

Investing in the Big Society



The case for ESOL provision in Newham

INTRODUCTION

Learning a new language poses many challenges. For migrants to the UK, learning English is not only a challenge in its own right, but the key to solving many other issues with which they have to contend and the key to active participation in society, including finding work and integrating into wider society.

One of the most common accusations made against newcomers to the UK is that “they don’t speak English”. However, as most British-born citizens know, learning another language is seldom easy and most of us give up once we have “enough to get by”. Having a full grasp of a new language usually involves learning in a structured way, which is why English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes are so important.

Learning the language of the host community fluently has a positive impact on the lives of individuals, families and society as a whole, affecting access to services, the ability to contribute to community activities through volunteering, and securing and holding on to employment. Investing in ESOL can help unlock the huge potential of people joining the UK and will benefit our economy and culture. The Big Society is about encouraging people to take an active role in their communities and a common language is essential to achieving this.

In Newham the need for investment in ESOL is particularly important. The borough’s population is the most diverse in the UK with some 70% of residents from Black and

Newham Facts

- 70% population non-white
- High numbers of EU migrants
- 47% adults with entry level ESOL needs
- Highest number of National Insurance Number registrations in London
- High unemployment (14.2%) and low employment (56%)

Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds¹. A significant number of new arrivals in the UK come to Newham and many need to learn English. In 2009 more than 22,000 adults from other countries received their National Insurance numbers in Newham - the highest number in the country.

Newham ESOL Exchange is a consortium of voluntary and statutory sector organisations working together to improve ESOL provision locally. This briefing sets out the case for ensuring that, at a time when public sector spending is under review, ESOL is seen not as a minor expense but as an essential and cost effective way of drawing people into their host community, enabling them to access local services and contribute to society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Newham's diverse and transient population with high unemployment and low literacy levels means it has a particular need for effective ESOL provision. Funding for ESOL in Newham should be at least maintained, and ideally increased.
- Central government needs to recognise the impact of ESOL provision on all areas of people's lives including health, employment and training, and on society as a whole.
- Reducing or marginalising ESOL provision would be a false economy. Investment in ESOL will reduce the need for spending in other areas. The significant and growing demand for ESOL provision is likely to continue and needs to be accommodated.
- The focus on ESOL for employment, with much funding dependent on learners finding work, is even harder to achieve in a recession. Funding should not be dependent on immediate movement into employment - there are long term benefits to individuals and society not linked to short-term targets and some provision needs to focus on ESOL for living.
- More funding needs to be made available for pre-entry level ESOL and classes for people with no recourse to public funding.
- The government needs to provide clear direction to dispel uncertainty around the future of ESOL provision generally and the New Approach to ESOL in particular.

¹ GLA Ethnic Group Population Projections (2008)

AN OVERVIEW OF NEED IN NEWHAM

- Newham has the most diverse population in the UK with high numbers of economic migrants and new arrivals and probably the highest population of refugee and asylum seekers in London.² Its needs are therefore different from an area with a long established ethnic minority population who are mostly second or third generation.
- 70% Newham's population is from non-white ethnic groups and the 30% white population includes a substantial proportion of non-English speakers from Eastern Europe.² Because they are relatively new arrivals, many need ESOL classes.
- Newham is a place where EU and other incomers choose to live in large numbers. In 2009 Newham had the highest number of National Insurance Number registrations (NINOs) from EU accession states in London (over 22,000). The number rose from 2008 despite a reduced inflow of migrants nationally.²
- In 2009, 3,590 Newham residents attended British Citizenship Ceremonies - the highest in London.²
- Three quarters of the population are under 45 years (compared to two thirds across London) but despite being a young population, the borough has high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity and low levels of earnings and qualifications.³
- The employment rate in Newham is just 56% compared with the London average of nearly 70%³. Unemployment is exceptionally high in Newham at 14.2%, compared with 8.6% across London.³ In July 2010, there were 10,134 claimants of Job Seekers Allowance in Newham and in November 2009, 13,260 Incapacity Benefit/Employment Support Allowance customers in Newham.⁴
- 57,400 people are economically inactive - more than one third of residents of working age.³
- Among residents that do work incomes are low, on average £12,500 less per annum than London as a whole. Over half of Newham residents are qualified only to NVQ level 1 or below and they are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market. An unusually low proportion of working age residents in Newham have higher-level qualifications (25%) compared with the London average (39%).³

² Data from Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2010 - Draft, August 2010

³ Newham, London Economic Development Strategy 2010 to 2027 – Consultation Draft, August 2010

⁴ Jobcentre Plus Newham Labour Market report – September 7th 2010

- The link between ethnic diversity and poverty was recognised in the New Policy Institute's report *London's Poverty Profile* in 2009, which noted that *"over half of all people in poverty in London are from BME backgrounds"*.
- Given the clear and proven links between competency in English and employability, the provision of ESOL is particularly important in this borough.

