

**ASSET: ASYLUM SEEKERS SKILLS, EMPOWERMENT AND
TRAINING**
A project funded by ESF Equal

**Improving the experience of asylum seekers in ESOL,
literacy and numeracy classes**

FINAL REPORT (3rd year)
For LLU+
London South Bank University

Charmian Kenner
Consultant

Educational Studies
Goldsmiths College London
New Cross, London SE14 6NW

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Developments in the ASSET project 2004-05

The ASSET project targets teachers from a refugee background, and those teaching asylum seekers and refugees, whether in mainstream adult education provision or in voluntary organisations including refugee community groups. The brief for LLU+ has been to improve the experience of asylum seekers in ESOL, literacy and numeracy classes.

From 2002-04, the LLU+ course ‘Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners’ (an accredited London South Bank University course giving 1 unit at HE level 1, 15 CATS points) was delivered to organisations in a variety of locations around the UK and Ireland. The course was found to be an excellent way of enabling participants to teach effectively in general ESOL classes and in ESOL literacy classes.

The Certificate Programme in Adult Literacy, Adult Numeracy and ESOL Education has also been delivered as part of the ASSET project. This is a part-time, in-service professional development course for experienced teachers working in one of the three specialist areas covered by the course. Evaluation of the course showed that it enhanced practitioners’ generic skills as an adult and further education teacher, whilst at the same time giving them an advanced understanding of their specialism.

In 2004-05 the following developments took place in the ASSET project:

- LLU+ began offering the ‘Training the Teacher Trainers’ course to cascade training in teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners for teachers of asylum seekers and refugees
- Advice, support and training on teaching ESOL, literacy and numeracy were offered to an increasing number of organisations around the country
- The Voluntary Sector ESOL Network was set up to share good practice and update participants on Skills for Life initiatives
- Workshops were provided to support tutors in using the online training elements for the ESOL Core Curriculum

Evaluation was carried out for each development and the results are discussed in this report.

Evaluation questions for Year 3 of the LLU+ ASSET project

- 1) How is the Training the Teacher Trainers course equipping participants with transferable skills in the area of teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners?
- 2) What types of advice, support and training are of most use to organisations teaching ESOL to asylum seekers?
- 3) How does the Voluntary Sector ESOL Network enable participants to share good practice and discuss issues and concerns with others from the voluntary sector?
- 4) How can support best be offered for people using the online training elements for the ESOL Core Curriculum?

Methods used in the evaluation

Observation of the course ‘Training the Teacher Trainers: Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners’ and **interviews** with participants on the impact of the course

Questionnaires and interviews with representatives of organisations teaching ESOL to asylum seekers on the support which they require from LLU+ and their response to the advice, support and training input they receive

Observation of Voluntary Sector ESOL Network meetings and **interviews** with participants on how the Network can support working with ESOL learners

Observation of online training workshop and **interviews** with participants on the delivery of the workshop and its impact

Summary of findings

- 1) How is the Training the Teacher Trainers course equipping participants with transferable skills in the area of teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners?

The course builds on participants' own experiences as learners on the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* course

Micro teaching enables participants to thoroughly understand theoretical issues and how to present class activities

Preparation for micro teaching and debriefing helps participants clarify key issues

Evaluation of micro teaching is sensitively conducted to highlight strengths and weaknesses

The course is continually adapted to participants' needs

- 2) What types of advice, support and training are of most use to organisations teaching ESOL to asylum seekers?

Organisations choose LLU+ because they are seeking specialised help stemming from hands-on experience

Organisations can set up a flexible dialogue with LLU+ about their requirements

Organisations appreciate advice, support and training tailored to their needs

Small voluntary organisations particularly benefit from advice, support and training

- 3) How does the Voluntary Sector ESOL Network (VSEN) enable participants to share good practice and discuss issues and concerns with others from the voluntary sector?

VSEN meetings have highlighted issues specific to the voluntary sector

- *Staff recruitment difficulties*
- *ESOL tutors being given the responsibilities of the coordinator role*
- *The need to meet other ESOL practitioners within the voluntary sector*
- *A particular need for training and resources*
- *A particular need for sources of advice and guidance*
- *The need for support in obtaining funding for ESOL work*

VSEN meetings offer updates on Skills for Life, networking and training opportunities

Activities are planned to stimulate participants' learning

VSEN sessions introduce participants to the PDC

- 4) How can support best be offered for people using the online training elements for the ESOL Core Curriculum?

