



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy



Association of Colleges

ESOL Qualifications and funding in 2014: Issues for consideration





A Report for:

The Association of Colleges (AoC)

From:

The National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC), Institute of Education, London

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Report authors:

Pip Kings, Director Development, NRDC

Helen Casey, Director, NRDC

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The broad context for this work is the general agreement across political partners and society that adults who are settling and settled in this country need good English language skills. This short piece of research took place in the context of a period of change for ESOL qualifications in England, in which proposed changes to funding for ESOL from September 2013 and the new qualifications and funding for 2014 were causing concern.

Interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including: the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Awarding Organisations (AOs), FE College principals and ESOL curriculum managers. In addition, recent relevant research and policy documents were reviewed.



2. Extreme diversity – one size does not fit all

The research confirmed that providers cater for an extremely diverse intake of ESOL learners, from those who are highly educated and proficient learners tackling a new language to those who have had little or no experience of schooling and are not literate in their own languages. This diversity is unevenly spread across providers and contributes to very different patterns in the learning hours needed for success.

This poses unique challenges to fundamental concepts in our qualification and funding systems which use an 'average learner' as a starting point for planning new qualifications and an 'average' time taken as a basis for calculating funding. The 'average' ESOL learner, someone who is midway between the extremes, may not exist at all.

3. Learners at the lowest levels – the need for smaller steps

There is high demand for ESOL at Entry level 1 and Entry level 2, falling off sharply at Levels 1 and 2. The recent high volume demand for ESOL from JCP clients is predominantly at Entry level 1.

The journey from 'zero' to achieving at Entry level 1 is far greater for an ESOL learner than it is for a literacy learner as the former has to start from the beginning in all four skills - speaking, listening, reading and writing. Not least this is reflected in the sheer size of the ESOL curriculum, which is nearly three times as big as its literacy counterpart. Evidence

from practice shows providers are looking for ways of marking learner achievement in smaller steps than current qualification patterns allow.

4. Use of non-regulated provision

Non-regulated provision is the term used for SFA-funded provision that is not based on nationally accredited qualifications.

Providers are encouraged to use nationally accredited qualifications for learners. They also need to pay close attention to their learner success rates. The picture that emerges is one in which, in the interests of careful management of success rates, learners needing more time study in non-regulated provision until providers have reasonable confidence that they will be able to succeed within a given time period, usually a year, at which point they are enrolled onto accredited qualifications. Having successfully achieved a qualification, learners often enter a further period of non-regulated provision before being entered for the next qualification stage. All providers interviewed use RARPA¹ for recording progress on their non-regulated provision.

This pattern of activity was not captured in the data used to estimate the emerging listed funding rates. Information on the time spent on non-regulated stages of learning is obscured and therefore has not been fed into either funding or accreditation analyses. This data needs to be captured to ensure funding rates are realistic and provision can be maintained.

5. Jobcentre Plus (JCP)

Providers are now offering high volumes of ESOL for mandated Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) clients, largely at the lower entry levels. JCP require shorter programmes of study than College mainstream provision, typically 10-12 weeks. JCP districts have discretion over the detailed arrangements, some have agreed to longer periods of study for clients with the lowest levels of skills.

JCP provision is largely being carried out as non-regulated provision and assessed using RARPA. Several Colleges are exploring ways of offering accreditation for these learners using a combination of language and employability. There are particular challenges in that many of the JCP referrals are those learners with the lowest levels of skills for whom more time is needed to achieve success in their learning.

The conflicting outcomes required by JCP (job outcomes) and those required for SFA success rates (qualification outcomes) continue to create tensions for some learners.

There is an expectation from colleges that the volume of JCP activity is set to grow, coupled with anxiety that they may not be able to access the SFA resource required for this growth.

6. Qualifications

The ESOL core curriculum is broadly considered to be a sound and comprehensive basis for qualifications. There is demand for qualifications that are neither too big nor too small.

