





'The Living Map', part of a community-based language learning initiative in Aberdeenshire. Image reproduced courtesy of the SSAMIS project, [www.glasgow.ac.uk/research/az/gramnet/research/ssamis/](http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/research/az/gramnet/research/ssamis/)

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CLD</b>	Community Learning and Development
<b>EAL</b>	English as an Additional Language
<b>ESOL</b>	English for Speakers of Other Languages
<b>FE</b>	Further Education
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>NATECLA</b>	National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults
<b>SFC</b>	Scottish Funding Council
<b>SQA</b>	Scottish Qualifications Authority
<b>WEA</b>	Workers' Educational Association



# Executive Summary with key findings and recommendations

This report outlines the findings of the research project 'Language learning and migrant 'integration' in Scotland: exploring infrastructure, provision and experiences' (2019-23). The project focuses on ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), defined as English language education for adult learners aged 16+, although we also explore initiatives not branded as ESOL but related to language learning and/or migrants' socio-cultural integration.

In this qualitative study, we explored the complex landscape of ESOL provision in Scotland through a comparison between Glasgow, Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire, and considered the perspectives of diverse ESOL providers, decision-makers, practitioners and learners. The research took place in 2020-21, a time when ESOL provision in Scotland was undergoing significant changes in terms of governance, funding and organisation of provision.

## KEY FINDINGS

### **1. There was evidence of significant unmet ESOL needs and demand across Glasgow, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire**

Unmet demand was a particularly prominent issue in Glasgow city, where demand for both College and community classes far outstripped supply (see section 3.1). This is clearly documented in the centralised waiting list operated by the Glasgow ESOL register. We found evidence in both Glasgow and Aberdeen city that third sector providers were stepping in to fill gaps in existing provision. In Aberdeenshire, providing for smaller numbers of potential learners, especially in rural areas, was a challenge made more difficult by recent changes in the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) funding model (See section 3.3).

### **2. Collaboration among different providers is key to successful partnership work and the effective planning and delivery of local provision.**

The landscape of ESOL provision in Scotland is very complex, and traditionally based around a division of labour between college and community providers. Further Education (FE) Colleges generally offer Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) accredited classes and more intensive tuition based on a national curriculum, while community providers (Local Authority Community Learning and Development (CLD) partnerships and third sector organisations) generally offer non-accredited, less intensive classes based on a social practice model, rather than a set curriculum. The division between formal/accredited and informal/non-accredited provision is not absolute however, and there are overlaps between college and community provision (see sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2).

Changes in the SFC funding model seemed to reinforce a hierarchy between accredited and non-accredited classes and incentivise some community providers to move to a credit model and accredited classes, particularly in Aberdeenshire. Community practitioners raised questions about whether a credit model borrowed from the FE sector can be reconciled to the social practice model that has traditionally

underpinned community provision, and whether all ESOL learners necessarily seek or would benefit from accreditation (see sections 3.2 and 3.5).

Collaboration among providers was central to: a) coordinating ESOL provision locally; b) communicating, marketing and signposting of ESOL provision to other providers, services and potential learners; c) testing and cross-referrals of learners to various providers; d) gathering and sharing information to identify and address unmet demand or the needs of specific cohorts of learners. The report highlights examples of effective cooperation and innovative joint work and a general openness and goodwill among providers to make partnerships work, but it also explores the challenges involved in collaboration (see section 3.4). Lack of clear guidelines and insufficient funding can have a detrimental impact on collaboration: evidence shows that in some local authority areas changes in SFC funding mechanisms had the unintended effect of stifling cooperation and innovation by creating competition for scarce resources and reinforcing hierarchies among providers (see sections 3.3 and 2.4.1).

### **3. Uncertainties about funding, and the introduction of more stringent SFC reporting requirements, had a significant impact on provision.**

The report documents funding challenges for community and college ESOL providers within a broader context of cuts in adult and community education and rising levels of unmet demand (see sections 3.3 and 2.4.1). Across all our fieldwork locations third sector providers frequently stepped in to fill gaps in provision, but this relied on ad-hoc, short-term funding that was not conducive to a sustainable growth of ESOL provision. Our findings also show that funders' reporting requirements and expected outcomes are not always aligned with providers' aims and learners' needs. This raises questions about what kind of outcomes can be meaningfully measured and how: numbers of learners, attendance and progression into education or employment may be easier to measure than other, no less important, things that learners look for and get out of ESOL classes, such as improved confidence, wellbeing and social connections (see section 3.3 and 4.2.2).

### **4. Learners' needs and aspirations in the context of their broader lives should inform ESOL-related policy and ESOL provision.**

ESOL practitioners saw ESOL as more than just a subject, and language learning as part of a broader process of settlement or 'integration' for their learners, which included economic, social, cultural, civic and political dimensions. The importance of centring learners' diverse needs and aspirations in ESOL policy and provision also chimes with the strategic objectives of the most recent Scotland ESOL strategy (2015-2020). Our findings also point to the importance of a joined-up approach to ESOL provision, connecting the ESOL sector and wider services supporting asylum seekers, refugees and migrants (see section 3.5). This approach would be consistent with the one followed in the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-22 (Scottish Government 2017), which is currently being renewed. The Refugee Integration Strategy includes language alongside other aspects of settlement<sup>1</sup>, but only applies to forcibly displaced migrants and not to those who have chosen to come to Scotland for work, study or family reasons (see section 2.2). The failed renewal of the Scotland ESOL strategy in 2020 and the lack of strategic vision for the sector are putting pressure on ESOL providers and have resulted in under-resourced, piecemeal and disjointed provision (see sections 2.4.2, 2.5 and chapter 3). They have also resulted in a lack of clarity about who, and what, publicly funded ESOL is for (see section 3.2 and Conclusions).

### **5. Experiences of access to ESOL classes are inflected by learners' migration status, location and gender. (see Section 4.1)**

In Glasgow, all our interviewees were refugees or asylum seekers who had moved to Scotland independently, rather than through resettlement schemes. Finding and enrolling in ESOL classes had been an early priority for most, but the high level of unmet demand made it hard to access the kind of ESOL provision they preferred, especially for college courses. Several participants had accessed community ESOL through third sector organisations offering wraparound support to asylum seekers and refugees, while access to college classes had been facilitated through word of mouth and social work referrals. In Aberdeen and

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<sup>1</sup> These are: employability and welfare, housing, education, health and wellbeing and communities, culture and social connections.

Aberdeenshire, all our participants were voluntary migrants, most of them economic migrants in low-paid, precarious employment. The majority had been living in Scotland for many years, managing with varying degrees of confidence and competence in English. For many, ESOL learning had not been an immediate priority and some had only started ESOL classes after living in the UK for several years. ESOL classes had to be fitted around shift work and family responsibilities. Most had found out about ESOL classes through word of mouth, and the most significant barrier to accessing ESOL was around distance to available classes. Financial considerations linked to the cost of travel as well as fees for college courses (up to £6,000 per year for a full-time course) also created barriers for some learners. Across Glasgow, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, family responsibilities, especially for women with young children, could further delay or interrupt access to ESOL learning.

## **6. Diversity of ESOL learners shapes motivations and aspirations linked to language learning**

Work and improving employment prospects was a strong motivation for both voluntary migrants and asylum seeker/refugee learners in our study (see Section 4.2.1). However, migrant status nuanced experiences given that it determined opportunities for employment: asylum seekers in the UK are granted permission to work only in very specific circumstances, and English language learning is often seen as a prerequisite for employability. And yet, many voluntary migrants, especially EU nationals who had moved to Scotland under free movement, had been able to enter the workforce, irrespective of their level of English, but usually in precarious, low paid jobs (see Section 4.2.1).

Learners' educational backgrounds and social capital informed their aspirations for the future. Those with professional backgrounds in their country of origin often hoped that ESOL learning would lead to getting a 'good' job, well-matched to previous experience. Those with limited formal education in their country of origin had more vague aspirations in relation to future employment or education. Many voluntary migrants, especially those with experience of precarious and/or low paid work, regarded ESOL learning as a key component in improving their employment prospects, asserting their employment rights, or developing a career. Some had progressed careers as a result of improving their English language skills, however others had found that better English was not all they needed, and that other structural inequalities linked to age, gender, education and ethnicity came into play (see Section 4.2.1).

Social connections, increased self-confidence, and independence were also important motivations for language learners (see Section 4.2.2). ESOL classes and activities provided opportunities to meet other people and impacted on learners' social connectedness and mental well-being. These connections also had practical implications, improving access to information about institutions and day-to-day life in Scotland. The importance of language classes as a site for sociability and support for general well-being was especially marked amongst forcibly displaced migrants, who experienced isolation and high levels of stress from dealing with the asylum system. Increasing self-confidence was linked to independent access to services and rights. Being able to deal with formalities linked to their migration status but also with healthcare professionals, utility companies, schools, and other institutions without relying on others for help was important to almost all our learners, regardless of migrant status, gender, length of stay or language ability. Several learners who had arrived in Scotland with already strong English still sought out ESOL classes as a way to increase social connections and gain confidence. They also described ESOL classes and activities as a source of solidarity and support networks with both other learners and teachers or volunteers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. Undertake a comprehensive mapping exercise to scope need and demand for, and provision of ESOL in Scotland**

There is ample evidence of unmet demand in all three council areas covered in this report. Yet we know little about the geography of ESOL need and demand across Scotland, and how it has changed as a result of shifting migration patterns and policy over the past twenty years. The landscape of ESOL provision in Scotland presents significant regional variation, which has and will continue to change over time: while Rice et al. (2004) estimated that 80% of ESOL learners in Scotland attended FE College classes, existing research, including our own, suggests that this figure does not apply to all local authorities, and that the balance between College and community ESOL may have shifted. A comprehensive scoping review would be timely: the last Scotland-wide mapping exercise was commissioned in 2004, to inform the first Scotland ESOL strategy (Rice et al. 2004). The scoping review would require the collection of new quantitative and qualitative data, but can also draw on existing datasets (i.e. demographic data from the latest Scottish census, records from FE and community providers). Given the dynamic landscape, it would also be helpful for such a review to consider potential new learner groups who are arriving, or are likely to arrive, as a result of current policy developments at UK and Scotland level. These include ongoing changes in the UK asylum and resettlement routes, changes in the UK points-based visa routes for voluntary migrants, and the role of migration in Scotland's population strategy.

### **2. Make sure that ESOL governance and provision are underpinned by a long-term strategic vision for the sector and by adequate funding**

Until 2020, ESOL governance and provision in Scotland was underpinned by two successive ESOL strategies. Scotland no longer has a standalone ESOL strategy: instead, ESOL was incorporated into the broader national Adult Learning Strategy 2022-2027, alongside other areas of community adult learning. The Adult Learning Strategy commits to undertake a review of the impact of the Scotland ESOL strategy 2015-2020, and to produce recommendations for this specialism within the context of the Adult Learning Strategy, rather than to produce a new standalone ESOL strategy. The current position leaves the ESOL sector without a clear strategy, raising justified concerns that the distinctiveness of ESOL learners and specialism may be lost within the broader Adult Learning Strategy. The policy vacuum around ESOL is already having detrimental effects on the sector, particularly around funding and related capacity, and effective coordination of resources and provision nationally and locally. While it is hoped that the review of the previous Scotland ESOL strategy and ensuing recommendations will provide a sense of direction, it is essential that ESOL maintains a distinct profile within the broader Adult Learning Strategy. ESOL-related policy needs to centre learners' diverse needs and aspirations and be informed by a consultation with learners and practitioners. Rather than referring to a generic 'ESOL learner', ESOL-related policy also needs to have a clear vision about who and what publicly-funded ESOL is for: while it is right that the emphasis should remain on the poorest and more marginalised migrants, consideration needs to be given to the fact that ESOL needs are not limited to these groups (see Chapter 4 and Conclusions). Adequate funding is essential to enable the sector to cope with continuing change, and avoid an overreliance on unpaid volunteers: thus, a funding strategy should be a key part of a long-term vision for the ESOL sector. Consideration also needs to be given to the fact that, unlike other areas of community adult learning included in the Adult Learning Strategy, ESOL is delivered across Community and Further Education.



### **3. Promote a joined-up approach to ESOL provision which reflects the diverse needs of learners and facilitates coordination and cooperation across ESOL providers and with other services supporting migrants**

This report outlines the diversity of the ESOL landscape in Scotland in terms of learners, providers and regional contexts. Developing a more joined-up approach to this diversity would enhance coordination and cooperation across the sector but would also require thinking across ESOL and other relevant policy areas such as migration policy; policies around integration and community development; and educational policies. This more joined-up approach underpins the New Scots Integration Strategy for asylum seekers and refugees, but is much less clearly articulated, for example, in the Scottish Government's thinking about how to attract and retain migrant workers, or how to support family members accompanying them. Our study points to the key role that ESOL activities play in a broader process of settlement for learners, one which includes economic, social, cultural, civic and political dimensions. Our findings show the importance of centring learners' diverse needs and aspirations in ESOL provision and understanding their language needs in the context of their wider lives. Devising a framework that starts from the needs of learners rather than drawing boundaries around what is/is not ESOL, or setting hierarchies around accredited and non-accredited learning, would lead to a more joined up approach to ESOL provision. This joined-up approach would facilitate the coordination of diverse provision and encourage cooperation and innovation across Scotland's many geographical contexts and between different ESOL providers. It would also incentivise cooperation across ESOL providers and other services supporting ESOL learners and facilitate outreach to hard-to-reach groups.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

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This report outlines the findings of the research project ‘Language learning and migrant ‘integration’ in Scotland: exploring infrastructure, provision and experiences’ (2019-23). The project focuses on ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), defined as English language education for adult learners aged 16+<sup>2</sup> (Scottish Government and Education Scotland 2015), although we also explore initiatives not branded as ESOL but related to language learning and/or migrants’ socio-cultural integration. Political and policy discourses often posit the acquisition of English as playing a key role in migrants’ successful integration (Cooke and Simpson 2009); yet language learning can be awkwardly positioned between different understandings of the purposes and meanings of ‘integration’, a contested concept that has been exposed to extensive critique (Saharso 2019).

In this qualitative study, we explored the complex landscape of ESOL provision in Scotland through a comparison between Glasgow, Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire, and considered the perspectives of diverse ESOL providers, decision-makers, practitioners and learners. The research took place at a time when ESOL provision in Scotland was undergoing significant changes in terms of governance, funding and organisation of provision.

We set out to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1: How do geographic location and changes in ESOL governance shape the complex landscape of ESOL provision in Scotland?**

**RQ2: How well do policy frameworks, funding priorities and expected outcomes align with the experiences and understandings of ESOL providers and learners?**

**RQ3: What is language learning for and about, and how does it relate to ‘integration’?**

**RQ4: Who is considered in need of language learning and/or integrating?**

## 1.1 SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The LLAMI project is a qualitative, comparative study and it is exploratory in nature. One of the main aims of the project was to scope provision and demand across Aberdeenshire/Aberdeen and Glasgow, and frame it within the broader picture of Scotland-wide ESOL governance and migration patterns. The comparative dimension of the project and in-depth exploration of rural and urban settings provide important insights about the diversity of ESOL that apply to the whole of Scotland – in terms of demand, provision, governance, learner profiles and needs (see section 1.2). This diversity is often overlooked at policy level. The project is not solely focussed on accredited ESOL classes typically delivered in Further Education Colleges, but also looks at less formal community provision. Some of this community provision was not branded as ‘ESOL’ but included a language element as part of broader work with migrant and/or local communities. Another distinctive feature of the LLAMI project is the inclusion of learners’ perspectives, which have been less central (Rice et al. 2004, Brown 2018) or omitted (Meer et al. 2019) in previous research in Scotland. We are indebted to and draw on this previous research, more focussed on ESOL policy and governance.

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<sup>2</sup> In Scotland English language provision is divided between pre-16 education (EAL, English as an Additional Language) and post-16 education (ESOL, English for speakers of Other Languages) (Meer et al. 2019: 1-2).

The fieldwork was mainly conducted between January and August 2021<sup>3</sup>, and took place at a point when ESOL in Scotland was undergoing profound changes in terms of policy and governance, and as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The main method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, mostly conducted online. We interviewed experts (ESOL providers, decision-makers – 14), teachers and community-based practitioners (17) and learners (22) (see Appendix 1). Most of our interviewees were based in Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen city or Glasgow city, with the exception of a few experts, who had oversight of ESOL matters at Scottish level and one ESOL coordinator based at a college in Greater Glasgow. In addition to interviews, we also conducted participant observation in language cafés and classes. Initially envisaged as short intensive periods of observation at language classes and language cafes in Aberdeenshire and Glasgow, this part of the fieldwork was adapted due to the COVID pandemic. Participant observations were conducted at a regular online language café run by a third sector provider in Aberdeenshire and at a language class and language café organised by a different third sector provider in Aberdeen city, over the spring and early summer of 2021. The shift to online learning, however, blurred the geographic boundaries of these ESOL activities so that learners attended more flexibly from across Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen city. All interviews were conducted in English<sup>4</sup>.

