

# IVEA ESOL SURVEY

## Chapter 6 Recommendations

Having carefully considered the discussion and conclusions set out above, together with the policy documents<sup>1</sup> published by the IVEA earlier this decade and documented international best practice, the following actions (national, county and local) are recommended with a view to putting in place a permanent system for delivering effective and efficient ESOL teaching both to school-going students and to adults.

There are three main recommendations, each of which is set out in detail in this chapter.

- [Devise a national ESOL strategy and support the strategy with a five \(5\) year implementation plan – the plan to include targets expressed in terms of specific outcomes](#) – see 6.1 below.
- [Inaugurate an integrated national ESOL service operating, in the main, through the existing VEC infrastructure around the country](#) - 6.2 below.
- [Establish a National ESOL Support Office \(NESO\) at the core of the national ESOL service and within the VEC sector to inform, coordinate, support and quality assure the delivery of](#)

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<sup>1</sup> IVEA Policy on Educational Provision for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Other Non-Nationals. IVEA Working Group Report (2001).

Pilot Framework for Educational Provision for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Minority Linguistic Groups. IVEA Working Group Report (2004), Volume 1: Lifelong Learning.

Pilot Framework for Educational Provision for Bilingual Learners Including Asylum Seekers and Refugees. IVEA Working Group Report (2004), Volume II: Second-level.

Pilot Framework for Educational Provision for Minority Linguistic Groups Including Asylum Seekers and Refugees. Working Group Report (2004), Volume 111: Further Education.

Pilot Framework for Educational Provision in Vocational Education Sector for Migrant Workers with English Language Needs in the Vocational Sector. IVEA Working Group Report (2005), Volume 1V: English Language Provision for Migrant Workers.

[all ESOL training in primary schools, post-primary schools and in further education](#) - 6.3 below.

## **6.1 Devise a national ESOL strategy and support the strategy with a five (5) year implementation plan – the plan to include targets expressed in terms of specific outcomes.**

In constructing the necessary strategy, Ireland does not face a ‘green-field’ project. As mentioned above, many countries with which Ireland has close ties have already developed effective approaches to teaching host country languages to immigrants. Indeed, in coming late to the twin issues of ESOL and integration, Ireland is fortunate in that best practice is well documented.

It should, therefore, be feasible to establish what might be termed an expert/technical group comprising a relatively small group of people with solid, practical experience in delivering ESOL in this country and maybe one or two overseas experts that would be capable of constructing a coherent national ESOL strategy within a period of some six-months. Some of this group might then go on to form the core of the National ESOL Support Office (NESO) being proposed at 6.3 below.

Notwithstanding the expertise and experience of the technical/expert group, it would nevertheless be necessary to put in place a representative group to oversee/steer the work of such a group. This steering committee should ideally include representatives of the following groups/bodies.

- Each school management body
- Each teachers’ union
- The Department of Education and Science (DES)
- FAS and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE)
- The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA)
- Groups representing non English speaking communities
- Persons nominated by the Minister for Integration

Once the national ESOL strategy was in place, this committee might well metamorphose into steering committee to oversee the work of the National ESOL Support Office (NESO) and, indeed, to oversee the whole national ESOL service and to provide annual reports on its oversight to government.

In putting in place a national ESOL strategy, the Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland might be expected to provide significant guidance.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the critical issue of funding, it seems, on the basis of the survey findings, that the root cause of most current difficulties is the lack of a national ESOL strategy to provide coordination and coherence at every level of the service. Indeed, at both a national and VEC level the service does not exist on its own; rather it exists as an appendage to a related but nevertheless different service - literacy.

A national ESOL strategy and the plans for its implementation would need to address each of the following six areas.

- Funding - see 6.4.1 below.
- Service Coordination – national, VEC and local - see 6.4.2 below.
- Qualifications, training and continuous professional development - see 6.4.3 below.
- Syllabi, curricula, resources, support and quality assurance - see 6.4.4 below.
- Student assessment, certification, transfer and progression - see 6.4.5 below.
- Student recruitment and retention - see 6.4.6 below.

While it would properly be the function of the Expert Task Group referred to above to devise the detail of a national ESOL strategy, it is recommended that the strategy should incorporate the fundamental elements set out in Sections 6.4.1 to 6.4.6 below.

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<sup>2</sup> The Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland, Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department (March 2007) <http://www.scottishexecutive.gov.uk/Publications/2007/05/09155324/11>

## **6.2 Inaugurate an integrated national ESOL service operating, in the main, through the existing VEC infrastructure around the country.**

The integrated national ESOL service would encompass all personnel involved in the provision of ESOL teaching, irrespective of:

- whether they operate within or without the VEC sector;<sup>3</sup>
- whether they operate in a full time or part-time capacity or whether their involvement in the provision of ESOL constitutes a major or minor proportion of their work;
- what aspect of ESOL provision they are involved with – support, training delivery, quality assurance, etc.

This second recommendation, more than anything else, relates to the need for a clear commitment on the part of the State to the provision of a permanent and appropriately resourced ESOL service to all who need it – a service similar to that which is provided in other countries around the world with significant numbers of non English speaking residents.

