

The Integrated Communities Strategy green paper: Our Response

Learning and Work Institute

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*In January 2016, NIACE and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion
merged to form Learning and Work Institute*

Learning and Work Institute

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Learning and Work Institute is a new independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

We bring together over 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion'.

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The Integrated Communities Strategy green paper invited views on the government's vision for building strong integrated communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Learning and Work Institute responded to some of the questions raised and a summary is below.

Learning and Work Institute believes that a national core of entitlements, rights and responsibilities (e.g. around English language) is necessary. How those are delivered and in what ways they are augmented should be tailored sub-nationally. We welcome the government's commitment to implement the McGregor-Smith review recommendations

Learning and Work Institute's evaluation of Community Based English Language provision comprehensively demonstrated that ESOL provision not only improved language proficiency, but also led to improvements in social and community integration among traditionally introverted and marginalised communities. Our research showed a significant impact on the level of social interaction involving speaking and listening in English and with people from different backgrounds, including evidence of cross-cultural social bonds being formed.

Supporting migrants

In addition to the proposals relating to boosting English language, there is also a need to review eligibility criteria for English language programmes in order to ensure that recent migrants who are intending to remain in the UK are supported to access language learning as soon as possible on arrival. Research shows that motivation to learn is highest at this point, and early intervention can avoid the development of coping strategies which enable individuals to delay participation in language learning, in some cases for many years. Possible measures could include reviewing the entitlements of 'new spouses' to Adult Education Budget ESOL provision, so that they do not have to wait for up to three years before becoming eligible for funding entitlements.

More generally, to promote a 'rights and responsibilities' approach to learning English the Government should identify and test ways in which interaction with public services can be used to trigger or 'nudge' referral (e.g. through use of language screening) to English language learning at key points of influence. This should include existing referral arrangements to skills provision for benefits claimants via Job Centre Plus, but also consider other services such as health, housing and schools. The development of referral routes could be taken forward by the local ESOL networks in Integration Areas and language learning infrastructure improvements envisaged in the Green Paper.

Improving English language learning

Learning and Work Institute agrees that it is an urgent necessity to improve the offer for people to learn English. Recent government initiatives to expand the English language learning offer are welcome, including the Community-Based English Language programmes and additional support for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) within the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. However, these have not been sufficient to compensate for the learning opportunities lost through budget reductions since 2010 to Adult Education Budget ESOL - from £203m in 2009/10 to £99m in 2016/17. Boosting English language skills will require significant additional government investment in the AEB and/or other English language programmes. Additional measures include to support diversification of investment in English language learning, by supporting and encouraging individuals and employers to invest in learning and training where appropriate.

As the AEB is focused on progression to further learning and employment, it is right that other programmes focused on a wider range of outcomes, such as reduced social isolation, arising from participation in language learning are promoted. Learning and Work Institute therefore welcomes the expansion of Community-Based English Language programmes and the development of a network of conversation clubs. However, it is important that the models used are effective. Learning and Work Institute's evaluation of one CBEL model shows that this can work, but other CBEL initiatives with different models of delivery may require further evaluation to demonstrate their efficacy.

In particular, the use of volunteers in CBEL programmes and conversation clubs must be carefully considered. The role of volunteers should be clearly specified, and volunteers carefully recruited, trained and provided with suitable resources to carry out these roles. Where volunteers are in teaching roles, they should have the appropriate training and qualifications to do so. Where they are supporting learning, buddying, coaching, mentoring or facilitating social interaction, this should also be clearly specified, and the volunteers appropriately trained and supported to do so. A progression route should be established to help volunteers supporting language learning move on to train as specialist ESOL teachers, for example by re-establishing and funding qualifications similar to the former Adult Learning Support certificate, which had a specific ESOL unit as an option.

Community-based and informal language learning interventions have been shown to play a valuable role in engaging people in learning, boosting confidence and motivation to progress to further learning, and delivering improved social outcomes. However, they cannot replace the formal, accredited language learning often needed for progression to further learning, skills training and employment. English language teaching, particularly at the lower proficiency levels and where teaching basic literacy skills is required, is a specialist field, and teachers and others involved in supporting learning should have access to appropriate continuous professional development opportunities. Such opportunities could be provided through increasing the focus on ESOL/English language within existing government-funded CPD programmes, such as the Education and Training Foundation's English 'pipeline'. To enhance the English language teaching infrastructure, the Government should review data on the ESOL teaching workforce in relation to the likely increase in demand created by the proposals to boost English language learning. It should consider the need for greater support to initial and in-service ESOL subject specialist teacher training programmes. This would ensure that providers are able to recruit appropriately qualified English language teachers and curriculum developers, able to design and deliver effective classroom and community-based formal and non-formal language learning.

