

Informing NALA's future direction in ESOL

Overview

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is currently reviewing its involvement in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in light of its current strategic plan which sees a move to a more research and policy focused role. The purpose of this paper is to outline what NALA has been doing in relation to ESOL supports over the past 6 or 7 years and to set out recommendations for NALA's future involvement in ESOL. It sets out the policy context for the Agency's involvement in ESOL to date and outlines key work that NALA has undertaken in this area. It also draws on the main findings of an internal NALA review of ESOL practice and provision internationally.

The report will be broken down into the following sections. The first section will look at the role of ESOL within the VEC Adult Literacy Service. The second part will be an overview of ESOL provision in other states / countries. Then the paper will examine literacy and language skill sets among the migrant communities in Ireland. The final section will make recommendations for NALA.

In making recommendations for NALA's future involvement in ESOL we are cognisant that the policy context and operating environment for ESOL is currently under review at national level. In 2007 the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) and the Department of Education and Science (DES) commissioned a review of ESOL provision. The review and consultation is part of the development of a national English language training policy and framework for legally-resident adult immigrants. The report of the review was originally planned for January 2008, but is now due to be published in late 2008 at the earliest and it is hoped a national policy and framework will follow.

The role of ESOL within the VEC Adult Literacy Service

The White Paper on Adult Education 'Learning for Life' (2000) extended the remit of adult literacy services to provide English language supports for asylum seekers. In practice this saw the development of ESOL classes to a range of students over and above those who came to Ireland seeking asylum, within the remit (and budget) of the VEC Adult Literacy Service. The current social partnership agreement, 'Towards 2016' further expands the remit to cover the language needs of migrants, whatever their educational levels or qualifications. ¹

Due to increasing demand from our members, the National Adult Literacy Agency became involved in providing support to ESOL practitioners within the VEC Adult Literacy Service. This support came in the form of ESOL materials, professional development and dissemination of good practice and training. Most notably, in 2003, NALA developed a set of ESOL policy guidelines with key stakeholders from the Department of Education and Science, the VEC and other community education providers. Its core aim was to support ESOL provision within the VEC Adult Literacy Service and all ESOL providers who are NALA members. NALA members had called for this at the 2001 NALA AGM.

The landscape has changed considerably since 2003, both in terms of the legal status of ESOL students and the type of ESOL students presenting for classes, along with their needs and educational background. At present almost 29 per cent of students in the VEC Adult Literacy Service are ESOL students (DES adult literacy returns 2007²). In some adult literacy settings more than 50 per cent of the students are ESOL.

ESOL providers within the Adult Literacy Service are developing varied responses and strategies for meeting the needs of students presenting for classes. Examples of the current developing practice are outlined further in the

¹ NALA response to the National Development Plan 2007 – 2013 and 'Towards 2016'

² Department of Education and Science, 2007. VEC Adult Literacy Returns figures

next sections of this document. In addition, private language schools and the higher education sector continue to provide a range of tailored English language programmes with flexible and part time study options increasingly available to the migrant community. There are also a wide range of community and local initiatives to support English language learning and integration that have developed in response to identified needs at local and county level.

The changing role of NALA regarding ESOL supports

NALA continues to provide supports to ESOL practitioners working in the VEC Adult Literacy Service and other adult education and work-based settings. These supports include:

- three ESOL modules as part of the WIT/NALA³ accreditation project;
- an annual ESOL conference with international speakers and a wide range of workshops;
- liaising with other organisations working in ESOL

Further details of NALA's ESOL work to date is outlined in Appendix 1 at the end of this document. However the current strategic plan commits NALA to a review of its involvement in ESOL which will shape its future role, if any, going forward.

