



# ESOL Neighbourhood Audit Pilot (Harehills, Leeds) Executive Summary

May 2011



## **The ESOL Neighbourhood Audit Pilot (Harehills, Leeds)**

People who move to the UK need English language skills to access training, gain employment and participate in society. Migrants bring with them valuable abilities, qualifications and experience which can lie untapped unless they have the chance to learn English to an appropriate level. The way that this is achieved is through English language provision known as ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). This is the summary of the Harehills ESOL Needs Neighbourhood Audit (HENNA) project, which is concerned with improving the understanding of the English language skills needs of Leeds' new and more settled migrant communities in the specific neighbourhood of Harehills. The findings are intended to inform and improve the planning and delivery of ESOL provision across the city, and to be applicable to other similar contexts across Britain's urban centres.

Empirical research is needed to gain an in-depth understanding of a neighbourhood and its ESOL needs, to indicate how ESOL planning might progress, and to inform policy-makers. The report of this study shows how this can be done. The methodological toolkit which accompanies the report provides future researchers with the means to carry out similar work elsewhere.

### **Background to the project**

This study was instigated when the Leeds City Council-facilitated ESOL Working Group identified a need for research which would investigate the match, or mismatch, between ESOL need and ESOL provision in Leeds. Funding

for the research was secured by the Regeneration Service of Leeds City Council from YoHrSpace, the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) for Yorkshire and Humber, which is hosted by Local Government Yorkshire and Humber. The requirements of the project were for:

- a study carried out at a *local* level of both ESOL need and of the meeting of that need through ESOL provision;
- the development of a replicable methodology through which parallel work might be carried out in other neighbourhoods across the city and beyond.

The Leeds neighbourhood chosen as the focus of the research is Harehills, a highly diverse area of inner-city Leeds, to the east of the city centre. Harehills is an area with high levels of unemployment and of households on benefits, and has significant new and more well-established migrant and Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

The project offers a detailed understanding of:

- The scale and extent of English language skills needs of new and more settled migrant communities in the neighbourhood of Harehills in Leeds, and of any differences amongst the different communities that make up the neighbourhood.

- The scale and extent of English language needs of young people from new and more settled migrant communities in the neighbourhood.
- ESOL provision, delivery models, engagement routes and take-up rates of provision in the neighbourhood.
- The barriers to accessing ESOL provision in the neighbourhood.
- The views of key ESOL stakeholders in terms of both current and future provision to better support the needs of adult migrant English language learners.

### ***Data and methodology***

The HENNA project was carried out by researchers working in the School of Education, University of Leeds, and at RETAS, The Refugee Education Training Advice Service, Leeds. Fieldwork took place between December 2010 and March 2011. The research follows a case study approach. In summary the data sets are developed from:

- a demographic study of Harehills
- a neighbourhood survey of ESOL provision
- questionnaire surveys of ESOL students and teachers
- interviews with ESOL teachers, managers, and a range of stakeholders

Analytical strategies include statistical analysis of survey data, content analysis of interview data, and qualitative

analysis of field notes and other documentary data collected in the course of the project.

### **Summary of conclusions and recommendations**

This study recognises that in order for migrants to integrate in a meaningful way in their communities, i.e. to gain employment, retrain, participate locally and access their full set of rights, adult migrants require a sufficient level of English language skills. Competence in English underpins employability, and provides people with the ability to support themselves and their families. A key outcome of this research is to begin to improve the employability prospects and progression of Leeds residents who have English language needs, through more appropriate and effectively targeted ESOL provision.

ESOL provision will not be effective if it adopts a narrow view towards employability; it will only be effective if it is sustained and embedded in the whole of social life. A knowledge of English enables communication for work, at work and in society generally. Moreover, as a pre-requisite to learning English, students need to be able to participate in the social life of a community. Hence this report examines ESOL needs and barriers to provision broadly.