FACTS ABOUT ESOL NEED & PROVISION

Need

It is hard to find data on the levels of need for ESOL, either current or projected. In 2006 it was estimated that 600,000 people of working age had an ESOL need, with around only one in four accessing publicly funded ESOL provision⁵. According to 2006/7 figures, 62% Newham's population were second language speakers and 47% adults had entry level ESOL needs⁶.

In the 2003 Skills for Life Survey 16% of the UK adult working age population had literacy levels at Entry Level 3 or below.⁷

The Mayor's Refugee Integration Strategy (December 2009)⁸ states that: *'Being able to understand and speak English is essential for all aspects of integration.'* (p14).

ESOL can dramatically impact the ability of people to find work:

Rabia's Story

Rabia started an Entry Level 1 course with Newham College in 2009. She has now developed her English skills to such a high standard she has recently completed a work placement within Newham College and said this helped her to realise that:

"if you are prepared to work hard, you can get where you want and that getting your foot in the door is not that difficult."

Lack of English language skills is a barrier to employment, to accessing health and other services, and to helping children achieve their educational potential. Social inclusion is impossible where there is no shared language.

⁵ London Skills & Employment Board – ESOL & Employability in London – 2008, p5

⁶ New Approach to ESOL - Newham Adult Learning Service, December 2009

Provision

The New Approach to ESOL was introduced by the previous government in 2009 to encourage local authorities, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and others to work together so ESOL plays a more effective role in supporting community cohesion. The LSC has been superseded by the Skills Funding Agency (SfA), which still funds ESOL but currently has no involvement in the New Approach. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is currently voluntarily supporting the strategic leads of the New Approach but there is uncertainty about the future and Newham is still awaiting confirmation to proceed with its action plan, completed in December 2009. Newham has been cited by NIACE as an example of good practice and its progress is largely due to Newham ESOL Exchange.

Funding for ESOL is complex and eligibility for classes, usually linked to funding, is complicated and shifting. Since August 2007 more learners have had to pay for their ESOL provision which has also impacted on take-up and provision. Funding is recognised nationally and locally as a limiting factor in ESOL provision:

*'Funding appears to be the key issue preventing growth in this area for many providers, both in terms of providers accessing sufficient funding to deliver their programmes as well as individuals accessing funding to attend training.'*⁷

The London Mayor's Refugee Integration Strategy states that: *'...current courses do not meet all the diverse needs of refugee communities.'*⁸ During 2010 the London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) will develop the Mayor's Integration Strategy to include other migrants and will lead on one of three priorities: enabling migrants to learn English.

Newham's New Approach to ESOL Action Plan states that around 6000 people access ESOL provision in the borough: *'We are therefore only capturing around 12% of [the] potential pool of learners.'*

Even with the Action Plan and the links available through Newham ESOL Exchange, it is difficult to obtain data on the total number and needs of learners or provision of ESOL places locally. Our 2010 directory lists 33 organisations delivering ESOL in over 40 venues. The exact number of courses is unknown but totals well over 100.

Much ESOL provision focuses on higher levels and employability; because most funders target these areas. Anecdotally it seems to be hard to find classes for people at pre-entry level and for those with no recourse to public funds.

⁷ National Research & Development Centre for Adult Literacy & Numeracy – Teachers of Adult Literacy, Numeracy & ESOL: progress towards a qualified workforce –2010, p.38

⁸ London Enriched – December 2009, p.14

One provider (Newham College of Further Education's Centre for Innovation & Partnerships) supplied a breakdown of the ESOL level of students on entering their ESOL classes between March and August 2010. 39% were at pre-entry level, and 75% combined at entry and pre-entry level. If their intake is representative of a wider trend this confirms anecdotal evidence that a significant proportion of learners need ESOL provision at a low level in Newham. Funding needs to be made available for pre-entry level ESOL - the Skills Funding Agency (a major ESOL funder) has never funded provision at pre-entry level.

