

Delivering *Skills for Life*

FACT SHEET 11 – Ensuring learners with literacy and language learning needs are placed on the most appropriate provision

October 2007

The purpose of this fact sheet is to support providers offering Skills for Life literacy and language (ESOL – English of Speakers of Other Languages) provision to place learners on to the most appropriate learning aims and to ensure that ESOL learners are not placed on literacy qualifications based purely on their financial situation.

Readership

1 Regional and local Learning and Skills Councils (LSC); LSC Audit and Provider Financial Assurance teams; colleges and other providers: directors responsible for curriculum development; senior managers and managers responsible for literacy and ESOL provision; teachers and tutors and planning managers of literacy and ESOL; colleagues in the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED); other colleagues responsible for literacy and ESOL provision.

Structure

2 The fact sheet has 3 sections. Section one looks at the context, the issue and the importance of enrolling learners onto the correct learning provision. Section 2 looks at what the LSC and OFSTED will do to support learners and providers and section 3 suggests actions that providers can take.

3 This fact sheet has been prepared by the Employee Development team at the National Office of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) with support from colleagues in OFSTED, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the LSC's Provider Financial Assurance (PFA) team. It will be posted on the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk). For further clarification providers should, in the first instance, contact their regional or local Learning and Skills Council. Contact information can be found on our website.

Section One: The context and the issue

The context

- 1 The LSC's *Annual Statement of Priorities: raising our game 2007/08* published in October 2006, set out a number of policy changes including the removal of automatic fee remission from Skills for Life English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision.
- 2 This change was requested by the minister in response to growing concern for the sharp increase in the spend on ESOL, and the need to manage public funding to ensure it supports the most disadvantaged learners and that those who can pay, do pay.
- 3 This removal of automatic fee remission for ESOL resulted in the different subjects of the Skills for Life qualifications being funded differently. Skills for Life literacy provision continues to attract automatic fee remission for any learner with an identified learning need, whereas Skills for Life ESOL provision is only fee remitted if a learner fall into one of the standard LSC fee remission categories, ie unemployed or on an income based benefit. (See paragraph 131 in the LSC's *Funding Guidance for Further Education 2007/08*).
- 4 This policy means that in 2007/08 some learners will need to pay up to 37.5% of their course fees when enrolled on to ESOL provision – 62.5% still being publicly funded. The fee element will increase to 50% by 2010/11. Again this is a deliberate intention of the policy so that those who can pay, should pay.

The issue

- 5 It is important that the ability to pay does not influence which learning aim a learner is enrolled on to. Learners should be enrolled on to the most appropriate learning provision that supports their level of skills, needs and aspirations. Initial assessment should identify this prior to discussion of the learner's financial situation and any ability to pay fees.
- 6 The Learning and Skills Council does not expect the number of Skills for Life ESOL enrolments within individual providers to decrease due to this policy change; neither do we expect to see any notable increase in Skills for Life literacy enrolments. In addition to this we do not expect to see ESOL learners being enrolled on to literacy provision but being taught ESOL.

Why is it important to have learners following the correct learning provision?

- 7 The curriculum and supporting teaching materials for Skills for Life ESOL and Skills for Life literacy have been produced in order to support the learners with specific learning needs. Whilst the curriculum is the same across the two subjects, the methods of teaching and assessments are different.
- 8 If an ESOL learner is placed on to inappropriate literacy provision, the learner is likely to suffer. The mechanisms for teaching differ between the two subjects and literacy training will not provide the level of speaking and listening required.

Section Two: What the LSC and OFSTED can do to support learners/providers?

- 9 In order to support providers this section sets out how the LSC and OFSTED will work to ensure learners are enrolled onto the most appropriate learning provision. This ensures quality and relevance for learners; and consistency and fairness across the sector.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

- 10 The LSC monitors the Individual Learning Records submitted by providers noting any shifts in learner enrolments. Particularly of interest will be any movement away from Skills for Life ESOL to Skills for Life literacy. Partnership teams will also address any issues through their regular performance reviews with providers and discuss how providers are managing this policy change.
- 11 The LSC's in-house or appointed auditors will look at a variety of evidence and documentation to gain assurance that literacy is being taught in literacy classes and ESOL in ESOL classes and that learners are following the correct provision according to their needs. This includes:
- teaching plans
 - initial assessment and/or the training needs analysis
 - individual learning plans and their relevance to the syllabus for ESOL or literacy
 - shifts in provision and monitor any changes in trends using dsats (Data Self Assessment Tools).
- 12 The future format of the current SARQ (Self Assessment Review Questionnaire) will be reviewed to take account of the Financial Management and Control key performance area of the Framework for Excellence, with the aim of incorporating this issue into the testing criteria.

The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)

- 13 Ofsted inspects providers in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework (CIF). Key question 3 of the CIF asks "How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?" The Ofsted Handbook for inspecting colleges and Handbook for inspecting work-related and community learning, provide guidance for colleges, other providers and inspectors on the interpretation of the CIF for inspecting post-16 education and training
- 14 The Ofsted Handbook for inspecting work-related and community learning is available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070077>
- 15 The Ofsted Handbook for inspecting colleges is available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070075>

Section Three: What providers can do

- 16 This section aims to support providers with practical actions they can under take to support the funding policy change.
- 17 The funding policy change around ESOL has introduced a difference to the way we deal with fee remission within the Skills for Life family of qualifications.
- 18 Providers should have a plan of action in how they manage this change and how they will support Skills for Life teachers, tutors and others involved in enrolments and initial assessment to make this transition.
- 19 Providers should ensure colleagues who are talking with learners for whom Skills for Life ESOL has been identified as the most appropriate learning provision, are clear on the new arrangements and able to talk through eligibility for fee remission, expected fee levels if not eligible, the possibility of support through the discretionary Learner Support if available, through to how fees will be collected.
- 20 Supporting documentation should be made clear and accessible to staff and learners so they understand what is required at each stage. Some providers have developed documentation in a range of languages to particularly support this learner group.
- 21 Additional work may be required to engage with harder to reach learners, for example, women in settled communities who may face greater barriers to engaging with learning, and providers should ensure their learner engagement strategies are updated.

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