The conclusions and recommendations group into broad themes:

- mainstream and peripheral ESOL provision;
- fragmentation and coordination of ESOL provision;
- the notion of the 'group';

- appropriate provision and pedagogy;
- funding issues.

### **Mainstream and peripheral ESOL provision**

1. Within ESOL provision, there is a sense of the 'mainstream' and the 'periphery'. The mainstream refers to Further Education college provision which takes place at large or main sites, which play a key role in neighbourhood ESOL provision, and where students are likely to have access to a range of levels and progression routes. Peripheral provision refers to voluntary or private-sector, small-scale and locally- or community-based ESOL provision.
2. The marginality of peripheral provision is reflected in the spaces which accommodate ESOL classes.
3. Many students cannot be accommodated in mainstream provision for a variety of reasons, including long waiting lists, childcare and crèche availability, immigration status and eligibility, and affective issues such as their own confidence.
4. Those most likely to suffer isolation and marginalisation even in their local communities – women with young children who do not speak English and who do not have the networks necessary to support them – will often be dependent on peripheral provision from voluntary organisations, for whom funding is often insecure.

### ***Implications***

- Students who cannot find a place in mainstream provision (due to their eligibility, status, ability to attend regularly, etc) might do so in more peripheral provision, including that from voluntary sector organisations, which often have the political commitment to cater for them.
- Funding for such organisations, when it is precarious, does not afford coherent, sustained provision.
- Locally-appropriate, and locally-provided, high-quality provision can be the stepping-stone to successful language learning for many students.

### ***Recommendation***

- ESOL needs to be provided both at the mainstream and the community level, and these dimensions of provision need to be closely coordinated.
- Local Authorities should take the lead in provision of ESOL and its coordination across a neighbourhood and district.

### **Fragmentation and coordination**

5. Patterns of ESOL provision, funding and attendance are complex, and pertain beyond the neighbourhood boundaries to the city as a whole. The general picture is one of fragmented ESOL

provision locally and city-wide which is in urgent need of coordination.

6. An overarching conclusion is that the erosion of the cohesive framework afforded by *Skills for Life* is likely to lead to a return to the fragmented picture of ESOL provision of previous times.
7. The pattern of multiple funders and combinations of providers and centres is likely to remain characteristic of ESOL under the proposed new funding regime.
8. The complexity of provision and funding raises questions of continuity, coherence and quality of tuition for the benefit of students. For successful sustained learning, progression and progression routes need to be meaningful, clear and coordinated. However, lack of continued and stable funding streams disrupts progression routes both between ESOL courses of different levels, and from ESOL into training and work.

### ***Recommendations***

- The diversity of provision and funding points to the desirability of a dynamic city-wide directory of ESOL provision.
- Coordinators of such a directory might recruit volunteers to assist in its compilation.
- Much locally-based provision is the responsibility of the voluntary sector. However, this responsibility could equally be shouldered by an institution such as a Further Education college in collaboration with local voluntary and community



groups, thereby bringing together the two sectors and enabling clearer progression from one type of provision to another.

- Local Authorities have a role in coordinating links between the FE sector and voluntary and community groups, at the level of the neighbourhood and district.
- Information regarding ESOL is scarce and often inaccurate. It is important that information about ESOL across the city needs to be connected.
- It is worth considering efforts made in other parts of the country to co-ordinate information on local ESOL provision, e.g. the ESOL Exchange in the London borough of Newham: see <http://www.aston-mansfield.org.uk/esol.php>
- Coordinators and providers such as Further Education colleges might explore the potential of electronic networks in enabling and enhancing access to learning opportunities and coordination at local level.
- The process of planning and commissioning ESOL provision in a neighbourhood or district should be informed by a detailed study of the demographic make-up, ESOL need, take-up and routes to engagement at the relevant geographic level. The toolkit developed in parallel with this project can be used in part or in its entirety to support this process and help achieve positive outcomes for learners and neighbourhoods.