Expert and ESOL Teachers and Practitioners interviewees were recruited through connections made during previous migration- or ESOL- research projects (Flynn and Kay 2017; Stella and Gawlewicz 2021; Stella et al. 2018) and through snowballing. In Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, learner interviewees were recruited via language classes or language initiatives (such as language cafés) organised by voluntary sector organisations. All Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire learner interviewees are voluntary migrants who came to Scotland to work, study or join other family members. In Glasgow, learner interviews were recruited via one intermediate FE College class and via one intermediate class organised by a voluntary sector organisation. All Glasgow learner interviewees are displaced migrants (either asylum seekers or refugees) who came to Scotland to seek humanitarian protection. This profile of learner interviewees is not representative of the wider community of ESOL learners within Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen city or Glasgow. For example, we were unable to reach out to displaced migrants living in Aberdeenshire or Aberdeen city, or to voluntary migrants in Glasgow; we did not interview any learners with literacy needs, and the majority of our interviewees were relatively fluent in English.

## 1.2 DIVERSITY OF THE ESOL LANDSCAPE

Diversity is a central feature of ESOL at a range of levels, namely:

- **Diversity of learners:** The ESOL sector caters to a very diverse group of learners in terms of migrant status, socio-economic background, educational and literacy levels as well as gender, race and ethnicity.
- **Diversity of providers:** Mirroring similar developments in other parts of the UK (Rosenberg 2007), ESOL classes in Scotland are organised and delivered by a range of providers, including FE colleges, local authorities (through their CLD units) and voluntary sector organisations.
- **Diversity of regional contexts:** ESOL provision looks very different across different regions of Scotland, and across rural and urban locations. This reflects the different profile of learners and levels of demand, but also different levels of supply and challenges around meeting demand.

Below, we briefly explore these three key features across our fieldwork locations; these will be explored in greater detail in subsequent sections of the report.

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<sup>3</sup> Some interviews were conducted face-to-face between December 2019 and February 2020, but fieldwork had to be suspended because of the Covid-19 pandemic. When fieldwork resumed in January 2021, all interviews and observations were conducted online.

<sup>4</sup> We initially envisioned conducting some interviews through interpreters to include learners who had limited English or felt more comfortable being interviewed in their first language. This was discussed with some ESOL providers who supported the project, but financial and time constraints made this unfeasible.

## 1.2.1 DIVERSITY OF LEARNERS

Should there be something within ESOL partnerships that's also asking for a statement about understanding the needs of [diverse] learners?... I think that's maybe the bit that's missing... it's still very much about just 'an ESOL learner'.

*[EXP2\_Aberdeenshire]*

The profile and needs of ESOL learners in Scotland, and in the UK more widely, have changed over time, and are linked to wider immigration patterns. Although there is a broad overlap between patterns of immigration and the profile of ESOL learners, not all newcomers to the UK need ESOL classes, and for those who do there may be a considerable delay between arriving to the UK and seeking out or being able to access ESOL classes. ESOL needs also exist in communities who, over time, have become settled, for example among UK citizens or long-term residents who moved from former British colonies several decades ago. ESOL learners range from highly qualified to people who need to learn or improve their English, to those with little schooling in their own countries or with broader literacy needs.

The diverse profile of ESOL learners across Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen city and Glasgow reflects the different migration histories of these places. In this report, we focus on the profile of ESOL learners in these locations as reported by the ESOL practitioners we interviewed and refer to broader migration patterns only briefly for context.

### 1.2.1.1 Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen city

According to recent statistics, both Aberdeen city (2nd) and Aberdeenshire (7th) were among the council areas in Scotland with the largest proportion of residents born outside of the UK (National Records of Scotland 2021). An estimated 22% of Aberdeen city's population was born outside of the UK (ibid.).

In rural Aberdeenshire, until recently ESOL catered mainly for the needs of voluntary migrants. ESOL provision changed significantly in the mid-2000s, in response to the arrival of large numbers of mainly East European migrants who came to work in agriculture, fish and food processing. These migrants settled mainly in North Aberdeenshire - particularly in the larger towns of Peterhead and Fraserburgh, as well as in smaller towns and villages such as Turiff, Banff and Mintlaw. At the time when fieldwork was conducted, East Europeans represented a sizable group of ESOL learners, alongside other economic migrants from both the EU (particularly Southern Europe) and further afield (particularly South America). Aberdeenshire was also home to a relatively small number of displaced migrants who attended ESOL classes. From 2016, Syrian refugees began to be resettled in Aberdeenshire through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme. Syrians were settled mainly in more affluent, rural villages and towns in central Aberdeenshire, away from the more deprived areas of the North Shire. More recently, and after our fieldwork had ended, refugees from other countries, such as Afghanistan and Ukraine, have also been resettled in Aberdeenshire.

At the time when fieldwork was conducted, the ESOL sector in Aberdeen city also catered mainly to voluntary, rather than displaced migrants. A significant number of them came from Eastern Europe, starting from the mid-2000s, and the trend seemed to continue after Brexit: in 2016-17, nationals from 78 different countries were allocated a National Insurance Number in Aberdeen, with the highest number of allocations to Polish and Romanian nationals. Nationals from these countries accounted for almost 79% of all allocations in Aberdeen City in 2016/17 (Aberdeen City Council 2017: 10). Only a small number of refugees from Syria lived in Aberdeen city at the time when fieldwork was conducted; however, this has changed since 2021, with the arrival of significant numbers of Afghans and Ukrainians (Hebditch 2022). According to the 2011 Scottish Census, 68 languages were used at home among the city's population. Among the languages most commonly spoken at home other than English or Scots were Polish (3% of the city's population), French, Chinese and Russian (Aberdeen City Council 2016).



### 1.2.1.2 Glasgow

In 2021, 14% of Glasgow's residents were born outside of the UK, and Glasgow was ranked third in Scotland among the council areas with the largest proportion of residents born outside of the UK, preceded by Edinburgh (20%) and Aberdeen city (18%) (National Records of Scotland 2021).

In Glasgow too the profile of learners has changed quite dramatically over the past two decades. The profile of Glasgow ESOL learners is unique because until recently it was the only local authority in Scotland to take in asylum seekers through the UK government's Dispersal scheme<sup>5</sup>. The arrival of asylum seekers through the UK Dispersal scheme began in 2000, and it has been a key driver behind the growth of ESOL provision in Glasgow (and indeed a key driver behind the creation of the first 2007 Scotland ESOL Strategy). In the early 2000s, up to 80% of ESOL learners in Glasgow were displaced migrants (Meer et al. 2019; Rice et al. 2004). This proportion has fluctuated over the years and it decreased in the mid-2000s, with the arrival of large numbers of EU migrant workers, particularly from Central and Eastern Europe. However, currently displaced migrants make up the majority of ESOL learners both in FE colleges and in community provision. Our interviewees consistently estimated that 80-90 % of their learners were displaced migrants. Nonetheless, demand for ESOL tuition also exists among voluntary migrants and settled communities: our interviewees mentioned in particular: Poles, Portuguese, Roma from East European countries, South Americans of various other nationalities (often dual nationals of European ancestry with EU passports), Pakistanis and Chinese (see also MacKinnock 2015).

In the project we focused on Glasgow city rather than the Greater Glasgow area, however the demand and profile of learners in Greater Glasgow may be significantly different. For example, the majority of the ESOL learners at a FE College in Greater Glasgow were voluntary migrants from Central and Eastern Europe, but the College also catered for a relatively small number of displaced migrants living in Glasgow who were not able to access an ESOL college class in the city (12\_Expert\_GLA).

## 1.2.2 DIVERSITY OF PROVISION

ESOL provision in Scotland is structured around three pathways:

- Courses in Further Education colleges, funded by the Scottish Government through the SFC (Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council)
- Local authority provision in the community<sup>6</sup>, funded through local authority CLD budgets or SFC additional strategic funding underpinning the Scotland ESOL strategy. Classes are usually delivered by local CLD teams, sometimes in partnership with third sector organisations such as the Workers Educational Association (WEA) or Glasgow ESOL forum;
- Third sector provision delivered in the community, funded through other routes (i.e. other streams of Scottish Government funding, the European Social Fund, charity donations, Big Lottery funds). (Meer et al. 2019:27-28).

Broadly speaking, **accredited** ESOL classes are usually delivered in FE colleges, where teaching is structured around an Adult ESOL Curriculum Framework. Learners taking accredited classes can obtain ESOL qualifications certified by SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) and aligned to the Scottish education system to facilitate progression into FE and HE, or employment. College classes cater for learners at all levels, from literacy/beginner level to advanced/proficient<sup>7</sup>.

**Non-accredited** ESOL classes are usually delivered in the community by CLD teams or third sector providers. Non-accredited classes do not lead to an ESOL qualification, and teaching is not usually

<sup>5</sup> Since April 2022, the Home Office mandated that asylum seekers and refugees can be relocated to any Scottish local authority (Quadir 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Local authorities are also responsible for EAL (English as an Additional Language) and ESOL (for pupils aged 16+) provision in schools. ESOL provision in schools can be funded through local authorities' secondary education budgets. Our project does not explore ESOL provision in schools: we focused exclusively on college and community courses.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of ESOL levels in Scotland and their equivalents in other parts of the UK see Meer et al. 2019: 9.

structured around a curriculum but around learners' goals and aspirations, according to a Social Practice model (Scottish Government 2022:19). Community classes generally cater for a narrower range of levels, up to SQA level 3 (pre-intermediate), and deliver the majority of literacy level provision. As well as non-accredited ESOL classes, community provision within the third sector also includes a range of initiatives not branded as ESOL, but broadly related to language learning and socio-cultural integration.

There are some overlaps between accredited and non-accredited provision: for example, some FE colleges also deliver classes in the community, and some community providers have also started to offer accredited classes. Oversight across all strands of provision was provided, until 2019, by Education Scotland (Meer et al. 2019: 28) <sup>8</sup>.

In addition to the funding streams outlined above (Scottish government money channelled through SFC and local authorities, charitable funding), substantial pots of funding for ESOL classes and related activities have also been made available by the UK government and the EU, although this funding has usually targeted displaced migrants. At the time of our fieldwork, the UK government provided funding through the Home Office to local authorities participating in the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme to provide ESOL classes for mainly Syrian refugees (COSLA 2017). The European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) also provided substantial funds to resource the New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Project, and some of these funds were used for ESOL-related work (Scottish Government et al 2021).

### **1.2.3 DIVERSITY OF REGIONAL CONTEXTS**

ESOL provision looks very different in different regions of Scotland, and across rural and urban locations. This reflects the different profile of learners and levels of demand, but also different levels of supply and challenges around meeting demand. As Scotland's largest city, Glasgow has a particularly complex and varied ESOL landscape. Learners in Glasgow potentially have access to a wide range of classes from three FE Colleges and several community providers. However, demand far outstrips supply, and some learners have to wait for a long time, particularly for College places. In Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen city, FE College classes were available through NESCOL (North East Scotland College), but only at its Fraserburgh and Aberdeen campuses. Community provision was available in a wider range of locations across Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen city. However, for learners living in more remote and sparsely populated areas, accessing ESOL classes can be a considerable challenge. Localised decision-making was important in coordination of provision and allocation of funding, and there was significant variation in how this took place across Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen city and Glasgow, as discussed in chapter 3.

In their scoping exercise of ESOL provision in Scotland, Rice et al. (2004:13) noted that FE colleges had become the biggest player in the ESOL sector, both by number of students and number and range of classes. FE provision, however, was more prevalent in Glasgow and Edinburgh, while in more sparsely populated areas only community education classes were available. (ibid: 10). This is still the case twenty years on: FE colleges remain the biggest ESOL provider nationally, however college ESOL classes are not universally available across all parts of Scotland, and community education classes continue to play a very important role in ensuring ESOL is available to diverse cohorts of learners. It should be noted that there are overlaps across FE and community ESOL: for example, some FE colleges deliver outreach classes in the community, and FE providers and community providers are jointly responsible for coordinating ESOL provision within local authorities through Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). Cooperation across the community and FE sectors is crucial to the planning and delivery of ESOL provision, however partnership work can be challenging, particularly in a context of diminished resources allocated to ESOL and changes in ESOL governance (see chapter 3).

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<sup>8</sup> Coordination of provision is discussed in chapter 2 and 3.

## 1.3 CONCLUSIONS

In this introductory chapter we outlined the research questions driving the scope and methodology of the project 'Language learning and migrant 'integration' in Scotland: exploring infrastructure, provision and experiences'. We also outlined the diversity of learners, providers and regional contexts as key to understanding the complex landscape of ESOL provision in Scotland. Through a comparative focus on Glasgow, Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire, the study explores ESOL provision in Scotland at a time of significant change in terms of governance funding and coordination of provision. It considers the perspectives of diverse ESOL providers, decision-makers, practitioners and learners.

# Chapter 2: Background and policy context

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This chapter sketches the development of the ESOL sectors in Scotland since the early 2000s, and highlights the profound changes in governance, funding and coordination that the sector has faced since 2018.

As Rosenberg notes in her work on England, the ESOL sector has found itself at the mercy of competing demands across different government departments and agendas, notably migration, education and budgetary constraints set by the Treasury (Rosenberg 2007:191-261). In Scotland, the policy framing of ESOL is made more complicated by the relationship between reserved and devolved powers of the UK and Scottish governments respectively. ESOL falls under the education remit, which is a devolved matter; the ESOL landscape, however, is also shaped in fundamental ways by migration policies, which are reserved to Westminster, as ESOL learners are subject to UK government rules over immigration and border control.

The first part of the chapter (sections 2.1 and 2.2) charts the key features of the UK government's migration policies, the relationship between migration policy and language learning, and the Scottish Government's attempts to articulate a different stance on overseas migration. The second part of the chapter, based on a review of policy and grey literature, outlines the development of the ESOL sectors in Scotland since the early 2000s (section 2.3), and highlights the profound changes in governance, funding and coordination that the sector has faced since 2018 (section 2.4). The last section of the chapter (section 2.5) draws on our interviews with ESOL teachers, practitioners and experts to highlight their hopes and concerns about recent changes in ESOL governance and the ensuing uncertainties for the sector.

## 2.1 UK MIGRATION POLICY AND SCOTLAND'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION

The profile and needs of ESOL learners in Scotland, and in the UK more widely, have changed over time, and are linked to wider immigration patterns. In the early 2000s the growth of the ESOL sector was driven by patterns of migration and related demand, particularly among displaced migrants coming to the UK to seek sanctuary and migrant workers<sup>9</sup> (Simpson 2019). Supply also increased significantly at the time, supported by public funding for ESOL and adult education. This also resulted in the professionalisation of the ESOL sector, which came to be dominated by formal and publicly funded provision, while before the 1990s it had been predominantly delivered by the voluntary sector and often by volunteers (Rosenberg 2007; Simpson 2015; Rolfe and Stevenson 2021).

UK immigration policies have changed significantly over the past 20 years and become increasingly restrictive, as migration itself became highly politicised in the aftermath of the 2008 economic recession and the 2015 refugee 'crisis' in the Mediterranean. Major changes to UK immigration policies have included: the introduction of a points-based immigration system (2008) to regulate voluntary migration, which prioritised migrants in 'skilled' occupations as good for the economy (applicable only to non-EU migrants until 2021); attempts to reduce migrant arrivals and increase removals through a punitive approach to migration management known as 'the hostile environment' (Griffiths and Yeo 2021); the Brexit referendum (2016) and the UK's final departure from the EU (2020), which put an end to free movement of labour from the EU; and the ongoing overhaul of the asylum system, including the removal of asylum seekers entering the UK independently and the processing of applications in a third country.

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<sup>9</sup> EU migrants coming to the UK under the principle of free movement of labour represented a significant proportion of these migrant workers, particularly after successive rounds of EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007. Many migrant workers came from new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe and took up employment mainly in low-paid jobs, designated as 'low-skilled' and therefore not eligible for migration from non-EU countries, regulated by a 'skills-based' migration system since 2008.



