



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

REPORT

# A review of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) policy for Wales: executive summary

Executive summary of the findings from a review of how we work with our partners to help adults learn English in Wales.

First published: 20 July 2023

Last updated: 20 July 2023

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# Research aims and methodology

This paper is a review of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) policy for Wales and aims to assess the availability and adequacy of ESOL provision in Wales as well as making viable, evidenced informed recommendations for improvements. The review took place between February and July 2022.

The aim of the research was to determine how well formal ESOL provision in Wales offers adequate and timely support to learners, including an assessment of:

- what works well in the provision of ESOL and ESOL+ in Wales, and what gaps exist in the provision
- what challenges/barriers and/or facilitators exist in the provision of ESOL in Wales
- how well ESOL provision is offering adequate and timely support to those subject to varying immigration statuses, to those facing particular vulnerabilities, and to those based outside of the main dispersal areas of Wales – Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham
- whether the types of ESOL provision in Wales are adequate in terms of their quality, appropriateness, availability, and flexibility
- the impact of remote learning and digital exclusion on access to ESOL provision
- the extent to which more informal, participatory forms of learning support the real-life language needs of adult forced migrants
- how the progress and outcomes of ESOL learners, and their demographic characteristics, are monitored and measured over time and how anonymised data can be shared for transparency and accountability
- whether ESOL providers are developing bespoke ESOL provision to support people into work (or maintain work) and how ESOL provision is aligned with vocational training

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- whether ESOL providers are developing bespoke ESOL provision for other specific purposes, such as community orientation or to support passing driving tests
- the available provision to learn Welsh as well as, or instead of, English where appropriate, and the take-up of the Welsh provision
- where the take up of Welsh language teaching provision is high or low, to capture reasons for these variances
- whether funding for ESOL provision is being used in the best possible way to achieve maximum efficiency and outcomes
- the role of the Welsh Government, local authorities, Institutions, and public service partners in providing a strategic and co-ordinating lead to ensure sufficient, quality ESOL provision in Wales

The review also looked to determine whether there is sufficient access to other opportunities to develop language skills in informal and social settings, such as Friends and Neighbours (FAN) who run groups to develop conversational English or Welsh, and whether partnerships between formal ESOL providers and Hubs and informal ESOL providers are effective.

The final report proposes viable, evidence informed actions/recommendations for future policy development which could improve ESOL provision in Wales and address the gaps identified in the review.

A range of methods were used for the review including a brief rapid review of literature and analysis of the ESOL learning aims data collected by the Welsh Government on the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR).

An online survey was conducted during April and May 2022, distributed to over 150 organisations throughout Wales, including further education institutions, adult community learning providers, local authorities, vocational training organisations and third sector organisations.

Four online forums were delivered in June 2022 to gather insight from ESOL

providers (formal and informal) organisations involved in wider support and learners. Representatives from 24 organisations and 10 learners in total attended.

Semi structured interviews were conducted during June and July 2022 both online and in person with key stakeholders involved in ESOL delivery or support. Representatives from 14 organisations were interviewed in total.

Twelve online/in person focus groups were delivered with teachers, learners and managers from organisations delivering formal and informal ESOL provision in May and June 2022.

## Key findings

A summary of the key findings are grouped around funding and infrastructure, awareness and access, online and blended learning, curriculum and quality, workforce development, Welsh language provision, ESOL and employment. The research revealed that teams of tremendously dedicated, professional language educators are working hard across the country to provide the sort of language education desperately needed by people seeking to build new lives in Wales.

However, issues need to be addressed around ESOL teacher education, the lack of intensive pathway options, and collaboration between formal and informal providers, as well as signposting and awareness of ESOL provision. Moreover, ESOL provision is uniquely and ideally placed to play a more holistic, positive role in fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion. Providers should be supported in designing syllabi that can facilitate these opportunities.

## Funding and infrastructure

In the majority of discussions with tutors and providers of ESOL, participants reported concerns in the way provision was funded. Feedback highlighted that the current funding mechanism for ESOL provision does not have the necessary flexibility needed to deliver the best outcomes for learners. Participants highlighted how the ESOL student demographic differs markedly from other cohorts and secondly, that language use, and how it is acquired, assessed, and taught differs markedly from other subject areas.

Many respondents reported that being tied to a prescribed syllabus and assessments for funding reasons reduce flexibility in being able to respond to unplanned needs, leading to lengthy waiting lists to join classes for new arrivals.