Training sessions enable some teachers to access the online training elements for the first time

Working with the online training elements improves teachers' capacity to use the ESOL Core Curriculum

Support from colleagues and trainers helps understanding of the online elements

Online activities are appreciated for their flexibility and enjoyment

A balance of online and offline activities is helpful

Summary of recommendations

The 'Training the Teacher Trainers' course is an excellent way of cascading training on 'Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners' and should continue to be made available to teachers of refugees and asylum seekers

LLU+ should be funded to deliver advice, support and training to small voluntary organisations around the country

Voluntary Sector ESOL Networks should be set up by other PDCs in order to offer updates on Skills for Life, networking and training opportunities

Voluntary Sector ESOL Networks should include training on how to obtain funding and how to represent the needs of voluntary organisations to funders

Training workshops should be offered widely in order to stimulate use of the online elements of the ESOL Core Curriculum and produce feedback on the online activities

FINDINGS IN DETAIL

- 1) How is the Training the Teacher Trainers course equipping participants with transferable skills in the area of teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners?

The *Training the Teacher Trainers* course was set up in autumn 2004 as a route to cascading the LSBU accredited course *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*. Successful completion of the *Training the Teacher Trainers* course leads to LLU+ associate trainer status. LLU+ will then be able to contract people who have taken the course to run *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* in the future, using the published materials. In this way, the number of people able to run the Basic Literacy course will be extended to keep pace with demand.

The *Training the Teacher Trainers* course is a six-week, 30-hour course with additional private study hours. In order to take the course, participants must have:

- an ESOL qualification
- completed the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* course and successfully completed the assignment
- substantial ESOL experience, including experience of teaching learners with a beginner level of literacy
- some training experience

The course covers the theoretical underpinnings of *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* relating to the development of reading and writing skills, methodology and classroom activities, dyslexia and learning styles. The course objectives of *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* and the aims of course activities are considered in detail. A key component of the training is micro-teaching of activities from *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*.

The course is followed by an assessment procedure which, if successfully completed, leads to LLU+ associate teacher trainer status. The procedure involves running the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* course with an LLU+ member of staff and being evaluated by the co-trainer. If a positive evaluation is received, the status of associate teacher trainer is gained.

A typical session on the *Training the Teacher Trainers* course consists of:

- Welcome and objectives
- Micro training (participants present sections of a particular session from *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*)
- Preparation for next week's micro training by considering theoretical issues underpinning that topic and key points to emphasise in the activities
- Evaluation of the session

The course builds on participants' own experiences as learners on the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* course

Course participants for *Training the Teacher Trainers* were coming each week from as far away as Dublin, Sheffield and other areas of the North of England. They all showed considerable interest and dedication and stated that this was because they had gained so much from previously taking the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* course, and found the current training well-organised and well-managed.

Three participants from Sheffield commented that they had been using resources and activities from *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* in their work, having found the course's focus on literacy unusual and useful. One person stated that she had never previously been trained specifically to teach literacy. The course had given her the tools to do so and to empower her students. For example, one of her students had written a letter to their children's primary school to protest about a problem with school uniform. By addressing the issue of dyslexia, the course had also helped this teacher to make a breakthrough with a student who had been struggling for more than a year just to write her address. After four sessions using picture cards to represent words (such as pictures of 'hat' and 'apple' to remind her of 'happy') the student had become much more confident because 'she could "see" letters from pictures'.

Participants commented on the progression they were making from being learners on the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* course initially, to understanding the theory behind the course and how to deliver it. They also noticed how the course was developing; for example, there was a different emphasis in some activities than there had been when they took the course.

Micro teaching enables participants to thoroughly understand theoretical issues and how to present class activities

Micro teaching involves the course participants being split into small groups, each of which prepares a particular section of a session from *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*. In each group, everyone is ready to teach the section but only one person is actually called upon to do so.

Each micro teaching session lasts 15 minutes. Micro teachers begin by outlining what their input will cover and then present one or more activities used in *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*. They invite comments and questions from the class and respond to them. In this way the micro teaching sessions reprise the content and experiential learning style of *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*, with the addition of 'meta-commentary' in the shape of discussion on how to teach the course.

Participants commented that micro teaching was a very good method of training, because although they had already done the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* course 'I don't think everything goes in till you have to teach it yourself...it means looking at it with different eyes'. The background reading they were required to do gave a more in-depth understanding, and the need to analyse the organisation of each session 'makes you look at the topics and think about why they were ordered that way'. Complex issues such as dyslexia took time to 'settle in', so the extra input and opportunity for discussion made this possible.

For example, a micro teaching session on ‘Raising awareness of dyslexia’ (the first part of Session 3 from *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*) began with the micro teacher asking ‘who knows someone with dyslexia?’ The class responded with examples of friends and relatives. In small groups, they then identified characteristics of dyslexia for one of the people they had mentioned, with the micro teacher circulating to facilitate discussion and ask questions.

Each group was then asked to contribute one of the characteristics they had discussed, with the micro teacher building up a list on a flip chart. Class discussion was encouraged to amplify the points made. The micro teacher rephrased points to highlight theoretical issues (for example, ‘reading problems’ was rephrased as ‘limited sight vocabulary’). She also expanded on points made (for example, explaining that research on ‘global thinkers’ who can concentrate on the whole rather than the parts – a common characteristic of people with dyslexia - shows they tend to have a particular learning style).