Longer

qualifications run the risk of losing students prior to completion, as the ESOL learner

¹ Recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA), in the education Sector in England, is a tool to measure the progress and achievement of learners on some Further Education courses that do not lead to an externally accredited award or qualification. The majority of such courses are in the adult and community learning Sector. (Brooke and Duckett, (2006) New measures of success. LSN p1)

community is unsettled and geographically mobile. At the other extreme there is uncertainty about the levels of administration and registration fees of the new and very small 'stand-alone' units of assessment. There is, however, some interest in trying out combinations of these for ESOL learners.

There is demand for single mode qualifications: separate assessments for the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. This is particularly in response to frustrations where the 'spiky profile' of learners prevents them achieving in areas of strength while they work to bring other areas up to the same level. For example, some learners may gain no achievement (other than RARPA) in a given year in which they could easily have achieved in reading but were a fair way behind in writing skills.

For learners at the lowest levels of skills, particularly those with little or no educational background, there is a need to make it possible to mark achievement in a longer, slower process, through smaller steps in qualifications or by finding ways to fund a 'slow track'. Identification of learners who need this approach could potentially be done via initial assessment.

There is also enthusiasm for an accreditation vehicle which can be tailored to the needs of JCP clients who currently are not getting much in the way of formal accreditation of their achievements due to the different timescales and outcome targets.

7. Initial assessment

Currently initial assessment is not logged on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), though there are pilot programmes investigating the feasibility of this. For data on initial assessment to be useful for distinguishing between learners for whom a slow or a fast track to the same qualification would be appropriate it will need to record the following data:

- Snapshot of current skill levels
- Highest level of qualifications achieved
- Number of years' schooling undertaken (particularly important for those who have no qualifications or may have had only a couple of years' schooling at most in their country of origin)
- Number of hours a person has available to focus on their learning (providers have found this to be useful in determining when learners are ready to go forward for assessment)
- Length of time in the UK (or in an English speaking environment)

8. Funding / time to learn

To cater for the learners who need much more time, as well as to ensure resources are efficiently used for those who can make more rapid progress, a mechanism needs to be found which can allow funding to follow the individual learner and enable them to receive the hours of delivery they need. It may for example be possible, on the basis of thoroughly recorded initial assessment, to identify which learners would benefit from a 'fast-track' route, and which need to be allowed much more time to make up for their lost schooling.

1 Introduction

1.1 Project objectives

The National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) was commissioned by the Association of Colleges (AoC) to conduct research into the context for changes in the national suite of ESOL Skills for Life (SfL) qualifications. These qualifications are due to be revised to best meet the needs of the ESOL learning community and the requirements of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

The objectives of this research were:

- to review current provider practice in providing ESOL programmes
- to summarise the work that Awarding Organisations (AOs) are doing to develop new ESOL qualifications for the QCF
- to make recommendations for the way forward

1.2 Context

There is currently more agreement amongst government departments and key stakeholders regarding the importance and funding of ESOL but concern about high spending in a climate of public spending cuts. There is a balance to be achieved between adequate provision to support access to employment and social cohesion, and over-ambitious provision that seeks to meet all demand. Whilst responsibility for provision rests with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the government recognises that benefits of this provision impact positively on other departments, as has been seen in recent policy decisions regarding immigration, citizenship and employment related benefits.

Nationally recognised ESOL SfL qualifications from Entry level 1 to Level 2 were developed in 2004. At each level, the qualifications comprise three units: Speaking and Listening; Reading; Writing. Of these, the Speaking and Listening unit can also be delivered as a stand-alone qualification.

ESOL SfL qualifications were previously funded on an 'unlisted rate' basis, i.e. according to the taught hours needed by learners. From September 2013 they became listed qualifications with a fixed rate of funding regardless of learning hours delivered; for some providers this will have a radical impact on patterns of delivery.

1.3 The research approach

Interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders including: BIS, SFA, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), AOs, Further Education (FE) College principals and ESOL curriculum managers. In addition, recent relevant research and policy documents were reviewed.

Eighteen FE Colleges with large ESOL provision were invited by AoC to participate through telephone interviews. A high response rate of 78% was achieved, with responses from 14 Colleges. This was despite the research being carried out at the end of the summer term.

Questions were developed from the AoC specification and discussions with AoC, and from the input of the stakeholder steering group brought together by AoC to oversee the research.

