

## Context for developing further work re ESOL and Asylum Seekers

This document was written by the Partnership for Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council. It aims to provide an overview of information for a wider range of partners outlining the position (in May 2005) re:

- the statutory context for ESOL and Refugees/Asylum Seekers
- materials/reports relating to ESOL and refugees/asylum seekers that have been produced by agencies such as Basic Skills Agency, NIACE, other bodies.

[Note: The content may date rapidly over time, and should be read in this context.]

### 1. Language and knowledge tests for naturalisation

*The 'New and the Old: Report of the Life in the United Kingdom Advisory Group'* was set up to advise the Home Secretary on the implementation of a naturalisation test and to define what requirements should be set for standards of English language and knowledge of society. The report (2003) is available from [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk). Since the publication of *The New and the Old report* a second group, the Advisory Board on Naturalisation and Integration, has been set up to provide independent advice to the Government on its citizenship and integration programme. The Home Office web page [http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/news/archive/2004/august0/new\\_language\\_requirement.html](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/news/archive/2004/august0/new_language_requirement.html) provides the latest information on language requirements for naturalisation. While currently Entry 3 is still advertised as the minimum level required to citizenship, an announcement is due from the Home Office on revised levels of language.

There will be a Citizenship test available on line, which Learndirect are working on, and questions for the test will be taken from 'Life in the UK' (due to be published by The Stationery Office, [www.tso.co.uk](http://www.tso.co.uk) - £9.99 ISBN 0-11-34302-5). Citizenship materials have been developed for the language classroom by NIACE and LLU+ and tutors are being trained at the moment. Provider organizations in Birmingham have been involved in this development of ESOL and Citizenship curriculum materials (national contact for ESOL and Citizenship Materials is via [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)).

The latest Home Office paper 'Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain' – the Five Year Strategy for asylum and immigration (February 2005) indicates that the Home Office intends to introduce language tests for

all people who want to stay in the UK permanently; and not just for refugees. The Home Office sets the language requirements for highly skilled workers at IELTS Band 8. The reference for this document is: <http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm64/6472/6472.htm>

The Home Office is also developing a handbook for new arrivals which will be called: *Welcome to the UK; what you need to know.*

***The implications of all of this is that people arriving newly in this society and wishing to find routes into economic activity will be expected to have English language skills at much more than simple, functional levels, with language speakers having developed all four skills, not just Speaking and Listening.***

## 2. LSC eligibility for funding of ESOL

The aim of development work is to make use of mainstream funding, as far as possible, from the outset. The funding of ESOL, via LSC main funding methodology, is undergoing some changes and rules re eligibility need to be clearly understood.

The text below has been taken from *LSC Funding Guidance For Further Education in 2004/05*; sections 307 to 310. (May 2004) ref: lsc/aa000/1036/04; [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk).

(para 307) The following persons will be eligible for funding (these groups correspond to the groups listed in the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations, 1997 (“the Regulations”)):

- a person on the relevant date who is “settled” in the UK, and who has been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands (that is, including the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) for the three years preceding the relevant date (that is, the date of 1 September, 1 January or 1 April that is closest to the beginning of the first term of the person’s learning aim), and whose main purpose for such residence was not to receive full-time education during any part of the three-year period. “Settled” means having either indefinite leave to enter or remain (ILE/R) or having the right of abode in the UK. British citizens and certain other citizens have the right of abode in the UK:
  - i. those who hold British Citizen passports
  - ii. British Dependent Territory Citizens (now known as British Overseas Territory Citizens)