The politicisation and intense scrutiny of migration have had important repercussions for the ESOL sector, although ESOL has followed a different path in different parts of the UK (Simpson 2015). In England, government funding for ESOL has been steadily and significantly reduced over the past 15 years, as ESOL ceased to be a central part of adult education under the aegis of Skills for Life (Simpson 2019:28); this has resulted in fragmented and piecemeal provision unable to meet demand, and in the renewed prominence of community-based classes (Simpson 2012, 2015). The Scottish Government has consistently expressed a more positive attitude towards immigration. For much of the 20th century, Scotland experienced depopulation and negative net migration; this trend was reversed in the early 2000s, with Scotland becoming a country of immigration. Net overseas migration to Scotland has remained consistently positive in every year since 2003-04 and this has been viewed politically as a positive trend which helps to mitigate Scotland's demographic challenges as well as contributing to the economy and filling gaps in the labour market. (Scottish Government 2021). The Scottish Government and Scottish Local Authorities have generally taken a different stance from the UK government on overseas migration, for example:

- They have emphasised the economic, social and demographic benefits of migration for Scotland;
- They have sought to encourage migration to rural areas facing depopulation;
- They have expressed a desire to take the maximum possible numbers of people through refugee resettlement schemes;
- They have made asylum seekers eligible for free ESOL tuition from arrival, without the restrictions that apply in other parts of the UK. This is linked to the aim of 'integration from day one' in the *New Scots – Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-22* (Scottish Government 2018).

This approach to migration has arguably influenced a different prioritising of ESOL over the past two decades compared to other parts of the UK, particularly England (Simpson 2015, 2019); however, similarly to other parts of the UK, Scotland experiences problems of unmet demand, underfunding and lack of a long-term vision for the sector. These have become more acute in the past few years through austerity cuts and significant changes in ESOL governance.

## 2.2 WHY LANGUAGE LEARNING AND MIGRANT 'INTEGRATION'?

As Simpson (2019:26) notes, English language tuition for adult migrants is an area of education closely connected to policies around immigration control, citizenship and migrant 'integration'. For example, since the introduction of the points-based immigration system in 2008, demonstrating fluency in English has been a requirement for obtaining a so-called 'high value' or a skilled worker visa (Fortier 2018). For migrants wishing to naturalise, since 2002 proving one's knowledge of the national language has been a key hurdle in acquiring UK citizenship; this requirement was later extended to migrants seeking long-term settlement (Spencer 2011; Fortier 2018). In the absence of a coherent set of integration strategies, "English language tuition for adult migrants has in the past two decades been the main means of fostering integration" (Simpson 2019:26, Spencer 2011). This pattern is not unique to the UK: a recent report points out that across most OECD countries "language training is the principal component of introduction programmes for new arrivals and represents the bulk of government expenditures on immigrant integration" (OECD 2021:8-9).

In our project, we set out to explore the relationship between language learning and migrant 'integration'. We put the term in scare quotes because we recognise it as a contested concept: far from being a neutral expression to describe an objective reality, 'immigrant integration' is both an ideologically charged and ill-defined concept<sup>10</sup>. Throughout the report, we nonetheless use the term 'integration' for two main reasons. Firstly, the concept remains ubiquitous in political and policy debates about migration, and efforts towards migrant 'integration' are mostly channelled through language training, as noted above. Secondly, we start from the position that it is useful to see language learning in the context of learners' wider lives (Cooke

<sup>10</sup> It is beyond the scope of this report to explore these extensive debates - see for example Mulvey (2015) for discussion of integration as a process or as an outcome; Miles (1993) and Schinkel (2018) on how integration policy and political discourse, as well as academic research, target and racialise particular groups 'in need of integration'; Favel (2019) on the abstract, static and normative idea of the host society against which 'successful integration' is measured.

2006), and as part of a broader process of migrant settlement or 'integration' encompassing economic, social, cultural, civic and political dimensions (Spencer 2011:203).

When discussing integration policies, it should be noted that in the UK (and in Europe more broadly) these typically target specific groups of migrants rather than all newcomers, particularly refugees and non-EU migrants (Spencer 2012; Boswell and Geddes 2011). Both in the UK as a whole and in Scotland, integration policies are focussed on refugees, with no specific integration programmes for migrants arriving through other routes, such as work or family visas (Spencer 2011). In Scotland, two successive refugee integration strategies have made the case for 'integration from day one', extending the remit of the strategy to asylum seekers who have not yet secured refugee status or humanitarian protection (Scottish Government 2018). However, in practice it is only after individuals transition from asylum seeker to refugee status that the UK state acknowledges 'a humanitarian and legal responsibility' towards them; it is largely at this stage, when refugees' lives gain a degree of stability, that the process of 'integration' proper can begin (Strang et al. 2017). Thus, despite the stated intentions of the New Scots Refugee Integration strategies, asylum seekers are only partially and precariously included in integration strategies, and this has ongoing implications for those who are eventually granted refugee status (Mulvey 2015).

The rationale for focussing integration efforts and resources on refugees is that they are particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable, and therefore most in need of support. Indeed, lack of state support can cause difficulties in the process of settlement, although 'top down' integration policies can also have negative effects, such as heightened scrutiny on meeting 'integration targets' and the problematisation of displaced migrant populations (Korać 2003). Migrants arriving through other routes, however, also go through a process of settlement and adaptation in a new country, which may include challenges in communicating with long-settled communities, developing social connections, accessing jobs, education, welfare and housing and looking after their health and wellbeing. The scale of these challenges is determined in no small part by migrants' routes into the UK and legal status, which affects eligibility for public funds and other services<sup>11</sup>, making asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants particularly marginalised. Nonetheless, existing research also shows that other categories of migrants, particularly migrant workers in precarious and low-paid employment, can be marginalised and that language barriers can add to their marginalisation (see i.e. Netto et al. 2019, Theodoropoulos 2021; Biggar 2022).

## 2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESOL SECTOR IN SCOTLAND

As noted earlier, in the early 2000s ESOL provision in the UK expanded as a result of new education policies. In England and Wales, this happened through the Skills for Life national strategy on adult education, which included ESOL alongside literacy and numeracy skills (Rosenberg 2007, Simpson 2015). In Scotland, this happened through the development and implementation of two successive Scottish Government ESOL Strategies (Scottish Government 2007, 2015). Scotland's approach was distinctive in setting up a standalone ESOL strategy, unlike England, where ESOL practitioners have long advocated for one (NATECLA 2016, 2022). In Scotland, the ESOL strategy was separate from adult education policies around numeracy and literacy (Scottish Government 2010), although the revised 2015 ESOL Strategy for Scotland aligned its aims to national objectives for adult learning in Scotland (Scottish Government 2007, 2015). Moreover, while in England the prominence of ESOL in adult education, and related allocation of financial support, drastically declined after 2009, the Scottish government continued to support and resource the ESOL sector.

The reasons for Scotland's distinctive policy on ESOL reflects a different approach to migration, but also the smaller scale of then existing ESOL provision in Scotland relative to other parts of the UK. Despite its long history of overseas immigration, Scotland, unlike other parts of the UK, had only become a country of net immigration in the early 2000s, which contributed to a boom in ESOL demand (Simpson 2019:29).

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<sup>11</sup> For example, after Brexit, most EU migrants with settled or pre-settled status continue to enjoy similar welfare rights to UK citizens, while migrants arriving through visa routes do not, unless they have Indefinite Leave to Remain, refugee status or another form of humanitarian protection. See [www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information-and-resources/rights-and-entitlements](http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information-and-resources/rights-and-entitlements)

The mapping and scoping exercise that informed the first Scotland ESOL Strategy noted substantial unmet demand (Rice et al. 2004). Although unmet demand and under-funding were common problems for the ESOL sector across the UK (Rosenberg 2007), in Scotland the sector was particularly under-resourced because historically it had had no equivalent to funding schemes operating in England and Wales, such as Further Education Funding Council streams or the Skills for Life initiative (Rosenberg 2007: 167, 237).

The Guiding Principles for ESOL provision in Scotland, enshrined in two successive ESOL strategies (2007-2020), have emphasised inclusion and equality of opportunity for migrant learners, and the positive contribution they make to 'society and the economy' (see Appendix 2). As Brown (2018:108) notes, however, the ESOL strategies' 'vision and objectives contain language that implies an emancipatory agenda; however, competing agendas and contextual limitations mean that this agenda does not necessarily result in emancipatory practice'.

The first ESOL Strategy for Scotland (2007) came with substantial dedicated funding attached, and a commitment to improve the quantity, quality and coordination of ESOL provision in Scotland. Among the most important outcomes of the 2007 strategy were:

- The development of an Adult ESOL Curriculum Framework, which was more flexible, less prescriptive and less skills-based than the one developed in England and Wales under the aegis of Skills for Life (Simpson 2015:209).
- The development of a suite of ESOL qualifications that aligned to the Scottish education system to facilitate progression into FE and HE and were certified by SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority).
- The development of SQA-certified professional development awards and framework for ESOL practitioners.
- Coordination and collaboration through partnership work.
- A dedicated ESOL development officer, based in Education Scotland <sup>12</sup>; an ESOL Strategy Implementation Group, convened by the ESOL development officer; and a dedicated website (Scottish Government 2007, Rice et al. 2004).

The second ESOL strategy (2015-2020) intended to build on the achievements of the previous strategy and identified five areas for improvement as strategic objectives:

- Improving ESOL learners' access to "learning opportunities throughout all stages, changes and circumstances in their lives". This was to be achieved by addressing barriers, improving partnerships between ESOL providers and wider services at local level, and offering more flexible approaches to provision.
- Involving ESOL learners in co-designing their learning experience.
- Supporting ESOL learners to transform their lives and communities through their learning choices across a range of settings (personal life, work, family and community).
- Enabling ESOL learners to influence ESOL strategy and policy at local and national levels.
- Supporting ESOL learners in their learning journey (Scottish Government 2015)

While continuing to emphasise the economic and social benefits of overseas migration to Scotland, the 2015 ESOL strategy also noted the unprecedented pressure on public spending and the need to streamline provision and make efficient use of resources. Significant cuts in public services were widely felt in Scotland and had a major impact on ESOL and on the education sector more generally.

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<sup>12</sup> Education Scotland is a Scottish Government executive agency responsible for supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education.

## 2.4 REFORM OF ESOL GOVERNANCE IN SCOTLAND

Since 2007, two successive Scottish Government ESOL Strategies, have provided a “framework against which ESOL delivery can (to an extent) be resourced and monitored” (GLIMER 2019:14). However, ESOL governance has gone through significant change in recent years, reflecting shifting governmental and funding priorities. The most significant changes have concerned:

- Changes in mechanisms for funding allocation through the Scottish Funding Council (2018), and demise of the ring-fenced ESOL budget from 2018-2019; new emphasis on accredited ESOL classes in funding allocation requirements and monitoring.
- The failed renewal of the Scotland ESOL Strategy 2015-2020, and the subsuming of ESOL into a broader Adult Learning Strategy (2022), together with other aspects of Adult Education.

### 2.4.1 FUNDING

Funding for ESOL comes from a variety of different strands, as noted in chapter 1. Since the implementation of the first ESOL strategy, however, the most significant pot of funding through which publicly funded ESOL was resourced came from the Scottish Government. This funding was channeled through two main funding streams:

- **Core teaching for FE colleges:** this funding was allocated to each FE college by the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC). It could be used to fund classes in any subject including ESOL, although it was at the discretion of each College to decide whether and how much funding to allocate to ESOL.
- **Additional strategic funding:** this was funding ring-fenced by the Scottish Government to support the Adult ESOL strategy. It was initially administered by SFC (2007-2012), and later by Education Scotland (2012-2017), when it was tasked with oversight of the ESOL sector. After 2012, this funding was allocated, via a host college, to local Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), which included different actors and ESOL providers, such as local FE colleges, CLD units and voluntary sector organizations. These partnerships were then responsible for coordinating delivery in their local authority area, based on an assessment of local need, and redistributing resources accordingly among local ESOL providers. It should be noted that this second funding stream, although substantial, was much smaller than the first <sup>13</sup>. The budget for this second funding stream remained the same throughout 2012-17, at roughly £1.45m/year (SFC 2017).

In 2017, SFC eliminated the second funding stream, determining that all ESOL activity should be funded from the core FE teaching budget. To facilitate the transition to the new funding allocation system, a final year of strategic funding (£1.45) was allocated in 2017-18; however, this pot of money was folded into FE college budgets rather than being allocated to CPPs (SFC 2017:3). SFC also determined that in future the responsibility for coordinating local ESOL provision should be moved from CPPs to local colleges, although local colleges were still expected to collaborate with local CPPs to ascertain need and coordinate provision (SFC 2017).

These cuts to resources for ESOL happened within a broader context of cuts and streamlining of services. The rationale provided by SFC for the demise of the strategic budget was that it was intended to support strategic change, but that the additional financial resources it provided were always supposed to be limited in time, as activities funded through it were supposed to become self-sustaining in the long run (SFC 2017). Cuts in overall ESOL spending were contextualised by squeezed government budgets and efficiency drives which also affected the public sector more widely, impacting both local authorities' budgets (including CLD) and the FE sector. A major Scotland-wide restructure of FE colleges started in

13 For exact figures see SFC 2017.



2012 and saw local colleges merge into much larger regional institutions to achieve efficiency savings (Brown 2018). Moreover, regional outcome agreements between FE colleges and SFC aimed to ensure that SFC funding was used to meet government policy objectives, foremost among them employability, and imposed more stringent requirements for funding and reporting, favouring courses leading to accredited qualifications and measuring outcomes on criteria such as learner attainment and retention (Brown 2018:106-109). The demise of ESOL strategic funding, which had underpinned the work of CPPs in planning and coordinating local ESOL provision, and the increased focus on efficiency had profound implications for the ESOL sector:

- **The emphasis on accountability and streamlining provision prioritized accredited over non-accredited provision.**

SFC expected that allocating all ESOL funding through the core FE teaching budget would simplify the process of reporting by removing the need for different reporting requirements across the two streams, while also increasing accountability (SFC 2017). The new guidelines thus effectively imposed FE college reporting requirements on community providers, making continued funding dependent on student progression and retention. This was criticized for imposing a rigid model of provision on local authority and voluntary sector providers, and creating significant administrative burdens for them (COSLA 2018). Initial guidelines also stated that the majority of activity funded should be credit-bearing (SFC 2017, 2019), although subsequent ministerial guidance to SFC seems to indicate a shift towards greater recognition of non-accredited classes 'where appropriate' (SFC 2021), and an emphasis on colleges supporting 'all types of provision' that meet ESOL need (SFC 2022).

- **The shift in funding allocation and local governance of ESOL created tensions and misunderstandings amongst CPP providers.**

The 2017 SFC guidelines envisaged that the change in funding allocation would 'support a more collaborative focus for colleges and CPPs to meet the needs of ESOL learners in their local community' and 'ensure greater accountability of the funding by colleges' (SFC 2017:2). While seemingly giving a more central role in local decisions about ESOL provision to colleges, the SFC guidelines stressed the importance of the continued involvement of CPPs in the planning and delivery of ESOL provision locally (SFC 2017). The guidelines were criticized for being unclear about FE colleges' responsibilities to work with local authority and voluntary organization partners to meet local demands for ESOL (COSLA 2018, Meer et al. 2019). Colleges were asked to 'jointly prepare delivery plans with CPPs that make clear how local need is being met and make best use of core funding' (SFC 2021)

## 2.4.2 TRANSFERRAL OF ESOL REMIT AND DISCONTINUATION OF PREVIOUS ESOL STRATEGIES

Until 2019, Scotland had a dedicated ESOL development officer, based within Education Scotland. The ESOL development officer convened a Scotland-wide ESOL Strategy Implementation Group, including representatives of FE colleges, CLD and voluntary sector providers. The ESOL development officer also coordinated a Scotland-wide ESOL website through which resources and information were shared with the ESOL community across Scotland. The creation of the post was recommended in the scoping exercise commissioned by the Scottish Government to inform the first Scotland ESOL Strategy (Rice et al. 2004).

In 2019, the ESOL remit was moved from Education Scotland to the newly formed CLD Policy Unit within the Scottish Government<sup>14</sup>. This happened at a time of transition for the ESOL sector, following changes to the SFC funding model and leading up to the expected renewal of the second Scotland ESOL strategy in 2020. Community learning and development (CLD) covers a broad range of areas, spanning community-based adult learning, adult literacy and numeracy, family learning, community development and youth work<sup>15</sup>. Although local authority CLD units had been involved in ESOL provision for a long time

14 It should be noted that at the time of writing CLD sits within Education Scotland, although at the time when fieldwork took place it operated as a standalone unit within the Scottish Government. (<https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/what-we-do/supporting-community-learning-and-development/>).