The micro teacher was well prepared and able to answer complex questions such as ‘how can people with dyslexia have good visual ability if they have visual problems when reading?’ She was also able to link different comments made and bring out further points, thus enhancing theoretical understanding.

The micro teaching session finished with participants working in pairs to read a case study of Ali, a Bangladeshi learner with dyslexia. Participants had to underline parts of the description that related to dyslexia and identify which characteristics of dyslexia were being exhibited. As the micro trainer circulated between pairs so that participants could raise questions with her about the material, she once again demonstrated considerable command of the theoretical issues involved.

Further micro teaching sessions for Session 3 from *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* dealt with identifying students with dyslexia, screening students with very basic literacy, dyslexic learning styles, how to teach learners with such styles, and handwriting issues. In each of these sessions, theoretical and practical questions were raised and discussed, including:

- How can teachers distinguish between difficulties arising from first/second language transfer and those arising from dyslexia?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of learners starting with print or with cursive handwriting?

Other activities used to stimulate discussion included:

- Each participant being given a card with a learner characteristic and asked to decide if this is typically connected with the right-hand side of the brain or the left-hand side – then going to stand on the right or left side of the room accordingly, finding out which other characteristics have been taken to that side and discussing with other participants whether they have chosen the correct side
- Each participant writing their name using the hand they do not usually write with, discussing the difficulties they experienced when doing so, and relating their own feelings to how learners might feel when facing a new script.

Preparation for micro teaching and debriefing helps participants clarify key issues

Each week, trainers helped participants prepare for the following week's micro teaching through activities and discussion. For example, when preparing to teach Session 4 from *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*, participants first looked at the aims of that session through a matching exercise linking aims with activities. They then discussed the underpinning philosophy of the course, identifying main principles as: learning styles theory, student-centred, the importance of context, starting from whole texts, experiential and multi-sensory learning.

Further groupwork then took place on the topic of phonics, which is part of Session 4, to clarify participants' understanding of the difference between synthetic and analytic phonics. This was followed by an activity on teaching phonics in context, and a roleplay in which participants had to debate why contextualising phonics was important. Each of these activities was designed to support participants in preparing their own micro teaching for the following week.

After each micro teaching session, the trainers helped participants reflect on issues arising. For example, the dyslexia sessions raised the question of whether it was too simplistic to associate particular learning styles with particular hemispheres of the brain. The trainer pointed out that it depended on the level of understanding of the teachers being trained: if the concept of the left or right brain was new to them, then it was more important to ensure they had a general awareness of possible differences and how these could affect their students. Through examples such as these, the trainers encouraged participants to consider how they could help other teachers improve their teaching.

Evaluation of micro teaching is sensitively conducted to highlight strengths and weaknesses

Observers for each micro teaching session include another person from the group that prepared the session, and two or three other participants. The status of observer is indicated by a symbol such as wearing a hat or a flower, thus giving an air of light-heartedness and decreasing the sense of tension for the micro teacher.

Feedback is written on post-it notes – yellow for strengths, and pink for things that could be improved. Trainers then collect the post-it notes (thus dissociating the feedback from any particular observer) and read out some of the strengths first, then raise any weaknesses, and finally return to more strengths. As one micro teacher commented, this 'sandwiching' of feedback helps to take on board weaknesses while retaining confidence from the strengths.

Examples of strengths noted by observers referred to both content and teaching approach, such as 'good knowledge of the topic', or 'sympathetic manner'. Weaknesses were put forward in the spirit of constructive criticism, pointing out issues such as being specific about the time allowed for a particular activity, or clarifying the task.

Feedback from trainers to individuals is not given in this whole-group context, but rather when participants co-train on *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*. This

is considered a more appropriate time to deal with individual needs. The peer feedback given in micro teaching sessions draws attention to significant issues and stimulates all participants to think carefully about their own teaching through observing others.

The course is continually adapted to participants' needs

Activities for *Training the Teacher Trainers* take on board the feedback of participants in the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* course. When LLU+ staff found that contextualising phonics work was typically thought too difficult and time-consuming, they devised a roleplay activity for *Training the Teacher Trainers* in which a trainer and a participant discuss this issue.

Feedback on *Training the Teacher Trainers* was also taken into account as the course progressed. Each session began with feedback on issues raised the previous week. For example, a session on dyslexia triggered a number of questions and at the beginning of the following session the trainers therefore explained that a video on dyslexia would be available to watch in the breaks. This video was experientially-based, designed for parents of dyslexic children to give them a sense of how it feels to be dyslexic, and would help to increase course participants' understanding of the issues.

With regard to delivery of the training, new approaches were tried if previous ones had run into difficulties. For example, each week the aims of one of the sessions on *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* needed to be clarified in preparation for the following week's micro teaching. Putting participants into small groups to do this, followed by re-grouping and then feedback to the whole group, was found too time-consuming. Whole-group feedback only was tried instead, but was a static and lengthy experience. So on the next occasion, small groups were given cards each showing one aim and asked to match the aims to activities on A4 sheets. Participants then walked around the room to pool ideas by writing them on flipchart sheets stuck on the wall. This was a more dynamic exercise and rapidly stimulated discussion.

