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Policy Briefing: Education and employment outcomes of young people who use English as a second or additional language

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About The Bell Foundation

The Bell Foundation is a charity which aims to overcome exclusion through language education by working with partners on innovation, research, training and practical interventions. Through generating and applying evidence, we aim to change practice, policy and systems for children, adults and communities in the UK disadvantaged through language.

The Foundation works in three key areas:

- **The ESOL Programme is a new pilot programme to improve outcomes for adults and young people aged 16 to 25, and migrant workers, including refugees and asylum seekers, who use English as a second or additional language. The programme will include investment in projects and partnerships which improve outcomes for ESOL learners.**
- **The EAL Programme aims to improve the educational outcomes of children with English as an Additional Language in the UK to benefit the individual child and society as a whole. The Foundation works in partnership with a range of organisations across the education system to provide training and resources in order to build capacity, develop and evaluate models of good practice, and provide thought leadership.**
- **The Criminal Justice Programme seeks to break down the language barrier to accessing justice and rehabilitation for individuals in contact with the criminal justice system for whom English is an Additional Language. In 2017 the Foundation developed a long-term strategy for its work in the sector, with a focus on both victims and offenders of crime. The Foundation works through interventions in research, policy, practice and service support.**

About UCL Institute of Education

The UCL Institute of Education is a world-leading centre for research and teaching in education and social science, ranked number one for education worldwide every year since 2014 in the QS World University Rankings. It was awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize in 2016. In 2014, the IOE secured 'outstanding' grades from Ofsted on every criterion for its initial teacher training, across primary, secondary and further education programmes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework assessment of university research, the IOE was top for 'research power' (GPA multiplied by the size of the entry) in education. Founded in 1902, the Institute currently has more than 8,000 students and 800 staff. In December 2014 it became a single-faculty school of UCL, called the UCL Institute of Education. www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Context

In 2020, The Bell Foundation commenced a new programme of work on ESOL.

The first step in this new programme was to commission UCL Institute of Education (IoE) to undertake research to understand the education and employment outcomes of young people who speak languages other than English. This research was formed of two parts – a literature review of the existing research and a quantitative analysis. This paper is a summary briefing, informed by the evidence in the literature review undertaken by the IoE and other existing evidence from experts in the ESOL arena.

The report makes recommendations to Government and others, informed by the issues arising from this evidence which would improve learning and employment outcomes for young people who speak languages other than English.

External context

In the Conservative Party 2019 manifesto, on which the Government was elected, there was a commitment to “boost English language teaching to empower existing migrants and help promote integration into society” (Conservative Party, 2019). This policy followed the commitment to a new national English Language Strategy for England in the cross-government Integrated Communities Action Plan (HM Government, 2019). To date, the development of an English Language Strategy has not progressed.

The current Government has a focus on employment and developing the workforce to meet the needs of employers. This is reflected in the Skills for Jobs White Paper (Department for Education, 2021a) and the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill (Department for Education, 2021b). English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision is crucial to ensure those young people who are not English first language speakers, for example recent migrants or refugees, can achieve education and employment outcomes. As the Skills for Jobs White Paper (2021a) states: “Any migrant should have access to employer-recognised, high-quality ESOL qualifications which enable them to progress in work.”

At the same time, the Department for Education (DfE) is reviewing level 2 and below qualifications, which includes ESOL (2020). The outcome of this review will inform the plans for the Skills for Jobs White Paper, with initial plans and consultation on the future of ESOL qualifications expected in autumn 2021.

The Skills and Post-16 Education Bill (Department for Education, 2021b), once enacted, will create a legal framework for employers to shape local skills improvement plans, in consultation with key stakeholders such as further education colleges. The aim is to ensure that post-16 technical education and training is better aligned to employers’ skills needs. Along with the devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB), from which formal ESOL provision is funded, the power over ESOL services is shifting to combined and local authorities.

The Home Office is planning on introducing regional integration hubs for refugees, which will include a caseworker, ESOL adviser and employment adviser. Each refugee would have a tailored integration plan. The plans for refugee integration, like the Skills for Jobs White Paper, promise to “boost English language teaching for refugees”.