15 <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/cld/about-community-learning-and-development/>

(Rice et al. 2004), ESOL was a somewhat marginal area of practice and expertise within CLD, with many CLD workers lacking specific training and qualifications in teaching ESOL<sup>16</sup>. Some of our interviewees expressed concern that CLD lacked a nuanced understanding of ESOL and did not meaningfully engage ESOL practitioners in policy changes concerning ESOL (1\_Expert\_SCO, 5\_Expert\_SCO).

After the ESOL remit was moved to CLD in 2019, the dedicated ESOL Development officer post and the ESOL website were discontinued and work on the ESOL strategy, due for renewal in 2020, was paused. The Scottish Government decided instead to create a broader national Adult Learning Strategy, which would encompass ESOL and Literacy and Numeracy alongside other areas of community adult learning traditionally provided by CLD. An Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland was set up to feed into the new Adult Learning Strategy; this included representation from a range of providers across Adult Education, including ESOL providers. Work on the strategy was delayed by the pandemic, but a draft strategy was circulated for consultation in June 2021, and the final Adult Learning Strategy 2022-2027 was published in May 2022.

The Adult Learning Strategy 2022-2027 is mainly focused on setting up general principles for better community education provision. Its strategic action plan centers around four areas: workforce development; expanding and extending adult learning; access, diversity and inclusion; and connecting the adult learning journey. As part of the broader 'expanding and extending adult learning' area, the strategy commits to undertake a review of the impact of the Scotland ESOL strategy 2015-2020 and of the Scotland Adult Literacies strategy 2010-2020 (Scottish Government 2022:17, 27). The review would produce recommendations on next steps for both specialisms, but these would be developed within the context of the Adult Learning Strategy, rather than as standalone ESOL and Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) strategies.

## 2.5 ESOL PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS ON THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF ESOL GOVERNANCE

During the period of research for this project (2019-2021), debates about changes in ESOL governance were in full swing. Our expert and practitioner interviewees had different levels of knowledge of and involvement with policy-level discussions around ESOL. Many of them had limited insights into policy, although they had experienced policy-level changes in their daily work, a topic discussed in chapter 3. A few of our expert and practitioner interviewees were involved in policy-level debates and discussed these in some detail during interviews.

The loss of a standalone ESOL strategy was widely perceived as a step backwards. Interviewees emphasised the importance of a shared vision for the sector inscribed in a formal ESOL strategy, for practical purposes such as funding applications but also to coordinate delivery. There was widespread concern that, as ESOL was subsumed into a broader Adult Education agenda, ESOL practitioners' distinctive specialism and their expertise about the diversity of ESOL learners and their wider lives may be lost.

**But what's the point in ripping it up [ESOL strategy] and then in a few years' time trying to start from absolutely nothing again? It doesn't make sense to put it to one side, I feel like it should be built on. I think adult learning is so broad and I'm concerned about losing the speciality that's required for ESOL because really an ESOL learner can be anyone, they can be absolutely anyone and the barriers they face can be the same as any other adult learner, but they have the additional language barrier.**

*[EP\_Amy\_Glasgow]*

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<sup>16</sup> A recent CLD planning guidance note highlighted ESOL as a key area for improvement, as a review of local authority CLD plans had revealed that 'specific actions around ESOL are not as widespread as we would have expected' (Scottish Government 2020:16).

There was also widespread concern that the loss of the ESOL strategy also meant that ESOL was losing prominence at policy level (6\_Expert\_SCO), and that this would translate into loss of resources for the sector. Some of our interviewees were involved in both ESOL and Adult Literacies and Numeracies, and they expressed this concern about both: as one of them put it 'if strategy falls by the wayside, money goes with it' (10\_Expert\_GLA).

When it became apparent that the Scottish Government was unlikely to agree to the renewal of a standalone ESOL strategy, there was broad consensus that the next best option was a 'drop down' ESOL strategy within an overarching Adult Learning Strategy. This was supported by the whole Glasgow ESOL sector (8\_Expert\_GLA). Interviewees involved in both ESOL and ALN advocated for separate 'drop down' strategies for both.

The potential to develop more joined-up work across different ESOL providers within a broader Adult Education Strategy was cautiously welcomed by some of our interviewees, particularly those working in community education. They pointed to greater potential to share expertise and good practice around working with literacy level learners, or better joined-up approaches to direct learners to work-related ESOL or apprenticeships (ET\_GLA\_Mary).

There were concerns that ESOL practitioners were underrepresented in the new Adult Learning Strategy working group by comparison with other specialists, particularly CLD (1\_Expert\_SCO, 5\_Expert\_SCO). Some of our expert and practitioner interviewees were anxious that ESOL may be 'shoehorned' into a CLD framework. The latest glossy policy, however, may lose sight of the holistic picture of ESOL learners' lives.

**Within refugee integration, you know, you're looking at things holistically. So you're looking at health, education, social bonds, social connections, ESOL. It all kind of comes together. And so people are doing various initiatives and projects that address all of these things, like wellbeing groups and community-led groups that organise events and kind of Our Voice for refugees. It all comes together. And I think the New Scots strategy looks at that whole landscape. I worry that the CLD team at the Scottish government with their new adult learning strategy are not looking at the wider picture. They're not looking at people on the ground, they're not looking at me, they're looking at a shiny strategy. That's good on paper. And maybe it tidies up a cluttered policy landscape but doesn't actually have any impact on the people.**

*[1\_Expert\_SCO]*

## 2.7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has outlined the development of the ESOL sectors in Scotland since the early 2000s and shown that ESOL governance is multi-level and cuts across migration policy (a Westminster reserved matter) and education (a devolved matter). ESOL learners are subject to UK government rules over immigration and border control, and language learning for adult migrants is an area of education closely linked to immigration control, citizenship and policy agendas around migrant 'integration' and social cohesion. While the UK government has implemented increasingly restrictive and hostile policies towards migrants, the Scottish Government has consistently taken a more welcoming stance, seeing immigration as a solution to Scotland's demographic and economic challenges. This was reflected in its different prioritising and sustained support for the ESOL sector, underpinned by two successive ESOL strategies (2007-2020).

Over the past few years, however, ESOL governance in Scotland has undergone profound changes. While all funding streams supporting the ESOL sector (including FE and local authorities budgets) have shrunk, the demise of strategic funds to support provision delivered locally by CPPs has had a significant impact on their work, a topic explored in more detail in chapter 3. The missed renewal of the Scotland ESOL strategy 2015-2020 and the transfer of the ESOL remit between Scottish Government departments signalled a de-prioritisation of ESOL, which was subsumed into a much broader Adult Education Agenda. The recent Scotland Adult Learning Strategy includes a commitment to review the outcomes of the most recent Scotland ESOL strategy to produce recommendations on the next steps for ESOL within the broader Adult Learning Strategy. This, however, leaves the ESOL sector under-resourced and without a clear sense of direction, and perpetuates the uncertainty experienced by many practitioners and providers within the sector.

# Chapter 3: ESOL governance, provision and coordination

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This chapter explores English language learning provision and coordination in relation to demand for ESOL across Glasgow, Aberdeenshire, and Aberdeen. The chapter looks at how the ESOL policy framework outlined in the previous chapter plays out in the work of providers and practitioners, highlighting the extent to which provision meets demand and to which funding priorities and intended policy outcomes align with the experiences of ESOL practitioners and their values as a community of practice. In relation to practitioners' values, the latter part of the chapter looks at ESOL practitioners' understandings of the relationship between language learning and learners' broader lives .

The chapter focuses on the perspectives of providers and practitioners: some of our interviewees were ESOL teachers, referred to by the acronym ET (ESOL teachers). Others worked for FE colleges, local authorities or voluntary sector organisations, and their responsibilities included the organisation and coordination of ESOL classes, or other activities related to English language learning and socio-cultural integration. Depending on their role, they are referred to in the report as ESOL practitioners (EP) or Experts. It should be noted, however, that there was some overlap between ESOL teachers, practitioners and experts: several practitioners and experts had a background in teaching ESOL, and some FE college ESOL coordinators had managerial responsibilities while also being involved in ESOL teaching.

## 3.1 DEMAND FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Although our project did not systematically gather data on waiting lists for ESOL classes like Rice et al (2004), we found evidence of unmet demand across each of our three fieldwork locations.

Unmet demand was a very prominent issue in **Glasgow city**, where demand far outstripped supply. The Glasgow ESOL Register was established in 2016 to streamline and simplify access to both community and FE college ESOL classes (MacKinnon 2015, Meer et al. 2019); learners wishing to pursue an ESOL class are asked to register their interest through the online Register and are then contacted when a place becomes available. At the beginning of 2021 there were around 12,000 people waiting for an ESOL class (excluding duplicates, i.e. people registering more than once for a class); approximately 4,000 of them had been tested for their level of English (10\_Expert\_GLA). To plug the gap between provision and demand, Glasgow CLD partnership, chaired by Glasgow Life, put together a business case for increased investment in ESOL in the city (8\_Expert\_GLA) and successfully bid for additional resources to be allocated to Glasgow's ESOL sector (Glasgow Community Learning and Development Strategic Partnership 2022). In January 2022, the number of registrations on the Glasgow ESOL register had risen to 17,989, falling to 6,870 in July 2022, when it was decided that the ESOL Register would only be used to record interest in community ESOL classes (Glasgow Community Learning and Development Strategic Partnership 2022:7). The ESOL register may be an imperfect instrument to gauge demand, and the scale of unmet demand is likely to vary over time: for example, the Covid-19 pandemic may have exacerbated the problem owing to suspension of services and bottlenecks (10\_Expert\_GLA). Nonetheless, previous research has also found consistently high levels of unmet demand (Meet et al. 2019, Rice 2004): by way of comparison, Rice et al (2004:15) put the average number of learners on a waiting list in Glasgow at 980.

**Since I started community-based classes in Glasgow and Edinburgh, waiting lists have been huge and that has never changed. So, there isn't enough ESOL provision and that has just never been addressed and I will retire, and it won't be addressed.**

*[6\_Expert\_SCO]*



Since 1999, when Glasgow became a dispersal city, demand for ESOL has been sustained in particular by the arrival of significant numbers of asylum seekers, many of whom settled in the Glasgow area after obtaining refugee status (Expert\_1\_SCO; Expert\_10\_GLA). Previous research has emphasised particularly high demand and long waiting lists for College places among asylum seekers and refugees, who generally preferred them over community ESOL (Meer et al. 2019: 13). However, the latest available data indicate that demand is very high for both FE College and community classes. Indeed, some of our participants pointed out that demand was especially high for lower level and literacy classes, mostly catered for by community providers. Moreover, in response to long waiting lists across the board, third sector community providers had stepped in to plug the gap:

**[P]eople in communities are very aware that there is a large ESOL population there, and some of them have been on the register for a year or two and haven't been offered a class, there's not enough provision. So, community providers do what they always do, which is to try to respond to need. So there's stuff popping up all over the place – Govan, and Govanhill, and Springburn, and wherever else there are refugee populations**  
*[Expert\_10\_GLA].*

The downside was that this additional provision was based on ad hoc, short-term funding which did not support a sustainable growth of ESOL provision able to meet evidenced and unanticipated demand (see also Glasgow Community Learning and Development Strategic Partnership 2022:7). For example, in 2019 we approached a community organisation that offered ESOL for work classes to unemployed young people from refugee and minority ethnic backgrounds in Glasgow's Southside; when we contacted them again for an interview in 2021, their ESOL classes had been discontinued because they had been unable to secure follow-on funding.

In Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen city there was no resource comparable to the Glasgow ESOL Register to keep track of demand. Providers, however, also pointed to persistent demand for ESOL and language-related activities among economic migrants. In Aberdeenshire learners in small rural communities were disadvantaged because the new funding model detailed in chapter 2 made small classes unviable, establishing requirements around minimum number of learners and attendance that applied not only to FE colleges but also to community classes. A third sector provider explained:

**So, where you've got pockets of people housed in, say, a small village maybe ten miles away from the next one, where there's much more provision, we just can't do it. Because where we've got three people and paying a tutor just the same and drawing down the equivalent of three people, bums on seats funding - we can't make it work. And the only way we can make some of that work is because we have, in [name of village], for the sake of argument, we have quite a substantive group, and that's subsidising [other classes]. But that's a fluctuating picture.**  
*[3\_Expert\_ABD].*

The same interviewee also suggested that for some providers the focus of activity had shifted from economic migrants to a new cohort of Syrian refugees who had arrived through the resettlement scheme. The Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme, funded by the UK government, included targeted funding for their 'integration', including well-resourced provision for language learning. In some instances, as alluded to in the previous quote, well-funded activities with this group could be used as a way to balance the costs of under-resourced activities in other areas, but this was difficult.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, ESOL classes had to be moved online across Scotland. Sometimes it was possible to open up classes to learners based across a broader geographical area, although this could run counter to funding conditions if strictly applied (ET\_ABD\_Irene). This made ESOL classes potentially more accessible for some learners living in rural areas or with poor transport links, those with inconvenient or changing work schedules, and those with caring responsibilities (see Chapter 4).

For many learners, however, access to technology and digital literacy represented significant barriers to online ESOL classes, despite resources being devoted by ESOL providers to overcoming these barriers. Some of our participants told us that a move towards blended learning had already been on the agenda, both in Glasgow and across more rural areas of Aberdeenshire prior to the pandemic. There were, however, mixed views on the extent to which online or blended provision could be fruitfully used to meet growing demand for ESOL, and in the case of Aberdeenshire to cater to the needs of small pockets of learners in remote areas.

Several participants based both in Aberdeenshire and in Aberdeen City told us that provision of sufficient classes in the city was problematic, particularly as COVID-19 hit. This led to a number of learners based in the city starting to attend online language cafes and classes provided through third sector organisations and CLD classes located in the Shire. Prior to the pandemic, gaps in provision had also prompted third sector organisations in the city to develop their own language learning programmes, sometimes funded through the council, sometimes through external grants, but in both cases often coming under an 'integration' or 'employability' rather than an ESOL funding scheme.

Across all our fieldwork locations, community providers working closely with migrant communities seemed better placed than colleges to gauge and flexibly respond to fluctuating English language needs compared to colleges. This reflected a different approach to outreach and recruitment as well as to provision:

**A lot of what we do has to be about community engagement, and reaching people who aren't knocking on your door, and it feels like that [college] model is really just delivering for people who are coming through the door of the system rather than reaching out to people who are not.**

*[15\_Expert\_ABD].*

## **3.2 PROVISION**

As noted in chapter 1, a division of labour exists between ESOL providers in Scotland, with regional variation reflecting the needs and priorities of local contexts. This division of labour both reflected and reinforced an implicit hierarchy among providers, not just across FE and community providers but also within community ESOL. This hierarchy reflected the different financial resources available to FE, CLD and third sector providers, and their relative power within local partnerships tasked with delivering ESOL.

### **3.2.1 FE COLLEGE PROVISION**

FE colleges generally provide accredited classes, mostly on campus, across a range of levels from literacy/beginner level to advanced/proficient. Teaching is person-centred and structured around an Adult ESOL Curriculum Framework. Learners can progress to higher levels and obtain ESOL qualifications certified by SQA and aligned to the Scottish education system.

Colleges provide a substantial number of teaching hours, based on a notional 240 hours of supported learning that a language learner would need to progress from one level to the next, benchmarked on the Common European Framework of Reference (6\_Expert\_SCO). Most colleges provide both full- and part-time classes, based on learners' demand, although there was often significant variation across colleges in terms of the ratio of full to part-time classes, and in the schedule (i.e. morning/afternoon/evening classes); there were also differences in the number of contact hours allocated to full and part-time teaching.

College provision is funded by SFC, which had introduced strict requirements for colleges to submit yearly reports, based on KPIs such as student retention (full attendance for students until they have attended 25% plus one day of the course) and attainment (progression to a higher level ESOL class, progression into

FE mainstream classes or HE, progression into employment). For the majority of college learners, ESOL classes are free at the point of access: most are entitled to apply for a fee waiver or means-tested bursary through the College, subject to rather complex residency and immigration requirements. Our findings suggest that the complex rules around requirements are managed differently across different colleges and locations and applied variably to full and part-time courses. Insufficient attendance or progress can affect learners' eligibility for fee waivers, bursaries or travel funding. Some of our interviewees, however, pointed out that a degree of discretion and flexibility was exercised by colleges to balance learners' needs and KPI requirements. For example, in some colleges there was little difference between the number of hours offered in part-time and full-time ESOL classes (14\_Expert\_GLA). This gave learners flexibility to progress to the next ESOL level class over two years if they were unable to do it in one, which was especially important for displaced migrants who faced protracted uncertainty and disruptions to their learning (13\_Expert\_GLA).