2) What types of advice, support and training are of most use to organisations teaching ESOL to asylum seekers?

Five organisations were contacted regarding the advice, support and training they had received from LLU+ via the ASSET project:

BEC (Bede Education Centre), an adult and community learning centre in Southeast London, received pre-inspection consultancy involving advice and observations

SAVTE and REEP, both voluntary organisations in Sheffield working with ESOL learners including refugees and asylum seekers, received basic literacy training for volunteers working with ESOL learners

CAVE (Community and Voluntary Education), a voluntary organisation in South London, received training on ILPs, and advice and support on running provision

Basic Skills Agency ESOL Section in Wales, via which basic literacy training was delivered to teachers in organisations including Welsh Refugee Council and South Riverside Community Development Centre

Organisations choose LLU+ because they are seeking specialised help stemming from hands-on experience

Most organisations turned to LLU+ for advice because they had already been in contact with the Unit and were impressed by its capacities and its reputation. One interviewee described LLU+ as '*the* place for research and information to do with basic skills especially ESOL' and 'at the forefront of developing new teacher training qualifications', explaining that it was therefore the obvious place to choose when seeking help. Another co-ordinator had done her Core Curriculum training with LLU+ and found the staff very knowledgeable. Another had found a week-long training course from LLU+ for her class teachers successful and decided to request input for her volunteer tutor training.

LLU+ staff were seen as having hands-on experience which they brought to advice, support and training, in contrast to some consultants who were relatively removed from involvement. The practical ideas for teaching offered by LLU+ were found to be challenging and interesting. Staff taking the training courses spoke very positively about how they could use what they had learnt and apply it directly to their classroom work. The trainers were found to be approachable, and staff were not afraid to ask even the most basic questions, whereas 'sometimes especially if people are from a posh place like London they frighten you'.

LLU+ staff were also valued as having knowledge of the specific needs of asylum seekers and refugees: 'they have experience of working with our kind of learners – asylum seekers and refugees are quite marginalised'. LLU+ staff understood, for example, that these students were particularly affected by issues such as childcare or health, and structured their advice to take these matters into account.

Organisations can set up a flexible dialogue with LLU+ about their requirements

Organisations were able to negotiate a programme with LLU+ for advice, support and training depending on their particular needs. One organisation had emailed LLU+ staff with a list of points with which they required help, emphasising that they would like a focus on classroom observation. In another organisation, LLU+ worked in consultation with the co-ordinator to select aspects from a week's training course on basic literacy, and adapt these to produce a one-off evening course suitable for volunteer tutors. In another, the co-ordinator sent her initial ideas for help to LLU+, and was then pleased to receive a phone call checking back with her to make sure her needs had been correctly interpreted: 'I was asked 'Is this the angle you want?' and I realised it was....I didn't know the correct questions to ask'.

Organisations also felt able to keep in touch with LLU+ to follow up issues resulting from advice, support and training. As one person commented, 'I always feel able to ask for more', whilst another said 'I know I can ring and say what do you think? – they give you the impression there's no barriers'. Another co-ordinator found LLU+ pro-active in following up the training with suggestions for useful websites and material on 'Dyslexia and Bilingual Learners'. This ongoing contact enabled organisations to fully implement new initiatives and was likely to lead to further requests for consultancy from LLU+.

Organisations appreciate advice, support and training tailored to their needs

One organisation had benefited from a pre-inspection observation of classes in ESOL and Literacy, with verbal feedback to tutors and further discussion with the organisation's co-ordinator. This was directly relevant to the kind of observation that took place in the inspection. LLU+ staff also observed a teacher doing an initial assessment, and then discussed aspects to prioritise when deciding which learners to admit to which class. Other forms of assessment such as ILPs were approached similarly. A report from LLU+ highlighted key issues in assessment as part of the learning process, and the need for clear objectives and differentiation in classroom planning. The co-ordinator organised her time accordingly to support tutors before the inspection, focusing on differentiation and planning for the right level. The organisation also created a new scheme for tracking students' progress. They followed LLU+ advice to concentrate on improving teaching and learning, rather than producing paperwork for the inspection. This approach was indeed found to meet the inspectors' main concerns, and the inspection had a successful outcome.

In another case, a co-ordinator realised her organisation needed help regarding planning, assessment and the recording of achievement. A session of several hours with an LLU+ staff member enabled her to reflect on good practice, leading to an overhaul of procedures and paperwork, and the confidence to run a session on diagnostic assessment for her colleagues. The ILP was re-written and students were provided with a folder containing this together with their initial, diagnostic and formative assessments. The co-ordinator reflected 'It's interesting to think how much we've done in a year'.

