

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Introduction

This document is intended to give you a brief introduction to ESOL provision, and the options available to you when supporting refugees.

There are a variety of ways of supporting refugees to learn English. We have focused here on explaining the formal routes, but you also may wish to explore other routes such as commissioning or providing classes yourself for the refugees you are working with. Many groups have found it beneficial to appoint a specific group member to look at language issues, and you may have members with experience of language teaching who can assist with this.

As with all areas of the sponsorship, you should feel confident in arranging language provision as your group sees fit, in a way that makes the best use of your group members' skills and responds to the situation in your area.

What is ESOL?

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses are English language courses specifically for people whose first language is not English. They range from very basic courses for people with no knowledge of English, up to GCSE level.

Accredited and non-accredited ESOL

ESOL can be accredited or non-accredited. The refugees you support must receive accredited ESOL provision but can also take part in informal non-accredited classes to help them progress. Accredited ESOL courses lead to recognised qualifications by a range of awarding bodies, including City & Guilds or Edexcel. ESOL qualifications can be obtained at Entry Levels 1, 2, 3 and Levels 1 and 2. Entry levels are for beginners. Some providers additionally run 'Pre-entry' classes. These are designed for people with the most basic grasp of English and are often aimed at people who are not literate in their first language.

If someone is assessed as Entry Level 3, it may be possible to have a basic conversation without an interpreter. In some circumstances, many refugees are required to have a qualification at or above ESOL Entry Level 3 in order to apply for citizenship.

Level 2 is the equivalent of GCSEs at grade A-C. Many colleges and private learning providers will require people who do not speak English as a first language to have ESOL at Entry Level 3, Level 1 or Level 2 before allowing them entry to other courses. Many

employers require people to have Level 1 or Level 2 qualifications to be considered for employment. There is a different level of availability of English classes in different parts

of the UK. Many courses are oversubscribed with long waiting lists. The more basic levels tend to be less frequently available and oversubscribed.

To access classes, refugees will need to undergo an assessment to determine their current level of English so they can be assigned to an appropriate class. The Resettlement Referral Form (RRF) might give you some indication of each refugee's English level, but this is not always accurate, so every refugee will need to undergo an English assessment after arrival to determine their level.

Non-accredited ESOL does not lead to a qualification. Learners will attend informal classes that are sometimes mixed-ability. They may take place in a variety of locations such as community centres or schools, and may be conducted by volunteers. They can be very useful for building confidence, supporting lower-level learners and introducing refugees to other people in their community, but completing them alone will not ordinarily grant the student access to mainstream college courses or be sufficient for many employers. Sponsor groups are asked to provide lots of opportunity for informal opportunities to practice English, and groups have told us how useful this is as they can shape the language practice around what the refugee hopes to achieve; this can include work-related words, or local words that will help the refugees to start their lives in the UK well.

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 for those who have a higher level of English and wish to obtain an internationally recognised qualification to demonstrate this.

Private tuition

Some groups may choose to fund private tuition for refugees. This is absolutely fine and may well be the most practical option in some situations, such as rural areas with poor transport links. Equally, groups should not feel obliged to fund private tuition if there are formal courses available in your area. As stated in the Home Office guidance, the teacher will need to be suitably qualified. The two most recognised qualifications are CELTA and TESOL, but there are also a range of other TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign

Language) qualifications. You should feel confident in deciding as a group on who is an appropriate teacher to use.

Private tuition has the natural advantage of being tailored to the individual and may be focused on their particular needs which can lead to rapid progress. The options available will vary regionally, and with the knowledge and experience of your group members. Some groups have been fortunate to have English teachers within their membership.

You may find it useful to speak to other groups who have been through the process of providing English tuition. If you would like any support with this then please feel free to contact Reset, who will be happy to connect you to their networks.

The role of the sponsor group

Home Office guidance states that sponsors must provide every adult member of the refugee family with the opportunity to access English language provision within one month of arrival and provide formal English language tuition by an accredited ESOL teacher, for a minimum of 8 hours per week for 12 months.

It may be that you plan to use a combination of the above options. For example, you may enroll refugees with a local college upon arrival but provide private tuition initially while you wait for a place to become available.

We recommend that you research the ESOL provision in your local area while preparing your application form. Your Local Authority may be able to provide you with information on this.

If you choose to fund private tuition, we recommend you consider the timescale for which you will provide this, so that you can be clear in your budgeting, and with the refugees once they arrive.

Additional ESOL funding for VPRS and VCRS schemes

The Home Office can provide an additional £850 funding to support access to English classes for each adult refugee during their first year in the UK. This could include contributions towards fees and could also address barriers to access such as a lack of childcare facilities. This funding is only available on request, and a proposal must be submitted by the Local Authority, so you would need to coordinate with them.

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.