While this devolved approach allows each region, combined authority or local authority to meet the needs of a local population, the lack of an overarching national strategy means there are still inconsistent approaches across England. As a result, ESOL learners will have different access to ESOL provision depending on where they live.

What is required is a cross-government national English Language Strategy to co-ordinate all the different Government policies and funding streams. While responsibility for the delivery of ESOL can be decided at a local level, there needs to be an overarching vision for the future of ESOL provision and delivery based on need on a national scale. For example, consideration needs to be given to how the Home Office's proposal of local integration hubs will fit with ESOL advice services, where they are in place, which currently are accessible to all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees who want to learn English. Similarly, the DfE's proposed legislation for the development of employer-led local Skills Improvement Plans in collaboration with further education colleges should provide opportunities for young people learning ESOL to gain the language and employability skills for local employment. Recommendations to resolve this issue are provided in this report.

These issues are discussed in this policy briefing, with evidence of the impact of the barriers to learning and teaching ESOL. The report makes recommendations to Government which, if implemented, could boost English language teaching and learning and ensure better outcomes for young ESOL learners.

Terminology

It is important to understand the different terminology used in this report. The term EAL refers to pupils in compulsory education who speak English as an Additional Language. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is used as the name of qualifications or provision for people who study English as a second or additional language beyond compulsory education. The term "people who speak English as an additional language" refers to people who speak languages other than English as their first language.

For the purposes of this report, young people are defined as 16-25 years old.

Key findings

ESOL services in the UK have faced high demand and fragmentation of provision and funding, making it difficult for some young people to access the most appropriate provision. While ESOL provision is crucial to support educational and employment outcomes for young people, the literature highlights a patchwork of provision for this diverse group of young adults within the post-16 further education and training sector in England, with most provision at pre-entry and entry levels.

A lack of strategic planning is a key barrier to provision for young people who speak languages other than English. There was a commitment to a national English Language Strategy in the cross-government Integrated Communities Action Plan ([HM Government, 2019](#)) and the Government elected in December 2019 committed to "boost English language teaching" ([Conservative Party, 2019](#)). To date, no national English language Strategy for England has been published.

The absence of a national ESOL strategy has hindered the development of a co-ordinated approach to provision. This needs to include national and local government as well as co-ordination between government departments such as the DfE, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The development of skills strategies in some devolved English regions may begin to offer an opportunity for joined-up policy in some local areas.

There is a scarcity of information and research about the educational and employment trajectories and transitions of young people who were identified as speaking English as an Additional Language (EAL) in schools and their subsequent outcomes. This is linked to the loss of the EAL identifier when young people move out of compulsory school system and continue into further education and training as their outcomes stop being recorded in the National Pupil Database (NPD).

The lack of an EAL identifier means that there is limited information on the scale of need for young people who speak languages other than English. This includes learners with very complex and diverse needs, such as learners with limited or no schooling in their first languages.

There is a lack of evidence on education and training for young people who speak languages other than English. Much of the available research evidence focuses on discrete 16-18 programmes for young refugees and asylum seekers rather than on the wider group of young people who speak languages other than English. Research with young people 19+ is generally subsumed within the general literature on adult education.

There is a lack of independent information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young people who need to identify future education and training pathways that will provide a route to employment. While some learning providers have incorporated IAG into their individual programmes and enrolment processes, five studies highlighted a lack of independent advice and guidance about progression pathways that lead to opportunities for employment.

There is a general lack of information, advice and guidance aimed at refugees and asylum seekers in a context where young people need information about the English education system as well as advice and clear information about available choices leading to education, training and employment (Mishan, 2019).



