ESOL Needs Analysis and Placement for Refugee Learners: a toolkit for providers

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Aims

The aim of the toolkit is to provide principles, guidance and resources to providers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), to support effective and consistent initial assessment. The research which informed the toolkit is available in a report which forms part of the resource. It was produced by Leeds Beckett University in partnership with Migration Yorkshire, as part of Refugee Integration Yorkshire and Humber, part-funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

Methodology

17 in-depth interviews were undertaken with ESOL providers, representing a variety of provision types. Providers were asked about current initial assessment practices and their experiences and views of this.

16 learners were also interviewed about their experiences, recruited with the help of Migration Yorkshire peer and community researchers. 11 were male and 5 were female. They originated from Africa, Afghanistan and the Middle East.

An online discussion was held with Migration Yorkshire peer and community researchers.

The fieldwork was conducted mainly online but involved consulting providers and learners from different parts of the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Key issues

Providers

During the initial assessment process, used to decide on learner placement, providers tended to collect demographic information, and information about previous education and employment, reasons for learning English and availability for classes. They did not all ask about income, family, potential skills the learner could offer or other opportunities. They did not tend to ask about wider needs. Variations in approach depended on available capacity - the size of provision was a factor in this. Assessments were undertaken by Information Advice and Guidance officers, class

teachers, or centre co-ordinators. The interview was treated as a conversation. There was some variation in the rationale used for class placement of learners.

Providers felt that a common assessment tool and centralised regional process would avoid the issue of multiple assessments for the same learner, and improve class placement. They also thought that better training would result in more accurate assessments.

Learners

Experiences of initial information about ESOL varied between participants. The majority found out about provision via people they knew, rather than through formal channels. Most hadn’t received information about ESOL levels and progression. Understanding of the information also varied. Some learners reported being moved to a different class, having not been placed correctly after the initial assessment.

Learners arriving via the asylum route wanted to be able to start learning English immediately rather than having to wait 6 months. In general learners wanted more and clearer information (and in their expert language) about ESOL levels and course length, and about classes in subjects other than ESOL. They also wanted information to be available on arrival in the country, and for the focus to be on what they could do, rather than not do. It was also suggested that the term ‘assessment’ could be off-putting.

Recommendations

Based on the research with providers and learners, the author has developed some key principles for the ESOL initial assessment process, which have been incorporated into the toolkit. The process should:

- Take place as soon as possible after arrival in the UK and with the outcome communicated to the learner immediately.
- Be undertaken by trained staff who are aware of refugee needs, and with a good knowledge of local ESOL provision and other further education provision.
- Be supported by resources to help identify the learner level.
- Include an assessment of digital skills and access needs.
- Include information sharing about ESOL levels and provision beyond ESOL.
- Be holistic.

The author also recommends that the following values should underpin the assessment process:

- Empathy
- Dialogic – learners should have the chance to ask questions and comment

Transparency – in communicating the outcome

Web Link
https://express.adobe.com/page/VHJYagxMgnB8V/
Migrant Group

Refugees
Topic
ESOL
Further and higher education
Work and education
Place
Yorkshire & Humber - region-wide
Year
2022
Month
12
Resource Type
Working paper

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/esol-needs-analysis-and-placement-refugee-learners-toolkit-providers*