IMPACT OF ESOL PROVISION

Research

There is conclusive evidence of the positive effects on earnings and employment of having basic skills as an adult: *'People with higher literacy and numeracy skills earn more in the labour market than those with lower basic skills.'*⁹

Widespread recognition, supported by research evidence, also highlights the impact of ESOL provision on people's life chances generally, and their ability to integrate into their host community:

*'Finding employment and accommodation, using local services and mixing with members of the wider community all depend on the ability to speak English.'*⁸ p.14

*'People without sufficient English language skills do not have the same life chances for accessing services or supporting their families, or for work and volunteering.'*¹⁰

Research suggests that early access to ESOL works best:

*'The less time the students in our study had been in the UK, the greater progress they made.'*¹¹

⁹ Department for Business Innovation & Skills – Economic Impact of Training & Education in Basic Skills – October 2009, 3.18

¹⁰ London Skills & Employment Board – ESOL & Employability in London – 2008, p3

¹¹ National Research & Development Centre for Adult Literacy & Numeracy - Effective Teaching & Learning ESOL - Summary Report - 2007, p.26

Fatima's Story

Fatima sought asylum in the UK from Somalia with her young children. Her route to the UK was through several countries. She kept her family together by working, making sponge cakes and selling them in markets. She settled in Newham and attended a mixed entry ESOL class held in a local nursery school twice a week. She was very pro-active; networking in the local Somali community where she lived and on several occasions brought other Somali women to the class to join.

During her second year, on the way into class, Fatima told her tutor she had gone to her children's school parents' evening the night before and for the first time had understood what the teachers had been saying. She had always attended parents' evenings and on return when her children had enquired what their teachers had said about them she had always replied in Somali "They said you're doing very well", oblivious of whether this was the case or not.

Zeynab's Story

Zeynab attended a mainly Somali female entry 2 ESOL class in the local church twice a week. During one lesson, this usually engaged learner was noticeably distant and obviously pre-occupied. Her tutor, concerned about her lack of engagement, commented that she seemed as if she was not in the class. She replied that she had a hospital appointment that afternoon and there was to be no interpreter. Zeynab had received shrapnel injuries from an exploding device in Somalia, the shards of which were too small to surgically remove and which could also migrate around her body.

The tutor abandoned the planned lesson in favour of addressing Zeynab's pressing need and began to look at possible questions that she could pose to the doctor that afternoon, drawing on his experience as a non-practising nurse. In return, Zeynab agreed to inform the class at the next lesson how she had got on. Although the lesson became exclusively centred on her needs, it did not alienate the other learners whom he observed writing down the questions as if applicable to themselves and joining in with helping to make questions.

On return to the class, Zeynab reported that there had been an interpreter, but that she had also shown the doctor the list of questions that she had taken with her. The doctor read through them and praised her for bringing them with her.

“Zenith gets the right treatment”

As part of an all female entry 2 course, a health related ESOL resource from the Bromley by Bow Centre was used: “Zenith gets the right treatment”. This was about women accessing breast screening services, which have a poor uptake by some sections of Newham’s many communities. The story had a happy ending i.e. Zenith the main character had a clear screening result. To establish that learning had occurred the tutor changed the ending to the receipt of bad news to see how learners would respond if this was a possibility. He used flip chart paper for a make shift envelope and asked learners to pass it around the class.

When the envelope came to a Pakistani learner, she was very anxious saying that she didn’t want it as she’d had a lot of bad news from hospitals. Tearfully she began to inform the class about major health issues that her daughters had, the frequent journeys to a central London teaching hospital and how isolated she as a mother felt. This allowed her to be supported by the rest of the class.

ABOUT NEWHAM ESOL EXCHANGE

- Newham ESOL Exchange is a consortium of voluntary, statutory and private sector organisations established in February 2008 to improve the co-ordination and effectiveness of ESOL provision in the borough. Before the ESOL Exchange, Newham had no co-ordination of ESOL service planning, commissioning, or delivery; no clear picture of what classes were available, where, and when.
- More than 100 organisations have expressed an interest in the ESOL Exchange and 110 individuals have signed up to an email distribution list to share information about ESOL in Newham.
- Steering and Consortium groups meet regularly, sharing information about ESOL in Newham. The ESOL Exchange Steering Group has organised three conferences/events and overseen the production and wide distribution of two directories of ESOL provision in the borough.
- Prior to its inception there was ignorance of the provision of ESOL in Newham. There is now greater awareness of ESOL provision leading to a more joined up approach as opposed to fragmentation.
- Newham ESOL Exchange is a prime example of current government philosophy of communities taking responsibility. It was borne out of the community to serve the wider community through provision for the communities.

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