

# English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

## Introduction

This document is intended to give you an overview of ESOL provision, the challenges refugees may encounter in accessing it, and some of the steps you may take to overcome them.

You are required to provide a minimum of 8 hours per week of ESOL classes from an accredited ESOL teacher or institution. This document does not provide the direct experience of other Community Sponsorship groups in accessing ESOL, but if you contact your Reset they can put you in contact with other groups who can provide advice.

## What is ESOL?

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is the name for the English courses in the UK most commonly studied by people whose first language is not English. In recent years, funding cuts have reduced mainstream accredited provision and increased waiting lists, which has made the barriers to participation even worse, particularly for women and people with a lower level of English. There can be a long gap between referring refugees to colleges or learning centres, and them starting a course. The number of study hours offered can also be less than the 8 hours per week required by the Home Office.

Sponsor groups should aim to utilise the provision available in their area and identify gaps where the group can consider making alternative arrangements, including commissioning classes, formal or informal classes with volunteers, or working with volunteers to support refugees to get better access and learn in a supportive environment.

## Accredited and non-accredited ESOL

ESOL can be accredited or non-accredited. Accredited ESOL can lead to a recognised qualification at the end of a course, for example a City & Guilds qualification or one provided by a range of other recognised awarding bodies. The refugees you support must receive accredited ESOL provision for eight hours per week in order to receive certain benefits. The length of course, study hours available and accrediting body will vary between providers. ESOL qualifications can be obtained at Entry Levels 1, 2, 3 and Levels 1 and 2. Entry Levels are for beginners, Levels 1 and 2 are for more confident learners. Please see Annex 1 for a detailed description of the different ESOL levels offered in accredited classes.

Non-accredited ESOL does not lead to a qualification. Learners studying in non-accredited courses might attend informal classes that are sometimes mixed-ability. They are often taught in community centres, online or through private companies, and can be led by volunteers or paid workers who may or may not be formally trained. Some non-accredited courses include assessment of the learners' abilities before they begin the course. Often learners will simply be able to start without any assessment, or with a very brief assessment or registration process.

While they do not provide formal qualifications, non-accredited courses can be useful for building confidence, developing skills, and introducing clients to other people in their community. Refugees with a very low level of English may initially have to attend non-accredited courses until their English is of the required level to attend the accredited courses in their area.

Whereas accredited courses tend to have a rigid curriculum, teachers of non-accredited courses may have more freedom to tailor the content of courses to meet the needs of learners. However, by their nature non-accredited courses are far less regulated and are not required to place people with similar English levels in the same classes, nor follow any specific teaching or assessment practices.

## Online resources

There are a variety of online resources which can help support language learning, including videos, study materials and online classes. The British Council website is particularly comprehensive <https://www.britishcouncil.org/english/learn-online> and the BBC website has a range of resources which may be particularly useful for those who speak some English and wish to improve: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish>.

Online study has the advantage of flexibility and may be particularly useful for those with health or mobility issues that inhibit their attendance at classes. The disadvantage is that they do not provide for personal interaction, but sponsor groups will be able to provide this through the community.

## IELTS

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a standardised system that measures the language proficiency of people who want to study or work where English is used as a language of communication. In the UK, it is typically used for university admissions and visa applications where English is a requirement. It is not a requirement for refugees to obtain an IELTS qualification, and it will have no bearing on their immigration status. However, it may be required for those that wish to pursue further or higher education, or those who have a higher level of English and wish to obtain an internationally recognised qualification to demonstrate this.

If you are supporting a refugee who wishes to pursue further education, we suggest you support the refugee to contact the institutions concerned directly. Further information is available on the IELTS website: <https://www.ielts.org/>.

## CEFR

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR or CEF) was put together by the Council of Europe as a way of standardising the levels of language exams in different regions. It is widely used internationally and the levels used on accredited courses in the UK are mapped to the CEFR.

## Teaching qualifications

TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) is a broad term for qualifications in teaching English. Two of the most widely recognised English teaching qualifications are CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and Trinity TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), although there are a range of other qualifications available,

Many colleges that train people to teach English will offer free or discounted English classes to enable their students to practice, and you may wish to research whether there are any available in your area. Given that the teachers are still training, the standard of teaching may be variable, but they can be useful as a stop gap option, or in addition to other classes.

## The role of the sponsor group

Sponsors should aim to provide every adult member of the refugee family (above the school leaving age) with the opportunity to access accredited English language provision within one month of arrival. Children's education is the responsibility of their school but the sponsor group may also want to think about how you can support this, particularly with older children.

This will involve:

- **Working with local colleges**, adult learning centres and other community providers to support refugees' access English courses. This should be planned before refugees arrive so that relevant arrangements are made with the provider in advance. For example, before the family arrives, it is helpful if you can arrange an appointment for the adults to register and take an initial assessment as well as clarify arrangements for providing proof of their eligibility to study. This will usually involve the refugees presenting their Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs) and letters

confirming their benefit entitlement – although the latter may be more complicated if claiming Universal Credit. In our experience, refugees claiming Universal Credit can either download the award letter from their online journal and present this, or they can print a screenshot of their most recent payment screen and ask the Jobcentre to stamp it to confirm it is genuine. Pre- arrival, it may also be beneficial to determine any needs for childcare and how these can be met.

