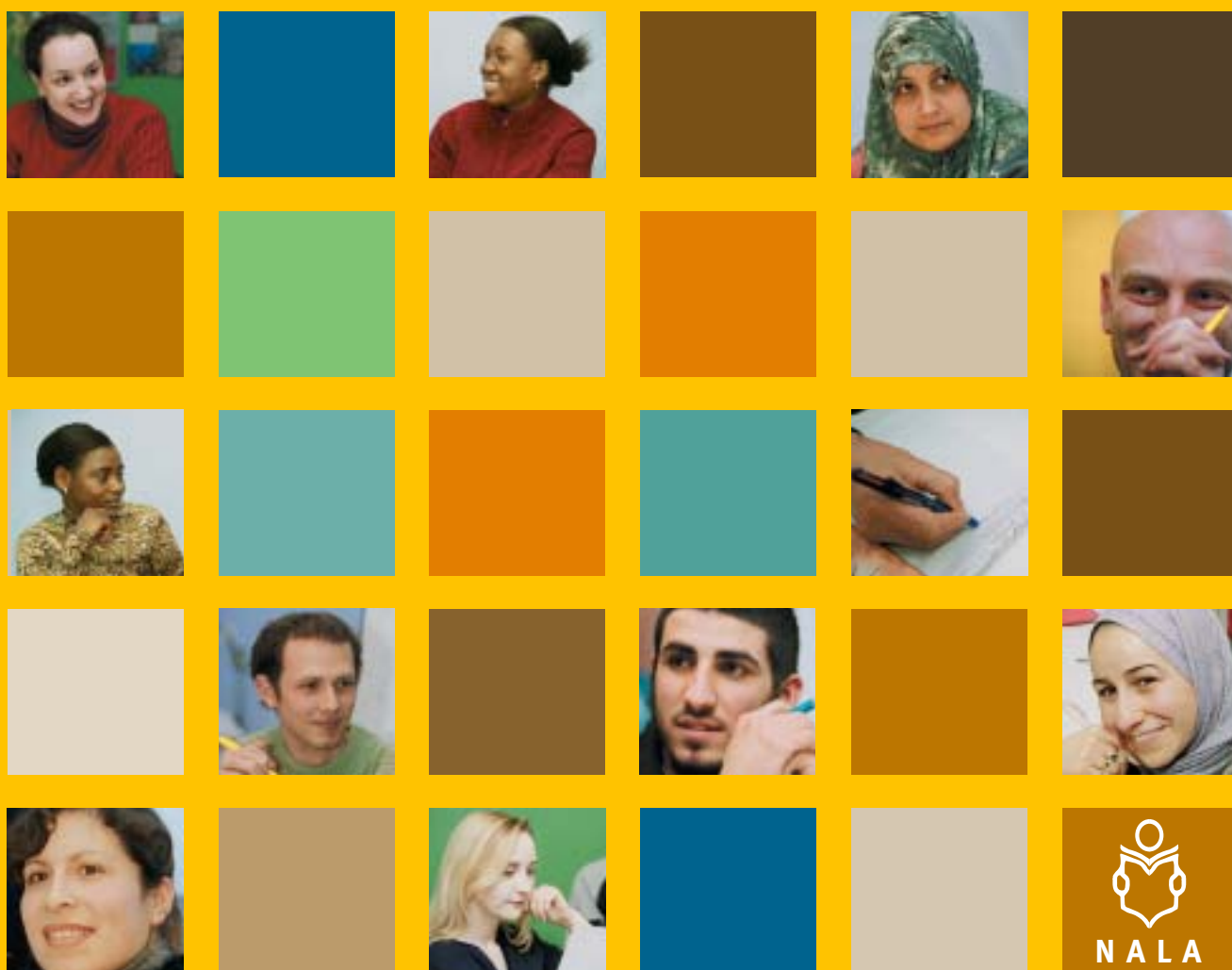


Summary



English for Speakers of Other Languages: Policy Guidelines and Supports for V.E.C. Adult Literacy Schemes





Summary

Summary of ESOL Policy Guidelines and Supports

Teaching ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) to members of linguistic minorities is a relatively new area for most Irish adult literacy services, and so many practitioners feel unsure of how to deal with areas such as assessment, provision, promotion, participation, training and accreditation. NALA has therefore developed these policy guidelines and supports for literacy practitioners dealing with adults whose first language is not English.

The White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life (2000) sets the policy context for the development of ESOL provision. In particular, the White Paper underlines the need to encourage the participation of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in education and states that there should be “free access to adult literacy, English language and mother culture supports” for these groups¹.

The recommendations below are based on the survey findings of ESOL provision in the adult literacy service (from February 2002) and feedback and inputs from the NALA ESOL Executive Working Group. The guidelines are proposed in the context of the principles for adult basic education outlined in the NALA Quality Framework as follows²:

- The learner’s right to attend on a voluntary basis and to set his/her own goals will be supported by the organisation
- An ethical code of confidentiality, respect and trust will inform all aspects of the organisation
- Cultural differences will be respected at all levels of the organisation
- Particular attention will be paid to creating and maintaining an atmosphere of social interaction, informality, and enjoyment within the organisation

- Learners will be enabled to participate in all aspects of the organisation, including evaluation of the scheme.

