

## ESOL Provision in Scotland

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this paper is to update the SSCG on COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership's work on ESOL, and to consult them on our developing position.

### **Recommendations**

2. Members are invited to:
  - Endorse the position that funds for the provision of ESOL should be routed through local authorities from 2009 in order to achieve more accountability and better strategic oversight of ESOL provision in Scotland
  - Discuss and support the potential role for CLD Partnerships in achieving a more strategic, outcome focused and needs led approach to the allocation of ESOL funds in Scotland
  - Support the position that ESOL provision should continue to be delivered by colleges, community groups and the voluntary sector to ensure the needs of a diverse group of learners are met
  - Support COSLA's work on developing indicators for ESOL provision for eventual incorporation into Single Outcome Agreements.

### **Background**

3. In 2008 Scottish Government allocated £9 million over three years for the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. The new funding should deliver up to 7000 new places for refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers or other people who wish to learn English.
4. In April 2008 it was announced that funds for 2008/09 would be allocated in the same way as 2009/10. 10% is retained by Scottish Government for technical and professional development support and the remaining £2.7 million per annum has been split between colleges (60%) and Community Learning and Development Partnerships for community-based provision (40%). COSLA was supportive of this as the best way of ensuring money was with providers by the start of the year and on the condition that the issue was revisited before future allocations were made.
5. From 2009 COSLA has asked Scottish Government to consider that all funds for ESOL provision are routed through local authorities to Community Learning and Development Partnerships. This would address specific issues with the current system and lead to a more strategic and outcome focused approach to the provision of ESOL. Funds for ESOL provision refers to the 90% currently routed to providers, and not the 10% which is retained centrally.

### ***Issues with the current system***

6. COSLA is aware of a number of issues with how ESOL is currently delivered, and concerns have been reinforced by Scottish Government research. The research stated that “ESOL in Scotland faces a constantly shifting pattern of demand and inelastic supply”. Particular challenges include existing waiting lists, demand from existing students for more hours, the need for wrap-round services such as childcare and the influx of migrant workers from the EU with a significantly different profile to the asylum seeking community and other existing users.
7. Waiting lists for ESOL classes tend to be longer and more common in the central belt rather than in more rural areas, with city centre providers having much longer waiting lists than those in other areas. COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership is aware that people granted status through case resolution (asylum seekers) are facing significant waiting lists to access ESOL classes as part of their route to employment. This points to the need for a more strategic approach to the distribution of funds, which is not being realised by the current system.
8. Research conducted by local authorities including Glasgow and Fife has revealed that ESOL provision does not meet the needs of migrant workers in particular. According to the Scottish Government 80% of ESOL places are provided by colleges and these classes whether they operate in the college or through outreach into the community tend to take place during the day when full-time workers cannot attend. This issue is particularly significant as a result of increasing numbers of migrant workers arriving in Scotland from Europe.
9. On the other hand, community based providers cannot always provide appropriate tuition for ESOL students, with their wider range of educational qualifications and communicative needs, compared to native-speaker literacy students. Qualifications offered by colleges are a key route to employment. ESOL has to continue to be provided by colleges and community-based agencies to ensure the diverse needs of learners are met.

### ***Allocation of future funds***

10. Routing all ESOL funds through local authorities for distribution through CLD Partnerships from 2009 would lead to more flexible approaches to the provision of services that are more responsive to the needs of local communities. By distributing all funds through CLD Partnerships money could be allocated in a more strategic and publicly accountable way, which could remedy existing gaps in provision. It would also lead to more accountability at the local level.
11. This approach would sit comfortably with the new relationship between Scottish Government and Scottish local government and would encourage longer-term, mainstreaming approaches to ESOL rather than short-termism and "project"-focus that currently exists. A more strategic approach led by local government could avoid a repeat of the current situation where, despite additional pots of several millions pounds made available to address under-provision, significant gaps still exist.
12. It is important to stress that different sectors are able to meet different needs of a diverse group of learners. This approach would not necessarily involve reducing funding to one sector in favour of another, but would involve a strategic approach to distributing funds at a local level based on need, with a focus on outcomes. In order for this approach to work

representatives of all ESOL providers in an area (colleges, community-based and voluntary sector) have to be effectively represented on the CLD Partnership.

### ***Next steps***

13. COSLA began dialogue with Scottish Government about this approach during discussions around the allocation of the 2008/09 funds. It was agreed that any change to the way money is allocated has to be based on robust evidence and Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council are working on developing this.
14. COSLA has already committed to working with Scottish Government to ensure that CLD Partnerships play an active role in delivering outcomes. In order to strengthen the case for allocating ESOL funds to local authorities, COSLA officers would engage with CLD Partnership Managers to ensure that all Partnerships are in a position to adequately represent all ESOL providers in their area. We would also seek to develop specific indicators relating to ESOL to be incorporated into Single Outcome Agreements.

### **Conclusion**

15. While it is clear that it is desirable for ESOL to be provided by a range of providers across sectors, evidence suggests that there is a need for greater strategic oversight to how ESOL funding is allocated. Members of the group are invited to consider the proposal that funds for ESOL provision are routed through local authorities to Community Learning and Development Partnerships in order to achieve a more strategic, outcome focused and needs led approach to provision, with flexibility to respond to local needs.

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