An organisation that specialised in providing one-to-one tuition to clients and then helping them take the next step towards group classes needed advice regarding assessment. Two half-day sessions provided by LLU+ included input on this issue and

led to producing a student record that suited the organisation, making it ‘really easy when reviewing the six months one-to-one – we can refer to the initial assessment and see what they have achieved, and when we send the learner to a group or other provision they can go with that sheet of paper to show the level they’re at’. Previously some learners had become bored with repeating the same topic over and over again, but now there was proof that they had mastered it and could progress. The training activities such as roleplays had also put the tutors in the position of the learner, making them remember that ‘these learners have a life, a history – it’s important not to patronise them’.

Small voluntary organisations particularly benefit from advice, support and training

Refugees and asylum seekers often prefer to attend classes at small voluntary organisations that have the flexibility to adapt to their varied needs. However, these organisations tend to have little money available for staff training and development, and therefore were especially grateful for the ASSET-funded opportunity. As one interviewee put it: ‘Being in the community/voluntary sector, Skills for Life passed us by – we weren’t sought out for training’. She described the LLU+ input as ‘inspiring...it felt like a real treat’, emphasising the value of ‘three hours with someone who really knows and is incisive’.

Another interviewee underlined the importance of training to provide the best possible service to students: ‘We are voluntary but not amateur’. She described the advent of the Core Curriculum as ‘a shaky time for the voluntary sector delivering ESOL – I was panicking’ because ‘as a voluntary organisation you’re very tiny – all these new things come from the Government and you can’t be funded for training’. She found the LLU+ staff supportive and reassuring and commented ‘I wish I’d called them earlier – I would have saved a lot of wasted emotion’.

Organisations could make use of the advice, support and training received to cascade the ideas into their own systems. For example, one co-ordinator incorporated activities from the LLU+ sessions, particularly the ‘hands-on’ practical ones, into the training she ran for volunteer tutors. Another co-ordinator took the same approach and commented ‘It’s kickstarted us – now if you see our training programme you’d be amazed – we extended it to include two sessions on how to use the Core Curriculum, how to plan sessions and do diagnostic assessment’.

3) How does the Voluntary Sector ESOL Network enable participants to share good practice and discuss issues and concerns with others from the voluntary sector?

The Voluntary Sector ESOL Network (VSEN) was set up by LLU+, funded by ASSET and the Central London Skills for Life Professional Development Centre. The Network is open to ESOL teachers and coordinators of ESOL provision working in voluntary sector organisations.

The aims are:

- To provide an opportunity for networking and an information exchange about ESOL provision in the voluntary sector
- To provide Skills for Life updates
- To identify key issues for ESOL providers in the voluntary sector and explore ways forward
- To consult voluntary sector organisations offering ESOL provision to ensure that LLU+ meets the professional development needs of the sector in relation to Skills for Life
- To widen knowledge of resources available at the Central London Skills for Life Professional Development Centre
- To offer training through workshops at VSEN meetings

The VSEN resulted from an initial one-day event set up by LLU+ in May 2004, funded by ASSET and the Central London Skills for Life PDC, for people working in ESOL in the voluntary sector. 51 people attended from 43 organisations, including Iranian, Somali, Tamil, Turkish, Vietnamese and Latin American community groups. Stalls were provided by the Basic Skills Agency and Kings College London. The programme included discussion groups on key issues for ESOL in the voluntary sector, a tour of the PDC and a choice of workshops on differentiation or learning styles. Evaluations showed a very positive response, with participants wishing to continue such meetings, particularly in order to network and receive training.

LLU+ has since run three VSEN meetings: in October 2004, February and June 2005. Each has included an update on current Skills for Life issues and a training workshop.

VSEN meetings have highlighted issues specific to the voluntary sector

Staff recruitment difficulties

Staffing is a key issue, with voluntary organisations having particular difficulty in recruiting tutors, support assistants and volunteers.

ESOL tutors being given the responsibilities of the coordinator role

Small voluntary organisations often do not have a dedicated ESOL coordinator, with classes being set up by other staff in the organisation and ESOL teachers being contracted to teach the classes. This means that teachers work in isolation, with no ESOL manager to refer to. They are asked to take on responsibilities that go beyond their experience and training, with nowhere to turn for support and advice.

The need to meet other ESOL practitioners within the voluntary sector

ESOL tutors want the opportunity to meet with colleagues from other organisations, to share good practice and discuss issues and concerns.

A particular need for training and resources

In organisations without an ESOL coordinator, teachers have to carry out coordinating tasks and take decisions that require specialist ESOL knowledge. However, their training has not equipped them for this role. Voluntary organisations play an important part in providing classes for beginners, but some staff have insufficient background and resources for this area. Although organisations have the Skills for Life documents, they are uncertain about how to use them. Many tutors are also uncertain about how to incorporate employment issues into ESOL, for example teaching job search to students.