Overview of ESOL provision in other countries / states

As part of this work, a review was carried out to look at practice and provision in five countries / states. The aim of the review was to explore current ESOL arrangements in a range of countries in order to inform NALA's deliberations. The review looked at the current situation in England, Scotland, New Zealand, Australia and California under the following headings:

- funding of ESOL classes
- links between adult literacy and language provision (ESOL)

³ WIT is Waterford Institute of Technology. The NALA/WIT Accreditation Project was established in 1997 as a partnership between the Department of Adult and Continuing Education in WIT and NALA. Its aim is to support the adult literacy sector in Ireland by providing recognised higher education qualifications for adult educators working in the field of adult literacy.

- organisations which provide a support and lobbying role in ESOL
- provision and accreditation options for ESOL students
- conditions and qualifications for ESOL teachers.

From looking at ESOL policy and provision, it is clear that there is no other organisation which plays NALA's unique role in the five countries / states selected. The main findings on lobbying, policy making and funding are summarised below.

Funding of ESOL classes: In each of the five countries looked at, the government funds ESOL provision. In Australia, the adult literacy and ESOL budgets are totally separate and there is separate management, curriculum and organisation for ESOL. ESOL is funded through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, while adult literacy is funded by the Department of Education. In England and Wales adult literacy and ESOL are funded separately, while in California some of the funding comes from federal adult education money for adult literacy and ESOL and there are also other funding lines which are only for ESOL. In New Zealand the government fund ESOL through the Further Education Commission.

In Scotland there are 32 directly elected local authorities which provide local services and receive a large part of their funding from the Scottish Government. In addition to this core funding, since April 2007, the Scottish Government has allocated additional funding for ESOL to local Community Learning and Development Partnerships (32 Partnerships of local authority, college and voluntary sector) (55%) and directly to colleges (35%) – the other 10% is retained within Government for national developments such as developing an ESOL curriculum and professional development .

This year (2008) £5 million was allocated to ESOL. Providers decide their ESOL priorities and if they want to include 'ESOL literacy' within this funding. Local government also funds adult literacy and numeracy (from the core funding it

receives). The criteria for 'ESOL literacy' accessing adult literacy and numeracy funding is for someone who 'has low levels of literacy in their native tongue and whose spoken English ranges from beginner to fluent' (Scottish Government, 2006). Informal feedback from ESOL practitioners in Scotland indicates that there is confusion and a lack of clarity around the distinction between 'ESOL literacy' and 'ESOL language', as the criteria are difficult to measure and each adult basic education setting interprets it in their own way. The criteria was created in order to ensure that a large proportion of the adult literacy money was not taken up by ESOL. This move has generally been welcomed by adult literacy and ESOL practitioners in Scotland. The additional funding of £14 million (2007-2011) has enabled all providers (colleges, community learning, voluntary) to offer more ESOL places.

Lobbying role for ESOL: The lobbying role for ESOL is carried out by:

- the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in England and Wales;
- the Scottish branch of NATECLA⁴ in Scotland;
- the ESOL Home Tutors in New Zealand;
- a professional association in Australia, but they are mainly concerned with lobbying for ESOL teachers; and
- CALTESOL⁵ in California. They are the only organisation which focuses on ESOL lobbying, but they mainly lobby for ESOL teachers.

In Ireland the IVEA⁶ also lobby on a range of issues for ESOL provision for adults within the VEC Adult Literacy Service. They have called for 'a dedicated national ESOL budget to fund every element of ESOL provision for primary, secondary and further education' (Research Report. ESOL: A survey of its provision in the VEC sector, P. 71).

⁴ National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults

⁵ California Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages

⁶ Irish Vocational Education Association

ESOL Policy makers:

- in England and Wales the DIUS⁷ Skills for Life Strategy Unit work on ESOL policy;
- in Scotland the Directorate-General for Education and Lifelong Learning has policy responsibility for ESOL;
- in New Zealand the further education section of the Department of Education has policy responsibility;
- in Australia the Department of Immigration and Cultural Affairs works on ESOL policy; and
- in California the State Department of Education has ESOL responsibility.

The main findings of the review are summarised in Appendix 2, Table 1.