Chapter 2: Education and employment outcomes for young people who speak languages other than English

Issues with current ESOL provision

The ESOL landscape is fragmented and confusing due to multiple funding streams from various government departments, meaning that it does not meet the needs of young people who speak English as an additional language. As a result of this fragmentation, there are no accurate data on the numbers of young people post-16 who need to learn English and their levels of proficiency. This results in learners:

- waiting a long time for a space in a local ESOL class;
- going to classes which are not suitable for their level of proficiency; and
- attending an inappropriate class, for example, the needs of young ESOL learners are different from older learners with a few years of professional experience.

There is a lack of robust and up-to-date data on the scale of need for ESOL for young people. The best estimate of need is based on data drawn from the 2011 Census and other data from further education colleges. This is not a good proxy on the need for ESOL provision as the Census is based on self-perception and not an accurate measure of proficiency in English. The 2021 Census may provide more up to date information on the scale of need, however, the same caveat around self-perception will apply. In further education, some students who speak languages other than English will be placed in GCSE or Functional Skills English courses or on vocational training programmes; therefore, progression in English language proficiency is not recorded.

Funding of ESOL provision

Funding of ESOL provision is complex. Allocation of funding for ESOL is also moving to combined authorities. From 2019-20 approximately half of the adult education budget has been devolved to the Greater London Authority (GLA) and six mayoral combined authorities, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Liverpool City region, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Tees Valley, and West of England (SFA, 2016). This transfer of part of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) aims to reshape regional adult education provision for those aged over 19 and may offer an opportunity for co-ordinated ESOL policy.

While young adults must undertake some specified qualifications on the RQF (Regulated Qualification Framework)¹ as a condition of funding, areas with a devolved budget now have more flexibility to fund “unregulated provision” (Kings and Casey, 2013). As stated in the West Midlands Combined Authority ESOL Strategy (2019): “Although the Adult Education Budget has been cut in real terms, devolution of the budget does offer an opportunity to fully integrate ESOL into a comprehensive adult skills offer and target those further away from the labour market.”

There is a risk with the proposed employer-led Skills Improvement Plans (Department for Education, 2021b) that ESOL provision is overlooked. Therefore, it is important that all the various Government plans to boost ESOL teaching are co-ordinated, whether they are funded through the devolved AEBs, the future Refugee Transitions Outcomes Framework, or directly through MHCLG funding. A cross-government national English Language Strategy is required

1. The Regulated Qualification Framework is a list of general and vocational qualifications which are approved by the regulator, Ofqual, in England.

to co-ordinate all the different Government policies and funding streams. While responsibility for the delivery of ESOL can be decided at a local level, there needs to be an overarching national vision for the future of the ESOL landscape.

In a survey of ESOL providers, 80% said that they were funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through the AEB for 19+ learners (Higton et al 2019). However, two-thirds of providers noted that some or all of their provision was funded through other sources such as the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (for Syrian refugees), the Home Office Controlling Migration Fund (CMF), and the European Social Fund. A third of organisations stated that they subsidised ESOL provision from alternative income in order to increase provision. However, the survey results showed that third sector provision was often dependent on short funding streams such as the CMF, and so provision ceased when the funding was no longer available. In Greater London, additional funding could include course fees, grant funding from charities or the Greater London Authority, and funding support through MHCLG (Stevenson et al, 2017).

Recommendations:

- There is a need for a cross-government national English Language Strategy to co-ordinate all the different Government policies and funding streams, which provides an overarching national vision for the future of the ESOL landscape to local and combined authorities.
- Data collection on the needs and levels of proficiency of ESOL learners must be a priority action in the English Language Strategy. Data collection, using a common framework, needs to take place at a local level in ESOL hubs, which could be at a local authority, combined authority or Strategic Migration Partnership level, the most appropriate to each locality.