- iii. those whose passports have been endorsed to show they have Right of Abode in the UK
  - iv. those who have a certificate of naturalisation or registration as a British Citizen.
- a national of any European Union (EU) country or the child of an EU national who has been ordinarily resident in the European Economic Area (EEA) for the three years preceding the “relevant date”, and whose main purpose for such residence was not to receive full-time education during any part of the three-year period. Spouses of EU nationals are not eligible unless they are eligible in their own right.
  - an EEA migrant worker or the spouse or child of an EEA migrant worker who has been ordinarily resident in the EEA for the three years preceding the “relevant date”, and whose main purpose for such residence was not to receive full-time education during any part of the three-year period
  - anyone who is recognised as a refugee by the UK Government (granted Refugee Status) who has remained ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands since so recognised, or the spouse or child of such a refugee
  - anyone refused refugee status but who has been granted since 1 April 2003 Humanitarian Protection (HP) or Discretionary Leave (DL), or, prior to 1 April 2003, was granted exceptional leave to enter or remain (ELE/R) by the UK Government, and who has remained ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands since so recognised, or the spouse or child of such a person
  - learners studying under reciprocal exchange agreements.

(para 308) Students from the 10 countries joining the EU on 1 May 2004 who have been previously resident in the Accession Countries (see glossary) will be eligible for funding at the “home” rate from 1 May 2004 for programmes that start on or after that date (subject to the student meeting the normal three-year residency requirements in the new enlarged EU) for tuition-fee purposes. Students already on a programme of study will be treated as “home” students from the next term that starts after 1 May 2004.

(para 309) In addition to considering the groups outlined above, the LSC will also consider the following groups of learners to be eligible for LSC funding:

- persons who have legally been living in England for the three years immediately preceding the start of the programme, ignoring temporary absences (this does not include persons with time-limited leave to remain as a student whose leave to remain does not extend to the expected end date of the proposed learning aim of study)
- asylum seekers and their dependants (those over 19 are not eligible for learner-support funds) in receipt of:
  - i. income-based benefits, or
  - ii. assistance under the terms of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 or the Children Act, 1989, or
  - iii. financial assistance (subsistence payments) from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), or
  - iv. assistance under the National Assistance Act 1948.
- persons with exceptional leave to enter or remain, their spouses and children
- persons with recently settled status (this means those having been granted indefinite leave to enter or remain, Right of Abode or British Citizenship within the three years immediately preceding the start of the course)
- the spouse of a person with settled status, who has been both married, and resident in the UK, for one year.

(para 310) In addition to the groups above, the LSC will also consider the following groups of 16–18-year-old learners as eligible for funding:

- any unaccompanied asylum seekers aged 16–18 who are placed in the care of social services
- 16–18-year-olds accompanying parents who have the right of abode or leave to enter or remain in the UK
- 16–18-year-old dependants of teachers coming to the UK on a teacher-exchange scheme
- 16–18-year-olds entering the UK (where not accompanied by their parents) who hold full British Citizen passports (but not British Overseas passports), or 16–18-year-olds whose passports have been endorsed to show they have the right of abode in this country (holders

of passports describing them as British Overseas Citizens have no automatic right of abode in the UK, nor do other non-EEA nationals).

### **LSC fact sheet on Funding of ESOL qualifications**

The LSC produce a series of fact sheets. (Available on the LSC website at [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)). Most relevant to this topic, at April 2005, is Fact Sheet 6, which has a Section 1 which lists the new ESOL qualifications and Annex A which has a useful list of awarding bodies and the approved and funded ESOL qualifications.

A detailed list of all accredited ESOL qualifications for 2002-4 is available on the readwriteplus website:

[http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/ESOL\\_Qualifications\\_Report](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/ESOL_Qualifications_Report)

A recent initiative worth highlighting is *The ESOL Exemplars: A resource for teachers* (DfES 2004) and available from DfES publications/reference EXESOL. The exemplar pack aims to present characteristic features of the levels of language performance for the 5 levels of the national literacy standards.

*Working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers - Support Materials for ESOL providers* According to DfES this is particularly helpful for organisations with little experience of delivering ESOL provision to refugees and asylum seekers in the post-compulsory education sector. DfES Publications, reference WRASPACK or download a pdf or Word version of the document from the readwriteplus website:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/teachingandlearning>

QCA has indicated to awarding bodies that, as a guideline, it expects each mode at each level to take 150 GLA to achieve.