Literacy and language skill sets among the migrant communities in Ireland

Migrants and new community members in Ireland come from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, educational and social backgrounds. In many English language classes across the country you can find learners who are highly educated with professional and skilled backgrounds who are attending classes to learn or improve their English. However, a large number of other people learning English may have missed out on formal education in their home country. They may now lack the necessary literacy skills to participate fully in and benefit from standard English language classes. These learners may also be marginalised and may be at a disadvantage in the workplace.

'ESOL language' students

'ESOL language' focuses on English language development for students who **do not** have literacy difficulties in their native language. Many ESOL language learners may be familiar with the Roman script, that is, the alphabet we use in English. However, learners who are literate in the conventions and script of **any language** transfer the skills and knowledge they already have to the learning or

⁷ Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

reading and writing in English (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006). While the majority of ESOL language learners do struggle with the fact that English is not phonetically regular, that it does not have a one-to-one sound letter pattern, this does not mean they have literacy difficulties.

‘ESOL literacy’ for students who are new to English

‘ESOL literacy’ refers to teaching and learning that focuses on both language and literacy development in English for students who have literacy difficulties in their mother tongue. This creates significant, additional challenges for the learning of English as a second language. Generally, these learners have literacy difficulties in their native language (in some cases, they may be new to reading and writing and may never even have held a pen before). Many of these learners are also very new to the English language and require additional support to acquire the literacy skills essential to the acquisition of English in order to actively participate in the workplace and wider society.

If learners are unable to read or write proficiently in their own language, they may experience significant difficulties in acquiring reading and writing skills in English. They do not have prior knowledge of writing conventions, may not understand the concept of a letter to sound pattern and may have profound difficulties with different handwriting, fonts and prints. Having literacy difficulties in their mother tongue will also hinder these ESOL learners in learning English in a formal structured setting where there are no tailored and literacy specific supports available.

International students with strong spoken English who have literacy difficulties

Some students may be proficient in spoken English having come to Ireland from countries where English is used as a ‘lingua franca’, that is as a common language of communication in an area where there are a number of national, regional or local languages. Or they may be self taught in English and have only

needed to speak and be understood in English. These learners, as Spiegel and Sunderland (2006) point out, may come from regions with a strong tradition of oral literacy but have very few written literacy skills in any language and may be approaching the formal learning of reading and writing for the first time. Though these learners may have high levels of spoken English, their reading and writing skills in English may not be fully developed which could make it difficult for them to participate fully in Irish society.

Teachers and tutors working with ESOL students with literacy difficulties need to have a thorough grounding in literacy acquisition, development and teaching methodologies.

Further definitions of ESOL literacy and ESOL language can be found in Appendix 3.

Recommendations for NALA

Support and advisory services

NALA should provide supports for practitioners working with ESOL students with literacy difficulties. Migrants with literacy difficulties are more likely to be marginalised and ESOL literacy classes are crucial for these individuals if they are to integrate into society. NALA's *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work* (2005) states that 'literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation explore new possibilities and initiate change'. These guidelines (2005) also state that 'for some people learning English as a second language is the core element of literacy learning'. (NALA, p.13). Many of the ESOL providers are NALA members and there are ESOL classes in almost all⁸ VEC Adult Literacy Services throughout the country. ESOL literacy learners are like adult literacy learners, as both groups need to improve their reading, writing, numeracy, listening and speaking skills for everyday activities, for communication and for their own personal development. These skills will enable them to play an active role in their communities and workplaces and have access to further learning opportunities.

This will involve continuing with a targeted engagement and dissemination strategy with ESOL providers who are NALA members within and outside the VEC Adult Literacy Service. This could include the promotion of family learning models. Family learning has an important role in helping migrant families to integrate and to develop confidence. In line with the NALA strategic plan this will mean that NALA should look at an ESOL policy and an ESOL plan, as well as looking at research, which will be outlined below.

⁸ 32 of the 33 VEC Adult Literacy Services provide ESOL classes (Department of Education and Science returns 2007)

NALA should develop a shared understanding of what is meant by ESOL literacy and the challenges facing ESOL students with literacy difficulties.