Non completion of courses negatively affects funding for provision. It was reported that ESOL students, more often than other cohorts of learners, are less likely to complete a course; this could be because of the transient nature of some learners, but it is also because progressing into employment disrupts completion.

ESOL learners are required to take assessments to evidence progression and must repeat a whole year if they fail one element of the final year exams. This process can be demotivating and costly in terms of time and ambition, but it also has a direct impact on funding. Several college heads reported being dissatisfied that the bulk of current funding is dependent on a learner passing all four aspects of the qualification.

The funding mechanism, and the associated requirements to evidence progression through testing, was cited as being the reason a greater amount of class time could not be included as part of the syllabus. A number of college tutors and managers asserted that the inclusion of an informal, non-assessed element in the curriculum would make language learning a far richer experience

for the students involved.

There is some evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to less collaboration between providers as opportunities for networking have been limited and disrupted. Feedback focused on the need to have ESOL co-ordination and planning groups across regions and localities.

There is growing demand for ESOL outside of the main dispersal areas and the Reach+ Hubs. In these areas there was concern that more investment was needed to establish co-ordination and development work.

Overall, there was evidence that there was a need for more flexibility in the system for providers to adapt to local needs and that it was essential to have a funding system to enable this.

## **Awareness and access**

The majority of respondents reported that there is a lack of communication on a number of levels within the profession, and more co-ordination is needed between all providers both within regions and nationally.

Several participants highlighted the need for a digital platform to list all forms of ESOL provision across Wales. A Wales-wide platform would facilitate better awareness of available courses and enable online provision to be more easily identified and accessed. This would also provide a solution for areas where ESOL is not available because of issues around rurality or the need for a specific level or type of ESOL provision.

Improved communication within colleges and organisations also emerged as a concern and was articulated by several college managers. The absence of any “engagement officer” or “central point for collection of holistic data” was reported as being a barrier to better recognising individual learner needs.

Feedback also suggested a need for dual roles, for example, tutors who could also work as development officers, fulfilling a need to outreach, network, identify learners and facilitate links.

The lack of creche and childcare facilities was highlighted as a major barrier to participation in ESOL classes. The review highlighted a need for greater support for parents with children through both family ESOL classes and the provision of facilities.

The review also highlighted a lack of alternative options to the regular, levels-based annual progression and highlighted a need for fast-track, intensive and bespoke options for learners based around the education or employment aspirations of participants.

## **Online, remote and blended learning**

The review highlighted the potential to continue to test and develop remote and blended ESOL provision for higher level learners who have more skills to cope with digital learning and resources. Discussions highlighted that remote ESOL provision may also have benefits for providing some continuity for those learners who are transient, face uncertainty in living arrangements and find themselves being relocated to other dispersal areas at short notice.

The challenges of remote learning were highlighted for those ESOL learners who are not literate in their first language and the majority of feedback suggested that for these learners face to face teaching was essential.

Several participants noted that a digital pan Wales provision could be developed for certain levels of ESOL or some bespoke, focused ESOL pathways, for example ESOL for employment. A number of participants suggested that this would have benefited the sudden influx of new arrivals from Ukraine.



The review found concern at the lack of support for learners with additional learning needs (ALN) there were reports of undiagnosed ALN for some learners who may also never have experienced formal learning in their home country and a lack of access to ALN funding was highlighted as a barrier.

The review found that the instability in living accommodation was identified as a barrier for achieving good outcomes for learners. Moving frequently disrupts learning and can be challenging for individuals to find provision in a new area and that they will often have to join waiting lists before they can continue with their learning.

The review found that more clarity is needed for providers across Wales in terms of eligibility of funding and what provision is free to access for learners.

Funding concerns in relation to a lack of access to the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for young asylum seekers over the age of 16 were also raised by some providers and practitioners.

## **Curriculum and quality**

The review highlighted the need for more informal, participatory types of language education, based on the real-life needs of the learners. Migration, and certainly forced migration, frequently entails the loss of cultural, social and linguistic capital, and ESOL providers are aware that language education is ideally placed to foster the type of social bonds, bridges and links that are often impacted as a result of being a migrant.

Where funding is available, third-sector providers have the autonomy and flexibility to adopt the type of participatory pedagogies which can address the social and cultural issues that are intertwined with language education.