The following aspects of ESOL were considered:

- Numbers of learners, both self-referring and JCP referrals
- Qualifications used
- Length of courses
- Providers' experience of appropriateness of current ESOL Sfl qualifications and of any changes needed

Interviews with government policy (BIS) and funder (SFA) representatives were carried out in light of the first stage interviews. Additionally, four AOs participated through telephone interviews.

Members of the NRDC team also attended an AoC provider forum which offered an opportunity to discuss the ESOL project work and solicit participants' views.

The team was also able to attend a NATECLA London region ESOL managers' meeting to canvass views and NATECLA London ran and promoted a national online survey, which drew responses from 92 members.

Participating organisations are listed in Appendix 1.



2 Extreme diversity – one size does not fit all

Providers cater for an extremely diverse intake of ESOL learners, from those who are highly educated and proficient learners tackling a new language to those who have had little or no experience of schooling and are not literate in their own languages. The diversity of ESOL learners is unevenly spread across providers and contributes to very different patterns in the learning hours needed for success.

This poses unique challenges to fundamental concepts in our qualification and funding systems which use an ‘average learner’ as a starting point for planning new qualifications and an ‘average’ time taken as a basis for calculating funding.

2.1 The ESOL learner population

ESOL learners are of all ages. The focus of this report is primarily concerned with adults, but feedback regarding younger learners aged 16 to 18 has been included in considering the future development of ESOL qualifications.

The population of ESOL learners is extremely diverse. There is a wide range of educational, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic origin, first and other languages, life experience and trauma (for example through war, and torture).

At one extreme, we have learners with little or no experience of schooling or formal education who are unable to read or write in their own language, which may also be based on a different script from English. At the other end of the scale are those with qualifications and skills from their own country and good study skills, who are capable of learning quickly and progressing directly to higher level occupations.

Allemano (2013) identifies three broad categories of potential ESOL learners:

The first group consists of well educated (secondary level or beyond), highly literate learners with a background in a language that uses the Roman alphabet, for whom the issue is more that of learning a modern foreign language at a beginner level. They are not basic literacy learners.

The second group consists of learners who are also well educated and highly literate but with a background in a language that uses a script other than the Roman alphabet. These learners do have to learn a new written code, sometimes also a different direction of reading text on the page, as well as the language, but they have literacy skills to transfer. Many also arrive in the UK fully cognisant of the Roman script. In both cases, they are also not basic literacy learners.

The third group ... consists of learners who have had little or no schooling and, therefore, have limited literacy skills in their first language (L1) or any other acquired language. At the beginning of their studies, they may even be grappling with the notion that ‘print carries meaning’.

Allemano (2013: 70)

In addition to the categories defined above, providers identified a fourth group of learners “with some education, some literacy skills in their first language or any other acquired language”. One provider noted that, “Prior formal education, where the alphabet is the same as in English, makes all the difference.”

2.2 Impact on provision

The SFA reports a wide variation in the number of hours taken to complete qualifications by different provider organisations. This wide variety reflects the extremes of the diversity in the learner population. Providers consulted in this research reported that different groups of learners were likely to need very different amounts of time on programmes in order to make the same progress. Across the 14 Colleges consulted as part of this research there was no common pattern of provision other than its diversity. Hours per week varied from 4 to 12.5, numbers of weeks from 17 to 36, and programmes from one module to all three. Within one single provider, the offer to learners is from 1.5 to 15 hours per week depending on their availability. Over a year this equates to programmes of 45 to 450 hours.

This variation is supported by NRDC research. The NRDC “Effective Teaching and Learning in ESOL” study (Baynham et al, 2007) investigated a number of factors potentially affecting the rate of learner progress (that is, skills gain, as measured on standardised tests) in ESOL courses in England. In this study, 12% of ESOL learners had university qualifications, while 10% were not literate in any language. The longer a learner had been in the country, the slower their progress, taking all other factors into account. Baynham et al (2007) found that these learners were more likely to be female, older, and lacking first language literacy. They also tended to have several years’ fewer schooling. Based on these findings, Baynham et al concluded that older learners, those with less experience of schooling, those who lacked first-language literacy and those who had been in the UK longer were likely to require more class time than other learners, in order to make the same progress.

