

IVEA ESOL SURVEY

Ireland, an emigrant nursery for over a century and a half, experienced significant inward migration from the late 1990s. Consequently, the population grew rapidly and Irish society diversified rapidly.

Indeed, Ireland has belatedly joined mainstream Europe in that a significant percentage (10%) of its population is now foreign born and mixed ethnic origin is beginning to be seen as the norm; hence the need to provide appropriate English language teaching (ESOL) to both school-going students and adults.

Though VECs had been proactive in responding to the need for ESOL services and the IVEA had compiled a number of policy documents to inform ESOL provision throughout the sector, IVEA felt in early 2007 that, due to circumstances outside the control of VECs, ESOL was not being provided to the desired standard. Consequently, IVEA established a task group to explore ways in which this situation could be remedied.

In April 2007, the Task Group decided to survey those with responsibility for ESOL provision in VECs as a prelude to constructing a set of recommendations for putting in place an appropriate and nation-wide system of ESOL provision.

Essentially, the survey sought and obtained two kinds of information.

- What VECs are currently doing in the area of ESOL provision.
- What those involved in ESOL provision within VECs feel is impeding appropriate ESOL provision and what needs to be done to overcome the perceived impediments.

In relation to current practice, the survey found that many VECs have put best practice in place in relation: co-ordination and management of ESOL provision, quality assurance, student assessment, teaching group allocation and teacher qualifications and training.

Furthermore, the survey found that:

- a majority of VEC schools, colleges and adult education centres feel the need to offer some kind of ESOL teaching;
- there is a need for greater proactivity in the promotion of ESOL to adults;
- a dedicated ESOL budget should be put in place to fund ESOL provision;
- external assistance with the design of ESOL syllabi/programmes would be very welcome; and
- the number of ESOL teaching contact hours per week for both school going students and adults is inadequate and needs to be increased significantly.

While most survey questions focussed on specific issues, the survey also included questions that offered respondents the freedom to catalogue what they saw as the 'major impediments to making appropriate ESOL provision' to both second-level and adult students.

Respondents clearly used these questions to cut to the core of the problem and the identified the critical impediments as follows.

- Lack of a national ESOL Strategy or a formal curriculum or a formal system of accreditation or evaluation.
- Shortage of trained and dedicated staff to co-ordinate ESOL provision resulting in poor coordination at national, VEC and school/centre level.
- Lack of training for ESOL teachers and shortage of trained ESOL teachers.
- Lack of funding, funding constraints and no dedicated ESOL budget.
- Lack of teaching resources/materials and inadequate accommodation.
- Work commitments of adult ESOL students constrain participation in ESOL programmes and the times and locations of some ESOL classes are unsuitable.
- Duplication of provision due to poor coordination.

- Lack of certification, test materials and assessment procedures.
- Difficulties in recruiting ESOL students.
- Capacity or preparedness of ESOL students to pay for ESOL classes.
- Insufficient class contact hours per week.

Indeed, respondents went further and provided both a cogent analysis of the defects in the current ESOL system and a blueprint for a coherent national ESOL service capable of meeting the needs of those whose first language is other than English. The enthusiasm of some respondents in setting out what might be done to improve the current system was most heartening.

The final chapter of the report presents a detailed set of recommendations for putting in place a permanent, quality assured system for delivering effective and efficient ESOL teaching both to school-going students and to adults. These recommendations draw on: the survey findings, the ESOL policy documents published by the IVEA earlier this decade and documented international best practice.

Given the nature of the recommendations, it would be impossible to encapsulate them meaningfully in this brief article. Instead a copy of the complete recommendations' chapter may be accessed from the IVEA website at: <http://www.ivea.ie/esol.htm>

A full copy of the report will be published shortly and provided to all VECs.

In conclusion, I would simply like to thank everyone who contributed in any way to the preparation of the report. Your assistance was greatly appreciated.

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1.4.3 Proposals for addressing perceived impediments to appropriate ESOL provision

The proposals mainly flowed logically from the perceived impediments and may be summarised as follows.

Second Level ESOL

Recruit qualified tutors, provide relevant in-service training for all staff dealing with ESOL students, increase class contact time for ESOL, provide ESOL teaching outside of normal school hours to minimise disruption to academic programme, improve the teaching material/supports available to ESOL teachers, create a designated post of responsibility to coordinate ESOL in schools/centres and to liaise with those coordinating ESOL at VEC level thus ensuring that ESOL delivery is organised, coherent and coordinated; give schools access to translation/interpreter services and introduce family learning programmes.

Adult ESOL

Allocate sufficient dedicated funding to cover costs of providing and coordinating a quality assured service, establish a structure capable of supporting the provision of a quality assured ESOL service to a preset standard, appoint ESOL coordinators at VEC level to work in cooperation with a national coordinator, recruit more qualified staff, provide sufficient appropriate teaching resources/materials, train all relevant staff appropriately, proactively recruit and retain ESOL students and involve employers in the process, offer ESOL programmes at locations/times that suit potential learners, increase class contact time per week, assess all students prior to allocation to teaching groups, provide clear accreditation and progression for all learners, put in place some kind of

translation/interpretation service to enhance communications with ESOL students and establish family learning programmes.

1.2 Report Structure

The report has three main sections.

- A background section that looks at Irish demographic developments and the way in which Ireland sought over the years to provide English language training to those whose first language is other than English.
- An analysis and discussion of the survey findings.
- A comprehensive set of recommendations for Ireland to put in place a coherent national ESOL service.

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The changes in immigration patterns in Ireland over the course of the last dozen years have resulted in an unprecedented need to provide English language teaching to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

Against this background, the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) surveyed those with responsibility for ESOL provision on a scheme-wide basis and those with responsibility for ESOL provision in second-level schools/colleges and adult education centres.¹

The aim of the survey was to obtain a comprehensive account of the work currently carried out by VECs in the field of ESOL provision and to obtain the views of those responsible for ESOL provision, either on a scheme-wide basis or in individual schools, colleges and adult education centres, about the difficulties that they face in delivering an appropriate ESOL service and about what they feel needs to be done to address these difficulties.

The report provides an overview of the background to the current situation in Ireland - population growth and diversification, experiences with addressing the needs of non-English speaking people dating back to 1956 when the first refugees arrived in Ireland

¹ For the purpose of the survey, the term 'adult education centres' is used to refer to any location, other than a school or college, where adult education courses are delivered.

from Hungary and the various ways Ireland went about meeting the language learning needs of those whose first language is other than English.

A detailed description of the findings of the IVEA surveys is included in the report and the findings are discussed in the broader educational context, taking into account international best practice and the policy documents previously published by the IVEA.

The report concludes with a detailed set of recommendations for future action at national, VEC and local level with a view to putting in place a permanent system for delivering effective and efficient ESOL services – both to school-going students and to adults.