Language learning is a demanding process and it can take a long time to master. Funding of ESOL needs to reflect this. It can take years to achieve the necessary level of proficiency to access higher education or employment, meaningful to the individual. It takes on average six years to be rated as competent for those who are new to English (Strand, S and Lindorff, A, 2020). The reality is that many young ESOL learners will be studying other qualifications at the same time. This reduces the number of hours to focus on language learning per week and slows down progress in achieving the required proficiency in the language of instruction. While many qualifications in further education, including English and maths, are currently only fully funded up to the age of 19, ESOL is not. This creates a systemic barrier for learners from progressing to higher levels of ESOL qualifications which they may need for higher education or employment. This contributes to broadening the gap between ESOL learners who cannot afford to pay for ESOL lessons, let alone pay for both ESOL and an academic or vocational subject course, even though this can contextualise and accelerate learning overall and enable progression. Current funding arrangements give ESOL learners a double burden. As it stands, plans for the Lifetime Skills Guarantee as set out in the Skills for Jobs White Paper (Department for Education, 2021a), will not support funding of qualifications below level 3, which again could exclude some young people from progressing to higher level ESOL qualifications which they require for employment. Consideration should be given to the eligibility of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee so that it would include funding ESOL levels 1 and 2.

Recommendation:

- The DfE should consider extending eligibility criteria for the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to allow for young people to have the funds to progress through ESOL levels and achieve a proficiency in English for employment.

Eligibility

Eight research studies from the UK note how education was intertwined with issues of citizenship, including how eligibility restrictions may affect access to ESOL classes. For example, migrants, including young women on spousal visas, were eligible for fee remission on ESOL courses only if they could prove they were on “active benefits” or had been in the UK for three years (Oliver and Hughes, 2018).

In England, refugees are entitled to fully-funded ESOL classes, on the condition that they have refugee status and meet necessary income requirements. Asylum seekers are only eligible for co-funding at 50% of cost once they have applied for refugee status and waited on the outcome of their asylum claim for six months. In contrast, asylum seekers in Scotland and Northern Ireland can attend free ESOL classes immediately after making a claim for asylum (Refugee Action, 2016).

Given the length of time it takes to become proficient in English, and that 41% of claims in the UK result in a grant of asylum or other form of protection, there is a case for considering asylum seekers have access to ESOL classes from when they first make their claim. This would ensure that young asylum seekers are already progressing in English, making integration a smoother process, and that they are developing the required proficiency in English to go into employment.

Recommendation:

- The Home Office considers giving free access to ESOL classes for asylum seekers who are applying for refugee status, from the moment they first apply.

Transitions for young people

Impact of age of arrival in the UK

For children who speak languages other than English, age on arrival in the UK is a critical factor in relation to access to education. This is particularly the case in Years 10 and 11 when the focus on GCSE examinations means that there is a disincentive for schools to enrol young people (Gladwell, 2019). The age at which a child or young person arrives in the UK can also affect attainment (Hutchinson, 2018). For example, at GCSE level, pupils with EAL scored an average grade of a C (or equivalent grade 4 in the new grade scales) if they arrived between reception and Year 7. This decreased to a grade of around a D (or grade 3) if they arrived in Year 8, 9 or 10 – and further to below an E (or grade 2) if they arrived in Year 11. This highlights that pupils, who arrive during secondary school education, need additional EAL support in order that they have the proficiency in English to achieve a higher grade.

Case study – Using multilingual learning to catch up on missed education in Austria

One study in Austria investigated how multilingualism could be used as a resource for low-educated migrants, aged 15-25 years, where young people are aiming to catch up on missed education and attain an Austrian secondary school leaving certificate (Laimer and Wurzenrainer, 2017). They created a multilingual learning space with materials and activities to make multilingualism visible in the classroom, using the learners' own linguistic repertoires. The study found that the young people's interest and motivation to learn increased with the focus on multilingualism. Students were also able to demonstrate their prior knowledge in mathematics when given the opportunity to use their first language.

Currently, there is no statutory requirement for schools in England to assess and record EAL pupils' proficiency in English. This makes it difficult to track the progress and to know what language support a pupil needs to progress, whether this is in compulsory or post-compulsory education. The Bell Foundation recommends that schools should be provided with guidance on undertaking robust and consistent assessment, moderation and recording of proficiency in English levels to ensure they can conduct valid and reliable assessments using appropriate tools. If schools can accurately establish a learner's level of proficiency in English during their initial assessment, they are better able to determine the type of support required to meet their language development needs.