The characteristics of learner cohorts change over time with demographic change. These changes often cluster geographically, meaning that the nature of the learner group within different providers can differ hugely, impacting on the length of time taken for learning and on success rates of their cohorts.

One London provider operating across two boroughs reported two distinct and contrasting learner populations in their two centres: longer settled and established learners in one centre,



many of Francophone West African origin; and a more transient population in the other centre with learners from South America, working in minimum wage jobs such as cleaning, and accessing provision before and after shifts.

One curriculum manager described how, in moving from a large urban FE College to one some thirty miles further out of town, she found that her success rates were suddenly much higher. She attributed this to the very different learner cohorts in the two locations, one with a much more educated background than the other.

The high level of diversity in the ESOL learner population creates unique challenges for qualifications and funding. In designing a qualification AOs are expected to start from the premise of an 'average learner' for the expected cohort of learners. Finding an average between those who have no literacy and those with highly developed study skills can easily result in something that meets the needs of neither extreme.

Similarly, if funding is based on an average learner and assumptions are made that the range of learners needing more or less time will balance out within the envelope of funding for a provider, this will not take account of the uneven distribution of ESOL learner populations. Some providers carry significantly higher numbers of learners at very low ESOL levels whilst other providers have higher numbers of learners at higher learning levels. The variations do not balance out at the level of an individual learning provider.

3 Learners at the lowest levels – the need for smaller steps

There is high demand for ESOL at Entry level 1 and Entry level 2, falling off sharply at Levels 1 and 2. The recent high volume demand for ESOL from JCP clients is predominantly at Entry level 1.

The journey from 'zero' to achieving at Entry level 1 is far greater for an ESOL learner than it is for a literacy learner as they have to start from the beginning in all four skills, speaking, listening, reading and writing. This is reflected in the sheer size of the ESOL curriculum, which is nearly three times as big as its literacy counterpart. Evidence from practice shows providers looking for ways of marking learner achievement in smaller steps than current qualification patterns allow.

3.1 Clarifying 'pre-entry' ESOL provision

Providers use a variety of terms to refer to the lowest part of Entry level 1. These include: 'pre-entry', 'ESOL and literacy', 'Entry 1a', and 'Stage 1 (E1)'. The term 'pre-entry' originates with the Pre-Entry Curriculum for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD). It refers to those ESOL learners who also have LDD, and is therefore not used in this report.

For the purposes of this report we will adopt the usage (as do many providers) of referring to two 'stages' E1a and E1b to reflect the need to differentiate within Entry level. The curriculum offer at E1a caters for those needing to develop basic literacy skills, moving on to E1b as they progress through Entry level 1.