Integrating ESOL

It is therefore important not to draw overly rigid distinctions between programmes such as AEB ESOL and CBEL – in many cases, providers will be delivering both and they are underpinned by similar expertise in language learning and community-based delivery of learning. For the proposed strategy for English language learning in England, it will therefore be essential to take a strategic view of the various programmes and set out in detail how they will provide an integrated and coherent offer, with measures to address any gaps in the offer. Learning and Work Institute welcomes the focus on local ESOL partnerships, networks and information sharing services to help co-ordinate different programmes and ensure learners are able to access the type of learning best suited to their needs. Evidence in Learning and Work Institute’s recent report ‘Mapping ESOL Provision in London’ (2017) highlights the role that these kinds of services play in London boroughs such as Newham and Hackney.

A recent Learning and Work Institute roundtable on participation in ESOL learning suggested a number of measures to help the existing language learning infrastructure work more effectively. In particular, gaps were identified in the support provided to people with English language learning needs who are in work (and often in low-paid, low-skilled jobs) but are held back because poor language skills are a barrier to progression.

As part of its proposed strategy for English language learning in England, the Government should review the AEB entitlements and co-funding arrangements for ESOL to ensure that:

- Those on low incomes are not faced with a ‘cliff-edge’, where ESOL is fully-funded whilst they are unemployed, but upon finding work the co-funding fee contribution becomes a barrier to continued participation. AEB ESOL providers should be allowed extra flexibility to support those on low incomes with fully-funded provision.
(We note the subsequent announcement by the Government that eligible learners earning less than £15,736.50 annual gross salary will be fully funded from 2018/19.)

- In line with other 19+ English and Maths provision, delivery of ESOL in the workplace via the AEB is permitted. The Education and Skills Funding Agency should develop additional, contextual funding guidance for providers on how non-regulated learning provision can be used to offer English language learning tailored to specific employer needs. The Department for Education should undertake further work to identify and pilot ways in which employers can be encouraged to (co-) invest in workplace language training.

Extending eligibility and increasing provider flexibility for ESOL is now feasible, due to qualifications reform in 2014 which resulted in greater standardisation of the number of guided learning hours attached to each course, effectively restricting the amount of AEB used to deliver each course. This means that the risk of ESOL provision consuming a disproportionate share of the AEB has been largely eradicated. In addition, extending eligibility and flexibility for ESOL may help providers reportedly facing challenges in spending their AEB allocations to do so, particularly in areas of high demand for ESOL courses. Mayoral Combined Authorities in AEB devolution areas should be supported to identify their local English language learning needs and consider how the future local commissioning of AEB provision could boost English language learning where this is a priority.

Personal Learning Accounts

More generally, Learning and Work Institute believes that Personal Learning Accounts can help support individuals and employers to invest in learning alongside government funding. Whilst this would require implementation more widely across the learning and skills system, the applications and benefits to ESOL are particularly relevant – for example in funnelling government entitlements, whilst supporting individuals and employers to contribute language learning.

Community provision

While the improvement in English language proficiency had in part contributed to social integration, as a community-based activity, the nature of the intervention itself created an environment that increased the social mixing of locally resident learners, within and beyond the walls of the classroom.

Though CBEL intervention targeted groups (predominantly female, of Indian sub-continent descent, and of Muslim faith) the findings are likely to be applicable to other population groups with relatively low levels of English proficiency. It should be noted that ESOL and integration were also gendered issues. The targeting of the intervention specifically to non-English speaking women, was due to the recognition of the higher levels of isolation from other communities and population groups faced by this group.

Part of the success of the CBEL intervention has been the community-based, hyper local approach to engage with potential learners and deliver the provision. The research affirms findings of other initiatives that have looked to update the social and economic inclusion of migrant communities, such as the Partner Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM) evaluation, and demonstrates that community level interventions can:

- Remove the friction of distance, which for many can be a major barrier to access;
- Enable flexibility in service design, by accommodating the specific needs of the participants. For example, providing childcare/creche facilities for courses with a high number of young parents;

- Draw in existing relationships of trust by working in partnership with existing community institutions and organisations (such as local schools, places of worship, public services, etc.);
- Allow for greater understanding of cultural and social norms and seek to accommodate these; this is often acquired through partnership working with existing community organisations.

Accordingly, evidence indicates that as well as the need to develop impactful content of interventions, the process of awareness-raising and engagement is a highly involved and resource-intensive activity which requires effective partnership working, outreach and development of highly accessible materials and approaches (including translated resources and bilingual frontline staff).

We welcome the proposal to provide tailored support to people to build the skills and confidence to take up or improve their financial situation through better employment opportunities. As noted in the Paper, alongside the personal and social benefits from increasing employment opportunities, there is an economic case for doing so; the 2017 McGregor-Smith review suggested that equalising representation across the working age population was valued at £24 billion per year (based on BEIS ad hoc analysis, not accounting for substitution).