Members of the VSEN have therefore voiced their desire for professional development opportunities, and for information about the new teacher training framework, rights to training, and employers' responsibilities and obligations. In particular, they would like to know how to support part-time tutors in obtaining qualifications. Training needs to be geared to the voluntary sector and should be flexible – for example, through distance learning or weekend meetings – because of problems in arranging cover. Some VSEN participants also expressed the desire for an external advisor or mentor, who could act as a 'critical friend' and advise on provision and delivery.

Training topics suggested by VSEN members include: advice and guidance, ICT and ESOL, effective use of ILPs, developing schemes of work, teaching basic literacy, and working with volunteers.

A particular need for sources of advice and guidance

Organisations need to know where to refer learners for advice and guidance or specialist support (for example, for dyslexia).

The need for support in obtaining funding for ESOL work

The voluntary sector needs to obtain funding for ESOL but funding applications are found difficult to prepare. It is hard to make funders aware of the diversity of needs experienced by the sector and the challenges involved in meeting them (such as the need for flexible differentiated teaching). Support could help organisations to become clearer about what funders expect in an application, and how to explain the particular difficulties and requirements of the sector.

VSEN meetings offer updates on Skills for Life, networking and training opportunities

Each VSEN meeting has brought in experts from LLU+, the Basic Skills Agency, NIACE to update participants on changes in Skills for Life and other key areas.

Topics have included:

- New ESOL skills for life qualifications
- New NIACE publication for the voluntary sector 'At the Heart of Learning: promoting literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy skills development'

- The new teacher training framework for ESOL tutors
- Training on offer through LLU+ at levels 2, 3 and 4, including the modular training programme leading to a Level 4 qualification for ESOL Subject Specialists
- The Regional Achievement Project enhancing the recording of achievement for ESOL learners and supporting progression (NIACE)
- The London Online Blended and e-Learning Collaborative Project
- New citizenship requirements with regard to ESOL
- Citizenship materials developed by the Basic Skills Agency

Material supplied to participants is current and comprehensive. For example, when finding out about the range of ESOL qualifications available to learners, participants were provided with a list of awarding bodies and features of the qualifications they offer. They also received advice on how to go about selecting qualifications for their particular learners, and a list of frequently asked questions. This material came from the draft Handbook on ESOL Qualifications commissioned by Central London LSC from LLU+, and the VSEN meeting served to get feedback from participants on whether information was inclusive and well presented.

VSEN briefings enable participants to clarify their understanding about new initiatives. Citizenship, for example, is a complex area and participants were keen to discover how the latest requirements affect ESOL providers. A discussion suggested topics that could be incorporated into ESOL courses, such as finding out how to contact your MP. LLU+ staff explained that draft materials to prepare students for the new Citizenship Test were being prepared nationally, and would be distributed soon. LLU+ would also alert VSEN members when more training was made available for providers, particularly since some voluntary organisations may not receive automatic mailings.

VSEN meetings have included workshop sessions on:

- Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners
- Assessment (including how to use the DfES guide for practitioners, 'Planning Learning and Recording Progress and Achievement')
- ESOL and the creative arts

The workshops have been popular with participants; in evaluations from the first VSEN meeting, 66% said the workshops were the most useful or one of the most useful things. A typical comment was 'I was able to get some really good tips which I can see myself applying to some of my classes'.

Networking with other participants at the VSEN meetings were appreciated: 'This sort of thing makes you feel you're not alone – you get feedback from other people and find out they're having the same problems'; 'a friendly helpful network'; 'a general overview of the voluntary sector and how everyone functions within it was very interesting'. Participants were able to compare experiences of particular initiatives: for example, whether awarding bodies for ESOL qualifications provided good training for tutors, the relative costs involved in teaching towards each qualification, and how each type of course could best be run.

Activities are planned to stimulate participants' learning

As well as discussing the above subjects with the experts, VSEN participants have engaged in activities enabling them to think through the issues involved. For example, when looking at the new teacher training framework for ESOL tutors, participants were asked to match a list of topics with modules from the Certificate for ESOL Subject Specialists. They were then given case studies of new teachers needing qualifications and asked to look for routes that might suit them.

Workshop sessions included input from participants: for example, sharing ideas around different kinds of courses run at their workplaces in ESOL and the creative arts (drama courses, taster courses for Arts and Crafts, photography) and how students responded (for some this suited their learning style, whereas others needed encouragement to realise the value for English language skills). LLU+ staff made suggestions such as clarifying learning outcomes, building in self-assessment activities, and encouraging progression to non-ESOL training courses. Specific examples mentioned by participants – a student gaining confidence as she taught others how to cook a dish, a usually quiet student who spoke at length when memories were prompted by a piece of music – were built on by LLU+ tutors to develop further ideas for the classroom.

VSEN sessions introduce participants to the PDC

The Learning Resources Centre is open during the meetings and participants are encouraged to visit it and borrow items. For example, a participant mentioned that she had seen a useful book for teaching Arabic learners. Having seen the resources available, participants have a better idea of what to order online.

4) How can support best be offered for people using the online training elements for the ESOL Core Curriculum?