3.2 Demand at Entry level 1

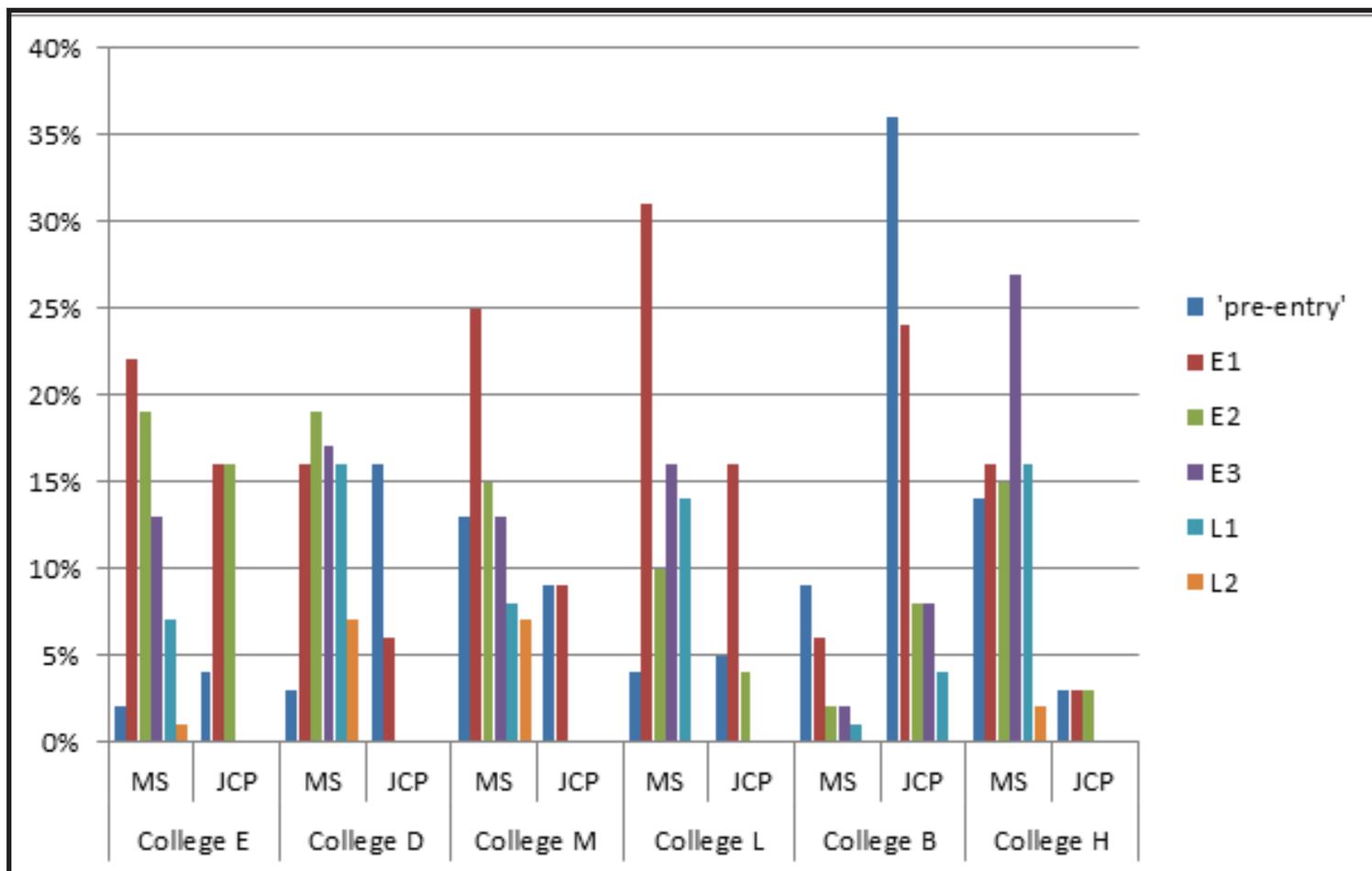
All providers we spoke to, split their Entry level 1 programmes into two sub-levels, or stages, to cater for large numbers of learners who need ESOL with a beginner literacy focus as well as speaking and listening.

Senior managers are aware that most demand for ESOL provision is at E1a, E1b and Entry level 2. Providers' reported that a large number of JCP job-seeker referrals are at E1a and also noted that changing demographics in local areas can impact on levels.

DWP attributed the large numbers of low level JCP referrals to new arrivals from Eastern Europe, as well as an increase in people from more settled communities coming forward to seek work as benefit changes take effect.

Table 1 shows the levels of learners in six Colleges, comparing the numbers in mainstream provision with those referred from JCP.

Table 1: Levels of ESOL provision, both JCP and mainstream, in six Colleges



The findings indicate higher demand at the lower Entry levels, particularly Entry levels 1 and 2, with numbers falling off sharply at Level 2. Some providers do not offer ESOL at Level 2 as their learners move onto vocational programmes or into Functional English classes.

3.3 Time needed to cover the Entry level 1 curriculum

The achievement level at Entry 1 (as defined by the National Literacy Standards) is the same for speakers of English as a first language as it is for ESOL learners. The journey however is different as is evidenced by the content of the ESOL curriculum, which at 412 pages far exceeds that for literacy at 144 pages. ESOL learners are learning to speak English as well as to develop their reading and writing skills. For learners with no literacy in their first language and for those whose first language uses a different script, as discussed above, the learning challenges are greater still.

Research carried out by Baynham et al (2004) found that learners with limited experience of formal education tend to take more time to adapt to classroom-based instruction. These differences impacted on individuals' self-concept and ability to learn. Some adults needed to "learn how to learn" in a classroom setting; others needed significant time to develop the self-confidence to make meaningful skills gain.