### 3.2.2 COMMUNITY-BASED PROVISION

CLD units and third sector organisations generally provide classes in the community, focussing on lower levels, up to SQA level 3 (pre-intermediate). In addition to ESOL classes, third sector community provision also includes initiatives not branded as ESOL, but broadly related to language learning and socio-cultural integration, including language cafes and 1-2-1 buddying schemes. Community classes offer a more limited number of teaching hours per week compared to college classes, usually 2-4. Although the majority of community classes we learned about in this study were delivered by CLD or third sector organisations, staff from two of the three Glasgow colleges involved in the research also delivered a small number of outreach classes in the community, in partnership with Glasgow Life<sup>17</sup> or community organisations<sup>18</sup>.

Community provision is free at the point of access for all learners. Community organisations had traditionally delivered non-accredited classes, with teaching usually structured around learners' goals and aspirations, rather than a set curriculum. Most of the community classes across Glasgow, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen were non-accredited, however there seemed to be a trend towards the introduction of accredited classes in the community, although with significant local variation.

In Aberdeenshire CLD had moved over the previous 2-3 years from non-accredited to SQA-accredited provision for all its classes, which also entailed following the national ESOL curriculum. The move towards accreditation, however, hadn't happened in Glasgow City, where CLD (Glasgow Life) continued to provide exclusively non-accredited classes. In Glasgow city, however, several third sector organisations were already providing some accredited provision, or were looking into it.

The move to a credit model in community ESOL was particularly stark in Aberdeenshire, where it seemed to reflect a local interpretation of the new SFC funding model described in chapter 2: funding was understood to be conditional on delivering to the FE Colleges credit model, including making most ESOL provision SQA accredited. This interpretation of the new funding model also led to a very formalised division of labour between providers: third sector organisations provide for beginners, and those with literacy needs (up to Nat 2), CLD covers pre-intermediate levels (Nat 2 and up to Nat 3) and more advanced learners progress to NESCOL (the local FE college) (2\_Expert\_ABD, 3\_Expert\_ABD). This shift towards accreditation reinforced hierarchies and created tension between community providers, while, as noted in chapter 2, in some local authorities the change to the SFC funding model also created tensions between colleges administering SFC funds and community providers (COSLA 2018; Meer et al. 2019).

<sup>17</sup> CLD classes in Glasgow, including ESOL classes, are delivered by Glasgow Life, a charity set up in 2007 to deliver cultural and leisure services on behalf of Glasgow City Council.

<sup>18</sup> In the early 2000s, Glasgow and Edinburgh Colleges were responsible for coordinating and staffing most community classes, indicating a strong link between FE and community provision (Rice et al. 2004). Currently in Glasgow the involvement of colleges in community provision seems to be more limited than in the past, as only a small number of community classes were delivered by FE college staff. In Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, NESCOL was not involved in the delivery of community classes at the time when the research took place, although it had been in the past, working with employers to delivering outreach classes in the workplace (ET\_Hassan\_ABD).

In Aberdeenshire community providers made sometimes conflicting claims about learners' needs and preferences for accredited learning. Our interviewees from CLD emphasised that the move to accredited provision reflected learners' demand and that learners were encouraged but not obliged to sit tests (in-course assessments rather than intimidating final exams) and acquire SQA qualifications. There were, however, mixed views among our participants about whether all learners sought accreditation and whether SQA-accredited classes were appropriate for all learners, not only in Aberdeenshire but across all fieldwork locations. Some third sector providers were ambivalent about the drive towards accreditation: they pointed out that some of their learners did not want accreditation, and that the new emphasis on accredited classes and a standard curriculum did not sit well with the social practice model that underpinned their work:

**I have mixed views about that [credit model]. [...] I think it's quite restrictive and I think that if you're not careful your tutors land up teaching to the test, to the assessment [3\_Expert\_ABD].**

In Glasgow, unlike Aberdeenshire, changes in the SFC funding model did not alter the ways in which money was redistributed to different providers within the Community Planning Partnership, and funding for community ESOL was not tied to the delivery of accredited classes. Nonetheless, some community providers in Glasgow had also introduced or were looking to introduce some accredited classes, based on different considerations, including: a demand for accredited classes from some of their learners; lack of opportunities for community learners to pursue qualifications because of long college waiting lists; and funding considerations, since SQA accredited classes provide more teaching hours and require greater financial resources.

### 3.3 FUNDING

Different ESOL providers faced different challenges and pressures around funding.

In the college sector some of our interviewees discussed how the de-prioritisation of ESOL at policy level and changes in UK migration policy may affect ESOL funding and provision. College ESOL in Glasgow and the Glasgow area remained buoyant through very high demand; however, some of our interviewees wondered whether the de-prioritisation of ESOL at Scotland level may lead colleges in future to channel SFC funding into other popular subjects, such as childcare, to the detriment of ESOL (13\_Expert\_GLA). Our participant based at NESCOL, the FE provider for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, where 80% of ESOL learners were from the EU, expected lower enrolments in 2021-22, reflecting lower numbers of migrants coming to Scotland after Brexit and as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Both our NESCOL informant and ESOL practitioners based in Glasgow colleges noted diminished demand from EU migrants since the 2016 EU referendum (Hassan\_ET\_ABD; 13\_Expert\_GLA). Outside of the three areas focussed on in our project, one of our participants was made redundant from a rural college which no longer planned to offer ESOL (5\_Expert\_SCO). Future scoping research on ESOL in Scotland could help to clarify whether concerns about diminished learner cohorts or reduced funding have materialised across Scotland, which areas have been most affected and how this has impacted on provision and demand.

Community providers faced uncertainties around ESOL funding and capacity, as well as constraints on the use of available funding, following changes in ESOL governance. Across Scotland austerity cuts to local authority budgets had resulted in reduced capacity for CLD/community ESOL, not least because ESOL is not a statutory service (1\_Expert\_SCO). In Aberdeenshire, changes in SFC funding mechanisms to Community Planning Partnerships had made delivering ESOL much more challenging for community providers. Reporting requirements for community providers had been aligned to college ones, creating a lot of extra bureaucracy –which was, in the words of one of our participants, 'an absolute nightmare' (11\_Expert\_Aberdeen). A practitioner at CLD mentioned having to check learners' immigration status, and being asked to pass on learners' personal information to the college through which funding was

administered, in breach of CLD's data protection regulations (11\_Expert\_Aberdeen). A third sector provider pointed out that the new regulations resulted in prescriptive, straightjacketed provision, and made some classes unviable because they did not meet minimum recruitment, attendance or accreditation requirements (3\_Expert\_ABD). In Aberdeen one third sector provider had consciously avoided branding their language-related activities as ESOL or tapping into SFC ESOL funding so as to avoid the constraints that came with it. Their rationale for this was that it was much more in keeping with the organisation's ethos, while noting that the new funding model promoted a siloed approach to ESOL and stifled work connecting language to different aspects of integration and migrants' broader lives (15\_Expert\_SCO).

As already noted, in Glasgow changes to the SCF funding model made no difference to the organisation and delivery of community ESOL. However, this stream of funding was less significant than in Aberdeenshire, as only two of the most established third sector providers, Glasgow ESOL Forum and WEA, could access SFC funding redistributed through the local Community Planning Partnership; for both, it accounted for only a very small part of their ESOL budget. Among third sector providers, funding for their ESOL work had to be painstakingly sought from a range of funders, an approach described by one of our participants as 'patchwork' (10\_GLA\_SCO). As already noted, third sector providers had often stepped in to fill in gaps in ESOL provision; however, they mostly relied on ad hoc, short-term funding which did not support a sustainable growth of ESOL provision underpinned by a clear vision for the sector (see also Glasgow Community Learning and Development Strategic Partnership 2022:7). Glasgow community providers were not exempt from auditing requirements: they also had to report back to funders and provide evidence that their previous work had made a difference when applying for new or renewed funding. One organisation, for example, was asked by their funder to measure the number of their learners who moved on to college ESOL or achieved other educational qualifications; however, they could also provide qualitative evidence of how their ESOL class had made a difference to their learners' lives, such as improving their confidence or enabling them to do volunteer work in the community (EP\_GLA\_Martin).

Two important issues that emerged across our fieldwork locations, and across both college and community sectors, are:

- **Whether funders' expected outcomes aligned with providers' desired aims and learners' needs.** As already noted, the mismatch between SFC expectations and monitoring and community providers' approach to ESOL and aims was particularly stark in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen city.
- **What kind of outcomes can meaningfully be measured and how?** As one of our interviewees noted, things like numbers in classes, attendance and progression into education or employment may be easy to measure, while other things that learners look for and get out of ESOL classes, such as improved confidence, feeling connected and wellbeing, may not be, particularly for more vulnerable learners (1\_Expert\_SCO).

Both points have significant relevance given the emphasis in the Adult Strategy for Scotland 2022-27 on developing tools to demonstrate and communicate the impact of community learning.

### 3.4 COORDINATION

Across all our fieldwork locations providers had a long history of collaborating through local partnerships, and we found many examples of effective and innovative collaboration. Both the resettlement of Syrian refugees to different Scottish local authorities with little experience of supporting refugees and the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic were catalysts for cooperation across the ESOL sector and public/third sector services supporting refugees and migrants. Examples of collaboration included sharing expertise on working with particular cohorts of learners, opening up online courses to learners based in different local authorities, as well as sharing learning resources, opportunities for staff professional development and toolkits.



Coordination was also linked to funding, as the partnership model essentially asks providers to pull together their respective resources (coming from different funding streams) to plan and coordinate local provision, and some of this planning has involved the outsourcing of ESOL provision to third sector providers. High level decisions around funding streams and models did have a significant impact on the coordination of local provision, as noted in previous sections. In Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, the introduction of the new funding model had created tensions and competition for resources across well-established partnerships; it had also diverted energy and resources away from creative solutions towards figuring out administrative issues. One local authority interviewee remarked that stability around ESOL funding is what “allows providers then to be able to be more relaxed and creative again” and respond to learners’ needs (2\_Expert\_ABD). This point was also echoed by some Glasgow community providers, which noted that unstable funding affected community more than college providers, and pointed out that their work was shaped in important ways by policy and funding priorities (10\_Expert\_Glasgow).

Across all our fieldwork locations coordination was central to:

- The gathering and sharing of information about unmet demand or needs for specific cohorts of learners, which sometimes generated new initiatives and collaborations.
- The initial testing of learners so they could be put in an ESOL class at appropriate level.
- Communication and signposting of ESOL provision locally, and cross-referral of learners to various providers.

In Glasgow, coordination of provision was a major challenge, given the very complex landscape of ESOL provision and the levels of unmet demand. The local partnership had made the joint decision to invest in the creation of:

- an ESOL Access Register to operate a single waiting list across the city, and
- an ESOL Network to coordinate the testing of prospective learners and signpost them to different providers.

The development of these initiatives illustrates both the importance of joined-up approaches to provision and the difficulties of reconciling the agendas of different providers. The Glasgow ESOL Access project was launched in 2016 to facilitate better signposting of ESOL provision to learners and a more transparent and consistent approach to waiting lists across city providers. Learners wishing to access classes were asked to register their interest through the online ESOL Access Register; learners were also asked whether their level of English had been assessed in the past 6 months, and to indicate a preferred location for their classes, with a choice between Glasgow North-West, North-East and South. Learners were then invited to an assessment session to assess their level of English; they received a certificate (known as the ‘yellow certificate’) showing their level of English, and this information was fed into the Access Register so they could be assigned to an appropriate class (Meer et al. 2019:12-13). The ESOL Access Register was supposed to be used by both College and community providers to populate their classes, matching learners to existing provision.

At the time when fieldwork took place, the ESOL Network had failed to receive follow-on funding from Glasgow City Council, and the future of the centralised Access Register hung in the balance. While endorsing the general principle of joined up provision, our interviewees pointed out that the Register had not worked as intended, not least because of insufficient resources put into it and unstable funding. The current system was widely seen as complicated and impractical for both learners and providers. Information on the Register was not necessarily up to date (partly because asylum seekers wishing to do an ESOL class are a very transient population); there were also duplications on the system, as some prospective learners, failing to be assigned to a class in a timely manner, or in an area close to where they lived, registered several times. Learners were also not clear about the fact that they may be offered a college or (more often) a community class, leading to disappointment for some. Providers had to contact a large number of prospective students to fill a class. The community providers we spoke to did not draw exclusively on the ESOL register to populate their classes: in particular, organisations with a broader remit, such as integration networks or community development trusts, organised classes on the basis of their

own service users' needs, as well as referrals from other services. Colleges pointed out that it was easier for them to populate classes through recruitment events or referrals. Moreover, among college providers the 'yellow certificate' was not always trusted as a true reflection of learners' proficiency in English, and learners were sometimes tested again to ascertain their level despite having a 'yellow certificate'. While some FE providers tried to stay loyal to the register, others used it very little, and continued to operate in-house waiting lists. The Glasgow CLD partnership (which included FE as well as community providers) continued to use SFC ESOL funds to support the Glasgow ESOL register; however, it was decided that from January 2022 the Register would only record enquiries for learners wishing to pursue community ESOL, while Colleges would keep separate in-house waiting lists (Glasgow Community Learning and Development Strategic Partnership (2022)).

The importance of communication, marketing and signposting of ESOL provision locally, and of appropriate cross-referral to different providers, was highlighted across all our fieldwork locations. Information about new CLD classes in Aberdeenshire was shared with other ESOL providers as well as with local charities and agencies such as DWP. In Aberdeen, a third sector organisation had set up the Facebook page Learning English in Aberdeen, where providers could post information about their classes that would be easily accessible for potential learners (15\_Expert\_ABD). In Glasgow, providers had developed a system enabling community providers to refer learners to colleges, once they had achieved a certain level and were deemed ready and willing to move on to FE.

### **3.5 LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LEARNERS' LIVES**

One of the principle aims of the first Scotland ESOL strategy was to enhance the quality, as well as the quantity, of ESOL provision in Scotland. In their investigation of 'the scale, nature and quality of ESOL provision in Scotland', Rice et al. (2004: ii) highlight the qualifications and professionalisation of ESOL teachers and the development of a suite of SQA-accredited ESOL qualifications as key to the development of quality ESOL provision in Scotland. Although 'quality of provision' is not an issue we specifically set out to explore in this project, our findings strongly suggest that the quality or success of ESOL provision cannot be measured only through qualifications of teachers and learners. This doesn't mean that qualifications are irrelevant: indeed, most of the ESOL practitioners we spoke to across the College and community sectors had TESOL qualifications ranging from CELTA to master's degrees and valued opportunities for professional development. The professionalisation of the sector was generally regarded as a positive development and a source of useful knowledge and good practice. Some of our interviewees noted that college-based ESOL practitioners generally had less experience of working with literacy level learners, while expertise around this was more developed in community settings.

Some interviewees across the College and community sectors expressed concern that some very informal community initiatives led by non-qualified volunteers were branded as 'ESOL'; these initiatives were seen as 'valuable, but not the same' as ESOL (10\_Expert\_GLA). Interviewees also noted that the use of volunteers was common in ESOL, particularly in the community sector, with volunteers involved in supporting ESOL delivery as language support, classroom assistants, individual and group tutors. There was some concern that lack of resources in the face of high levels of unmet demand may lead to an overreliance on volunteers: useful conversations have emerged in the sector about best practice in working with volunteers, resulting in the publication of resources and toolkits (Education Scotland and Glasgow ESOL Forum 2018; Glasgow ESOL Forum 2020).

There were also different views among interviewees about the importance of qualifications for learners, and the related issue of whether accredited provision should be prioritised over non-accredited provision. Some interviewees pointed out that only SQA accredited classes offered learners a clear pathway to progress into Further or Higher Education, on an equal footing with UK students. Some interviewees saw college classes as the 'golden standard', since they offered a number of hours substantial enough to ensure quick progress in learning English or reported that learners preferred college to community

classes because they facilitated access to other educational opportunities. However, other interviewees pointed out that learners have different needs and aspirations, and community classes may be more suited to some learners; moreover, in some parts of Scotland, community ESOL may be the only option available to learners. Indeed, interviews with ESOL learners reinforced the point that different kinds of provision suited different learners (see chapter 4).