## **The notion of the 'group'**

9. The idea of relating needs to specific ethnic and linguistic groups runs deep.
10. Group labels can obscure the causes of real, underlying needs by associating them with ethnicity or language. It is often more helpful to see 'needs' in terms of other factors such as length and conditions of residence, previous education, future intentions with regard to training and employment, gender and, in the case of younger learners, age.
11. The idea of the 'group' should not be dispensed with altogether: the notion does have short-term and strategic purchase. People who identify as members of specific ethnic and linguistic groups are often well-placed to inform about specific locally-felt needs.

## ***Recommendation***

- When trying to assess need, providers and other authorities should gain advice from, and consult with, community organisations about appropriate provision. This is despite the difficulties of identifying appropriate and knowledgeable 'community leaders'.

## **Appropriate provision and pedagogy**

12. Participants regard ESOL needs as lying in three spheres: a general or 'basic' knowledge of English;

English that is needed in specific contexts; and a broader knowledge of systems, structures and local ways of doing things.

13. Where provision exists, it must address these needs in a way that is appropriate for particular students.
14. ESOL also has to cater for the needs of a mobile ESOL population, multiple levels of competence among students, and students with little or no literacy in English or any other language.
15. Younger ESOL students have particular needs that extend beyond the ESOL curriculum.
16. ESOL for citizenship is also a major motivation for seeking a class.
17. Concerns were raised by ESOL learners and practitioners regarding the quality and quality control of ESOL provision for active JSA/ESA claimants in the Harehills area, and over the way it links with and complements other provision. Concerns were also raised about the future provision and funding of ESOL at pre-entry and entry level.

### ***Recommendations***

- Some ESOL students have little or no literacy, either in their expert languages or in English, and this needs to be addressed in the spheres of employability and teacher training, and requires sustained resources.

- Provision and progression at higher levels, into work, re-training or tertiary-level study, needs to be considered alongside that of progression at lower levels.
- The extra-linguistic needs of younger ESOL students, i.e. their pastoral needs and the need to access the full curriculum, have to be addressed with specialised provision.
- ESOL provision for 16-19-year-olds could link more coherently to provision for older EAL students in the secondary school sector.
- ESOL provision that is employment- or employability-related (e.g. DWP-contracted Jobcentre Plus provision) needs to address broad, transferable language (and indeed social) concerns, alongside employability-focussed ones.
- The notion of appropriate broad-based ESOL provision for jobseekers extends to all students: those whose language and literacy needs are more fundamental, or who are at a more preliminary level, still need to be catered for.

### **Funding issues**

18. The potential consequences dominate discussions with the informants on this project, and are a source of anxiety for senior managers, teachers, and students alike. Without being able to describe the precise picture before it has fully emerged, it should not be assumed that any current funding sources are stable.

### ***Implications of the current funding policy***

- In Harehills up to 75% of students currently in a free ESOL class will have to pay fees when these are implemented. Many of these students, predominantly women and the low-paid, are unlikely to be able to afford these fees and will therefore be excluded from provision.
- The ESOL sector will suffer job losses as a consequence of the cuts.
- The responsibility for ESOL is likely to be shouldered more heavily by the private sector and the voluntary sector.

## **Summary**

ESOL in Harehills and across the city needs to be better organised, publicized, coordinated and integrated with other local services; and – crucially – aligned with the linguistic, social and employment needs of students. While ‘something is better than nothing’, sustained, stable and appropriate ESOL provision, with clear progression routes, is the optimum.

## **Related documents**

- The ESOL Neighbourhood Audit Pilot report (the HENNA report)
- The ESOL Neighbourhood Audit Pilot Methodological Toolkit
- Annex 1 containing data and analyses from the HENNA demographic study
- Annex 2 containing data and analyses from the HENNA student survey
- Annex 3 containing data and analyses from the HENNA teacher survey

The ESOL Neighbourhood Audit Pilot (Harehills, Leeds) was carried out for YoHrSpace and Leeds City Council by a team from the University of Leeds, RETAS, Leeds and King’s College London.

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