As outlined earlier, different ESOL students bring different skill sets and have different literacy needs. More information is required on these subjects. This may involve building a profile of the ESOL literacy students, learning more about how literacy is developed in second language acquisition, an exploration of effective formal assessment tools that best support ESOL literacy students, and developing a better understanding of the use and role of literacy within the migrant community. To carry this out more effectively, NALA could link in with other organisations like the IVEA, Waterford Institute of Technology, the Advisory Council for English Language Schools, the Dublin Adult Learning Centre and a number of VEC Adult Literacy Services who are working in this area.

Research

More information is required to develop our understanding and promote awareness of what ESOL literacy is and how it is connected to language acquisition. Anecdotal evidence from ESOL practitioners at NALA events and through email and telephone conversations indicates that this is an area of importance to practitioners and that many are not fully aware of the different techniques that can be used to identify and work more effectively with ESOL literacy students.

Evidence from other countries such as the USA and England indicates that providers and policy makers need this information to best support ESOL literacy students. For example, Wrigley and Guth (2002) recommend that ESOL literacy teachers strive for genuine communication between teachers and students, link literacy with visual information, make literacy learning fun and focus on things that matter, focus on meaning while helping learners see how language works and connect literacy to life. Furthermore, practitioners need to better understand the relationship between second language acquisition and literacy in order to

tailor teaching methods according to the needs and previous educational background of their ESOL students.

NALA's role should include research into the interplay between literacy and language acquisition and a sharing of these findings with ESOL practitioners and other key stakeholders through conferences, the NALA Journal and other dissemination methods in order to promote effective practice in ESOL.

Voice

NALA should explore how the membership strategy can engage with ESOL literacy students. This would enable NALA to hear the views and opinions of ESOL literacy students and gain an understanding of issues which are important to them to better inform our work.

This should include the recruitment of ESOL literacy students to the NALA student sub-committee, stronger promotion of the NALA student forums and events to ESOL literacy students and efforts to increase participation of ESOL literacy students in all strands of NALA's work. The NALA membership strategy paper⁹ calls for support for ESOL students to join as members and to further explore ESOL students as NALA members.

NALA should build an understanding of the issues facing migrants with literacy difficulties into all our work.

NALA's mission statement aims to make sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. In particular, NALA should explore how the promotion of plain English can be of benefit to migrants with literacy difficulties.

⁹ NALA: A Strategy for Membership – October 2007

Advocacy

In line with the advocacy focus of the NALA strategic plan 2007- 2010, NALA's role should also include advocacy work and partnerships with other organisations working on ESOL literacy such as the IVEA, the Advisory Council for English Language Schools, FÁS¹⁰, Skillnets¹¹ and the trade unions.

NALA should continue to lobby for resources for ESOL

In line with NALA's mission statement, NALA should lobby for a totally separate line of funding for all ESOL provision – both ESOL language and ESOL literacy, so that the adult literacy budget is for adult literacy classes for native English and Irish speakers only.

Conclusion

We recognise that the above recommendations are not without challenges. There is not currently a national policy on language training and in the interim the VEC Adult Literacy Service has stepped in to meet emerging needs and developed experience and expertise in the area.

Literacy and language are intertwined not only within first language acquisition but also within the teaching and learning of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). International experience shows us that, even where policy separates ESOL literacy and ESOL language, practice does not always allow for a neat separation.

However NALA must focus its attention and resources on addressing the issues that migrants with literacy difficulties face. Our work must be guided by the needs and demands of migrants with literacy difficulties. This may involve the

¹⁰ FAS Workplace Basic Education funds workplace programmes for employees who have literacy difficulties in their first language and have English language needs.

¹¹ Skillnets is an enterprise-led support body whose mission is to enhance the skills of people in employment in Irish industry to support competitiveness and employability. Skillnets have a network called 'Embracing Diversity' which provides English language training to employees in the workplace.

development of a plan to set priorities and guide our work in ESOL over the next two years with a recommendation that our overall role in ESOL is further reviewed in 2010.