The key question emerging from our project, therefore, is not ‘what is ‘proper’ ESOL and what is not; it is rather, ‘what is language learning for, and how does it fit with learners’ needs, aspirations and broader lives?’ The ESOL practitioners and teachers we spoke to across the College and community sector agreed that language was one of the key barriers their learners faced in going about their everyday lives, and that language learning connected with many aspects of learners’ lives, ranging from social connections to wellbeing, and from employability to family and community relations.

**Well, I just think it [language] helps them to function, because without it they’re very much outside of their community, they wouldn’t speak to people. It just – it opens up other doors for them, and it gives them employability skills, it gives them the chance to make friends, to speak to their children’s teachers - you know, all the kind of things – those are the things that they tell us that they want, I want you to give me the language so that I can do that.**

*[12\_Expert\_GLA, College sector]*

**We were then very much aware that this [ESOL] was about survival, this was about employment, this was about viability, integration.**

*[2\_Expert\_ABD, community sector]*

For College-based practitioners ESOL was also an academic subject alongside others taught in FE; however, ESOL was seen as more than an academic subject, since its purpose was to facilitate learners’ ability to better function in Scottish society, a finding which echoes similar points made in Brown’s study of FE ESOL in Scotland (Brown 2018:123). Conversely, many community practitioners working in organisations offering holistic support to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants had, through their frontline work, developed an awareness of how important language learning was to improving their service users’ wellbeing and opportunities. Our interviewees had different understandings of integration and the policy agendas attached to this contested concept; nonetheless, they tended to agree that language learning was part of a broader process of settlement or ‘integration’ for their learners, which included economic, social, cultural, civic and political dimensions.

Our findings point to the importance of a joined-up approach to ESOL provision, connecting the ESOL sector and wider services supporting asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. As already noted, community organisations working closely with migrant communities were often best placed to gauge unmet demand and flexibly respond to it (see section 3.4). Initiatives to address the ESOL needs of particularly vulnerable learners, such as women fleeing gender-based violence, were the result of collaborations across ESOL and wider services (10\_Expert\_GLA). Some community ESOL providers also pointed out that input and support from wider services was needed to reach out to potential learners: for example, requests from trade unions and employers had been key to setting up workplace-based ESOL classes, while resources for outreach activities could make all the difference to the success of initiatives such as ESOL family learning and language cafes.

Our findings also point to the importance of centring learners’ diverse needs and aspirations when considering the future development of ESOL provision. This chimes with the strategic objective of improving ESOL learners’ access to “learning opportunities throughout all stages, changes and circumstances in their lives”, written into Scotland’s second ESOL strategy (Scottish Government 2015). For example, employability as a key aspect of economic integration featured prominently in the activities of both College and community providers. There were mixed views among our participants, however, about whether this was driven primarily by learners’ needs or by policy agendas. All College providers

involved in our project offered hybrid classes combining ESOL with vocational specialisms such as healthcare or business, or ESOL for Work modules; similarly, many community providers offered ESOL for work, or employability programmes with an ESOL component. Many providers were positive about this, recognising employment as a key motivation and aspiration for many learners (see section 4.2.1), which aligned to funders' emphasis on employability. Others were more sceptical, noting that employability was not a priority for all learners. As Brown (2018) notes, the emphasis on employability may create perverse incentives to focus efforts on learners with high levels of educational, linguistic and cultural capital, to the detriment of more vulnerable or marginalised learners. Although Brown is writing about ESOL in FE colleges, this point is also relevant to ESOL- and integration-related community services. For example, a practitioner at a successful charity working to support refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants to access the local labour market emphasised the great potential that many migrants had to contribute to the Scottish economy, as 'earners and taxpayers' (Rona\_EP\_GLA). The charity had dedicated schemes for healthcare professionals but also offered work placements and employability support in collaboration with a range of employers and worked in partnership with community and College ESOL providers to provide work-related English training when needed. The organisation received referrals from a variety of services, including Jobcentres, Colleges, community organisations and GPs; however, the manager added:

**I mean sometimes they're not appropriate referrals, like the Jobcentre is very bad at- They don't know what to do with people for whom English is a second language, and they just want them off their desks, so they punt them to us even though they don't have the English language level that we require. It doesn't matter how often you explain that to the job centre, they don't care.**

*[Rona\_EP\_GLA].*

This indicates that migrants with lower levels of educational, linguistic and cultural capital may not be as well supported from existing services. Moreover, not all migrants may be in a position to access the labour market for a variety of reasons, a topic explored in previous research in relation to asylum seekers and refugees (i.e. Meer et al. 2019) and explored in further detail in chapter 4 below.

## 3.6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we evidenced unmet ESOL needs and demand across each of our three fieldwork locations. Unmet demand was a particularly prominent issue in Glasgow city, where demand for both college and community classes far outstripped supply, as documented by the centralised waiting list operated by the Glasgow ESOL register. In Aberdeenshire, providing for small pockets of potential learners in remote areas was a challenge made more difficult by recent changes in the funding model.

The chapter has also explored in detail the differences and overlaps between accredited and non-accredited ESOL classes, traditionally the remit of FE colleges and community providers respectively. The chapter has illustrated how changes in the SFC funding model seemed to incentivise community providers to move to a credit model and to accredited classes. The shift towards accredited provision was particularly noticeable in Aberdeenshire and reflect a local interpretation of the new SFC funding model, although problems around its implementation have been documented in other local authorities (COSLA 2018). A key issue that emerged in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen is the extent to which the credit model can be reconciled to the social practice model that has traditionally underpinned community provision, and whether all ESOL learners necessarily seek or would benefit from accreditation.

The chapter has also shown how uncertainties about funding, reflecting both austerity cuts and the lack of a long-term vision for ESOL after the missed renewal of the Scotland ESOL strategy, impact both college and community providers. Across all fieldwork locations, third sector providers stepping in to fill in gaps in provision often relied on ad-hoc, short-term funding that was not conducive to a sustainable growth of ESOL provision. Our findings also explored the reporting requirements set by funders and show that funders' expected outcomes are not always aligned with providers' aims and learners' needs. The chapter further raises questions about what kind of outcomes can be meaningfully measured and how, noting that numbers of learners, attendance and progression into education or employment may be easier to measure than other things that learners look for and get out of ESOL classes, such as improved confidence, wellbeing and social connections (see section 4.2.2).

Our findings illustrate the complexity of the landscape of ESOL provision, and the centrality of collaboration among different providers is to successful partnership work. We noted how important collaboration was to: a) communicating, marketing and signposting of ESOL provision locally; b) testing and cross-referrals of learners to various providers; c) gathering and sharing information to identify and address unmet demand or the needs of specific cohorts of learners. We highlighted examples of effective and innovative collaborative work, including those around the creation of a centralised ESOL Register in Glasgow, while also outlining different agendas among providers that may not always easily converge or align. Our findings also point to the importance of a joined-up approach to ESOL provision, connecting the ESOL sector and wider services supporting asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

The chapter has argued that learners' needs and aspirations in the context of their broader lives should be central to ESOL-related policy work and provision. This reflects the views of most the ESOL practitioners we spoke to across the community and college sectors. Practitioners saw ESOL as more than just a subject, and language learning as part of a broader process of settlement or 'integration' for their learners, which included economic, social, cultural, civic and political dimensions. The importance of centring learners' diverse needs and aspirations in ESOL policy and provision also chimes with the strategic objectives of the most recent Scotland ESOL strategy (2015-2020).



# Chapter 4: Learners' experiences of language learning

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In this chapter we turn to explore in more detail ESOL learners' experiences of language learning, and their views on how this related to other aspects of their lives. As other research has shown, ESOL learners recognise the importance of English in their daily lives and their English language needs, as well as the value of English as a global language, while continuing to value their linguistic and cultural heritages and switching between different languages in different contexts (Cooke and Simpson 2009, Cooke and Peutrell 2019). Factors that facilitate language acquisition in the 'host' country include exposure to the dominant language, previous linguistic and cultural capital, and incentives to learn the dominant language; however, these factors are mediated by 'conscious and unconscious processes, access to resources, emotional responses and bodily experiences' (Netto et al. 2019: 856).

In the discussion that follows we consider our learners' experiences of accessing ESOL classes and activities, including some of the barriers they encountered. We discuss their motivations for learning and their understandings of how this would help their settlement process. Throughout the discussion we draw attention to the diverse characteristics of the ESOL learners who took part in this study and consider how aspects of migrant status, gender, and urban/rural location nuanced their experiences. When discussing the experiences of specific learners, we note their migration status: for displaced migrants we note whether they are asylum seekers or refugees, while for voluntary migrants we note their route to the UK (i.e. through the free movement of EU citizens, via a worker or family visa). A fuller picture of our participants' demographic details can be found in Appendix 1.

## 4.1 PATHWAYS AND ACCESS TO ESOL LEARNING.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, our research showed that there was no single pathway or route by which learners accessed ESOL. For some it had been a priority early on arrival in Scotland, while others had been living, and often working, for many years before they found time and opportunities for ESOL learning and activities. Whilst not determinative, migrant status and location seemed to play a part in some of the different experiences we heard about, and as discussed in Chapter 1, these overlapped in particular ways in our research due to the ways in which we were able to meet and recruit learners as participants.

The Glasgow-based learners who took part in the study were asylum seekers and refugees who had arrived in the UK independently, not through resettlement schemes. All but one, who had arrived in 2018, they had been in Glasgow for less than a year at the time of interview. Finding and enrolling in ESOL classes had been an early priority for most, however pathways into ESOL were varied with migrant status and access to wider formal and informal support playing a role. The high level of unmet demand for ESOL learning in the city made it hard for some of them to access the kinds of ESOL provision they preferred, especially where their preference was for college courses. However, interestingly, none of our learner participants had used the Glasgow ESOL register, discussed in chapter 3, to access ESOL classes.

All 3 of the asylum seekers interviewed, and 1 of the refugees, were enrolled in community classes, having accessed these as part of a wider programme of support from a third sector community organisation working with asylum seekers and refugees that organised in-house ESOL classes for their clients. By contrast, all the college learners who took part in our Glasgow fieldwork were female refugees who had recently moved to the city through the family reunion route, their partners having arrived as asylum seekers several years earlier. Their pathways to ESOL learning in a formal college environment had been

supported through social work referrals or because their husbands were, or had been, ESOL students at the college and had been able to facilitate their enrolment. Our findings suggest that word of mouth and personal contacts remain key even in the presence of a centralised ESOL register for Glasgow. They also suggest that asylum seekers may find more difficult to access oversubscribed college ESOL classes compared to relatively more secure refugees.

Izad was an asylum seeker who had been transferred to Glasgow from a reception centre in the South of England and had been in the city for less than 8 months before we met him. He had joined a community ESOL class and attended twice a week. He spoke very highly of the class but was also very keen to enrol in a more formal college course. However, he was struggling somewhat to understand the process for enrolling and was keen for more information about this.

**Actually... I just found one site for enrolling, and I... registered my information. And I'm just waiting for any informing... from... them. I haven't received anything yet... Actually, it was about maybe... three months ago... If you could please send me [the link to the website for registering], I can watch it, and maybe, maybe it's a different one. I'm not sure that that site is the certain site for going to the college, you know.**

*[Izad, Asylum Seeker, Glasgow]*

Nafisa had arrived in Glasgow just before the start of lockdown, joining her husband through the family reunion route after he had been granted refugee status. She had managed to register for ESOL classes directly at a local college with the help of a social worker, bypassing the Glasgow ESOL register.

**I go straight [to college] - I'm looking on the website for college to an exam, online exam. And after I did that exam, [my social worker] helped me in the registration. She is a social worker in the Red Cross, she did that for me. I am so glad for her.**

*[Nafisa, Refugee – family reunion, Glasgow]*

In Aberdeenshire, our participants were almost all economic migrants, many of whom had arrived from Central and Eastern Europe during the period of free movement. The majority had been living in Scotland for many years, managing with varying degrees of confidence and competence in English. They explained that prioritising ESOL learning had to take second place, and fit around very busy schedules involving, often precarious, employment in low-paid jobs, with shift working and family responsibilities taking up all their time (see also Netto et al. 2019: 850-853).

Justina was very focused on improving her English and had moved to Scotland from England partly to take up an opportunity to study full-time at college with a fee-waiver, which she said had not been available in England. However, prior to moving to Scotland, as a single mum juggling caring responsibilities and work, she had not begun ESOL classes for several years after her arrival in England:

**No, no. For first, no, no, was nothing, no any thought talked about studies. It was just work, work, work. And my daughter was too young, and son was too young to take care of her. So mm-mm. And after one year I divorced my husband. I was single. Single mum, yeah, with two children.**

*[Justina, EU free movement, Aberdeenshire]*

In Scotland, she combined a full-time ESOL course with evening work, finishing college at 4pm and starting a shift at 4.30pm - which she said, 'was not easy, I can tell you'.

For this group of learners, there had been little by way of signposting or support into language learning. Their routes into ESOL activities were based almost exclusively on word-of-mouth recommendations, information that they had picked up through migrant networks, or in some cases at workplaces or libraries.

Difficulties accessing classes in Aberdeenshire were less about unmet demand, and more about distance to available classes, and sometimes providers' perception of lack of demand. Financial considerations linked to the cost of travel, as well as fees for college courses, could also create barriers for some learners. Svetlana had moved to a town in Aberdeenshire to join her Scottish husband 3 years before we met. She was attending a variety of local community based ESOL classes, but desperately wanted to join a more formally accredited college course.

**When I arrived here, first of all what my dream, I want to learn my English and I go to college and ask how can I get English lesson. Now it's in [the town where I live] only full-time. Full-time it's price £6,000, for the English it's too expensive. But for part-time £250 but you always need to go to Aberdeen, it's you waste maybe about three hour, for way... Every year, I always went before start time college, I always comes and say, I have a few people in [my town] who want to get English class. Can you make a group in [my town]? And all the time I get the same answer, No we can't, just go to Aberdeen.**

*[Svetlana, Spousal visa, Aberdeenshire]*

Tatyana, a single mother with a teenage son, had also found the issue of distances and costs of language learning in more rural contexts problematic. She had completed one year of study at her local college in the town where she was living, having been able to access a fee-waiver and a small bursary. However, she had still needed to combine her full-time studies with shift work in a town some distance away, first in a fish factory then a hotel, to support herself and her son. She was accepted for a second year at college but dropped out due to the distances between the two towns.

**After two years I changed my job as I wanted to work in this Hotel [in a different town], I started an English, ESOL course, in [the town where I live]. I even applied and then got a place for a second year, but the trouble is a big dog, I have a German Shepherd, so the problem is I had to find a place to live. I had no car. Just my son and the dog.**

*[Tatyana, EU free movement, Aberdeenshire]*

The development of digital provision during COVID had an unforeseen benefit in breaking down some of these geographical boundaries. Svetlana finally enrolled for a college course in Aberdeen, joining online. College classes in smaller rural locations merged and were able to increase learner numbers as a result. Online language cafes attracted people from across Aberdeenshire, as well as from Aberdeen City. This also resulted in a greater mix of learners from all over the world and with a wider range of migration experiences and backgrounds, something which many learners appreciated (see section 4.2.2 below).

In all our fieldwork locations and across all groups of learners, we found that family responsibilities, especially for women with very young children, could further delay or interrupt access to ESOL learning. Having been to community ESOL classes for a few years, Danute dropped out when she went on maternity leave:

**I must again come back because maybe seven years I not go to English classes because I have kids. Small kids, and busy, busy. Not find the time... And you know I think before I went home better might be for me to learn the English but at the home when you have kids you don't think about some learning, just thinking about kids, family, home forever, that's it.**

*[Danute, EU free movement, Aberdeenshire]*

In this respect also, online provision had some advantages. In the language cafés which we observed over this period, parents (both mothers and fathers) often attended with young children present, either in the background, or joining in the activities of the group. Teachers and learners both commented that this was possible in ways that had been more difficult to organise without crèche facilities or suitable premises during face-to-face classes. Even for parents of older children the flexibilities of this kind of online activity could facilitate fitting attendance around other roles. At one point when Danute's sons joined a judo class

at the same time as the language café, she attended for several weeks on her phone from the carpark whilst she waited for them. Although this was hard even in the very relaxed language café activities and might have been harder in a more formal class, Danute was clear that it was much better than having to give up altogether.

## 4.2 MOTIVATIONS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

### 4.2.1 WORK AND EMPLOYABILITY

Work and improving employment prospects were a strong and often primary motivation for the learners in our study. Both economic and displaced migrants frequently mentioned work as the main reason they needed to improve their English. However, their migrant status, different rights to employment and experience of work in Scotland, as well as their previous education and work experience in their countries of origin, family roles and childcare responsibilities, all came together to produce a complex and nuanced set of practical experiences and understandings of the relationship between ESOL and employability.