Given the extent to which the VEC sector has developed substantial expertise in planning for and delivering ESOL training and the nation-wide infrastructure through which VECs deliver their services, there would seem to be real merit in using the existing VEC infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of a quality-assured ESOL teaching service to primary schools, second-level schools and further education providers all over Ireland. How this might be done is set out in significant detail below - see Sections 6.4.2 to 6.4.6.

While acknowledging that non VEC organisations provide substantial ESOL teaching<sup>4</sup> it is felt that a properly resourced and structured ‘VEC backboneed’

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<sup>3</sup> In the VECs, it would be important to include those who operate in the self-financing - evening class sphere.

<sup>4</sup> FAS and NGOs (community development agencies, community services centres, primary school parent groups, etc.) provide ESOL to adults while non VEC post primary schools and most primary schools provide ESOL teaching to those still in compulsory education.

ESOL teaching service would be well capable of serving the needs of all who provide ESOL teaching in either schools or further education settings.

In proposing the establishment of a national ESOL service using the nationwide VEC network, it is explicitly acknowledged that, to work effectively, the service would need to operate in close cooperation with organisations and agencies such as the Advisory Council for English Language Schools (ACELS), Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT), FÁS and other further education providers, non-VEC second-level schools and primary schools. Therefore, it would be critical that a national ESOL strategy should comprehend clear protocols for instituting and maintaining relationships between VECs and all other stakeholders in the ESOL teaching process.

An important advantage of ‘backboning’ a national ESOL teaching service through the VEC sector would be continuity it would provide. A ready made infrastructure is already in place with VECs having substantial administrative offices in every county in Ireland and schools and/or education centres in literally every community in Ireland. Also, given the extent to which VECs are already involved in the provision of ESOL, there would be no great need to disrupt what is currently happening in order to put the new system in place. It would simply be a matter of seamlessly upgrading the existing service and building the necessary linkages between the VEC and the non VEC elements over time.

Another significant consideration here is the fact that VECs are statutory publicly accountable, education providers.

### **6.3 Establish a National ESOL Support Office (NESO) at the core of the national ESOL service and located within the VEC sector to inform, coordinate, support and quality assure the delivery of all ESOL teaching in primary schools, post-primary schools and in further education.**

At the outset, it is important to stress that NESO should not be involved in any way in the funding of ESOL provision - see 6.4.1 below.

Although NESO would be charged with responsibility for driving every aspect of ESOL provision in accordance with preset national benchmarks (operationalised in terms of specific language learning outcomes), it should not exercise a 'command role' over those elements of the national ESOL service operating either within or without the VEC structure. Rather, NESO would fulfil its role through the provision of advice, information and non-financial supports to ESOL providers within its remit.

In this context, it is imperative that schools (primary and post-primary), further education providers and FAS would retain total responsibility for the ESOL service provided by their own staff, who they would employ, deploy and manage in every respect. Similarly VECs would retain responsibility for the employment, deployment and management of any of its staff that would be involved with ESOL coordination and/or provision. In employment terms, NESO should only have responsibility for the management of those appointed to work in the National ESOL Support Office (NESO).

NESO might also be given responsibility for quality assuring all ESOL training delivered by 'its' providers through the commissioning of regular, structured evaluations of the ESOL training service delivered by all ESOL providers. To ensure the transparency of such evaluations, they would need to be conducted by a competent, independent body, such as the Advisory Council for English Language Schools (ACELS), which undertakes a similar role in relation to private English Language colleges on behalf of the DES. Alternatively, the DES inspectorate could carry out these evaluations. The critical issue here is

that such evaluations should be conducted by personnel with an intimate knowledge of ESOL and the nationally agreed benchmarks for its provision.

As recorded elsewhere in this document, VECs have established considerable expertise in the development and delivery of ESOL services and it should be possible to staff the National Support Office (NESO) in the main through secondments from within the VEC sector. However, where expertise relevant to the work of the NESO resides outside of the VEC sector, this should not, in any sense, preclude the secondment of such personnel. The sole criterion for secondment to the NESO must be capacity to contribute to its work.

Where necessary, the NESO should be able to contract in other expertise as required. Also, given developments in communications technology, it should be possible for some NESO personnel, were it deemed necessary, to work from other than the support office and still contribute effectively to the work of the office.

**It is recommended that the role and function of the NESO should be along the following lines.**

- 6.3.1** To provide advice, curricular frameworks, teaching programme templates, assessment instruments, and teaching materials/resources to support ESOL teaching in primary schools, post primary schools and further education - on an ongoing basis.
- 6.3.2** To establish and disseminate national benchmarks and guidance for every aspect of ESOL provision in primary schools, post primary schools and further education.
- 6.3.3** From time to time, to organise seminars, conferences and information sessions for the purpose of keeping VECs and ESOL providers generally up to date with best practice. Likewise, to publish and disseminate newsletters and other publications (electronic and hard copy) to disseminate best practice to all involved in the provision of ESOL.
- 6.3.4** To engage the services of a competent body to conduct structured evaluations of ESOL providers on a regular basis; reports of these

evaluations to be published on the Web in the same way that Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports are currently published.

