

Initial Government response to the ten main recommendations in “Breaking the Language Barriers: the report of the Working Group on English for Speakers of Other Languages”.

The Government welcomes this report which will be an extremely useful starting point for further development in this area. The challenge will be to ensure that all ESOL learners can gain access to appropriate and effective learning opportunities.

We attach high priority to this area of learning as shown by the announcement in May of an additional £0.5 million for development activity. This work will be continued as an integral part of our efforts to tackle poor basic skills among adults generally.

Our initial response to each of the ten main recommendations in the report is set out below. It will be essential for the new Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, which we are in the process of setting up, to engage more fully in the detail of the report in the months and years ahead.

1. *All developments in the national adult basic skills strategy must address ESOL needs alongside but distinct from basic literacy and numeracy and this should be a specific responsibility of the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit.*

Part of the remit of the new Strategy Unit and the aim of the national strategy which we plan to announce later this year will be to ensure that all learners receive the teaching and support appropriate to their needs.

In addition, the Learning and Skills Council will have a duty to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity. We will expect the Council, in discharging that duty, to take full account of the recommendations in “Breaking the Language Barriers”.

2. *The research planned for 2001 to establish both national and local baselines for literacy and numeracy should establish equivalent baselines for ESOL needs, including language support.*

The Department is in the process of commissioning research on literacy and numeracy baselines and is considering how most effectively to extend the research to cover ESOL needs.

3. *The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) should:*

a) set clear participation and achievement targets for ESOL nationally and locally in order to drive up the quality and effectiveness of provision; and

b) provide an adequate, coherent and flexible funding regime for ESOL

provision which will permit it to meet those targets working with employers and education and training providers.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will set targets nationally and locally for basic skills: it is envisaged that ESOL targets will be one subset of these.

Discussions are under way on the funding of all provision for post-16 learning. The second technical consultation paper, recently out for consultation, addressed funding issues in relation to learners with additional needs. The issues raised in that consultation and in the "Breaking the Language Barriers" report will be taken into account as the Department and the Learning and Skills Council takes this work forward.

4. *The DfEE/LSC should look to an expansion of ESOL provision through colleges, Local Education Authorities and the voluntary and community sector - focusing on those areas with especially high demand or with specific refugee issues.*

A review of Local Education Authority and voluntary and community sector provision of basic skills including ESOL will be a priority for the Learning and Skills Council. We are proposing to develop immediately a number of community based pilot projects which will be carefully evaluated to provide models of good practice. The FEFC is considering extra funding to encourage colleges to extend their outreach work.

5. *The DfEE should commission the production and distribution of an information and support materials pack for the tutors and support workers of organisations providing ESOL to refugees.*

We will be issuing tenders to produce these packs shortly.

6. a) *The national standards for basic literacy should encompass ESOL standards up to Level 2 but there must be a distinct ESOL curriculum framework;*
b) *The review of the national basic skills standards framework planned for 2003/4 should consider the specific factors relevant to ESOL and involve consultation with experienced ESOL practitioners.*

A draft ESOL curriculum, currently out for consultation, has been developed by the Basic Skills Agency and the London Language and Literacy Unit. It is based on the national standards and linked to the literacy and numeracy curriculum but takes into account the particular needs of ESOL learners, especially oracy.

7. *There should be an independent evaluation of the ESOL curriculum in practice to link in with the proposed review of the national basic skills standards framework in 2003/4.*

We will commission this evaluation to link in with the review of the national basic skills standards framework.

8. *ESOL (and EFL) qualifications should be mapped against the national standards. These qualifications should allow flexibility in delivery, assessment and outcomes and should assess each of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) separately.*

We support this recommendation in principle and will be working with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and others to set up an ESOL qualifications framework.

9. a) *DfEE should commission FENTO (the Further Education National Training Organisation), together with ESOL specialists and other relevant organisations, to develop teaching standards and an initial training and qualifications framework for new entrants to ESOL teaching.*
- b) *Within the 'generic' training for all teachers, there should be a recognition that teaching should be inclusive; awareness of the needs of bilingual students, including the ability to work with students receiving language support, should be included;*
- c) *The links between diploma level and masters courses should be explored, so that Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL) can be given on masters courses for relevant qualifications and/or experience at masters level;*
- d) *DfEE should commission the development and delivery of a program of intensive training and support materials for ESOL teachers, based on the new curriculum. This training to be delivered to all ESOL teachers who work more than 6 hours per week by the end of 2001;*
- e) *By 2005 all teachers on ESOL courses funded by the LSC should be appropriately trained and qualified.*

FENTO and the Basic Skills Agency are already developing an initial training framework for new basic literacy and numeracy teachers. The specific needs of ESOL learners will be taken into account in the development of the standards framework and accompanying guidance. FENTO is also already working on ensuring that an awareness of the needs of those whose first language is not English is an integral part of the inclusivity element of their 'generic' teacher training.

We will shortly be issuing tenders for the development and delivery of a program of intensive teacher training based on the new ESOL curriculum. This programme will initially be delivered to teacher trainers, rolled out to all ESOL teachers who work more than 6 hours per week by the end of 2001 and eventually extended to all ESOL teachers, including those in the community and voluntary sector.

10. *Inspection arrangements being developed for the new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) should ensure that there is a coherent and consistent inspection process for ESOL provision and that inspectors have specific ESOL experience.*

We will ensure that the recommendations in “Breaking the Language Barriers” are taken into account by the new Adult Learning Inspectorate and reflected in quality assurance and inspection arrangements for adult basic skills.