None of the learners we spoke with in Glasgow were currently in employment, although all but one of them had advanced secondary and/or university education. They were mainly very recent arrivals and the asylum seekers among them had very limited rights to work. All but one of those with refugee status were women with children who had recently joined their husbands in Glasgow and were not immediately seeking employment, although they were all highly educated and wanted to work in future. Their strategies and plans for improving their employability combined (sometimes advanced) English language learning with more vocational courses and work experience through volunteering. Yet whilst they hoped this would lead to getting a 'good' job, well-matched to previous experience, they had not yet had an opportunity to test this on the labour market. Soraya, who had been in Glasgow for nearly 4 years at the time of interview and had an incomplete university degree from her country of origin, was planning to combine ESOL learning with volunteering, and hoped to be accepted for a university degree in pharmacy.

**Yes, after college I really would like to attend... take part in a volunteer work to improve my English, and also to... gain experience. Because it's really important if, when – because in here I don't have any experience, and for apply in university and in a job I need to have experience... Today [my ESOL teacher] told me that... because you want to study pharmacy it's better to attend, take part in a volunteer work that related to medical things. And he introduced me a website, St Andrews First Aid Volunteering. And I will apply.**

*[Soraya, Refugee – family reunion, Glasgow]*

In contrast to our other Glasgow-based learners, Hussain had no formal education beyond 6 years of primary schooling and no work experience outside of farming and catering in his home country. Unlike the other displaced migrant learners, his understanding of and ambitions concerning educational and work opportunities in Scotland were quite vague. When asked about his reasons for learning English he didn't mention any specific job-related aspirations or plans, saying simply:

**So I can understand, and I speak well, people I can make understand what I need, what I want. And is very important for me, to learning English, because I'm living now in Scotland, so I have to learn. And if I not speak well, so I can't understand somebody. So I'm trying to learn in my best, and I need to learning English, improve my English to speak with somebody.**

*[Hussain, Asylum seeker, Glasgow]*

The migrant workers we interviewed in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire had a somewhat different set of experiences and perspectives on the relationship between ESOL and employability. They were almost all currently in employment and having to combine their language classes and other ESOL activities with

paid work. Several were working night shifts or back shifts to fit around daytime classes, and some really struggled with this, sometimes dropping out as a result. Although all the learners we spoke to had at least intermediate level of English, several said they had arrived with very little knowledge of the language. Nonetheless they had been able to find work, many because of their EU migrant status which came with no restrictions on accessing the labour market, challenging the notion of ESOL as a prerequisite for employability. Danute, for example, originally came to Aberdeenshire to pick fruit and sort potatoes. After several years she began some community based ESOL classes and one of the tutors directed her towards a job in dressmaking.

**And after I- some- we started to go to English course with my friends. One lady ask me because I'm dressmaker, clothes, she ask me could you manage sewing. I tell her yes of course. I start go to interview with my friend because she better speak with me, English, because my English was zero. I speak German not English. That remember. After, I have one month to try on how I can do the job because zero English but I know what I must do. First day, like that, I can manage. I know every machine, how to use in my job. I can manage it. After one month they tell me I can stay longer time.**

*[Danute, EU free movement, Aberdeenshire]*

All the same, most of those who had found work with very limited English language skills had become stuck in low paid jobs and many saw ESOL learning as a key component in improving their prospects for getting a better job, asserting their rights as employees, or developing a career, especially if they were planning to stay long term. Justina was particularly clear that her wish to be able to negotiate directly with her employer and stand up for her rights as a worker had been a defining motivation for improving her English. She explained that in England she had worked in a factory predominantly staffed by migrants from Central and Eastern Europe like her; her co-workers with better English would translate their English boss' instructions for everyone.

**And if you don't agree with something you, of course, you can take that person like translator, but I always want to communicate with someone face to face. And the people was too quiet. If they don't like something what was told or something it just, head down and standing and do everything like he [English supervisor] want. I said, 'Nope!' If he said, one time he said, 'from today we will work every Saturday, and I don't care, I don't mind you need more [time] off. I came to him and said, by myself, with my very broken English, I said, 'no, I won't do Saturdays. I am single mum. I need to clean the house I need to wash clothes; I have to take care for my kids'. [...] And I decided, I need to know English.**

*[Justina, EU free movement, Aberdeenshire]*

Improved English language skills were linked to employability outcomes by most of our participants and several learners had been able to progress their careers as a result of improving their English language skills, whether through community-based classes and ESOL for work initiatives, or through gaining accredited learning and pursuing pathways through ESOL followed by vocational college courses. Others, however had found that better English was not all they needed, and that the careers they had originally envisaged might simply be beyond their reach. Difficulties with recognition of wider qualifications and work experience, complicated differences in professional structures or demands, as well as structural inequalities and barriers linked to age, gender, education and professional background could all come into play here.

Kristof had arrived in Scotland in 2012, already in his late forties and with limited English language abilities. He found a job quite easily working as a cleaner in a care home, but also took on a course in travel and tourism with ESOL at college in the hope of eventually getting a job similar to the one he had in his country of origin, where he had run his own real estate agency. As well as struggling to make the progress he had hoped for in English, he concluded that there were also other barriers to his career plans.



**Yes, I thought that it help me to improve my English, and I thought about too on the first time work in the real estate agency, maybe travel tourism, but I can't, this is my English too weak. So, for example, if you work in the estate agency, this is a lot of problems, right problem, law problems, you must contact the public notary, the lawyers etc. It's too difficult in English for me, too difficult. In [his first language] sometimes even, but in different levels of problems to explaining the clients, you know. So English is a barrier for me, the - not to work in this.**

*[Kristof, EU free movement, Aberdeen City]*

Svetlana was also keen to go to college so she could get better work than her current job at a local food processing plant. She was sanguine however about her prospects of working at a similar level to her previous experience as a lawyer:

**Just now I very want to improve my English, for me very important, talk with people very fluently and I want maybe one day- I work now in [food processing] factory... I was a lawyer in [my home country], but I want to something maybe be supervisor or something like that, just for protection and just for myself.**

*[Svetlana, Spousal visa, Aberdeenshire]*

Our discussions with ESOL learners showed that, at least for some, achieving a certain level of English was not always a prerequisite for getting a job. However, learners associated better English with improved employability in terms of access to less precarious, better paid and more rewarding work, and with their ability to assert their rights as employees with more control over their career progression and work-life balance.

Those with the strongest orientation towards employability, particularly where this was a focus on career progression and gaining more professional opportunities, were the most likely to seek formal learning opportunities leading to accredited qualifications, and with an emphasis on written as well as oral language competencies. However, many also saw great value in more community-based activities and person-centred approaches, as Kristof explained:

**I think that in college, in classroom was the atmosphere classroom. The teacher, pupils on the table, it is - but in the language café was the absolutely different, because this meeting was in the café. We speak of everything, we - "Hello, do you want café - tea, coffee?" when you arrive, everything in the relationship. So for me it was the good experience, not only the books, page by page.**

*[Kristof, EU Free movement, Aberdeen]*

The sociability and emphasis on relationships which Kristof refers to were crucial aspects of language learning for most of our learner participants, and those with the time and resource, as well as access to multiple opportunities for learning, often sought out a variety of classes and activities to join. Hua, who had moved to Aberdeen as a dependant linked to her husband's British National (Overseas) visa had followed a formal learning programme very focused on achieving IELTS qualifications before leaving her country of origin. She explained that since arriving in Scotland she was much more concerned about improving her speaking and aural comprehension than writing and grammar and was no longer really interested in accredited classes.

**They're more formal, and they help me to improve my English from, like, grammar or speaking, writing, reading, like, these kind of thing. But now, my practice always focus on speaking, because I think maybe writing is not so important now for me, because in most occasion, I need to speak with the people, or I need to pick up the phone from the local people. So I think listening and speaking is the most important aspects I want to improve**

*[Hua, dependant visa, Aberdeen]*

Whilst she was continuing some online classes with a private tutor, she was keen to attend a local language café which she and her husband both saw as an opportunity to meet others, acclimatise to the local accents of volunteers and tutors, and learn more about the city and day-to-day life in Scotland.

## 4.2.2 SOCIAL CONNECTIONS, SELF-CONFIDENCE AND EMPOWERMENT

Beyond issues around employability, the chance to meet other people and make connections was explained as an important motivation for attending language classes by the majority of learners in our study. Whilst this was linked to sociability and mental well-being, it also had quite practical implications for people's experiences of life in Scotland. Language classes were described as places where learners could get important information about day-to-day life, from both teachers and other learners. When asked what she liked about her ESOL class at a FE college in Glasgow, Deniz explained:

**First of all, I know my English skill and first of all, I have speaking opportunity in my class, and it's very important for me, speaking. And I saw different culture, and some of my friends and I meet them..., some of them like me, some of them is other problems. And... I... not confuse... comfortable, like, it is easy for me. And not only English skills, about citizenship, about social life, daily life. And we learn in class, in our teachers give some advice about the UK life for us, and it's very useful I think.**

*[Deniz, asylum seeker, Glasgow]*

This combination of opportunities for sociability, the forging of connections with other learners and the valuable role teachers could play in providing access to information about life in Scotland was, as we shall see, described by some as a form of empowerment and classes as a site of solidarity.

The importance of language classes as a site for sociability and support for general well-being was especially marked amongst the asylum seekers in our study. For those without employment and struggling with feelings of isolation in a new city and stress from dealing with the asylum system, language classes could be a real lifeline. Ganjeenah had arrived in Glasgow in 2020. He combined language classes with volunteering with a local community development project, seeing both as important to improving his English (and his familiarity with local accents) and as vital to providing him with social connections, a sense of purpose in life, and a way to deal with stress:

**Yeah, there are other reasons, like... actually first of all the reason is, to improve my English skills. And second reason is like I was feeling bored at home – I was bored and fed up from home, just I was like this home is eating me, eating my mind. So I just wanted to go out and make some friends, I want to communicate with some people so that they also understand me and I also understand them.**

*[Ganjeenah, Asylum seeker, Glasgow]*

Ahmad had also arrived in 2020. His English language skills were already quite advanced, and he didn't feel he needed ESOL as such: he had attempted to get a place on a vocational college course, which he saw as key to good employment prospects in Scotland but was still waiting to hear back. He attended an ESOL community class, not so much for improving his English, but for the opportunities it provided to keep his stress levels down, build social connections and 'have some fun':

**It's stress-free class. But when most of the times I spend home. I came from a very big family, and a very connected community. And since I am here, I am very alone, have not much friends, we cannot interact much. So... when I'm in the class I feel there are some people. So, the level of my stress and being loneliness is low... and also make new friends.**

*[Ahmad, Refugee, Glasgow]*

Other learners who were without work, for example those who had come to Scotland on family visas or as dependants, accompanying or joining partners on skilled worker routes, explained the importance of language classes in quite similar ways. This was especially the case of those who had arrived either just before or at the start of some of the strictest lockdowns of early 2020. For many, online language classes became the only regular source of communication and social contact beyond their immediate household. Abdul, for example, had arrived in Aberdeen on a family visa, joining his wife who had already gained the right to reside in the UK, just before the first lockdown of 2020. He had advanced English language skills and spoke fluently but was a regular attendee at an online language café. As the strictest lockdown rules eased, he spoke of his joy in bumping into other cafetistas in the city, and the importance of the chances his language learning activities afforded him to meet with people from other countries and cultures. Those in employment might not need language classes so much as a focus for daily activity or a way to get out of the house. Nonetheless, learners in this study who were in regular, paid employment, also talked about wanting to make better social connections locally and at work, as important motivations for their ESOL activities.

For many learners ESOL's role in increasing opportunities for sociability was also linked to a feeling that improved language skills were a boost to their self-confidence and independence, especially in relation to their ability to access services and claim rights. Soraya had arrived in Glasgow in 2018 to join her husband who had gained refugee status. With a young child to look after, she had not yet entered the job market, but explained how important she had found improving her English to being able to deal confidently with schools and other institutions, as well as for making vital social connections.

**Firstly, I came to Glasgow, I couldn't speak English. So, I wasn't confident, and I feel really sad and upset when someone spoke to me, because I couldn't answer them. But then, when I attend ESOL classes, it really helped me to learn English, to improve my English... For example... before I came to... ESOL classes, even I couldn't do my, I couldn't register my daughter in school, and I asked somebody to help me. But now I am really confident to do it.**

*[Soraya, Refugee – family reunion, Glasgow]*

Carla's migration story and language learning history were quite different from Soraya's. She had moved to Aberdeenshire looking for work, with excellent English, in fact she had a background teaching English through volunteer programmes in her home country. Nonetheless, she had enrolled for 'ESOL for work' classes and attended a language café.

**I think [learning language is important] also to be able to express ourselves in the best way in different situations even if I go to the doctor. Even I need to call like the driver's licence council to help me with anything, so I think the main point is, for me, is being able to use the English to solve for my life independently, independent. Of course, making friends is a second but the main point is this, should be able to do the things by my own, not oh can you help me because this is very annoying if you need to have other people to help you.**

*[Carla, EU free movement, Aberdeenshire]*

For more advanced learners like Carla, increased confidence in their communication skills and ability to navigate daily life successfully was also linked to a need to master local accents and increase spoken language skills. Some felt that their learning in their home countries had been very much focused on formal reading and writing skills and was less helpful for the day-to-day needs of life in Scotland. In any case, almost all the learners involved in our study, regardless of migrant status, gender, length of stay or even language ability, talked about the value of improving their English in order to be able to deal more confidently with formalities linked to their migration status but also with healthcare professionals, utility companies, schools and other institutions without relying on others for help.

For some learners, such implicit aspects of citizenship and empowerment linked to language learning were made explicit. These learners drew a direct association between their language learning and their right to be ‘full members’ of society, participating economically, socially and politically and claiming their rights to visibility and voice. As Svetlana put it:

**I live this country, I paid this tax and I want know everything and I want be member, full member who have my voice who can have my opinion as well.**

*[Svetlana, spousal visa, Aberdeenshire]*

These claims to citizenship were not about accepting a kind of assimilation or striving to be part of a monolingual or monocultural society. Learners were very clear that one of the important things they gained from ESOL activities was access to a multicultural group of other learners. They spoke in animated ways about how meeting and making friends with people from other countries enriched their experiences and brought them a sense of belonging. Both Soraya and Kaszia described the friends they had made from around the world as the ‘best’ part of their ESOL experiences both at college and in community-based classes:

**I found many friends from different countries, from international countries... I found all my friends in ESOL classes and because I didn’t – before I – when I came to here and before I went to this class in college, I didn’t have any friends, I didn’t know anyone, but yeah I found... I made friends from different places, ESOL places, and... I really enjoy that.**

*[Soraya, Refugee – family reunion, Glasgow]*

**I get some friends. We did some network here, thanks to them. We have a lot of friends from different countries now. It is the best part of being here.**

*[Kaszia, EU free movement, Aberdeen]*

The multilingualism inherent in ESOL spaces was described by learners as providing access to a relaxed kind of sociability where people could talk and gain confidence without worrying about their language abilities. Beatriz had come to Aberdeen as a dependant, accompanying her husband, a skilled oil worker. She already had very good knowledge of English, but talked about how important language classes were to her as she was very keen to meet others, stay busy, make connections and because they offered ‘a place you can relax and talk because no-one’s English is perfect’. For other learners, language classes were a place not only to learn English but where they could relax in a multilingual environment, sharing languages, helping others with language related, or other problems and sharing experiences and strategies. In one of the Aberdeenshire language cafés that we observed for several months as part of this research, learners switched frequently between languages but also between roles as learners and teachers. Spanish and Portuguese speakers used their competence in each other’s languages to clarify the teacher’s instructions as well as to share information about day-to-day issues. Speakers of a number of East European languages helped each other out in similar ways. One practitioner working for a charity that organised ESOL classes for asylum seekers and refugees told us that learners often valued the opportunity ‘to speak in their own language with somebody else in the same class from the same place’ (EP\_GLA\_Cheryl); indeed, interpreters were sometimes called in to help at beginner-level classes, particularly with new learners who had no previous knowledge of English. In contrast to some learners’ experiences of other everyday contexts in Scotland, ESOL classes and activities stood out as places where their broader linguistic competences and skills were valued as an asset not viewed as a hindrance.

The opportunity to share experiences, whether of going through the asylum system, dealing with the home office, coping with lockdowns, or juggling roles as essential workers and parents, language learning activities were also spaces where learners gained a sense of social solidarity. Some learners talked explicitly about ‘building solidarity and support networks with other learners’ [John, BN(O) visa, Aberdeen], others, like Kristof referred to the importance of ‘meeting people with the same problems as me’ [Kristof, EU free movement, Aberdeen].