There is a lack of research and information on the employment and education destinations of pupils who were identified as EAL speakers in schools, once they leave compulsory education. The EAL identifier is lost when young people move out of compulsory school system and continue into further education and training as their outcomes stop being recorded in the NPD.

However, a review of successful interventions and barriers for 16-18-year-olds in London who were designated as "vulnerable" or "not in education, employment or training" (NEET) from the Association of Colleges and Ofsted (Ofsted, 2014) found that speaking languages other than English was one of many risk factors cited by teachers and providers affecting some young people's lack of participation in post-16 education and training.

To understand this situation fully, schools should assess and record the proficiency in English of pupils. An EAL marker also needs to be introduced on the NPD for post-compulsory education and a marker included on Individualised Learner Records (ILR). This would mean that the outcomes of pupils marked as an EAL pupil in compulsory education would be tracked into sixth forms within schools, further education and training, post 16.

In addition to the lack of marker, the overall education system lacks a common framework at national level to describe, map and coherently articulate progression in English language skills and assessment of such skills for second language speakers. This results in a lack of robust assessment data on proficiency in English as learners progress from compulsory to post-compulsory education, which could usefully inform initial assessment at the start of further education and appropriate English courses. This would enable young people learning ESOL as they can access the classes they need, and progress in education and achieve their desired employment goals.

Recommendations:

- The DfE, in line with the devolved nations and other countries, should introduce a statutory requirement for schools in England to assess and record (for their internal monitoring purposes) EAL pupils' level of proficiency in English using the DfE's previously used five-point assessment scale, which was introduced temporarily in England for two years and is currently in operation in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.
- The Government should introduce a mechanism for ensuring that an EAL marker is collected for students on the NPD beyond compulsory education and that marker is transferred to ILRs, where appropriate, for the purposes of recording the education and employment outcomes of young people who speak languages other than English.

Access to high-quality, tailored information, advice and guidance

For those young people who speak languages other than English, there is evidence of the barriers they face when transitioning from compulsory to post-compulsory education, particularly for those who want to progress to further education. Key to this is a lack of information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young people who need to identify future education and training pathways that will provide a route to employment. While some learning providers have incorporated IAG into their individual programmes and enrolment processes, there is a lack of IAG about progression pathways and opportunities for employment.

For refugees and asylum seekers, the lack of IAG is compounded by a lack of opportunities to learn about the culture of the education system in England and the possible options available. As Mishan (2019) states, young refugees and asylum seekers need information about the English education system as well as advice and clear information about available choices leading to education, training and employment.

Case study – Access to information and guidance in the USA

In terms of transitions to higher education, research in the USA has found that teachers and guidance counsellors regularly steered young English Language Learners (ELLs) away from high track courses in the name of “protecting ELLs”, as well as citing a lack of differentiated instructions in high track courses to accommodate young ELLs (Kanno and Kangas, 2014). Finally, young ELLs and their parents acquiesced to the recommendations from teachers and guidance counsellors. ELLs either did not know that they had a say in their course selection or did not advocate for themselves to take higher courses than were assigned, due to a lack of information. Their parents and guardians were unlikely to challenge the school's decisions.

Recommendation:

- The DfE should consider funding options which allow providers to offer free ESOL to all learners, including levels 1 and 2 with proper independent advice and guidance to learners on the need for and benefits of higher-level language skills.

Transitions to employment

The current system does not easily allow young people to progress to higher levels of ESOL learning which would allow them to reach a proficiency in English for the workplace. In England, the current highest level of ESOL qualification is level 2, but this does not equip learners to progress into highly skilled employment or higher education. DfE data for 2016-17 show that 84% of ESOL enrolments were entry levels 1-3; 14% were at level 1 and 5% at level 2. As Schellekens (2019) points out, while a proportion of graduates who speak a language other than English have sufficient English to find employment, many are unemployed or under-employed because their English proficiency is too low. Entry levels 1-3 do not allow learners to reach a level of language proficiency to progress beyond unskilled work.