However, settled migrants often experience social and economic barriers to work and many are far from the labour market. These include:

- lack of confidence and self-esteem; low awareness of transferable skills;
- lack of UK work experience (having been out of the labour market for many years or never having worked in the UK at all);
- low levels of English language skills;
- childcare responsibilities / lack of access to affordable childcare;
- lack of appropriate job search skills; not knowing how to sell themselves to an employer;

- social and cultural norms, for example, family resistance to women entering the labour market or restrictions on the kinds of jobs they could do;
- lack of qualifications or recognised qualifications;
- social isolation; lack of awareness of services available for Information, Advice and Guidance or support into work.

Addressing the multiple barriers people often experience requires the delivery of a range of services which include coaching to build confidence and self-esteem, pre-application preparation, including CV and job search training, general coaching to build confidence, CV preparation, work experience and opportunities to improve language skills and access learning and skill provision. We are therefore pleased to note the area-based interventions being deployed in the five Integration areas and the inclusion of the opportunity to deliver intensive employment support in a community-based setting.

However, as well as supporting individuals, closing the gap in BAME employment requires engagement and commitment to equality and diversity from employers. Key learning from the evaluation of the Fair Cities Pilots included ‘the absolute necessity of cultivating robust links with employer’. Employer recruitment practices and unconscious and subjective bias often serve to disadvantage BAME people within the labour market, particularly those born outside of the UK.

The long term aims of the Fair Cities Pilots were to encourage fair and effective employer recruitment and promotion practices. Despite the pilots actively engaging with a range of employers and supporting them to become inclusive employers, there was limited evidence of changes to recruitment and selection practices. It appears that such changes require more active and interventionist forms of support. Accordingly, though, we commend government’s commitment to the recommendations of the McGregor Smith Review to support employers in making the necessary organisational changes necessary to become truly inclusive and diverse employers; and such support outlined in the Green Paper appears modest in comparison to the need.

In work progression

We are pleased to see the Green Paper's recognition of the importance of promoting good jobs and helping people to reach their full potential and progress in work, and in particular that people should be given the opportunity to upskill and reskill into future jobs. It is, however, noticeable that the Paper does not detail on how this is likely to be achieved beyond "supporting employers to get the best from their workforce ... as well as building clear career pathways that offer the prospect of enhanced skills and improved job opportunities" (p52).

Research has shown that people who start in low paid work have a relatively low chance of progressing to better paid work and careers – three in four people in low paid work ten years ago are still low paid today. The employment system focuses primarily on job entry and sustainability; at the same time the skills system focuses primarily on young people, leaving many in low paid work with insufficient support to progress or change careers.

Learning and Work Institute's research into in-work progression has demonstrated numerous beneficial outcomes, including increases in earnings, improved employment stability as well as the learning outcomes themselves. Our evaluations of West London Skills Escalator and Step-Up has shown integrated ESOL provision and skills training to be especially potent in helping people to improve their work circumstances, and broader outcomes (such as well-being). However, Adult Education Budget funding is not available for ESOL in the workplace, and, unlike for English and Maths, ESOL provision is co-funded for those in work, often resulting in a cost barrier to learning for those in low-paid work. This effectively means learners face a 'cliff edge', with Government support for language learning sharply declining on entry to work.

Apprenticeships

We note the intention to increase the profile and access to apprenticeships; individuals from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are under-represented in apprenticeship provision, making up only 9.3% of all apprenticeship starts during the first quarter of 2017/18. This is a significant under-representation compared to the general working age population. Research has identified a range of both demand and supply side factors that contribute to this under-representation. Demand-side factors can be grouped into: cultural barriers; negative perceptions of either individuals or parents/guardians; knowledge of apprenticeships; and ability. Supply-side factors include: the impact of developments in policy; recruitment issues; availability of vacancies; and working conditions. Ethnicity also magnifies the effect of gender segregation in choice of occupation.

Learning and Work Institute's recent work on addressing the under-representation of apprentices from BAME backgrounds has shown stark differences between the number of apprenticeship applicants from different ethnic backgrounds. In 2015, 18.8% of applicants registered on the Find an Apprenticeship website identified as being from BAME backgrounds, broadly reflecting the make-up of the working age population. BAME individuals had a success rate of only 6.4%, which is significantly and substantially lower than the 12.5% success rate for applications from individuals identifying as White. However, importantly, the analysis indicated that differences in success rate between White and BAME applications became similar when taking into account for the applicant's geographical location, with significant variation between different postcodes.

More recently, our recent evaluation of the ESFA local 'Diversity Hubs' in Birmingham, Leicester, Bristol, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and London, emphasised the need for personally tailored and community level interventions to increase apprenticeship starts among BAME communities.

1.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684496/Apprenticeship_reform_programme_-_Benefits_realisation_Oct_17_to_Jan_18.pdf

2. These figures relate only to applications through the Find an apprenticeship system, which is only one recruitment route.