- **Arranging an assessment of refugees’** English language capability. Formal colleges often carry out assessments at the beginning of term but may be able to pay for assessments outside this period. You can agree this with local ESOL providers as part of your arrival planning.
- **Clarifying the registration and assessment procedures** with the ESOL provider and discussing these with the refugee prior to arrival. Refugees may be able to register themselves without support, and some colleges may prefer this as it helps to gauge the language level. If you are attending with an interpreter, you will need to be clear with the refugee that the interpreter will not be present during the assessment, and even outside of the assessment, staff may wish to speak to refugees directly in English to help them assess their ability.
- **If courses within the local area are oversubscribed**, sponsor groups can also consider referring people to outside areas where necessary, and possible.
- **Considering childcare** needs for younger children and possible solutions. Some providers will have crèche facilities. If parents can attend classes at different times, it may be possible for one parent to study while the other is caring for children.
- **Considering any healthcare needs**, either of the parents attending class, or children being placed in a crèche. For example, adults with mobility issues may find it difficult to travel significant distances.
- Sponsor groups should also consider how they can **embed English language learning** in their ongoing support of refugees. For example, role playing phone calls with refugees and then encouraging them to make the call themselves or working with refugees to identify their language needs and supporting this with informal or volunteer support.

Once classes have been arranged, sponsor groups will need to take account of the following issues:

- Supporting refugees to check that hours are appropriate and do not clash with other commitments such as Jobcentre Plus appointments (also note that people receiving JSA are not allowed to study more than 16 hours per week and claimants must inform Jobcentre Plus of their learning hours as part of the conditions for claiming out-of-work benefits).

- Empowering refugees to attend English classes independently and offer them appropriate support when needed. You will need to ensure they are aware of public transport routes and costs. Occasionally, some courses can assist with travel costs, so check with the provider.
- Tracking the progress of refugees' English level. Some courses might be short-term or minimal hours, so you may need to support refugees to access further classes to enable them to progress to the next level. It may be that informal provision or additional support from volunteers will be sufficient to achieve this.

### Commissioning or providing classes

You should prioritise enabling refugees to attend mainstream English courses, where they can make social contact with other students. However, in circumstances where these are unavailable, it may be necessary to commission classes, for example from a college, local charity or private company/tutor. Some groups may be fortunate enough to have qualified ESOL tutors within their team who can provide ongoing support.

Mainstream courses may be unavailable for a short period, for reasons like a lack of capacity at the college/learning centre, refugees arriving mid-term or refugees' ESOL levels being outside of the range normally taught by the provider, some colleges do not offer pre-entry level or level one, or these may be over-subscribed. In more rural areas there may not be classes available within a reasonable distance, and you may have to look at longer term solutions.

While commissioning classes just for the refugees is not ideal, as it may not provide the same level of social interaction and independence, it does enable you to influence the content of the class to meet the specific needs of the refugees you're supporting. For example, if a refugee needs to develop specific language skills for an area of employment they are aiming for, you can ask the provider to focus on this. However, if you are commissioning classes, it may be better to explore inviting other English learners to these classes too. Local Authorities may be able to access funding from the Home Office to commission courses for sponsored refugees and others where needed.

If pursuing this option, then you should consider the following:

- Whether the syllabus of any commissioned classes can be negotiated to suit specific client needs.
- What the projected costs will be.
- childcare and healthcare needs and possible solutions.

If you proceed with this route, you will need to be very clear with the refugees about the limitations of this provision, for example if it is being provided for a limited period until classes become available, or until they progress to a level that would enable them to enrol in classes. People may naturally prefer the option of individual tuition, particularly if it is provided at home or a convenient location, rather than enrolling in college. You should be clear and transparent with them from the outset to avoid difficulties further down the line.

You will also supplement classes through conversational classes, either with ESOL tutors or volunteers.

### Informal opportunities to learn English

Sponsor groups should provide extra English practice support for refugees, where a volunteer or group member meets the refugee regularly either in their homes or in public places to practice basic English with them. This would supplement the formal ESOL provision and can prove invaluable in helping people progress more rapidly.

A key benefit of this kind of ESOL support is that unlike traditional college courses (which tend to be based around pre-planned curricula) you are more likely to be able to tailor what is learnt to the individual refugee's needs. You can encourage them to be open with you about the unique challenges they face with their language needs, allowing you to base what is practiced specifically on this. For example, if a refugee tells you they are struggling with the language to ask for a particular product in a shop, you can base language practice sessions to specifically meet this need.

This can also be beneficial for women with small children who cannot access formal classes due to a lack of child care facilities, and people who are waiting for ESOL classes to become available.