Please note that QCA are in the process of reviewing the status of the non-Skills for Life qualifications on the NQF. Of particular concern is the IELTS test, which is the gate-keeping English language test for the accreditation of medical, nursing and veterinary skills and qualifications.

***The implications are that, if mainstream funding is to be used as far as possible from the outset, there needs to be a detailed understanding, by LSC staff (who may not be Skills for Life experts) and providers, of the technical intricacies of ESOL qualifications and funding. Any development activity should, as far as possible, take these into account rather than be a non-replicable 'project'.***

### **3. Work and Skills acquisition**

The Department for Work and Pensions has just produced: *Working to rebuild lives: a refugee employment strategy*. For the executive summary see: [www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2005/emp\\_guide\\_summary.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2005/emp_guide_summary.pdf) The report outlines for example how Building on New Deal will provide increased flexibility and some specialist provision for the most disadvantaged job-seekers, including refugees (p12).

Refugees over the age of 25 may chose to join work-based Learning for Adults immediately (i.e. before the usual qualifying period of 6 months unemployment); if they have an English Language need DWP programmes for refugees aim to provide (in a work-related context):

- help with spoken and written English
- basic employability skills
- help in understanding how the UK labour market works
- experience of the world of work
- good information and guidance about skills needed for particular work sectors
- how to present qualifications (and their UK equivalence) in ways that employers can understand)

Currently asylum seekers are not eligible for New Deal and Work-based Learning for Adults programmes and other Jobcentre Plus services. Where asylum seekers may not be eligible for main programmes the same curriculum needs will still require addressing.

***Any skills work with asylum seekers should have a curriculum built around all four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening; related to basic employability where needed; structured around an understanding of the world of work (with visits/work experience etc); guidance around the specific skills and qualifications expected in various occupations etc.***

### **4. Inspection reviews of ESOL and basic skills**

In 2003 OFSTED and ALI published *Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages: a survey of current practice in post-16 and adult provision*. OFSTED publications centre, reference: HMI 1367 or [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index)

This report comments that the Skills for Life strategy has been successful in increasing the number of learners but expresses concern over the quality of teaching and learning. There are significant amounts of unsatisfactory ESOL

provision. (This is true via LSC provision and via Jobcentre Plus provision). Support is available via Quality Improvement initiatives to improve standards.

David Sherlock's report (for 2003-4) commented on language support as follows: 'Very few providers saw the need to provide language support for learners who spoke English as an additional language. These learners often had no option but to join English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes and were given scant opportunities to develop their English language skills in the context of their work or studies. Many learners had vocational, professional and practical skills that were not considered when they received advice on the most appropriate learning programme. For example, unemployed learners on Jobcentre Plus programmes who wished to work in catering invariably joined Basic Employability Training ESOL courses. A longer occupational training programme in catering, with specialist language support, would help them learn the functional language and vocabulary that they need to work in the catering industry.'

In prisons, arrangements for language support were still inadequate. Even when support needs were identified, little was provided. Other prisoners were often called on to provide translation and support. Prisons rarely had adequate materials or expertise to identify prisoners' language learning needs. Learners with language learning needs on adult and community learning or further education programmes also often got help from fellow learners. Many tutors provided good personal support, but did not have sufficient language awareness training to understand that the jargon and vocabulary they used was often a barrier to learners who spoke English as an additional language reaching their potential.

<http://docs.ali.gov.uk/ciar/0304/inspectionfindings/languagesupport/language.htm>

The inspection review's section of leadership and management noted that there were still significant weaknesses in the management and quality assurance of literacy, numeracy and language support. Few providers used management information systems to collect data that would help managers to evaluate the impact of learners' levels of literacy, numeracy and language on their overall achievement. Managers did not measure the impact of any additional learning support their learners received. Measures for improvement often went no further than identifying learners' needs and providing, at best, satisfactory support. The quality of the support was rarely monitored. Few providers included additional support sessions in their schedules for observing learning sessions.

