with English language acquisition needs across Wales. The need for a more enhanced ESOL provision was identified as a focus for The National Support Project for the Basic Skills Agency. A Development Advisory group has been formed to take forward the recommendations. However, the focus of this group is on discrete provision rather than on learner support provision. Providers have no clear lead to help them to form local strategies, policies and priorities.

- 35 Individual providers have no formal policy or action plan for the support of learners with English language acquisition needs. In a majority of cases, post-16 providers give learners inappropriate general literacy support. A minority of providers attempt to address the learners' needs through ad hoc initiatives on an individual basis. There is no consistent monitoring across Wales of the success of these strategies.
- 36 The quality of provision to address the needs of learners with English language acquisition needs is inconsistent between providers. There is little uniformity between providers from similar sectors and there is a greater divide between further education, work based providers and schools. The majority of work-based learning providers have no means of specialist support for these learners and no effective access to either ESOL or EAL expertise.
- 37 There is a disparity of funding for learners with English language acquisition needs between school provision and further education/work-based providers. The current funding structure leads to an inequality of educational support between the sectors. Many learners are disadvantaged in the language support they receive. This impacts adversely on learner retention, attainment and progression.

## Transition between providers and stages of education

- 38 In most cases, pre-16 support is structured and effective. Case study evidence shows that teachers and learners feel the support offered by local higher education institutions is helpful and meets learners' needs well. However, support for 16 to 19-year-old learners is unstructured.
- 39 Transfer of information between EAL provision and further education/work-based learning providers is poor for learners with English language acquisition needs. In most cases no information moves with the learner from one level of study to another. Both the learner and the teacher are then unable to build effectively on the learner's prior experience. This impedes learners' ability to continue their learning through a structured progression route of English language competence. These learners are disadvantaged from the beginning of a course.
- 40 In a minority of local authorities, Children and Young People's Partnerships are developing plans for the sharing of information about learners with English language acquisition needs as they transfer between education providers. In Cardiff, for example, the 14-19 Network is focusing on Key Element 5 in the 14-19 Learning Pathways; Access to Personal Support (learner support). They aim to open up opportunities for learners from British Minority Ethnic (BME) groups by providing transition support from Year 10 through to Year 12. However, developments are in their early stages and are not yet robust enough to drive the planning required.
- 41 Recent research by the Ethnic Minority Language and Achievement Service identifies that all learners experience a dip in their English language skills level when transferring between levels of study<sup>6</sup>. This shows that all learners would benefit from support at all transition stages to maintain their levels of skills in English language.
- 42 The number of learners transferring from pre-16 provision to further education colleges, work-based learning providers and sixth forms is not known as this data is not formally collected and analysed. Similarly, there is no record of those learners who continue to receive support. Anecdotal evidence from providers indicates that more learners in post-16 school provision continue with language support than their peers in further education and work-based learning. However, even in schools, there is no formal structure in place to ensure these learners receive adequate or effective support.
- 43 The majority of learners who were still having support at the end of their school based learning stated that they have either refused, or dropped out of, any form of support with their further education providers. However, the majority of learners who refuse support judge their ability to cope by their success on previous lower level courses. Learners also feel there is an expectation by providers and peers that they can cope on their own. Initial assessments are inadequate in helping them identify their own support needs.

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<sup>6</sup> Providing the Needs of Pupils from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds Studying in Sixth Forms within LEA Maintained Schools, J.L. Martin MA.Ed, April 2008

- 44 There is little or no evaluation of how well learners make the transition between learning levels, for example between GCSE and AS level or between GCSE and work-based learning. Many learners are not aware of the choices available to them and do not have an understanding of the level of support they can expect to receive. A minority of learners feel they have made a wrong educational choice and this hinders their attainment. A very few learners on further education courses return to after-school clubs to access support informally.
- 45 In a few cases there are good links between Careers Wales and EAL provision. EAL providers arrange for translators and interpreters to work in schools with Careers Wales advisers. This ensures that pupils understand their career interviews and options. However, this support does not extend beyond schools.

## Initial assessment of learners' needs

- 46 There is no common approach between post-16 providers to the assessment of learners' skills when they start a course. Most schools and sixth forms have well planned and designed initial assessment tools based on the five stage model of EAL teaching and mapped to the skills framework. Most schools and sixth forms take into account the learners' previous education and prior learning experience when forming a support programme.
- 47 The majority of further education colleges and work-based learning providers do not have a specific initial assessment tool for learners with English language acquisition needs. Most providers use one of the standard literacy assessment tools designed for use with British, first language English learners. Teachers and support workers have identified that these assessments are inaccessible to many learners with language acquisition needs. This adversely affects the outcome of the assessment and produces an inaccurate result below the true academic ability of the learner.
- 48 In the best cases, further education and work-based learning providers refer learners to qualified ESOL specialists for an initial assessment. However, the initial assessment tools and methods ESOL providers use to assess language skills are inconsistent between most providers across Wales. The majority of providers design their own in-house ESOL assessment material to assess learners' skills in social English. They do not have an academic or vocational English content. In many cases, the assessment is informal and takes the form of a friendly 'chat'.
- 49 In further education provision, a minority of learners fail to achieve marks in their initial assessment high enough to be able to enrol on their chosen mainstream course. For a few learners, providers advise them to take a lower level course suited to their English language ability but below their academic ability. Providers do not collate the number of learners who apply for courses but fail to make the entry standards or those who fail to take up the offer of other courses. There is no monitoring and analysis of the final destination of these learners.
- 50 A few providers offer the option of a 12-month English course within ESOL provision for learners who have little language ability. These courses aim to provide the skills needed for the learners to access their chosen mainstream course. In a very few cases, these are full time courses. A few learners felt they benefited from this approach and many have successfully progressed in later years to attain qualifications on mainstream courses. However, a minority felt that the course held them back a year in their studies and in a few providers there is a six-month waiting list for these courses. This results in a further delay to learners' progress.