- 6.3.5** To liaise with government departments and agencies, the social partners, third level education providers, representatives of those whose first language is other than English and any domestic or overseas organisation that it may deem to be in a position to contribute directly or indirectly towards enhancing any aspect of the national ESOL service.
- 6.3.6** To facilitate the sharing of best practice in relation to ESOL organisation and delivery (Irish and overseas) with all involved in the organisation and/or delivery of ESOL provision.
- 6.3.7** To facilitate the sharing of best practice in the recruitment, facilitation and retention of adult ESOL students.
- 6.3.8** To facilitate discussions between organisations representing migrant groups, whose first language is other than English, and the management bodies of both primary and post primary schools with a view to school premises being made available for mother tongue classes for school-going students outside of normal school hours.
- 6.3.9** To establish collaborative relations with and between bodies such as the following in relation to ESOL provision.
- Management bodies representing primary and secondary schools – the Joint Managerial Body for Secondary Schools (JMB), Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) and the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA).
  - Bodies representing teachers and school management – the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI), the Association of Secondary School Teachers Ireland (ASTI), the Irish National Teachers’ Association (INTO), the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and the Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN).
  - National organisations representing the social partners.

- Organisations representing those whose first language is other than English.
- Any organisation/agency relevant to informing and/or facilitating the provision of ESOL training.

It may be assumed that NESO would initially need considerable resourcing, most particularly in terms of the expert personnel indispensable to ratchetting the national ESOL service up to the desired level. Thereafter, once the service became established at the desired standard, the expert personnel needs of the support office might be expected to lessen.

To ensure the flexibility of the NESO all secondments to it should be for specified fixed terms.

## **6.4 Elements to be Incorporated in a National ESOL Strategy**

Following on from the initial strategic thinking discussed at 6.1 above, we return now to the details of the six main areas that a national ESOL strategy would need to encompass.

### **6.4.1 Funding**

**Put in place a dedicated national ESOL budget to fund every element of ESOL provision.**

As well as the direct costs of providing the teaching programmes, a national ESOL budget would need to be sufficient to cover the costs of research, coordination, staff training (pre-service and in-service) and recruitment, student recruitment, student assessment and accreditation, curriculum and programme development, production of teaching and learning supports, quality assurance, etc.

In making this recommendation, it is appreciated that the current DES approach to the funding of ESOL allows for total flexibility in the allocation of funds between ESOL and adult literacy and that this flexibility has a certain merit. Consequently, notwithstanding the clear recommendation for ESOL to be funded separately, it would seem advisable to allow for some flexibility in the allocation of funds between ESOL and literacy. This flexibility might be achieved by allowing VECs to transfer some 15 percent of funds allocated to either ESOL or literacy to either service – depending on local need.

The current cost of ESOL provision is quantifiable and, from that base line, it should be relatively straightforward to derive realistic budgets for the provision of a new, integrated, quality-assured, outcomes-focussed service.

Clearly, the starting point for funding the new service would have to be some kind of per capita payment based on the current activity level of providers, topped up to cover the increased activity that could be expected to flow from improvements in the service. The added costs of coordination, recruitment and teacher and learner supports would also need to be factored in to any new funding formula.

While, at a first reading, it may seem that the cost of implementing this report's recommendations might well be prohibitive, the reality is that many of the costs of implementing the recommendations of this report are already being incurred. However, the lack of an overall strategy/system means that current investment in ESOL provision is less productive than it might otherwise be.

In fact, implementing the report's recommendations might well be expected to produce returns that would go a considerable way towards covering the extra costs associated with its implementation - improved integration, social cohesion and active citizenship, greater workplace productivity, etc. At a time when Ireland's economic progress depends significantly on the availability of a highly skilled workforce, enabling our highly skilled immigrants to use their skills to the fullest in the workplace is going to be critical. Indeed, an effective ESOL teaching service is integral to implementing the national skills strategy.

The national ESOL strategy and the plans for its implementation would need to be explicit about the terms under which those with English language learning needs would be entitled to free or subsidised ESOL training and the budgets put in place would need to be sufficient to support the specified levels of subsidisation.

In line with existing IVEA policy, it is recommended that ESOL training should be provided free of charge to all who seek it – up to NFQ level 3. In this regard, a 2006 decision in the UK to confine entitlement to free ESOL teaching to those on benefit and those who qualified for tax credits resulted in a significant downturn in the numbers participating in ESOL programmes. Consequently, the new Secretary of State for Skills, Innovation and Universities, John Denham, has called for a review of the decision to restrict free access to such courses. A recent editorial in the Further Education Focus of *The Times Educational Supplement* welcomed the Minister's decision succinctly.

*“Spending restrictions have meant many migrants going without the English lessons they need to fully integrate with society ... Money saved on ESOL provision will be more than eclipsed by the loss of productivity which results from a workforce stripped of the most important of all vocational skills – that of communication.”<sup>5</sup>*

A universal objection to state subsidisation of ESOL training for workers is the argument that employers are major beneficiaries of any such training. Certainly, during the reign of the Celtic Tiger, employers benefited significantly from the inward flow of skilled migrant labour. Indeed, many employers recruited skilled workers overseas rather than just wait for them to arrive in the country.

Consequently, it would seem equitable that employers should contribute in some way to the cost of providing ESOL training and, having regard to the need to share the cost of such training between the State and employer, it is

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<sup>5</sup>The Times Educational Supplement, Further Education Focus. ‘Speaking up for ESOL’, by Steve Hook, Friday 11 January, 2008.

recommended that the new national ESOL service being proposed here should be part funded out of the National Training Fund.