***The implications are that any ESOL work with asylum seekers will need to build on these observations and:***

- ***offer English language support on a range of vocational programmes, and not assume that discrete ESOL classes are the answer***
- ***link guidance re learning programmes to existing vocational/professional skills – which may include intensive vocabulary work initially***
- ***provide adequate language support and bilingual support – enabling learners to support each other but not relying on this as the main form of language support***
- ***ensuring that teachers have an awareness of language influences on use of English by new arrivals.***
- ***any work, however funded, needs to fall within some quality assurance process.***

## **5. National and local development programmes**

### **(a) Asset UK**

ASSET UK (the Asylum Seekers Development Partnership) is a partnership to test new ways of helping asylum seekers gain access to advice, education and preparation for employment. It is an ESF-funded project under the Equal Community Initiative Programme and National LSC. The website is ([www.asset-uk.org.uk](http://www.asset-uk.org.uk)).

Asset UK is a partnership which includes the Refugee Council; The Sheffield College; London Metropolitan University; NiCEM; NIACE; The Basic Skills Agency; the Learning and Skills Council; and London South Bank University.

At a time when debate continues about when in the asylum process to allow asylum seekers permission to work, if at all, ASSET UK's message is clear: preparing asylum seekers for the labour market is important for integration, inclusion and can be beneficial for social cohesion and the economy.

Solving complex challenges in preparing asylum seekers for the labour market should they stay in the UK or return, requires a careful balance of expertise, new innovative methodology and plenty of strategic action. In the last few years, this has been the focus of ASSET UK. We have been busy developing practice in online information, advice and guidance, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision, volunteering placement, developing skills audits and working with employers. If carefully planned, this preparatory stage enables asylum seekers to be effective in the labour market and contribute to the host community should they stay, or take new skills to their country of origin should they return.

They can be contacted at [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk).

Activities and work that were showcased at a recent event in Birmingham included:

- A comprehensive CD-ROM on Citizenship
- On-line orientation resources to improve practice in giving information, advice and guidance for asylum seekers.
- Good practice in skills audits. Much work with employers with continuous support and supervision for the client has led to many successful education and training placements and volunteering opportunities.
- ESOL activities. ASSET UK provides ESOL for newly arrived asylum seekers in emergency accommodation. Partners gained an insight into how tutors were recruited, trained and supported. They also found out about embedded ESOL provision and teacher training course.

ASSET UK also showed its work at an ECOTEC transnational conference in Birmingham called 'Building an Equal Europe'.

RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit) recently visited several towns and cities across the UK to gain feedback on their website, 'Information for asylum seekers' ([www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/asset](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/asset)). The website offers information to this marginalised group about education, training and employment.

The Basic Skills Agency hosts a Citizenskills website at [www.citizenskills.co.uk](http://www.citizenskills.co.uk). They are also producing a CD-Rom on Citizenship, which is aimed at asylum seekers and tutors. For further details, contact [www.basic-skills.co.uk](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk).

A one-day seminar entitled 'Working with Volunteers and Asylum Seekers' was due to be held at the Refugee Council Training and Employment Section, Birmingham. The seminar would be looking at working with volunteers and/or asylum seekers in areas such as health, education, advice and guidance or any other capacity.

(b) DfES/LSC Skills for Life developments

The LSC Skills for Life Quality Initiative has produced a series of staff support/development modules at different levels. One of these (which is available as an on-line download) is aimed at frontline support workers (i.e. not teachers) and links refugee issues with ESOL/Skills for Life issues. Other material relates to Leadership and Management and teacher training. Materials available via [www.sflqi.org.uk](http://www.sflqi.org.uk).

The DfES, via NIACE, has also produced a training pack aimed at teachers/support staff within learning provider organisations. This pack covers a range of aspects re working with refugees and asylum seekers.