The review found that neighbourhood-organised events and conversation clubs

are a welcome addition providing further, informal opportunities for language practice and integration. However, they should not be seen as an equivalent or replacement for a non-formal pedagogy delivered by qualified teachers or volunteers.

Feedback suggested that working with volunteers in some formal provision is not widespread but there were reports from some providers that they would like to do more. The use of volunteers in ESOL provision is potentially beneficial, for example by increasing capacity and providing learners with extra support. It also requires careful planning and adequate support for those in volunteering roles.

## **Workforce development**

The review highlighted a lack of a suitably trained ESOL workforce to meet demand and a need for both ESOL-specific initial qualifications for teachers and a continuous programme of CPD to support the sector. Feedback suggested that more CPD is needed in areas such as teaching basic literacy skills, designing participatory classes, trauma informed approaches and the social context of migration.

## **Welsh language provision**

The review explored how Welsh language provision was available to refugees and migrants. Feedback suggested that whilst the priority for many providers has been on securing adequate ESOL provision there has been some progress on the development and delivery of WSOL (Welsh for speakers of other languages), with some providers offering WSOL or embedding Welsh language within provision.

The National Centre has created “Croeso I Bawb” taster course and established a policy whereby every Learn Welsh taster course is now free for all learners

enabling Croeso I Bawb to be offered free of charge to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, within this policy.

## ESOL and employment

Accessing employment is a key aim for many of those joining ESOL provision. Nevertheless, for many, the pathway into work that aligns to their skills and ambitions can be slow and difficult.

Several college tutors and managers reported the value of the ESOL+ courses in which learners come together for their ESOL class and are then streamed into the vocational modules of their choice. Data collected found that this type of provision has not been developed by other colleges across Wales, with feedback suggesting that developing courses in the ESOL + model has been challenging mainly because of smaller cohorts of learners.

The majority of college-based participants expressed a wish for more vocationally focussed ESOL. Many recognised the need to provide this but felt limited in their ability to do so because of lower numbers of learners, and cohorts of learners with lower language competency.

The need for vocational and employability support for ESOL learners was recognised as an area of provision that needed to be developed urgently, to respond to learner needs and ambitions.

One college manager suggested that, within current provision, a large proportion of ESOL learners are not considered to have a high enough level of language skills to access vocational ESOL classes. However, waiting for a learner to get to an appropriate level can take some time, lead to learner frustration and risk drop out because the learner is not satisfied or motivated by the level/type of ESOL that they are receiving.

Several college tutors and managers called for a more immersive, fast-track approach to ESOL that offered sufficient variety and flexibility to be tailored to different vocational routes. It was also noted that there was a need for holistic support that focused on wellbeing, confidence building and guidance for pathways into further learning or employment.

For some ESOL learners, recognition of their existing skills and qualifications could provide a faster route into the kind of employment they want. Many migrants and refugees settle in Wales with professional qualifications and spending five years moving through the ESOL levels can be extremely demotivating.

## Conclusions/recommendations

The recommendations set out below attempt to address the issue of constructing a more cohesive, joined-up approach to ESOL planning. They also seek to provide pathways to maximise the role ESOL classrooms can play in migrants' wellbeing, inclusion and sense of belonging. The recommendations have been grouped in the following headings: Funding and Infrastructure, Awareness and Access, Curriculum and Quality, REACH, and Other.

### Funding

#### Recommendation 1

A Task Group consisting of providers and the Welsh Government should be set up to review the ESOL funding model with the aim of i) implementing an improved system which recognises the mobility of the student cohort and ii) exploring options that would allow greater flexibility and innovation in the running

of courses. Specifically, the type of fast-track employment focussed, and participatory courses referred to throughout this report.

## **Recommendation 2**

Third-sector providers should be recognised for the role they play in the provision of language education and its interconnectedness with social inclusion. Such providers should be supported by Welsh Government funding to provide intensive, responsive, and inclusive language education initiatives.

## **Recommendation 3**

Welsh Government funding should be made available to colleges, local authorities, and other formal providers for the inclusion of non-accredited courses such as conversation-led classes and intensive, fast-track courses.

## **Infrastructure**

### **Recommendation 4**

The Welsh Government should work with the sector to ensure that ESOL co-ordinating and planning groups (perhaps aligned with each Adult Community Learning Partnership across Wales) are established with lead coordinators and development workers. These ESOL coordinators could be networked with the Welsh Government policy leads and other agencies to review provision, identify gaps and be alert to demand or supply issues.