## **6.4.2 Service Co-ordination – National, VEC and Local**

### **6.4.2.1 The DES to authorise the appointment of an ESOL coordinator in each VEC to coordinate and support ESOL provision within the VEC catchment area, including provision by non VEC providers, and to link with the National Support Office (NESO).**

This post holder should in every respect be a VEC employee and not just someone employed by either the DES or NESO and located in the VEC office.

The appointment of VEC ESOL coordinators would be very much the key to linking national elements of the service to the local elements, thus giving coherence and integrity to the whole service. Clearly, in the case of ‘larger’ VECs, it would be necessary to appoint more than one ESOL coordinator. The exact details of how many ESOL coordinators should be appointed to what VECs should be set out in the national ESOL strategy and the implementation plan. The specific role and function of both the VEC based coordinators and the national ESOL Support Office would also need to be set out clearly in these documents. Each VEC ESOL coordinator might be required to report, on a quarterly basis, to an advisory group comprising representatives of the non-VEC school management bodies in a VEC catchment area and other relevant agencies and organisations.

### **6.4.2.2 The DES to sanction a special post of responsibility for the coordination of ESOL in**

**each school, college and centre of Further Education with more than a particular threshold of ESOL students.**

This post could be similar to that which is currently available to second-level schools for the purpose of coordinating Transition Year and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme where there is also potential for the number of students involved in these programmes either increasing or decreasing over time. In the case of a school, college or centre not entitled to such a post, the VEC ESOL coordinator could undertake this role.

### **6.4.3 Qualifications, Training & Professional Development**

**All who teach ESOL should have appropriate qualifications.**

There are Human Resource issues at play here. Also, if those without such a qualification were absolutely excluded from teaching ESOL, it is quite possible that some in need of ESOL training could be left without it. Notwithstanding these realities, a national ESOL strategy and the plans for its implementation should clearly set out the qualifications that all ESOL teachers should possess as well as a roadmap for achieving the required level of teacher qualification/competence.

Ultimately, those who teach ESOL should possess a formal qualification that attests to their capacity to teach ESOL effectively and not just a teaching qualification. The mere fact that someone is a qualified teacher does not mean that he/she is competent to teach ESOL: no more than that a Geography teacher could be considered competent to teach Science.

Certainly, qualified teachers possess a corpus of pedagogical knowledge, skill and competence but it is universally acknowledged that specialist teachers

require specialist training in both their specialist subject and in the teaching methodologies relevant to teaching their specialist subject.

A key assumption here is that English Language Teaching (ELT) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), as a subset of ELT, is very much a specialist subject/discipline and that real progress in improving the effectiveness of ESOL teaching depends on acknowledging that reality.

The Advisory Council for English Language Schools (ACELS) was established in 1969 under the auspices of the DES to control standards in schools offering training in English as a foreign language (EFL) through an inspection/recognition scheme. ACELS' remit also now extends to the recognition of teacher training (TEFL) courses and the development of materials and examinations for overseas students. Already, therefore, there exists within the State a capacity to 'quality assure' both the delivery of ESOL training and the training of ESOL teachers.

Going forward, the Teaching Council may also be expected to have a role to play here.

Currently the DES requires all teachers who work in recognised English Language Training (ELT) schools to have one of the following qualifications.

- The Certificate in English Language Teaching (CELT) for those who already possess a Level 7 qualification (normally an Ordinary Bachelor's degree). This course involves the completion of a minimum of 120 hours of class contact time.
- The Preparatory Certificate for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language to Secondary Level Students for those with teaching qualifications recognised by the DES. This course is open to state-qualified teachers (and those in their final year of training).

County Dublin and Galway City VECs have been accredited to deliver the preparatory course and both VECs have actually delivered the course. County Dublin VEC and the Senior College Dun Laoghaire (Dun Laoghaire VEC) have done similarly in relation to the CELT course. Indeed, County Dublin VEC has

established a particular expertise in the delivery of these training courses – providing ESOL teacher training courses not only to those within its own scheme but to the staff of other VECs.

**Having regard to the above, the following is recommended.**

**6.4.3.1 The DES explicitly to recognise ESOL as a distinct discipline/subject.**

**6.4.3.2 The DES explicitly to acknowledge that those who teach ESOL need to have acquired a specific body of subject specific knowledge and subject specific teaching skills (pre-service and in-service) in order to teach the subject effectively.**

**6.4.3.3 The DES to stipulate that, wherever possible, all new staff employed to teach ESOL students, in either schools or further education settings, should hold one or other of the above qualifications (or qualifications that may supersede them<sup>6</sup>) or equivalents such as the Cambridge Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) or the Trinity College London Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CertTESOL).**

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<sup>6</sup>The Advisory Council for English Language Schools (ACELS) has submitted a proposal to the Department of Education and Science (DES) to establish a Higher or Advanced Certificate/Diploma in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This course would allow for teachers from different education levels (primary, second-level and adults) to specialise in their respective area and it would include provision for the accreditation of prior learning so it would seem particularly well suited to the needs of those involved in the delivery of ESOL training.