Several factors combine here to make the journey from 'zero' to Entry level 1 much longer for some learners. For learners with no educational background there is much to learn with regard to learning to learn and study skills as well as language learning. In addition to this,

in terms of learning a new language, the full Entry level standard is equivalent to an AS level in a foreign language.

Information from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN, 2013) shows that an AS level in modern foreign languages (e.g. French or Spanish) corresponds to ESOL Entry level 3 in terms of second language learning skills, and that an A level corresponds to Level 1 ESOL. An ESOL learner's Level 1 is really 'as good' in terms of linguistic competence as an English students' Level 3 in French, Spanish or Chinese. This comparative benchmark is confirmed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Providers have responded to this by creating sub-divisions of levels, but these do not sit easily with our qualification and funding structures as is discussed in the following section.

AOs are not at liberty to create qualifications that sit 'between the levels'. Ofqual regulations require any new qualifications to be based on the existing standards, which are defined at Entry level 1, Entry level 2, Entry level 3, Level 1 and Level 2 for this subject area.

4 Use of non-regulated provision

Non-regulated provision is the term used for SFA funded provision that is not based on nationally accredited qualifications.

Providers are encouraged to use nationally accredited qualifications for learners. They also need to pay close attention to their learner success rates. The picture that emerges is one in which, in the interests of careful management of success rates, learners needing more time study in non-regulated provision until providers have reasonable confidence that they will be able to succeed within a given time period, usually a year, at which point they are enrolled onto accredited qualifications. Having successfully achieved a qualification, learners often enter a further period of non-regulated provision before being entered for the next qualification stage. All providers interviewed use RARPA for their non-regulated provision.

This pattern of activity was not captured in data used to estimate the emerging listed funding rates. Information on the time spent on non-regulated stages of learning is obscured and therefore has not been fed into either funding or accreditation analyses.

4.1 ESOL non-regulated provision – the background

Both BIS and SFA recognise that ESOL provision has one of the largest uses of the non-regulated category and are concerned to reduce this level.

Prior to the development of nationally recognised ESOL qualifications in 2004, much ESOL provision was delivered using locally developed or in-house certificates. With the advent of the ESOL SfL suite of qualifications providers have moved towards their use but continue to make use of an amount of non-regulated provision for some learners. In 2005, the Learning and Skills Council (predecessor to the SFA) introduced the 80:20 rule to steer providers towards greater use of the national qualifications and reduce use of non-regulated provision. BIS policy implemented by the SFA now requires the majority of learning to be accredited through national qualifications, although it is recognised that there are occasions where non-regulated provision is more appropriate to learner need. The policy is not to completely remove its use but to be clear in what circumstances it is appropriate. ESOL non-regulated provision is expected to be quality assured using the RARPA process to measure and evidence progress¹ against individual learning outcomes.

4.2 Patterns and purposes in using non-regulated provision

Providers describe using non-regulated provision in the following four contexts:

- For learners assessed as E1a (i.e. at the lowest point of Entry level 1)
- For JCP referrals
- For consolidation between levels
- To provide a range of pathways.

¹ Recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA), in the education Sector in England, is a tool to measure the progress and achievement of learners on some FE courses that do not lead to an externally accredited award or qualification. The majority of such courses are in the adult and community learning Sector. (Brooke and Duckett, (2006) New measures of success. LSN p1)

Providers interviewed described various pathways from non-regulated provision through to achieving an Entry 1 ESOL Sfl qualification for learners with differing characteristics. In the survey of NATECLA members, the majority of respondents make use of non-regulated provision (64%) with main reasons for this being:

- learners can't complete E1 in a year (low level with literacy) (25 responses)
- used at all levels to 'bridge' to the next level (12)
- for beginners from E1 to E3 (10)
- for JCP learners (5)

Table 2 shows how the different groups of learners typically progress through provision at Entry level 1. The more educated learners with a familiarity with Roman script, can progress quickly through Entry 1, sometimes in a single term, depending on GLH per week. The second group, who are new to Roman script, may need longer, up to one year. The third group, with some previous education and some basic literacy in their first language may need up to a year in non-regulated provision before moving on to the accredited Entry 1 programme (again depending on GLH). Finally, a fourth group, with little or no previous education or literacy, may need up to two years in non-regulated provision before moving on to the accredited stage of Entry 1.