## Recommendation 5

The [National Centre for Learning Welsh](#) provides a model for the co-ordination of language provision. The Welsh Government could consider the development of a similar model for ESOL in Wales with responsibility for leadership around curriculum and course development, resources for tutors and CPD as well as research, course signposting and marketing.

## Awareness

### Recommendation 6

Each local authority area should develop a digital information page of local providers, with up-to-date details of provision.

### Recommendation 7

The Welsh Government should commission a national platform for ESOL and WSOL, with all providers encouraged to have a profile on the site to list courses (online and in-person) and a link to their own sites.

### Recommendation 8

Existing facilities e.g., REACH hubs need to work more closely with informal providers, especially those in community settings, to ensure learners are aware of all the options available.

## **Recommendation 9**

The major colleges and local authority providers should be enabled/funded to support an employment / development officer. Such a role would enable a better understanding of learners' holistic needs and facilitate closer liaison with external partners such as third-sector providers, voluntary organisations, careers officers, universities and so on.

## **Access**

### **Recommendation 10**

Formal and informal providers should be enabled, through an appropriate funding model, to design and deliver intensive, full-time language education courses based, as far as possible and feasible, on the stated aspirations of the participants.

### **Recommendation 11**

The Welsh Government should request a review of creche facilities on sites of formal provision, with follow up to investigate why there may be a lack of facilities and to find solutions.

### **Recommendation 12**

Providers should be encouraged and supported, through appropriate funding, to trial fast-track courses for suitably identified learners.

# Impact of remote learning and digital exclusion on access to ESOL

## Recommendation 13

The professional learning available for FE and Adult Learning practitioners via **Jisc** could be enhanced or supplemented, so that leaders and teachers have access to professional learning that supports their development in embedding specific ESOL digital learning into their teaching and practice. This would facilitate knowledge construction regarding the effective design of ESOL focussed remote and blended teaching and learning, as well as further develop teachers' pedagogical and assessment skills.

## Recommendation 14

The Welsh Government should review and commission online courses/learning resources that can be offered across Wales. Such courses would be level-appropriate, bespoke for certain target groups or vocationally focused.

## Recommendation 15

A Task Group with a focus on digital learning, building digital skills for learners and ongoing CPD for practitioners would promote the recommendations 13 and 14.



# ESOL provision for those facing particular vulnerabilities

## Recommendation 16

There is a need to review arrangements for ALN assessment and for support to be made available for those ESOL learners who are identified as having additional learning needs.

## Recommendation 17

The **TrACE** training resources should be promoted and shared more widely and provide a useful tool to develop more specific trauma informed training for the ESOL settings.

## Access to ESOL for those subject to varying immigration statuses

## Recommendation 18

A centralised online resource, funded by Welsh Government, bringing together all funding streams available for learners with varying immigration statuses, information about duration of funding and clear eligibility criteria should be developed.

## Recommendation 19

There is a need to implement bespoke provision and support for pre-16 students

and to provide more effective links to ESOL providers (in England colleges can support ESOL learners from the age of 14).

## **Informal and participatory approaches**

### **Recommendation 20**

Welsh Government funding should be made available for the delivery, testing and review of projects based on a participatory pedagogy. Such a pedagogy resonates strongly with the Nation of Sanctuary aspirations regarding inclusion and wellbeing.

### **Recommendation 21**

ESOL funding for colleges and other accredited adult language education providers should include a specific proportion allocated to the delivery of informal, non-assessed courses based on the needs of learners.

### **Recommendation 22**

Welsh Government should establish more coordination and awareness of the potential for volunteers to support language learning. Providers should be supported to ensure volunteers are adequately trained and supported to carry out their role. The support of volunteers in ESOL provision is potentially beneficial, by increasing capacity and providing learners with extra support and the opportunity for practicing language skills. It also requires careful planning and adequate support for those in volunteering roles. This helps avoid risks of “job substitution” whereby the roles of paid professionals are replaced by volunteers.

## Recommendation 23

The Volunteers in **Migrant Education project** provides resources to help distinguish between different kinds of volunteer roles. Learning and Work Institute has produced guidance for **volunteer-led conversation clubs**, which are suitable for use by community groups who wish to establish informal conversation clubs. The National Centre for Learning Welsh, **Siarad** scheme provides a model which could be reviewed for its applicability to ESOL settings.