**6.4.3.4 Each VEC and ESOL provider to become proactive in the recruitment of qualified ESOL tutors and then to organise ESOL provision in such a way as to utilise fully the services of these qualified tutors.**

The experience of several VECs would suggest that the supply of qualified ESOL tutors is not as limited as might be expected given that ESOL training is relatively new in Ireland. Apparently, there are significant numbers of qualified/experienced ESOL tutors residing in Ireland who gained their qualifications/experience overseas. It would be important that this putative pool of ESOL tutors be fully tapped.

The Department of Education's stipulation that those employed to teach in schools must have a specific teaching qualification, such as the Higher Diploma in Education (now designated the Post Graduate Diploma in Education PGDE), limits the number of qualified ESOL teachers available to teach in second-level or even primary schools. Given the current predicament, a case can be made for the DES deeming those with the Certificate in English Language Teaching (CELT) eligible to teach ESOL in either primary or post-primary schools – even if such an entitlement is granted in the context of some kind of 'confined teaching register'. An even stronger case can be made for granting such an entitlement to those who possess a diploma in English Language Teaching (ELT) and anecdotal evidence would suggest that a significant number of such diploma holders are available for employment – particularly in larger urban areas. Where the qualifications and/or teaching experience of some of these qualified ESOL teachers may not be particularly recent it should be possible to bring their skills up to date relatively quickly and relatively inexpensively.

**6.4.3.5 Establish a national programme to recruit potential ESOL teachers from within migrant communities and to train these recruits to be effective ESOL teachers.**

The migrant population in Ireland is generally considered to be better skilled than the native Irish population and it includes many with third level qualifications who, because of their English language limitations, have to work in occupations for which they are over-qualified. After spending a number of years in Ireland, a significant number of these migrants have acquired good English and the potential for enlisting some of these into the National ESOL Service seems obvious.

**6.4.3.6. Where it is not possible to obtain appropriately qualified ESOL teachers, those employed to teach ESOL to be required to commit to obtaining an appropriate ESOL teaching qualification within a prescribed period of time from the date of their employment – with the continuation of their employment being contingent on the ESOL teaching qualification being obtained within the agreed timeframe.**

Two points need to be emphasised in relation to this recommendation.

Firstly, the costs of acquiring an ESOL teaching qualification would need to be subsidised by the State and, in order to protect the State's investment in this training, the contract of employment offered to 'unqualified ESOL teachers' should include a provision that would allow the State to claw back the subsidy in the event of the 'unqualified' teacher either not completing the training course

satisfactorily or leaving the employment before completing an agreed amount of ESOL teaching.

Secondly, to ensure that the return on the State's investment in subsidising the teacher's training is maximised, it would be important that, wherever feasible, all qualified ESOL teachers should be timetabled to teach a minimum amount of ESOL each week. To achieve this in areas where the demand for ESOL may be limited might require ESOL teachers to deliver ESOL training in more than one school or for more than one provider.

**6.4.3.7 Establish a national programme to encourage and facilitate 'unqualified' ESOL teachers acquiring one or other of the ACELS teaching qualifications referred to above (or qualifications that may supersede them<sup>7</sup>) or equivalent qualifications.**

Examples of equivalent qualifications are the Cambridge Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) or the Trinity College London Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CertTESOL). Again, it would be necessary for the State to subsidise this training to some degree in order to incentivise take up and the State's investment would need to be protected as in the case of the ESOL teacher training provided to new employees. Furthermore, the timetabling of these teachers would need to have regard to the need to maximise returns on the State's investment by ensuring, wherever practical, that they are timetabled to teach as much ESOL as possible. There is little point in the State investing in someone being trained to deliver ESOL

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<sup>7</sup>The Advisory Council for English Language Schools (ACELS) has submitted a proposal to HETAC to establish a Higher or Advanced Certificate/Diploma in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This course would allow for teachers from different education levels (primary, second-level and adults) to specialise in their respective area and it would include provision for the accreditation of prior learning so it would seem particularly well suited to the needs of those involved in the delivery of ESOL training.

and then only timetabling them to teach a small amount of ESOL each week.

**6.4.3.8 Inaugurate a programme of in-service training for the purpose of providing intercultural training to those who work in primary schools, second-level schools, adult/further education centres and those who fill ‘front-of-house’ within roles in VECs, FAS and NGOs providing education and training to those whose first language is other than English.**

This in-service training should be provided at three levels.

Firstly, to continually enhance the skills of qualified ESOL teachers, especially those teachers whose qualifications and/or experience may not be particularly current.

Secondly, training to teachers who, while they do not specifically teach ESOL, teach classes containing ESOL students. This is essential to providing these teachers with the knowledge, understanding and methodologies essential to teaching effectively students whose first language is other than English.

County Dublin VEC has already revised the ACELS approved Preparatory Certificate for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language to Second-level Students (see above) into a 36 hour course to address this need. This course also earns its graduates credits towards the CELT course (see above). Were this course further reformed to incorporate significant distance learning, it could quite efficiently be delivered to teachers right around the country without placing undue demands on their time.

Thirdly, training in interculturalism and the particular needs of students (and their families) whose first language is other than

English. This training should be provided to all who work in either schools or VECs so as to ensure that all who relate to those whose first language is not English are sensitive to their particular needs and circumstances. County Dublin VEC has already developed a course suited to this purpose. Also, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has published guidelines for both primary schools and post primary schools in relation to intercultural education<sup>8</sup> and these publications might prove useful in the development of an in-service training programme on interculturalism.