Appendix 1 : NALA and ESOL outputs

NALA ESOL policy Guidelines 2003

The ESOL policy guidelines were developed by the NALA ESOL Executive Working Group to support ESOL provision in the VEC Adult Literacy Service.

<http://www.nala.ie/publications/listing/20030624160824.html>

ESOL materials

NALA developed 3 ESOL packs 'Paving the Way', 'The Big Picture' and 'The Big Picture 2', which focused on incorporating literacy and language tuition through every day situations relating to education, health, work and active citizenship in Ireland.

<http://www.nala.ie/publications/listing/20050209111801.html>

ESOL exercises on the NALA tuition and learning website: www.literacytools.ie

Professional development

A comprehensive training programme for ESOL managers, resource workers and tutors has been developed by NALA / WIT. This includes 3 ESOL modules as part of the NALA / WIT accreditation project. Each module is of six days' duration. These courses are run in Dublin, Cork and a number of other locations throughout the country:

<http://www2.wit.ie/SchoolsDepartments/SchoolofEducation/literacydevelopmentcentre/>

Training and awareness raising

NALA has organised and hosted an annual ESOL conference with international speakers on a range of subject areas of relevance to ESOL within an adult literacy setting.

NALA has put on a wide range of ESOL training days and seminars in response to the needs and interests of its membership.

Appendix 2:

Table showing overview of ESOL provision in others countries / states

Table 1

	England	Scotland	New Zealand	Australia	California
Funding	Government through the Learning and Skills Council	Government Through local government in each region	Government Further Education Commission	Federal Govt. Department of Immigration and Cultural Affairs	Federal Govt. and State of California
Links between literacy and ESOL	Separate ESOL and literacy seen as separate areas, e.g. specific ESOL curriculum, but often both based from same dept. in college	Mixed Scottish Exec. funds free ESOL literacy from Adult Literacy fund and ESOL and Literacy classes take place in same settings/colleges	Separate ESOL and Literacy are generally quite separate if run from Colleges of Further Ed. where they have different managers and tutors	Separate Specialist ESOL providers such as 'The Migrant English Service'. In many adult education classrooms, mix of native and non-native speakers	Mixed ESOL classes run from same centres as adult literacy with same managers
Lobbying role for ESOL	Who? NIACE is the major campaigning and lobbying organisation	Who? Scottish branch of NATECLA lobby for ESOL. Communities Scotland no longer exists.	Who? ESOL Home Tutors (voluntary association) lobby on policy and awareness raising	Who? There is a professional association in each state, but they are mainly concerned with lobbying for ESOL teachers. The state TESOL associations are quite powerless in terms of lobbying	Who? Only org which focuses on ESOL is CALTESOL, but they mainly lobby for ESOL teachers
ESOL policy makers	Who? DIUS Skills for Life Strategy Unit does training and policy making for ESOL	Who? Directorate-General for Ed & Lifelong Learning has policy responsibility	Who? Further education section of the Department of Education	Who? Department of Immigration and Cultural Affairs (Federal government)	Who? California State Department of Education

	England	Scotland	New Zealand	Australia	California
Tutors pay	Volunteer or paid? ESOL tutors are paid, but the majority also work part time. Some have full time teaching contracts	Volunteer or paid? A lot of ESOL teachers in Further Education colleges are full-time, while ESOL teachers in the community are mainly part-time or volunteers	Volunteer or paid? ESOL teachers in Polytechs are paid and generally full-time, while teachers in the community are often not paid	Volunteer or paid? ESOL classes in colleges are delivered by paid teachers. Some ESOL teachers work part-time and there are also voluntary 'home' tutors	Volunteer or paid? ESOL teachers in community colleges & other state run adult education programmes are paid
Qualifications for tutors	Yes ESOL tutors are required to have (or be working towards) both a generic teaching qualification and a subject specialism	Yes ESOL teachers have to have a university degree, plus a TESOL or TEFL qualification to work in Further Education colleges	No There are some Ministry of Education ESOL training courses, but in general ESOL tutors and managers are not coordinated nationally and it is up to each organisation to put on their own training	Yes Ongoing training for ESOL trainers and managers is provided by the Further Education English Language & Literacy Services. The Adult Migrant English Programme also provide training for ESOL teachers	Yes ESOL teachers have to have a masters in an ESOL-related field for a community college. ESOL training is run by the state Department of Education