Through ASSET funding, it has been possible to offer free sessions for teachers of asylum seekers and refugees on how to use the online training elements for the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum. The online elements are a training package which enable people to find out about and learn to use the Curriculum.

These one-day sessions are aimed at ESOL teachers who have not attended ESOL Curriculum training. They cover:

- a. The national standards and the levels in the curriculum
- b. Contents, structure and layout of the curriculum
- c. The referencing system
- d. The language content and progression of language in the curriculum
- e. Introduction to using the curriculum for planning teaching and learning, including assessing learners

Teaching approaches include both off-line activities (such as group tasks and discussion) and online work using the online training elements of the ESOL core curriculum.

A typical one-day training programme contains the following elements:

- Skills for Life
- ESOL element 1 (Introduction to the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum)
- ESOL element 2 (Using the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum)
- Recognising curriculum levels (from ESOL element 4)
- Diagnostic assessment (from ESOL element 3)
- Choice of activities: SMART targets (ESOL element 3), Measuring and assessing achievement (ESOL element 4), schemes of work (ESOL element 5)
- Summary, review of outcomes and evaluations

Training sessions enable some teachers to access the online training elements for the first time

Many participants in the one-day session visited by the evaluator had never used the online training for the Core Curriculum materials. This was usually because of lack of time, combined with lack of confidence or lack of motivation about working alone online. Comments included:

‘I knew this existed but I never had the time and motivation to sit down and use it’

‘It’s just getting to grips with it all – it’s too daunting’

‘I’m not a computer person so I wanted guidance when I heard the Curriculum was online’

One person had not even known the online curriculum training materials existed until they were invited to the workshop.

During the session participants began to feel more confident about working online:

‘Now I could look by myself when I have spare time’

‘I rarely have an opportunity to read the curriculum at work and don’t have time – so a whole day is very good’

‘It’s been good today – I’ve really got into it’

Working with the online training elements improves teachers’ capacity to use the ESOL Core Curriculum

All the 18 participants who filled in their evaluation form at the end of the one-day session were extremely positive, stating that the training had helped them to use the Core Curriculum more fully. Until that point, they had not been fully engaging with the contents:

‘My colleague has the book but I couldn’t really figure it out’

‘It’s like, someone at work says to you – here you go, there’s the book’

Most participants were referring to the hard copy of the Curriculum whilst working online, which increased their familiarity with its contents.

A typical online activity, on diagnostic assessment, involved looking at a sample text produced by a learner and completing a grid about the learner’s strengths and areas they needed to work on. Participants could then check their answers with a model set of answers provided onscreen. In another type of task, participants had to map elements of the curriculum onto a scheme of work by dragging and dropping each element into a particular box. The computer would only accept the item if it was correctly placed. These kinds of tasks were found to stimulate participants’ own thinking.

Typical comments on the benefits of the session included:

‘I now have a clearer idea of how to use the Core Curriculum’

‘This course made the ESOL Core Curriculum easier to understand and use’

‘I will definitely be using the Curriculum in the future, refer to it whenever I need to – I now know how to use it’

‘I will start using it in my next class’

The online work emphasised the value of the Curriculum contents: ‘Why don’t I do this every day – you don’t have to keep reinventing the wheel’.

In their written evaluations, participants mentioned many ways in which they would apply what they had gained from the session in their everyday work, to improve their teaching, planning and assessment:

‘I will work more closely with this material and try to set up a scheme of work’

‘I will be able to attempt mapping the curriculum to learning targets, and identify different strengths and weaknesses of learners’

‘I will be able to plan smart targets more effectively’

‘I will be able to apply differentiation to a mixed group of learners’

Some participants made comments on specific gains in understanding during the session. For example, after doing the online activity on diagnostic assessment mentioned above, one person noticed the category of ‘learner’s strengths’ and realised that this could be usefully included in an assessment grid recently developed by a colleague. Another person commented that they had never previously started from the descriptors when planning a scheme of work, but done things the other way round. It was interesting to consider the benefits of trying out the alternative.

Support from colleagues and trainers helps understanding of the online elements

Participants were observed pooling their curriculum knowledge and their computer knowledge in order to help each other find their way around the online content. They also discussed the tasks together and offered ideas from their own practice: 'I appreciated the opportunity to work with a partner'. One person commented that now they had experience of using the online resources, they would be able to help an older, computer-shy colleague at work to do the same.

The constant availability of trainers to advise during the session was also appreciated: 'they are always around to help us'; 'the tutors were helpful, providing guidance and support throughout'. This was described as 'a comforting environment' in which to work. One person noted that all the course outcomes were achieved 'in a calm relaxed way'.

Online activities are appreciated for their flexibility and enjoyment

A number of participants commented that they could work at the pace that suited them: 'It's useful to have time to sit and go through it at my own pace'; 'it was a very successful method, particularly the opportunity to go at your own pace and re-visit the site later'. For example, following self-assessment on their current knowledge of the Core Curriculum, they could start working online at the best point: 'I liked the option to work on the elements suited to you'. They could also choose between different topics in the afternoon session (SMART targets, measuring and assessing achievement, and schemes of work) and tackle these individually or with a partner.