**6.4.3.9 Incorporate as much eLearning as possible should into the above training programmes so as to maximise both the efficiency and effectiveness of their delivery and to minimise the demands placed on learner's time.**

An exploration of what such eLearning might entail is beyond the remit of this report. However, given that English language teaching (ELT) has been at the forefront of the development of blended educational solutions involving a combination of face-to-face teaching and interactive (electronic) practice activity, it would seem important to incorporate such approaches into the training of ESOL teachers.

**6.4.3.10 Establish specific teacher training programmes (pre-service and in-service) to provide ESOL teachers with the knowledge, skills and competences to address the specific needs of those ESOL students who have literacy difficulties (ESOLWILD).**

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<sup>8</sup> These guidelines may be accessed from <http://www.ncca.ie/index.asp?locID=62&docID=-1> and [http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/Interc%20Guide\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/Interc%20Guide_Eng.pdf) respectively

It is estimated that something in excess of 10 percent of ESOL students have literacy problems that need remediation before they can make real progress in becoming literate in English. Not every ESOL teacher will need to be equipped to deal with ESOLWILD students but it will be necessary to train a group of ESOL teachers capable of addressing the needs of these students – right around the country.

#### **6.4.4 Syllabi/curricula, resources, support and quality assurance**

##### **6.4.4.1 Through a process of consultation with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and other relevant bodies, establish a national ESOL curricular framework to inform and guide ESOL provision for all levels and all contexts.**

The IVEA survey found considerable demand for some kind of standardised ESOL curriculum for both school based ESOL and adult ESOL. Clearly, many involved in coordinating ESOL provision felt the need for some kind of curricular framework to guide their work. In this context, it is probably significant that Irish teachers generally are accustomed to following a set curriculum, irrespective of the subject that they teach or the level at which they teach.

There are a number of further points relevant to the matter of an agreed curricular framework. In schools, where a significant proportion of ESOL teachers are unqualified and where it is not uncommon to schedule those with less than full timetables in their specialist subjects to teach ESOL, the availability of an agreed national curricular framework should be well received.

Also, migrants generally tend to be quite mobile in the years immediately following their arrival in Ireland - a period during which their English language learning needs are most urgent. It would seem important that an ESOL student could confidently leave an ESOL course in one part of the country and pick up exactly where he/she left off in a similar training programme somewhere else in the country. Again, an agreed national curricular framework for ESOL should prove helpful here.

The task of specifying a national curricular framework may not present as difficult a challenge as might be expected. After all, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEF)<sup>9</sup> provides a reference for language learning, teaching and assessment for all main European languages and, as such, sets international standards for language syllabi, curriculum design and examinations. In addition, national ESOL curricula have been put in place relatively recently in both England<sup>10</sup> and Wales. Moreover, the Multicultural Programmes Unit of the Department of Education in Victoria Australia in 2007 published an excellent document entitled 'Advice to Schools on Programmes for Supporting Students Learning English as a Second Language.'<sup>11</sup>

The need is not for a highly prescriptive curriculum. Rather what is required is a flexible curricular framework sufficient to inform course design, assessment, qualifications/certification, access, transfer and progression. Much of the material essential to constructing a coherent, Irish ESOL curricular framework is already extant. It is simply a matter of a task group, comprised of persons with relevant experience, drawing up the curricular framework having regard to the Irish context and acknowledged best practice – at home and abroad.

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum\\_esol/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum_esol/)

<sup>11</sup> Available at <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl>

Sufficient expertise resides within the VEC sector to undertake this task in a relatively short space of time - in consultation with bodies such as ACELS and IILT.

**6.4.4.2 Establish a Resource Development and Support (RDS) unit within the National ESOL Support Office (NESO) to develop resources and programmes to facilitate and enhance the delivery of ESOL programmes in schools and in further education settings nationally.**

It is expected that this unit would be very busy initially as the ESOL service was cranked up to the desired level, in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Thereafter, once the ESOL service reached a steady state, it should be possible to significantly reduce the level of personnel and other resources allocated to the RDS unit. Therefore, it might be prudent to include a clause providing for a review of the unit's operation in the terms of reference for its establishment.

While, in theory, qualified teachers in any discipline should have the capacity to develop their own programmes and materials, in reality, even at post graduate level, many teachers rely very much on 'off-the-shelf' resources such as textbooks, manuals, DVDs and software packages for both teaching programmes and teaching resources. The reality is that only some qualified teachers have the skills, knowledge, competences, inclination and indeed the time to develop effective teaching programmes and teaching resources.

Therefore, it would be necessary both to develop new ESOL teaching programmes and to enhance existing programmes across a range of levels and contexts. Indeed, specific, yet flexible, teaching programmes will need to be developed or enhanced for all learner levels and for all contexts within each level. In this regard, the RDS could develop relatively detailed programme templates – each of

which could be supplemented through the provision of guidance regarding suitable textbooks, teaching strategies/methodologies, audiovisual and eLearning resources, etc.