In the current system, young people often study ESOL to entry level 3 (which is below a level 1 qualification)². Experts in ESOL practice say that learners will usually move to vocational training and education when they have achieved entry level 3, and before they have sufficient language skills (Schellekens, 2019). As a result, ESOL learners have to cope with learning new complex, technical subject content in a language they are still learning.

The Government has prioritised youth unemployment and has implemented many initiatives to support young people into work – for example, the introduction of T-levels as an alternative to A-levels, changes to apprenticeships and the introduction of Kickstart for young jobseekers using Jobcentres. There is currently no evidence to demonstrate whether ESOL embedded into these youth labour market interventions would be effective. However, the Government could explore, as part of the qualifications review, whether ESOL embedded into apprenticeships or T-levels could improve proficiency in English and lead to meaningful employment outcomes for young people who speak languages other than English.

Recommendation:

- The Government should test and conduct a robust evaluation of ESOL embedded with apprenticeships or T-levels to understand whether this improves accessibility, and education and employment outcomes for young people who speak languages other than English.

Case study – Experiences of vocational education and training for young migrants in Germany

Some studies have explored the transitions to vocational education and training (VET) for young migrants. One survey of 5,000 young people (18-24 years) in Germany found that young migrants were less likely than other young people to progress to company-based training, particularly if they had not acquired a higher education entrance qualification during their schooling (Beicht and Walden, 2017). In general, young people from higher social classes were more likely to achieve the higher education entrance qualification in Germany and the authors reasoned that the effect of social class is exacerbated in the case of young people with a migrant background. They also identified discriminatory practices by companies which affected transitions for young migrants leaving school with the lower-secondary school-leaving qualification. Following this research, they made recommendations for company training and for mentoring support for young migrants.

2. For qualification levels, see: [What qualification levels mean: England, Wales and Northern Ireland - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-qualification-levels-mean)

ESOL for a specific purpose

A young person who speaks languages other than English may face barriers in understanding the nuances of where and how to apply for jobs, CV-writing and interview skills. They have had little or no access to learning the specific English language vocabularies and registers needed, nor the cultural insights and understanding of the selection processes. Roberts describes how the formal British job interview operates as a “test of belonging” (2019:223) for migrants undergoing a formal job selection process where they need to demonstrate cultural and linguistic understanding of “the interview game”. This is an example where ESOL for a specific purpose – in this case employment – would be an advantage.

In its call for evidence, the DfE (2020) proposed transition programmes to give a balanced and purposeful curriculum, helping accelerate and increase progression from lower levels of study. ESOL transition programmes should be piloted as an integrated transition programme with work experience and preparation; introductory technical skills; pastoral support and personal development – with a focus on, and more time allowed for, the language learning. The programmes could include:

- ESOL transition programme for employability;
- ESOL for transition to academic study;
- ESOL for transition to vocational study; and
- ESOL for daily living.

Funding would need to be commensurate to the level of study due to the intensity and increased volume of study needed for ESOL learners. This funding level is necessary in order for fair access and progression to be achieved for transition programmes for ESOL learners.

Once again, this demonstrates the need for an integrated approach to ESOL provision, with funding which allows for a tailored package for young ESOL learners which enables them to learn the language they need to go into, and progress in, work.

Recommendations:

- DfE should consider piloting ESOL transition programmes which are integrated with other transition programmes, such as employability and vocational study.
- DfE should consider funding models for ESOL transition programmes which are commensurate to the volume of study required for ESOL learners to achieve the language proficiency required to progress to level 3 qualifications.

Chapter 3: Conclusions

This briefing, together with the literature review from UCL Institute of Education, demonstrates the need for a joined-up approach to ESOL.

While there is a commitment from Government to boost English language teaching, which is mentioned in the Skills for Jobs White Paper and in the Home Office integration plans for refugees, the lack of co-ordination on these plans and the continuation of multiple funding streams may not improve the access to ESOL learning and progression for young people. As the evidence presented in this report shows, a disjointed approach has made it difficult for young people to access ESOL provision to meet their needs and for them to progress in education and employment.