## Recommendation 24

A Task Group led by ESOL practitioners should be set up to review and improve issues around ESOL materials, assessments and methodology.

## Workforce development

### Recommendation 25

The provision of ESOL- specific teacher education needs to be addressed at a national level and programmes should be available to practitioners across all provision and for all existing staff. There is no ESOL-specific teacher education programme currently available in Wales.

### Recommendation 26

Welsh Government investment is needed for a Wales-based ESOL teacher education qualification. The needs of those working in the ESOL profession should be addressed as part of the Welsh Government's Post 16 Workforce

Development work

### **Recommendation 27**

A regular CPD programme for the ESOL workforce should be developed, in particular there is a need to embed CPD and teacher training on additional learning needs and ESOL-specific trauma-informed practice.

### **Recommendation 28**

The Welsh Government should stipulate that all new ESOL teachers possess or consent to studying for an ESOL-specific qualification.

### **Recommendation 29**

A Centre of Excellence for ESOL Teaching could be explored to develop, share practice and coordinate teacher education, CPD and support for the workforce. Providers should be encouraged to participate in the newly established Welsh branch of NATECLA (National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults).

## **Welsh language provision**

### **Recommendation 30**

The development of the Croeso I Bawb course has highlighted the benefit of the National Centre for Learning Welsh involvement in national conferences and the Wales ESOL forum. Opportunities should be sought to continue this

collaboration with the Centre and the network of ESOL providers.

### **Recommendation 31**

The National Centre for Learning Welsh should be included in the Wales ESOL Forum and the developing National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) branch for Wales. Moreover, opportunities for dialogue with the Adult Learning Partnership Network meetings and with each of the Adult Community Learning Partnerships across Wales should be facilitated.

## **ESOL and employment**

### **Recommendation 32**

A Task Group of ESOL providers should work with the Welsh Government to develop new models of provision. These would include vocationally focused courses, intensive fast-track courses, and courses for zero-level learners. Providers should be supported through more flexible funding mechanisms to create and pilot such bespoke provision.

### **Recommendation 33**

More co-ordination across the existing channels of employability support and programmes co-ordinated by Working Wales and others is required. This could be facilitated by recommendation 10.

### **Recommendation 34**

Welsh Government should focus on developing the systems and framework needed for recognition of prior learning (RPL) to be embedded in support for all migrants.

### **Recommendation 35**

The Welsh Government and Regional Skills Partnerships should play a lead role in liaising with employers to recognise the value of enabling access to learning at work and offering time off to attend ESOL classes.

### **Recommendation 36**

There is a need for more awareness of support for ESOL learners in programmes like ReACT+ and regular briefings or updates from Working Wales directly into the ESOL networks would be beneficial.

### **Recommendation 37**

In line with recommendation 10, guidance and advice for ESOL learners should include opportunities for volunteering as well as opportunities to receive support from agencies such as Business Wales, for example, in order to learn about routes to self-employment.

# REACH

## Recommendation 38

A formal evaluation of the REACH project should be carried out to assess its current effectiveness and the feasibility of it being rolled out across Wales. This will become more urgent should the UK Government plan to widen dispersal come into effect.

## Recommendation 39

There should be a review of how initial assessment (IA) are conducted. This would include a focus on how communication with all providers can be enhanced; how training in the use of initial assessment materials might be best organised and how a more holistic approach to IA would be of value.

## Other

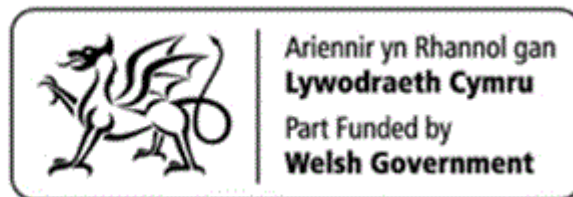
## Recommendation 40

We suggest that a number of Work Packages are established, and associated Task Groups set up to co-create solutions. These work packages might focus on the following areas:

- funding model review
- national and local co-ordination
- awareness/mapping/online Platform
- workforce professional learning and development

- digital learning and teaching
- curriculum innovation, materials and assessment
- vocational ESOL and employment

## About this report



The Migrant Integration project is part-funded through the European Union Asylum Migration Integration Fund.

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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