## Support for learners

- 51 The type of English language acquisition support offered to learners varies between providers and sectors. All providers consider each learner individually and plan to match the support to the needs of the learner. However, the provision of support is limited to the available resources and hindered by a lack of funding.
- 52 The two most often used forms of support in further education colleges, schools and work-based learning providers are in-class support with a learning assistant and out of class support in the learning support department. A minority of learners in further education provision have in-class support in small groups, attend specific classes in an ESOL department or attend classes supported by English GCSE tutors.
- 53 Very few learners in all sectors receive support from teachers and support staff with relevant qualifications for teaching and supporting learners with English language acquisition needs.
- 54 A majority of tutors of mainstream courses in schools, further education colleges and work-based learning feel that learners receive the wrong sort of support. They see a lack of cohesion between the core subject and the language support and feel that this results in learners making slow progress.
- 55 Both learners and tutors in all providers report the support of a good mentor as an effective tool in motivating learners. One learner felt the best advice to give to new learners was 'to find a good English-speaking friend'. Many schools have developed mentoring programmes, with staff, peers and outside volunteers supporting learners effectively. Retention of learners on courses is better where there are mentors in an effective support role.
- 56 The Ethnic Minority Advisory Service (EMAS) views the role of learning support mentors in schools as vitally important. EMAS currently has learning support mentors working with a group of Somali boys in Cardiff. EMAS run effective homework clubs for 100 young people. The impact of the support has been positive and schools have reported an improvement in their engagement in learning, school attendance and attainment.
- 57 Nearly all schools struggle to provide sufficient mentors on the budget allocation they receive. In a few areas, 14-19 Learning Networks have clear strategies for supporting learners through the use of mentors and learning coaches. In the best cases, learning mentors come from the learners' own communities and engage with the community as well as the individual learner. In one area, 100 parents came from the Somali community to attend a 'Help Your Child with Homework' event.

## Progress in learning

- 58 Tutors feel that learners with English language acquisition needs make slower progress than learners who are bilingual or whose first language is English or Welsh. Many tutors report that learners develop coping strategies but that these are often inappropriate. One learner interviewed for the research is writing assignments in the home language and then translating them into English. Another learner 'uses all manner of spellcheck machines'. The coping strategies delay learner progress.
- 59 Nearly all learners are translating parts of lessons. In the worst cases they are translating large amounts of information and in the best cases they are translating technical words. This adversely affects their progress as they are unable to keep up with the pace of the lesson. In some cases they have to copy work from another learner. This results in the learner gaining knowledge but missing the understanding which enables them to transfer the skills beyond the classroom.
- 60 A minority of tutors stated that the pace of the course outstrips the learners' ability to learn English and prevents them from reaching their full potential.
- 61 The number of learners with English language acquisition needs who become part of the NEET statistics (Not in Employment, Education or Training) is not clear. Tutors are concerned that a disproportionate number of these learners do not make a successful transition into post-16 progression options. They are at risk of dropping out of programmes early and becoming disengaged. Cardiff 14-19 Network has a successful model for working with NEETs and reports an 80% successful re-engagement. However, there are no statistics to distinguish the number of these learners who have English language acquisition needs.

## Glossary

**AS level:** General Certificate of Education at advanced subsidiary level

**Basic Skills Cymru:** Has lead responsibility to implement 'Words Talk, Numbers Count, the Basic Skills Strategy for Wales, within the Welsh Assembly Government

**DCELLS:** The Welsh Assembly's Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

**14-19 Learning Networks:** A strategic group of providers of education and training in a local area, set up as part of 'Learning Pathways 14-19'

**GCSE:** General Certificate for Secondary Education

**Learning pathways 14-19:** The Welsh Assembly's strategy for developing and improving education and training opportunities for 14 to 19-year-old learners referred to in 'The Learning Country (2001) and 'Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19 (2002)

**Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR):** This is a database managed by the Welsh Assembly's Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. It contains records of all post-16 learner enrolments and achievements.

**National Support Project for ESOL:** A project funded by Basic Skills Cymru which aimed to strengthen the support available to adults and children from linguistic minority communities in response to the ESOL/EAL scoping study, EAL and ESOL in Wales, commissioned in October 2002

**PLASC:** Pupil Level Annual School Census. PLASC data underpins the National Pupil Database.

## The remit author and survey team

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