At a time when the Government is developing initiatives to support young people into employment, and job outcomes are the focus of many Government policies, it is vital that ESOL is integrated and embedded into these initiatives. If not, there is a risk that young people who speak languages other than English will not be enabled to achieve their potential and reach career ambitions.

What is required is a cross-government national English Language Strategy to co-ordinate all the different Government policies and funding streams. While responsibility for the delivery of ESOL can be decided at a local level, there needs to be an overarching national vision for the future of the ESOL landscape. For example, consideration needs to be given to how the Home Office's proposal of local integration hubs will fit with ESOL advice services, where they are in place, which currently exist to all migrants, not just refugees, who want to learn English. Similarly, the DfE's proposed legislation for the development of employer-led local Skills Improvement Plans in collaboration with further education colleges should provide opportunities for young people learning ESOL to gain the language and employability skills for local employment.

Underpinning all this is a need for better data on the numbers of people who want to learn English and the levels of proficiency in English. While the Census data does give an indication on the number of people who speak languages other than English and who may need to learn ESOL (the latest being from 2011 while the 2021 data is expected to be released in 2022), this is assumed to be an underestimate as the data are based on self-perception and is not a valid measure of proficiency in English. There is a role for central government to collate all the ESOL data from a local level and to establish a robust mechanism for local governments to do this. This must be included in a national English Language Strategy.

The DfE should commission the development of an evidence-informed and robust assessment framework for proficiency in English, for use across ESOL provision nationwide. The Bell Foundation could work with an academic team to support the department in developing this tool. A common assessment framework could usefully inform initial assessment at the start of further education and appropriate English courses. This would ensure the availability of robust data; therefore, resources would be efficiently allocated. This in turn would improve the experiences of young people learning ESOL as they could access the classes they need.

The English Language Strategy must also set out clear guidelines to devolved and local authorities on integrating budgets which would ensure access to the right provision for ESOL learners. This would also ensure that ESOL provision could be integrated with other local support such as employability and wellbeing.

With the commitment to boost English language teaching, now is the time for Government to be ambitious and to rethink ESOL provision.

Recommendations:

- There is a need for a cross-government national English Language Strategy to co-ordinate all the different Government policies and funding streams, which provides an overarching national vision for the future of the ESOL landscape to local and combined authorities;
- Data collection on the needs and levels of proficiency of ESOL learners must be a priority action in the English Language Strategy. Data collection, using a common framework, needs to take place at a local level in ESOL hubs, which could be at a local authority, combined authority or Strategic Migration Partnership level, the most appropriate to each locality;
- The DfE should consider extending eligibility criteria for the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to allow for young people to have the funds to progress through ESOL levels and achieve a proficiency in English for employment;
- The Home Office considers giving free access to ESOL classes for asylum seekers who are applying for refugee status from the moment they first apply;
- The DfE, in line with the devolved nations, and other countries should introduce a statutory requirement for schools in England to assess and record (for their internal monitoring purposes) EAL pupils' level of proficiency in English using the DfE's previously used five-point assessment scale which was introduced temporarily in England for two years and is currently in operation in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland;
- The Government should introduce a mechanism for ensuring that an EAL marker is collected for students on the NPD beyond compulsory education and that marker is transferred across to ILRs, where appropriate, for the purposes of recording the education and employment outcomes of young people who speak languages other than English;
- The DfE should consider funding options which allow providers to offer free ESOL to all learners, including levels 1 and 2 with proper independent advice and guidance to learners on the need for and benefits of higher-level language skills;
- The DfE should test and conduct a robust evaluation of ESOL embedded with apprenticeships or T-levels to understand whether this improves accessibility, and education and employment outcomes for young people who speak languages other than English;
- The DfE should consider piloting ESOL transition programmes which are integrated with other transition programmes, such as employability and vocational study; and
- The DfE should consider funding models for ESOL transition programmes which are commensurate to the volume of study required for ESOL learners to achieve the language proficiency required to progress to level 3 qualifications.

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