Appendix 3

Definitions of 'ESOL language' and 'ESOL literacy'

City of Dublin VEC (CDVEC)

The CDVEC Handbook for ESOL Practitioners¹² (2007) makes a distinction between ESOL language and ESOL literacy.

They do this through their definition of ESOL as being specifically for people whose first language is not English and who need to develop their knowledge and skills to read, write, listen and speak in English.

The CDVEC handbooks describes ESOL literacy as 'ESOL for Literacy' and defines it as being specifically for people whose first language is not English and who need to develop their ability to read and write.

The definitions and advice in the handbook shows a clear distinction between those who need to develop reading and writing skills and those who need to apply existing literacy knowledge and skills to learning English as a Second Language.

IVEA

The IVEA provide some information on how they view ESOL language and ESOL literacy in their 2008 report on ESOL¹³.

While they do not provide definitive definitions of ESOL language and ESOL Literacy they do make specific reference to ESOL students who have literacy difficulties. They refer to these students as 'ESOLWILD', meaning ESOL students with literacy difficulties.

In the report the IVEA estimate that something in excess of 10 percent of ESOL students are students who have literacy problems. (IVEA ESOL Task Group, p. 88)

The IVEA further states that the needs of these ESOL literacy students are significantly different from those of literate language learners. The report makes a clear recommendation on the needs of ESOL students with literacy difficulties stating that addressing the needs of ESOL students with literacy difficulties

¹² CDVEC (2007) Handbook for ESOL Practitioners at Beginner (AO, A1, Literacy for ESOL) Level. Dublin: City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee.

¹³ Research Report: *ESOL: A survey of its provision in the VEC sector* (2008), IVEA ESOL Task Group.

requires tutors with specific skills, knowledge and competences (IVEA ESOL Task Group, p. 88)

Learning Connections Scotland

The Scottish agency, Learning Connections, don't have definitions as such, but they do have eligibility criteria for determining which service students can avail of for supports.

So, ESOL learners who have limited or no literacy in their first language **and** have literacy needs in English are eligible for free support through the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Partnerships (32 across Scotland).

All other ESOL learners can access provision within college or community learning settings. For these ESOL language students eligibility for free provision depends on a number of factors, for example if they are asylum seekers or refugees and/or meet the means test criteria. In addition, adult learners who earn less than £18,000 per year can get up to £200 for access to learning, which includes ESOL support.

Definition of 'legally resident'

Legally resident refers to a migrant who enters a country legally and remains in the country in accordance with his/her admission criteria.

Immigrant Council of Ireland 2008

Websites

Scotland

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/esol>
<http://www.ilascotland.org.uk/What+is+ILA+Scotland/ILA+Scotland+%C2%A3200+offer.htm>

England

http://www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum_esol/intro/ns/

Australia

<http://www.els.sa.edu.au/>

New Zealand

<http://www.esolht.org.nz/>

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CDVEC (2007) *Handbook for ESOL Practitioners at Beginner (AO, A1, Literacy for ESOL) Level*. Dublin: City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee.

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NALA (2005) *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work*. Dublin. NALA

NALA (2007) *Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010*. Dublin. NALA

Spiegel, M. and Sunderland, H. (2006) *Teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners: A Teachers' guide*. London: London South Bank University.

Wrigley, H. and Guth, G. (2002) *Bringing literacy to life*. Literacy Work International. Mesilla, New Mexico.