Groups may include young people who need to complete their education, families who need to understand the education system, and adults who wish to gain academic or vocational qualifications or to continue their careers in their chosen field. This range of skills, experience and qualifications is matched by an equally wide range of language and training needs. These needs should not be considered separately. As well as offering choices about how and where they learn English, organisations need to consider their wider needs, including such issues as health and housing.

To cater for the diverse needs of this group of learners, organisations should try to offer as many choices as staff and organisational structure allow – and to link up with other providers and organisations to offer learners opportunities they cannot provide on their own. Learners with some English – above Entry 3 – may prefer to join a vocational, leisure or academic course that includes language support, or a course with ‘embedded’ ESOL. Within such courses it is important to ensure that learners are clear about ESOL learning objectives and that English language skills are taught alongside other skills or subjects, and not just used in the classroom.

Opportunities available to learners should include:

- short courses
- intensive provision
- independent learning facilities
- fast track courses for learners with higher levels of English language (Level 1 and above)
- short courses or workshops on a variety of themes such as:
  - orientation/induction into the local community as well as the institution
  - citizenship
  - study skills
  - health, housing, leisure activities, financial capability and other issues that arise in adult life.

Young learners, and learners of working age, would benefit from the following:

- a focus on employability skills
- vocational tasters
- pre-access courses
- family programmes

Programmes should offer a range of teaching and learning styles including:

- whole class, pair, small group and individual work
- video, audio tapes and information communications technology (ICT)
- role play
- presentations
- out of class activities

(c) Report on issues, considerations and recommendations arising from 'Forward' Equal programme

Re: Influence of culture, learning styles and home language on basic skills learners

- Most of the research on culture and learning styles is American and has focused on school children, university students, managers etc – currently there is no relevant work with basic skills learners except this (via Equal Forward) and some pieces of work re ESOL and learning styles.
- This research looked at Somali; Chinese; Bangladeshi; African-Caribbean learners.
- Learning styles variation across adults are small but can be significant. Age has some effect on preferred learning style; gender has more of an effect. Whilst each person is an individual there are cultures within groups that can aid/resist particular teaching styles (and vice versa). It appears to be an issue – but not a major issue i.e. no need to undertake large scale developments until the degree of impact is clearer.
- Few organisations record individuals' preferred learning styles e.g. on Individual Learning Plans.
- Despite the ESOL curriculum etc many learners feel their needs are not being met. The issues are around pace and style of learning. Preferences were expressed for 'traditional' teaching methods; native English speaking teachers; using a mix of materials; with learning linked to practical life-tasks (re work; career; home). Pace often felt to be too slow. Learners from these groups feel the need to learn more quickly than e.g. 3 hr/wk provision can allow.
- Where there is a tight community there are few chances to practice English – opportunities to do this need to be seen as part of the learning.
- Some learners speak English at the speed of their home language which makes it unintelligible. Speaking and listening skills need to be a clear component of any learning.
- Some people born in the UK have home language effects which create difficulties in writing with:

- sentence structure
- prepositions
- tenses
- level of content

(d) Information book for newcomers to Birmingham

An information book has been produced by Birmingham City Council's Services to Newly Arrived Children and their Families project for individuals and families who are new to Birmingham. It will help people to learn about the city and about services they can use as they settle here or in other parts of Britain.

The information includes:

- Advice and Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- Health
- Hospitals
- Education, Childcare and Adult Education
- Services for Children and Youth
- Housing, Neighbourhood Offices and Supporting Agencies
- Emergency Services
- Transport and Travel
- Money Matters
- British Red Cross Services
- The Law
- Communication
- Shopping
- Libraries and Leisure Services
- Religious Contacts
- Britain and Birmingham

The book is available in English, French, Somali, Arabic and Kurdish. You can view or download this book online at [www.birmingham.gov.uk/newinbirmingham](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/newinbirmingham).