There are a range of materials that available for use from the Talk English website <https://www.talk-english.co.uk/introduction/learners-introduction/>

There are also vocational resources aimed at specific areas of employment here: <https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/vocational-and-embedded-learning>.

### The role of the Jobcentre Plus with ESOL

The Jobcentre Plus is likely to require people to attend English classes with local providers as part of the conditions for them receiving benefits. They may also refer people with limited English to Jobcentre Plus commissioned ESOL or employability programs.

Different Jobcentre Plus branches can approach this in different ways and how successful they are at referring people into classes is highly dependent on the provision available locally, as well as the commissioning and referral agreements they have with local providers. We have found that where JSA or Universal Credit is being claimed for a couple, Work Coaches may prioritise the main applicant and support them to get on to an ESOL course as part of their claimant commitment. However, they may also be able to refer the partner at a later stage.

People in receipt of Income Support and Employment Support allowance can also be referred by the Jobcentre Plus, but they will not prioritise ESOL for these claimants. People receiving pension credit are unlikely to be referred by the Jobcentre Plus, but again this can be requested and if there is availability they also may be able to access a course.

Courses commissioned by Jobcentre Plus can have a strong focus on employability, they can be short-term and intensive (e.g. four or five days a week for six to 12 weeks) and may only include speaking and listening English classes. We would advise you to have a conversation with the refugee and the Jobcentre Plus around the content and level of the class, and whether it is the most appropriate option. At times, you may need to negotiate with the Jobcentre Plus if the refugee would prefer to attend another class.

### **Additional ESOL funding for VPRS and VCRS**

The Home Office can provide an additional £850 funding for adult refugees to support access to English classes. This could include contributions towards fees, but also help address barriers to access such as a lack of childcare facilities. This funding is only available on request, and a proposal must be submitted through the local authority, so you would need to coordinate with them.

The aim of this money is to enable learners to access accredited ESOL provision, which means formal classes leading to an ESOL qualification, but it can also be used to support pre-entry level ESOL provision that can help a learner progress to an accredited Entry Level 1 courses.



## Annex 1

Commonly used ESOL level Descriptions:

Level	Skill Level	Equivalency
<b>Pre-entry</b>	<p>Pre-entry learners <i>may</i> be able to do some or none of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer questions about basic personal information. Follow very basic instructions.</li> <li>• Recognise and/or write letters and/or numbers. Recognise common signs and symbols.</li> <li>• Write their name, address and telephone number.</li> </ul>	
<b>Entry 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask and answer questions about personal information.</li> <li>• Give and follow basic instructions and directions.</li> <li>• Read and understand short texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics.</li> <li>• Read and obtain information from common signs and symbols Complete a form giving basic personal details.</li> <li>• Write a short note.</li> </ul>	Literacy skills expected of a native speaker at age 7



<b>Entry 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask and answer questions about daily routine, study and/or work.</li> <li>• Give a short account of something that happened in the past, spoken and in writing.</li> <li>• Ask for things in familiar situations e.g. out shopping, at the train station, at the library.</li> <li>• Talk about likes and dislikes in familiar contexts.</li> </ul>	Literacy skills expected of a native speaker at age 9
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read and understand short, straightforward texts on familiar topics.</li> <li>• Write an informal description of a person or place.</li> <li>• Spell common words and use capital letters and basic punctuation.</li> </ul>	
<b>Entry 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare people and places.</li> <li>• Tell a simple story using time markers and past tenses in speech and writing.</li> <li>• Give personal information in a formal context.</li> <li>• Read and understand short, straightforward texts on familiar topics and read and obtain information from everyday sources. Write an informal letter about a planned future activity.</li> <li>• Separate writing into paragraphs.</li> </ul>	Literacy skills expected of a native speaker at age 11

<p><b>Level 1</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe a process using time markers and the imperative (to give instructions).</li> <li>• Make formal requests for factual information, descriptions and comparisons.</li> <li>• Give advice and suggest possible solutions for common everyday problems.</li> <li>• Read and understand straightforward texts of varying lengths on a variety of topics accurately and independently.</li> <li>• Write a record of extended personal data for official purposes</li> <li>• e.g. personal statement for a job.</li> <li>• Write a formal report making comparisons between, e.g. countries, lifestyles, jobs.</li> <li>• Write an informal letter setting out a problem and asking for advice.</li> </ul>	<p>Equivalent level to GCSE grades D-G</p>
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<p><b>Level 2</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give opinions clearly, adapting their speech to the listener, medium, purpose and context.</li> <li>• Engage in discussion in a variety of different situations. Follow detailed explanations and complex step by step instructions.</li> <li>• Read and understand a wide range of texts of varying length and details.</li> <li>• Write information, ideas and opinions clearly and effectively,</li> <li>• using appropriate register for the context.</li> </ul>	<p>Equivalent level to GCSE grades A*-C</p>
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