Several participants mentioned the enjoyment provided by online tasks: 'just the book is boring, online is more fun'; 'it's an incentive to learn something new'; 'not paper-based makes a difference'.

A balance of online and offline activities is helpful

Whilst participants wanted online tasks to be the main basis of the workshop, many thought that all day in front of the computer would be too much. They appreciated the opportunity for some offline work as a contrast, and also as a chance for group discussion since the online work sometimes became rather individualised. 'I felt it was important to have blended learning methods – video, shared talk time and short lecture period'. Several people thought more group discussion could be usefully integrated into the timetable.

Offline tasks were also found helpful in providing concrete examples on which to base the online work. For example, an offline session on using the curriculum in diagnostic assessment involved watching a video of a one-to-one assessment interview between a learner and teacher. The learner was asked to read common signs such as 'Bus Stop', to read a birthday card and to find the date of their birthday on a calendar. The teacher then read out a piece written by another student about personal meanings associated with particular months of the year. The learner being assessed was asked to read out the same piece and then answer specific questions about aspects such as punctuation. Participants in the online training session compared the learner's

particular strengths and weaknesses with components of skill, knowledge and understanding from the Core Curriculum. Following this, they considered whether any additional issues arose from the video that were not already covered in the Curriculum. Moving on to online work on diagnostic assessment, participants could consider the setting of SMART targets for this learner and devising an ILP for her.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN DETAIL

The ‘Training the Teacher Trainers’ course is an excellent way of cascading training on ‘Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners’ and should continue to be made available to teachers of refugees and asylum seekers

The micro teaching approach used in the ‘Training the Trainers’ course is highly effective, enabling participants to clarify theoretical issues and try out different ways of organising learning activities. The requirement for all participants to have previously taken the *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* course ensures that they have a good grounding on which to build their training experience and also gives them insights into a trainee’s point of view. The ‘Training the Trainers’ course is continually adapted to participants’ needs and evaluation of micro teaching is conducted sensitively. The course therefore provides an important way of generating improvements in basic literacy teaching for ESOL learners and should be available throughout the country.

LLU+ should be funded to deliver advice, support and training to small voluntary organisations around the country

Small voluntary organisations were found to have a particular need for advice, support and training. All the organisations that had received such input from LLU+ had found it beneficial and several asked whether further support would be available. For example, one interviewee wished they could have been alongside her when she was re-writing her organisation’s ILPs. Now she wanted to re-write the initial assessment and would appreciate advice on which descriptors were the most important to include. She asked if more funding would become available for training. Another interviewee thought that, rather than each small organisation trying to obtain funding and find suitable consultants to deliver its own training, it would be more cost-effective if LLU+ could be funded to deliver training and voluntary organisations could be told this training was available: ‘Then I don’t have to worry about another hoop to jump through – we have a specialist who we can call on when we need them’.

Voluntary Sector ESOL Networks should be set up by other PDCs in order to offer updates on Skills for Life, networking and training opportunities

The VSEN has been enthusiastically received since many small voluntary organisations have little access to training and find it difficult to keep up with new Government initiatives. LLU+ will be circulating feedback from the VSEN events to Professional Development Centres outside London, since people from elsewhere are unable to attend VSEN events regularly. PDCs could set up their own local VSEN network, building on what has been learned from the LLU+ meetings.

Voluntary Sector ESOL Networks should include training on how to obtain funding and how to represent the needs of voluntary organisations to funders

Participants at the VSEN commented that individual voluntary organisations struggle to obtain funding. The voluntary sector needs to receive information about the funding sources available, and advice on how to prepare funding applications. Rather than each organisation using considerable amounts of time to find out about these

issues, it would be more cost-effective to provide training to a group of organisations. Also, funders are not always aware of the diversity of needs experienced by the voluntary sector and the challenges involved in meeting them (such as the need for flexible differentiated teaching). Support could help organisations to group together in order to explain the particular difficulties and requirements of the sector.

Training workshops should be offered widely in order to stimulate use of the online elements of the ESOL Core Curriculum and produce feedback on the online activities

Online training workshops are highly successful in helping participants to access and use the ESOL Core Curriculum where previously they have felt unable to do so. Training workshops also produce valuable feedback on the online elements themselves. As they worked on tasks, participants discovered ways in which the presentation could be fine-tuned. For example, it would have been useful to be able to see a text presented for diagnostic assessment alongside the grid that you were required to complete concerning it. Some participants felt there were too many 'drag and drop' activities, which again is a restriction of the current software. Another comment was that when filling in a grid with your own ideas, it would be helpful to be able to check whether each item was correct individually without seeing the answers in the rest of the grid. Although the available software does not make these options possible at present, participants' opinions were noted by the trainers so they could be taken into account when future versions are being produced.