The guidelines and recommendations are listed under the following headings:

1. Outreach and Promotion

2. Provision and Participation

3. Assessment

4. Accreditation

5. Training and Support

6. Equal Status Policy

1. Outreach and Promotion

Outreach and promotion must be adapted and changed as populations and needs change and this is particularly the case with ESOL learners. It is important to identify the target population before planning, implementing, evaluating and improving outreach and promotion strategies.

A community-based approach should be used to target new ESOL learners. Existing ESOL learners can also be used to recruit others, and members of ethnic minority groups can take on roles as paid ESOL tutors and volunteer tutors.

2. Provision and Participation

Language support should be provided free of charge, resources permitting, including ICT basic skills.

Organisers should access general regulations through their VEC so that they can inform learners of their eligibility in relation to tuition (see Appendix 1). In exceptional circumstances, e.g. when there are a group of people of the same nationality who have similar needs and are at a similar level with regard to ESOL they can be organised into distinct groups. For example, women-only classes can be organised, if participants experience

¹. Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education (page 173)

². NALA Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education



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specific difficulties in accessing provision related to cultural or childcare issues.

A wide range of tuition models should be highlighted in training to equip tutors with a broader range of skills to meet learners' needs (see 2.3 “A Framework for ESOL Provision in Literacy Schemes” from full report).

Every ESOL learner should ideally be offered a minimum of four hours ESOL provision a week. The scheme should aim to provide tuition that enables people to function autonomously in the society in which they are resident.

Beginners’ groups in particular should ideally be closed for short, initial general courses of 8 to 10 weeks’ duration and if possible, learners should have at least four hours tuition per week (i.e. 32 to 40 hours per course).

These short, 8 to 10 week courses can run in constant succession so that there is always a general ESOL class for new arrivals to join. Short courses generally prove more effective as attendance and numbers can fluctuate. Training teachers in strategies to cope with mixed-level groups and developing appropriate materials are key. Designing group learning programmes with specific aims for individual learners is also crucial.

ESOL learners’ motivations and goals should be taken into account when planning provision, by utilising particular outreach techniques and tailoring materials to suit learners' needs.

Schemes should be aware of both the outside forces and internal factors that may result in many ESOL learners dropping out of classes and take measures to address the issue of irregular or non-attendance.

In schemes with a large number of ESOL learners, there is a need for a member of staff (e.g. an ESOL Resource Worker) to take on the responsibility for the organisation and development of ESOL, in liaison with the Adult Literacy Organiser. This ESOL Resource Worker

should have ESOL training and where possible come from a language teaching background, as well as a literacy tutoring background.

Schemes should also seek to recruit and train group tutors and volunteers from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Schemes should liaise with other providers of ESOL within their VEC area and local community in order to maximise access for learners. They should encourage the integration of ESOL into other subject areas to avoid duplication.

Schemes should liaise with Community Welfare Officers, Health Boards, Department of Social and Family Affairs and FÁS local offices, as well as other local refugee/asylum seeker support groups to inform them as to the range of provision available.

3. Assessment

In further developing its literacy assessment framework, NALA will address the literacy needs of ESOL learners. However, there is a need for a broader assessment framework specifically for ESOL that involves all stakeholders and which takes account of international best practice in language teaching, drawing on the Common European Framework.

Practising ESOL tutors should be trained in on-going assessment once the framework is developed.



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4. Accreditation

We recommend that practitioners submit language portfolios for accreditation to FETAC who will also welcome comment and feedback from practitioners and learners. Organisers and ESOL tutors are recommended to contact NALA with FETAC feedback.

We also recommend that NALA review the use of FETAC foundation modules in literacy schemes on a regular basis.

Any review of the FETAC language modules should take into consideration the views of ESOL practitioners. VEC Adult Literacy Service should also familiarise themselves with other recognised accreditation options (e.g. T.I.E.).

5. Training and Support

The current situation in relation to training opportunities for ESOL practitioners is unsatisfactory and steps should be taken to implement a comprehensive programme specifically for ESOL.

In the interim, we recommend that tutors who have been assigned an ESOL group should have ESOL, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) or some language training and an adult literacy tuition background.

TEFL-trained teachers need an induction into the adult literacy service to complement their language training. For example the Initial Tutor Training Course for literacy tutors may provide an introduction to the adult literacy ethos.

Equally, experienced Adult Literacy Tutors should undergo some form of ESOL or TEFL training.

It is desirable that group tutors should have qualifications based on courses of at least 70 hours' duration (recommended by ACELS – the Advisory Council for English Language Schools) and where possible on courses of 100 hours. This should complement or build on credit transfers from the NALA/WIT accreditation project which provides qualifications for literacy workers. It is recommended that tutors avail of the NALA/WIT “ESOL and Literacy” module which will be available from Autumn 2003.

Adult Literacy Organisers and ESOL Resource Workers should also undergo some form of ESOL training and an element of ESOL awareness should be built into the Initial Tutor Training course for every scheme.

Schemes currently offer tuition to a wide range of ethnic groups and this has implications for intercultural awareness training. Intercultural awareness and anti-racism training should be made available to all staff in literacy schemes. An element of intercultural awareness should also be built into literacy awareness training provided by schemes.

Lack of childcare is a barrier to participation and there is an urgent need to expand accessible and affordable provision.

6. Equal Status Policy

Every scheme should develop an intercultural and equal status policy statement and all staff should be made aware of the policy.



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