As mentioned above, English language teaching (ELT) has been at the forefront of the development of blended educational solutions involving a combination of face-to-face teaching and interactive (electronic) practice activity. In this context, a crucial role for the RDS would be the procurement and/or development of eLearning packages to support and amplify class contact work for teaching programmes at every level. Judicious use of blended learning has the capacity to enhance/amplify ESOL teaching very significantly. ELearning resources could be hosted on scoilnet, the Official portal for Irish education.<sup>12</sup>

In proposing that these supports should be provided to ESOL teachers and coordinators, the intention is to facilitate and support their work rather than to prescribe it. Clearly, some teachers will require very little support and will rely to a large extent on teaching resources that they themselves will have developed either on their own or in collaboration with colleagues. On the other hand, there will be many others, as the survey findings confirm, who will not only welcome but very much depend on such resources. While in an ideal world, each teacher would prepare his/her own teaching programmes and resources, the reality is that the context in which ESOL teaching is currently being provided is far from ideal and this fact needs to be acknowledged if the current parlous state of ESOL provision is to be rectified.

Some of the staff of Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT), a body that coordinates the provision of English Language training for adult refugees and also provides teaching materials and other supports for ESOL teachers in primary and post-primary schools, could well be seconded to the RDS, on either a permanent or

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.scoilnet.ie/>

temporary basis, so as to avoid discontinuity from what is currently occurring and to facilitate building on progress that has already been made – rather than redeveloping materials and supports from scratch.

In this regard, it needs to be acknowledged that IILT<sup>13</sup> has developed some useful resources such as ‘*Féach*’ a publication for teachers working with adult learners of English who are absolute language beginners and ‘*Anseo*’ a resource book for teachers working with adult members of the newcomer population.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)<sup>14</sup> has also produced supports and guidelines for literacy tutors working with ESOL learners and it would also be advisable to enlist any expertise that might reside in NALA to assist with the development ESOL teaching resources.

#### **6.4.4.3 Utilise the services of volunteers, where appropriate, to support the work of the ESOL Service and to enhance the integration of non-English speaking new arrivals in Ireland.**

Volunteer tutors have made a significant contribution to both Adult literacy and adult ESOL provision in Ireland and overseas in countries such as Canada, Finland and Australia. However, there would appear to be significant potential to both grow and enhance the volunteer contribution right across the country. Apart from the undoubted capacity that volunteer tutors have to enhance English language skills, these tutors, because of the relatively intimate character of the relationship between student and volunteer tutor, can contribute in a unique way to the integration of the non-English speaking newcomer.

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.iilt.ie/home/default.asp?NCID=1>

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.nala.ie/publications/listing/20030624162342.html>

**6.4.4.4 Within each VEC, establish a pre-service and in-service training programme to equip volunteers to maximise outcomes for both themselves and their students.**

It would be important that the work of the volunteers should support what the professional teachers do in the classroom. This will only happen if the volunteers are trained appropriately and if a communication mechanism is put in place to facilitate clear communications between the ESOL teachers and the volunteers.

**6.4.4.5 NESO to engage the services of a competent agency, or the DES inspectorate, to conduct structured evaluations of all ESOL providers on a regular basis; reports of these evaluations to be published on the Web in the same way that Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports are currently published.**

**6.4.5 Student Assessment, Certification, Transfer and Progression**

There are three aspects to assessment – diagnostic, formative and summative. Diagnostic assessment is critical to determining objectively the language competence of ESOL students – either as they access or participate in ESOL programmes. It is essential to placing learners in appropriate teaching groups, in planning learning and in providing a base-line for monitoring learner progress.

For an ESOL service to work effectively all learners should be assessed prior to commencing training and the assessment tool used at this point should be capable of identifying learners with literacy needs. Those identified to have

literacy needs should then have their literacy issues addressed as a priority before being included in mainstream ESOL programmes.

Ideally, all ESOL learners, once their language competence has been determined, would need to be interviewed to find out as much as possible about why they wish to learn English and, subsequently, an individual learning plan should be prepared to guide the work of the teachers. The teachers should then use the diagnostic assessment tool in a formative context to review progress and to provide feedback to learners.

Summative assessment provides evidence of attainment, promotes articulation to other educational programmes and improves access to employment opportunities. Wherever possible, ESOL learners should be encouraged to work towards attaining the most appropriate, high-quality, accredited, ESOL qualification. Given that Ireland has put a National Framework of Qualifications (NQF) in place, it is essential that all ESOL certification/qualifications be linked to the national framework.

**Having regard to the above, the following is recommended.**

**6.4.5.1 NESO to procure/develop a valid, reliable and practical (efficient to use) diagnostic tool to assess the English language proficiency of ESOL students both at the point of their entry to training and while they are undertaking training to monitor progress and to provide feedback to the learners.**

Both the CEF and the ESOL core curriculum used in England and Wales provide guidance and reference levels that the trained ESOL teacher may use to prepare his/her own assessment tools to suit particular contexts. Also, Oxford University Press offers an easy to use assessment instrument – ‘Quick Placement Test.’<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, IILT<sup>16</sup> have developed an assessment tool for use in primary schools

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.oup.com/elt/catalogue/isbn/7162?cc=gb>

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.iilt.ie/home/default.asp?NCID=1>

and is currently working on the preparation of a tool for use in the post primary sector.