(e) National Research and Development Centre: Survey of case studies in ESOL (2004)  
Learners and learning

- Learners are often more resourceful and knowing than either the teacher or the task allows for. Tasks are too narrow, and constrain the learners whose substantial knowledge and interests go beyond the exercise.
- Refugees and asylum seekers have a raft of social, psychological and economic needs, related to their status, which set them apart from other basic skills learners. Many are exposed to racism and many have experienced severe trauma. The learners had to cope with fears from the past and anxieties

about the future while trying to learn a new language. This raises vital issues about the importance of a more holistic service for learners from vulnerable groups. There is a need for more debate, research and thinking about mental health in the Skills for Life strategy.

- Classes can also contain highly skilled, professional people with a fierce desire to find work commensurate with their qualifications (and these were often the same people as those just mentioned). These are not basic skills learners but sophisticated, highly educated people with considerable cultural capital. With these groups, the distinction between ESOL and EFL becomes blurred. Learners needed strategies for anticipating potential miscommunication in professional contexts.
- Learners often use their first language to work out meanings. This can be a short-cut both in puzzling out grammatical concepts and word meanings and in facilitating tasks.

#### The ESOL classroom

- Talk is work in the ESOL classroom. The language and cultural processes of the classroom are the curriculum. Talk is not an adjunct to learning or a social pause but is the reason for being in the classroom.
- Because of the centrality of talk, the most significant mode of learning is through group processes. The focus on individual learning and ILPs can be at the expense of these group processes.

#### Language and the ESOL curriculum

- The learners' use of language in the classroom shows that language development must be viewed as a complex, non-linear system. Much of the language used cannot be neatly tied to curricular objectives. It cannot be dismissed as incidental, since this assumes it is a sideline to the main project; the ordered acquisition of language.
- The detailed analysis of language use shows that social and cultural knowledge is wired to language. Socio-cultural knowledge is traditionally treated as separate from language and taught as facts – for example about institutions and how they work. However, the discussions about social activities (e.g. begging, accidents, work, health...) show that specific institutional knowledge, learners' stance on a topic and their means of self-presentation are interconnected.
- The language and socio-cultural knowledge to manage numeracy tests is an example of how these two aspects of communication are wired in together. The contextualising of

maths problems as mini-narratives creates rather than solves problems.

- The language of language learning is even more difficult for learners, whatever their level of competence. Even advanced learners cannot monitor their language behaviour and talk about their language needs. ILPs are often no more than a mantra to 'improve my English' or 'learn more grammar'. There is clearly a need, particularly at more advanced levels, to focus on the language for reflecting about learning, if learners are to gain a greater sense of ownership of their learning.
- Teachers as well as learners work hard to bring the 'outside world' into the classroom. Research shows that this, generally, is an effective practice (Condelli 2002). However, responsive ESOL teachers only bring the outside world in when the learners in that classroom can bear its weight. Talking about the past may be good for practising verb morphology but deeply traumatic for those who have fled torture and death.

### Analysis

- Need for more independence and control:  
Another aspect of the traumatic experiences of these students is the lack of control over their past lives, that led to them becoming asylum seekers, or that results from the condition of being a seeker of asylum or a refugee.
- Need for integration:  
Recently arrived students often arrive in a location because of the government dispersal policy and their preferences, e.g. to join family members in other towns were not taken account of. They all needed opportunities to meet and make friends, speak with native English speakers and for ESOL provision as they had very little fluency in English. All of them expressed a desire to integrate into the communities they were now living in and to find work and saw the urgent need to learn English to do this.

### How are students' expressed needs being met?

Self motivation and individual agency:

The lack of control and uncertainty, which all these students experience, makes them feel insecure physically, mentally and emotionally, and creates a fierce desire for some structure and 'settledness' in their lives, Despite the insecurity they demonstrate a strong motivation to integrate and learn English in order to be able to move towards independence. It is also important to note that the social and language learning needs of these students are not static and are always changing as people make efforts to become more integrated in society. The students were very positive, seizing on every opportunity

to act and take initiative where they could, despite their present and past restrictions.