## 4.3 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we have explored learners' experiences, particularly as these relate to access to and motivations for language learning. We have seen that learners are diverse and unequally positioned, not only in terms of their migrant status but also their previous socio-economic and educational backgrounds, their gender, family roles and current location within Scotland. All of these factors impact on experiences of language learning and can produce lines of difference but also similarities across intersecting groups and identities.

Migrant status and geographical location emerged as key determinants affecting access to ESOL classes and activities. The different landscapes of ESOL provision in Glasgow, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire outlined earlier in this report created different challenges for learners. Word of mouth referrals and knowledge embedded within the asylum-seeker, refugee and migrant communities could play a central role in accessing classes, but also created disadvantages for those with less dense social connections. Financial considerations linked to the cost of travel, as well as difficulties fitting time for commuting to classes in around already busy work and family schedules contributed to barriers for some learners. Caring responsibilities, especially for women with very young children, could delay or interrupt access to ESOL learning.

Pressure of time and a need to prioritise work had led many economic migrants to delay language learning activities, and some had been living and working in Scotland for several years before they began ESOL classes. This raises questions about assumptions about language competence as a prerequisite for employability per se, although often learners with this experience had become trapped in low paid jobs and sought out ESOL classes in a bid to progress their careers.

Employability was a strong motivation for joining ESOL classes across all groups of learners, but one which was nuanced by migrant status, experiences of employment both in Scotland and in learners' countries of origin, social status and educational backgrounds. Migrant learners who already had experience of precarious and/or low paid work in Scotland talked about ESOL and improving their language skills as important not only to improving their employment prospects, but also to asserting their employment rights. ESOL activities played an important role in helping learners to forge important social connections, to other learners, to teachers and volunteers. These connections also had practical implications, improving access to information about institutions and day-to-day life in Scotland. Social connections and increased self-confidence were described by many learners as linked to autonomy and empowerment. Learners at all levels and from all backgrounds spoke about the importance of being able to deal with formalities and institutions without relying on others for help. They also described ESOL classes and activities as a source of solidarity and linked this to claiming rights and participating in social, economic and public life.

Learners valued the role that their ESOL teachers, volunteers and other learners played in 'brokering' access to information about life in Scotland. This was understood as knowledge which could help them better to navigate the bureaucratic norms and social demands placed upon them by the system (Cooke and Peutrell 2019). Whilst several learners spoke of hoping that ESOL learning would help them to 'fit in' or feel at home in Scotland, their joy in the multilingual exchanges and multicultural friendships and connections that their ESOL classes fostered stood out against any suggestion of a simplistic one-way process of 'integration'.



# Chapter 5: Conclusions

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This report has explored the challenges faced by the ESOL sector in Scotland at a time of significant and multifaceted change. This change relates to: a) UK migration policies, which are already shaping demand for ESOL and the profile and needs of learners in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK (Rolfe and Stevenson 2021); b) ESOL governance and the broader landscape of adult education in Scotland. Giving the current policy vacuum around ESOL, the main aim of this report is to contribute insights to ongoing debates about what exactly will replace the Scotland ESOL strategy. The report, however, also raises issues that chime with insights and policy-related work from other parts of the UK, notably around unmet demand, underfunding and lack of a vision for the sector (see for example Simpson 2015, 2019, Rolfe and Stevenson 2021). It also raises questions about the relationship between language learning, migrants' broader lives and migrant 'integration' which resonate with political and public debates in the UK and internationally (see for example Simpson and Whiteside 2015, OECD 2021).

Almost 20 years since the Rice report, the ESOL sector in Scotland still needs to be 'adaptable enough, and sufficiently well-resourced to be able to cope with continuing change, -spurts in demand and changes in the kind of student requesting classes' (Rice et al. 2004:80). The report has highlighted the importance of joined-up thinking across different policy remits (notably education and migration), and of a joined-up approach across college and community ESOL providers, to meet the challenges that the ESOL sector currently faces. It has emphasised the diversity of ESOL learners, and the importance of centring an appreciation of learners' wider lives and language needs in ESOL-related policy. We conclude with some questions that should, in our view, inform future evidence-based policy initiatives around ESOL.

## 1. WHO NEEDS ESOL, AND WHO IS ESOL FOR?

The report has highlighted the diversity of ESOL learners, particularly with regard to migration status, geographic location, gender, and educational background. It has also evidenced unmet demand across Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen city and Glasgow. ESOL is currently publicly funded, and many ESOL learners are entitled to apply for a fee waiver or means-tested bursary for classes in FE colleges, making college ESOL free at the point of access for many. Learners are also potentially able to access free community provision. Lack of sufficient provision and other barriers to access highlighted in the report, however, means that even those nominally entitled to a free ESOL class may not be able to access ESOL provision, or not ESOL provision best suited to their needs.

The most recent Scotland ESOL Strategy framed English language learning as a right, rather than an obligation, starting from the principle that 'everyone in Scotland has the right to access high quality learning' and that 'the acquisition of English language skills is important for participation in a democratic society. Without adequate language skills, people can neither fully participate in their local and national communities nor can they meet their full potential' (Scotland ESOL Strategy 2015:2). However, currently resources are targeted primarily at:

- displaced migrants, who are the focus of three subsequent New Scots Refugee Integration Strategies and related delivery projects that explicitly address and resource ESOL needs (Scottish Government 2018; Scottish Government et al. 2021). Some refugees arriving through UK-wide resettlement schemes also have access to pots of funding for ESOL classes and related activities from the Home Office (COSLA 2017) and more recently, the Department of Levelling UP and Communities.
- migrants in low-paid jobs and/or on income support, as eligibility for a fee waiver is based on complex criteria around income, residency and migration status ( see section 3.2)

It is right that resources should be focussed on the more marginalised and poorer migrants; however, ESOL needs are not limited to these groups. Indeed, evidence from this and other research indicates that potential learners may be left out because they are ineligible for college fee waivers (currently £6,000 for a F/T ESOL course in Scotland), because of insufficient local community or college provision, or because of other barriers around travel, childcare or work (see i.e. Netto et al. 2019, Rolfe and Stevenson 2021). ESOL policy has to be informed by a clear picture of ESOL demand and needs, and to articulate a clear vision of who ESOL is for, and how it can be made accessible to all potential learners.

## **2. WHAT IS ESOL FOR?**

The report has highlighted different motivations and needs among ESOL learners. These relate to employability and improved job prospects as well as to social connections, confidence, and independence in carrying out everyday activities. Our findings point to the importance of centring learners' diverse needs and aspirations in ESOL policy, which chimes with the strategic objective of improving ESOL learners' access to "learning opportunities throughout all stages, changes and circumstances in their lives", in Scotland's second ESOL strategy (Scottish Government 2015). The experience of England has shown the limitations of an ESOL agenda very narrowly focussed on employability, to the detriment of other aspects of learners' lives (Cooke and Simpson 2009, Rolfe and Stevenson 2021).

Employability in ESOL needs to be thought through so that it does not chiefly focus on serving the needs of the economy and employers (Cooke and Simpson 2009), but also reflects learners' aspirations for career progression and their ability to demand the rights and entitlements as workers. ESOL policy needs also to be informed by an understanding of migrants' broader lives, beyond the world of work.

## **3. HOW CAN ESOL BE ADEQUATELY RESOURCED?**

A funding strategy should be a key part of a long-term vision for the ESOL sector: adequate funding is essential to enable the sector to cope with continuing change, to deliver high quality ESOL and to avoid an overreliance on unpaid volunteers. At a time of cuts to public spending, shrinking budgets for adult and community education and economic uncertainty this is a significant challenge. Policy-related work on ESOL may offer some useful ideas and starting points. Writing about the England context, Rolfe and Stevenson (2021) argue that community provision should be given the same stability of funding as college and other provision supported by the Adult Education Budget; they also argue that barriers to ESOL can be effectively addressed through flexibility in funding and provision. Rice et al. (2004) suggest that college ESOL/EFL in Scotland can attract fee-paying students from abroad, and these resources could subsidise ESOL for other learners. They also suggest that employers actively recruiting foreign workers with ESOL needs 'could be expected to contribute towards teaching costs' (ibid:31).

# Appendix 1: Interviewees' profiles

## NOTES ON ANONYMISATION

Expert, ESOL practitioner and ESOL teacher interviewees were given the option of being fully anonymous (referred to by pseudonym exclusively); referred to by the name of their organisation only; or referred to by name of organisation and job role. We have modified information about participants' roles where we felt this may make them too easily identifiable.

We collected demographic details about our learner interviewees, but in the interest of anonymity we omit full information about their country of origin. We note their citizenship as EU/non-EU/UK, and refer to the broad region they are from, as well as their migration status. Until recently the UK immigration system was underpinned by a division between EU citizens, enjoying freedom of movement within the EU, and citizens from non-EU countries, who were subjected to much more stringent rules to move to the UK.

All the names assigned to EP/ET and learner interviewees are pseudonyms.

## EXPERTS

Interview label	Role	Location
1_Expert_SCO	Local government employee, Glasgow	Scotland-wide remit
2_Expert_ABD	Local government employee, Aberdeenshire	Aberdeenshire
3_Expert_ABD	ESOL Provider, Aberdeenshire	Aberdeenshire
4_Expert_ABD	CLD, ESOL, North Aberdeenshire	Aberdeenshire
5_Expert_SCO	Chair of NATECLA Scotland	Scotland-wide remit
6_Expert_SCO	Policy-experienced ESOL practitioner	Scotland-wide remit
8_Expert_GLA	Glasgow Life Learning Services Co-ordinator (CLD)	Glasgow
9_Expert_ABD	ESOL Co-ordinator Aberdeenshire	Aberdeenshire
10_Expert_GLA	ESOL Provider, Glasgow	Glasgow
11_Expert_ABD	CLD, Aberdeenshire	Aberdeenshire
12_Expert_GLA	ESOL coordinator, Glasgow area College 1	Glasgow area
13_Expert_GLA	ESOL curriculum head, City of Glasgow College	Glasgow area
14_Expert_GLA	ESOL coordinator, Glasgow area College 2	Glasgow area
15_Expert_ABD	General Manager, Grampian Regional Equality Council	Aberdeen

## TEACHERS (ET) AND PRACTITIONERS (EL)

Interview label	Role/organisation	Location
ET_ABD_Hanna	Community ESOL teacher (CLD)	Aberdeenshire
ET_ABD_Alice	Community ESOL teacher (third sector)	Aberdeenshire
ET_ABD_Irene	Community ESOL teacher (CLD)	Aberdeenshire
ET_ABD_Jane	Community ESOL teacher (CLD)	Aberdeenshire
ET_ABD_Hassan	College ESOL teacher/co-ordinator	Aberdeenshire
EP_ABD_Susan	Community ESOL volunteer (third sector)	Aberdeenshire
EP_ABD_Katie	Community ESOL volunteer and project co-ordinator (third sector)	Aberdeenshire
ET_ABD_Alexa	Community ESOL teacher and co-ordinator (third sector)	Aberdeen
ET_ABD_Kathy	Community ESOL teacher (third sector)	Aberdeen
EP_ABD_Ruth	Community ESOL volunteer (third sector)	Aberdeenshire
ET_GLA_Joyce	College ESOL lecturer	Glasgow
EP_GLA_Amy	Glasgow ESOL Forum	Glasgow
ET_GLA_Agnes	St Rollox Outreach	Glasgow
ET_GLA_Mary	Community ESOL teacher	Glasgow
EP_GLA_Martin	Development Trust worker	Glasgow
EP_GLA_Rona	Bridges Programme	Glasgow
EP_GLA_Cheryl	Govan Community Project	Glasgow

## LEARNERS

Pseudonym	Citizenship	Migrant status	Location	Year of arrival in the UK	Gender	Family status	Occupation	Education/ Training
Learner_ ABD_Magda	EU (Central Eastern Europe - CEE)	Settled status	Aberdeenshire	2008	F	Living with partner and children	Factory worker (clothes manufacturing)	Unknown
Learner_ ABD_Justina	EU (CEE)	Settled status	Aberdeenshire	2010	F	Single mum living with child	Security	Vocational college (nursing)
Learner_ ABD_Tatyana	EU (CEE)	Pre-settled status	Aberdeenshire	2016	F	Single mum living with child	Unemployed	Unfinished university degree (accountancy)
Learner_ ABD_Rosa	Dual national non-EU (South America) and EU (Western Europe)	Pre-settled status	Aberdeen	2020	F	Single mum living with child	Unemployed	Anthropologist
Learner_ ABD_Svetlana	Non-EU (Eastern Europe)	Spousal visa	Aberdeenshire	2018	F	Married to UK citizen, living with husband	Factory worker (food processing)	Lawyer
Learner_ ABD_Danute	EU (CEE)	Settled status	Aberdeenshire	2009	F	Married to EU national, living with husband and 5 children	Curtain making	Seamstress
Learner_ ABD_Abdul	Non-EU (Middle East)	Family visa	Aberdeen	2019	M	Married to dual national (naturalised UK citizen), living with wife and children	Unemployed	Lawyer
Learner_ ABD_John	British Overseas national (non-EU, Asia)	British National (Overseas) visa	Aberdeen	2020	M	Married to non-EU national	Postgraduate student	Civil servant
Learner_ ABD_Hua	Non-EU (Asia)	Dependant visa	Aberdeen	2020	F	Married to British Overseas National	Teacher (working online with students from own country)	Teacher
Learner_ ABD_Beatriz	Non-EU (South America)	Dependant visa	Aberdeen	2020	F	Married to non-EU national	Teacher	Lawyer
Learner_ ABD_Kaszia	British (naturalised), originally from EU CEE country	British Citizen (Naturalised)	Aberdeen	2013	F	Married to EU National, living with husband and children	Factory supervisor, food processing	Management/ HR



Learner_ ABD_Kristof	EU (CEE)	Settled status	Aberdeen	2012	M	Divorced, living alone	Carehome cleaner	Real estate
Learner_ ABD_Carla	Dual national, non-EU (South America) and EU (Western Europe)	Pre-settled status	Aberdeen	2020	F	Single, living alone	Disability support worker	International development
Learner_ ABD_Carlos	EU (Western Europe)	Settled status	Aberdeenshire	2014	M	Married to EU national, living with wife and child	Factory worker (food processing)	Warehouse manager
Learner_ ABD_Zoya	EU (CEE)	Settled status	Aberdeenshire	2013	F	Married to EU national, living with husband and child	Factory worker (food processing)	Supermarket manager
Learner_ GLA_Ahmad	Non-EU (Central Asia)	Refugee status	Glasgow	2020	M	Married with children, family living in country of origin	Unemployed	University degree
Learner_ GLA_Izad	Non-EU (Middle East)	Asylum seeker	Glasgow	2020	M	Single	Unemployed	University degree
Learner_ GLA_Nafisa	Non-EU (East Africa)	Refugee (family reunion)	Glasgow	2020	F	Married with children, husband secured refugee status ahead of family	Unemployed	University degree (computing science)
Learner_ GLA_Soraya	Non-EU (Middle East)	Refugee (family reunion)	Glasgow	2018	F	Married with one child, husband secured refugee status ahead of family	Unemployed	Incomplete university degree (pharmacy)
Learner_ GLA_Deniz	Non-EU (Middle East)	Refugee (family reunion)		2020	F	Married with children, husband secured refugee status ahead of family	Unemployed	Teacher
Learner_ GLA_Ganjeenah	Non-EU (South Asia)	Asylum seeker		2020	M	Single, living with parents, also seeking asylum	Unemployed	Musician
Learner_ GLA_Hussain	Non-EU (Central Asia)	Asylum seeker		2020	M	Single	Unemployed	Primary school education

# Appendix 2: Guiding principles for ESOL provision in Scotland, 2007-2020

## **INCLUSION**

- Provision which supports migrant and refugee settlement, and aids inclusion and full participation in Scottish society and the economy.

## **DIVERSITY**

- Provision which recognises and values the cultures of learners and the contribution that New Scots make to society and the economy.

## **QUALITY**

- Provision which is high quality, easily accessible, cost-effective and uses best practice in the teaching and learning of languages

## **ACHIEVEMENT**

- Provision which contributes to wider national literacies targets and promotes attainment and personal and social achievement.

## **PROGRESSION**

- Provision which supports and encourages routes into further learning, employment and in local community life.

(Source: Scottish Government 2007:5; Scottish Government 2015:7).

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