It would seem important, however, that a standard tool be constructed/agreed at national level and that it be provided to all ESOL coordinators and teachers so as to ensure accurate and comparable assessment – irrespective of who carries out the assessment or in what context it is carried out.

The task here is not to reinvent wheels that already exist. Rather, it is one of selecting, from among an array of available options, those best suited to the circumstances that currently prevail in Ireland and, where necessary, to provide guidelines and other supports to ensure the effective use of the prescribed assessment tools.

**6.4.5.2 Wherever feasible, ESOL students should be allocated to homogeneous teaching groups in order to maximise learning outcomes.**

Achieving this objective is as much a function of coordination as of resources.

**6.4.5.3 At the point of their enrolment in a school, college or centre students (school-going and adult), whose first language is other than English, should be referred for assessment to the school's/college's/centre's ESOL coordinator for an ESOL needs assessment and, where a learner is found to be in need of ESOL teaching, the coordinator should prepare an individual learning plan (ILP) for the student and allocate the student to an ESOL teaching group. Furthermore, the school/college/centre authorities should consult**

**the ESOL coordinator before allocating any such learner to an academic programme.**

Where the number of ESOL students in a school is insufficient to merit the appointment of an ESOL coordinator, this function could be undertaken by the VEC ESOL coordinator.

**6.4.5.4 Establish a special ‘new arrivals’ intensive ESOL programme for all ‘new arrivals’ with minimal or no English language competence - this programme to be full time in order to maximise assistance to these students in the initial stages of learning English.**

The older the students the more important this programme would be. Students in the lower classes in primary school may require little extra assistance as they could be expected to learn English quite effectively through emersion in their normal classes, where a lot of class time is devoted to language learning.

This programme could be delivered at school, area or VEC/county level depending on demand and other relevant circumstances.

**6.4.5.5 Make interpreter/translation services available free of charge to all schools, colleges and further education providers in accordance with clear guidelines and within a defined budget.**

In time, it may be expected, as English language competence improves within migrant communities, that volunteer interpreters may become available to assist in non confidential communications. Irrespective of the extent to which volunteers might become available over time to assist with translating or interpreting, there will be a continuing need for professional interpreters.

#### **6.4.5.6 Establish a comprehensive portfolio of ESOL specific FETAC awards to cover all language levels set out in the CEF (or whatever curricular framework is agreed nationally) and all contexts within levels.**

The availability of these awards is essential to providing both progression and encouragement to ESOL learners at every level. In addition, ideally, these awards would need to map on to internationally recognised qualifications/examinations.

The Council of Europe's European language Portfolio (ELP)<sup>17</sup> provides a format for recording and formally recognising diverse language learning and intercultural experiences for the purposes of certification and these could be mapped to the common reference levels set out in the agreed curricular framework. The Milestone version of the European Language Portfolio seems particularly relevant here. A copy of the Milestone version together with a teachers' guide may be accessed from the IILT website.<sup>18</sup>

Also, an Irish organisation, TIE Examinations Limited,<sup>19</sup> have developed a suite of task-based, student-centred, internationally recognised EFL exams that could be mapped on to a common curricular framework.

Alternatively, there is a range of internationally recognised examinations (Cambridge University's Suite of exams, Trinity College London, TOEIC, etc.) which could be incorporated into the system without the need for any significant expenditure or work.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/Default.asp?L=EandM=/main\\_pages/welcome.html](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/Default.asp?L=EandM=/main_pages/welcome.html)

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.iilt.ie/teaching\\_materials/default.asp?NCID=71](http://www.iilt.ie/teaching_materials/default.asp?NCID=71)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.tie.ie/index.htm>

<sup>20</sup> For further details, <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/index.html>;  
<http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/site/?id=368>; <http://www.uk.toEIC.eu/?yourcountry=UK>

Essentially, the task of constructing a new portfolio of awards is not nearly as daunting as one might expect it to be.

#### **6.4.5.7 Establish a specific programme to provide ESOL students with literacy difficulties (ESOLWILD) with the literacy skills essential to learning English.**

ESOL practitioners estimate that some 10 percent of those whose first language is other than English have literacy difficulties of one kind or another. The needs of these students are significantly different from those of literate learners and addressing these needs requires tutors with specific skills, knowledge and competences.

#### **6.4.6 Student Recruitment and Retention**

If the above recommendations are substantially implemented, ESOL students should make satisfactory progress in learning English, even if they have to move residence within the country – provided the classes are conducted at times and locations that suit the learners.

ESOL students face many barriers to participating successfully in ESOL training programmes: poor awareness of what ESOL training is available, lack of confidence about their capacity to make progress in learning English, inadequate childcare support, training being conducted at times not conducive to learner attendance because of clashes with work and family commitments, training being offered at inaccessible locations and, most significantly, the uncoordinated manner in which ESOL is provided.

Furthermore, those whose English language competence is insufficient for them to enjoy fully the opportunities that living in Ireland offers, are very much isolated from mainstream Irish society. The key to integrating these newcomers is to provide them with the wherewithal to relate to the rest of Irish society – both at work and in their local communities.

**In this context, it is recommended that The National Support Office (NESO) should establish a mechanism to facilitate the sharing of best practice in the recruitment, facilitation and retention of adult ESOL students – see above.**