Self motivation to learn English:

One of the most striking characteristics of this group of learners is their enthusiastic and dedicated approach to learning of English. Their attendance at the classes is usually very high and they often work hard both in and out of class.

Informal networks/shared linguistic backgrounds:

As well as providing emotional support these friendships and contact with people from shared linguistics backgrounds are also important to help them survive officialdom, negotiate the minefields of seeking leave to remain and get to know what facilities they can access.

Constraints students face in meeting their needs:

Although students' basic material needs were met, inter-agency support for their mental health and social and legal support needs as they arrived was insufficient.

Loneliness, boredom and lack of social activities:

There is usually no systematic or formal support for these students to integrate into local communities, nor are they given access to any kind of activity set up to meet their social needs. Students talked of not having anything to do after their ESOL class and during college holidays.

The role of the ESOL class in meeting students' needs:

Because of the constraints such students face, a three hour daily language class is not only a vital learning environment but also an important social space which is enriched by the resources and life experience, informal support systems and desire to learn that these students and their teacher bring to it.

Classroom culture:

This section looked at some of the elements that contribute towards a positive classroom culture and the positive response by students related to their class, course and their teacher. A positive class culture, could be described as teacher-centred, language task oriented and well structured, with strong protocols for politeness, punctuality and attendance is underpinned by a strong teacher empathy for both the social and learning needs of these students. An example would be a class that is tightly structured in which the teacher steers the students between whole class, group and pair work.

In this way the teacher too finds a way to deal with the inevitable pressures and emotional stresses of supporting the learning and social needs of these students. So, for the first months of this class the students engage in tasks that have little reference to the rest of their lives and themes such as 'family' are approached with extreme caution, knowing that this is a very painful subject for students who have lost contact with theirs, or who fear for their safety. This approach is a successful one as the students get to know and trust each other and become familiar with the daily routines of the class. In addition, the teacher has drawn on students' willingness and initiatives to support each other both outside and inside the class, actively encouraging the students to look to their peers for learning support rather than setting herself up as the sole language expert in the class.

Humour:

Another resource that the students bring to this learning environment is humour. This humour often takes place in activities such as mechanical drills to practice particular grammatical structures. Although the students undertake these activities with the same amount of enthusiasm as all the other learning tasks, they make the mechanical, repetitive task meaningful to themselves and more enjoyable through play.

Approach:

Needs are those of individuals in a particular social context. The scope for individual agency has to be understood in terms of the resources they bring to the situation and the opportunities open to them. The starting point is not directly about individual needs but to let the needs emerge from an analysis of what people say about themselves, their context and their aspirations.

***Implications are:***

- ***there are a range of national developments to be made use of, built upon or linked with – rather than assuming that work needs to be done afresh.***
- ***work needs to be done at the strategic/whole system level, at the programme/organisational planning level, and at the curriculum delivery level.***
- ***a range of citizenship and ESOL materials already exist and work has been done on information for newcomers to Birmingham.***
- ***'asylum seekers' is a broad heading for a range of people with different needs and different motivations.***
- ***each provider may need to link to a range of other organisations to create a 'network of learning' that people can***

*move around within, rather than think solely in terms of single provider delivered standard courses.*

- *the range of opportunities will need to offer choice and variety.*
- *issues of pace and style need to be considered in order to maximise learner engagement and progress*
- *opportunities need to be created to practice English outside of the immediate setting.*
- *range of vocabulary; speed of speech; tenses; content; prepositions etc all need to be deliberately worked on i.e. a focus on specific skills rather than just confidence with language.*
- *there is often an underestimation of learners' abilities and resourcefulness.*

**Reminder:** This was a report written to describe contexts/developments at May 2005. Material in this article was accurate at that time.