Table 2: Use of non-regulated provision to support ESOL learners' progression to full Entry level 1

		Year 1			Year 2			
		Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	
Initial assessment	Learner Characteristics							
	1. Well-educated, highly literate, use Roman script	ESOL SfL programme	Entry Level 1 qualification					
	2. Well-educated, may use a non - Roman script	ESOL SfL programme						
	3. Some prior education, some literacy in first language	ESOL SfL programme						
		Non-regulated ESOL, e.g. RARPA, mapped to the ESOL core curriculum. Focus on speaking and listening			ESOL SfL programme			
		Non-regulated ESOL, e.g. RARPA, mapped to the ESOL core curriculum. Focus on basic literacy			Continuing non-regulated ESOL			Entry Level 1 qualification
					ESOL SfL programme			

Non-regulated for E1a learners

Providers use non-regulated provision for up to a year for people who have little or no literacy education (reading/writing) in their own language in addition to needing basic oral English learning. When questioned further as to the content of their low level Entry 1 ESOL programmes, providers described this as the basics of Entry level 1 across all modes for 'absolute beginners'. Content includes: focusing on speaking and listening; basic vocabulary; learning how to form alphabet letters; learning the English alphabet.

Learners will move from E1a programmes onto any of the following approved qualifications:

- Entry level 1 Speaking and Listening ESOL SfL qualifications
- Entry level 1 Full ESOL SfL qualification
- Approved units of Reading or Writing in ESOL SfL qualifications (designated by ZUNA prefixed 'dummy' codes (SFA 2012b:102))
- Other non-ESOL but approved qualifications (e.g. Functional English)

Two Colleges noted that they have designed E1a Schemes of Work to ensure that content is drawn from the Entry level 1 curriculum.

Another provider offers non-regulated RARPA courses of 15 hours per week (day) or six hours per week (eve), based on the ESOL Core Curriculum for all learners assessed at E1a.

Non-regulated for JCP referrals/mandated clients

Non-regulated provision is regularly used within discrete provision for JSA/ Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) clients mandated or referred by JCP. Twelve of the providers interviewed take JCP referrals.

As previously noted in **Table 1** a large proportion of JCP provision is at Entry level 1 (including E1a) where, as already noted, it takes learners much longer to complete a full SfL qualification. For all but one of the providers interviewed, JCP insist on short intensive learning programmes in order to more speedily move their clients off benefits and into work. To achieve this with low level learners, providers use a mixture of non-regulated ESOL provision and non-ESOL qualifications (e.g. OCN units of English, Maths and ICT qualifications, Employability qualifications, progression awards and personal progress qualifications). Providers noted that JCP are not concerned with qualification achievement although both they and providers are keen that learning be consolidated. In several instances JCP have agreed to allow their clients to repeat courses for this purpose.

One College principal, whose ESOL provision has swung considerably towards ESOL for JCP clients (79% of their ESOL offer), expressed concern that the new ESOL qualifications will not be small enough to suit this low level context. Currently they use non-regulated provision for their intensive JCP ESOL courses.

Non-regulated for consolidation of learning

There is on-going pressure to keep success rates high and for learners to make progress within one academic year. Several Colleges find that at every level it is beyond the reach of many learners to complete a whole ESOL qualification in one year. They have introduced

bridging modules or ESOL study programmes to consolidate previous learning and/or to prepare for the next level; this was noted in particular between Entry level 3 and Level 1 (seven providers), and between Levels 1 and 2 (six providers). One provider runs a short course in the summer term at all levels to provide this bridging for students moving to the next level in September.

4.3 The invisibility of non-regulated provision

From the SFA perspective, these uses of non-regulated provision are not easy to identify. Until August 2013¹ the coding of non-regulated provision in the ILR is recorded using 'dummy' learning aim references prefixed CBS (SFA 2012b:101-102). This data is not differentiated between the differing purposes of non-regulated provision identified above. Consequently, when data is drawn from the ILR to analyse, for example, the GLH taken by learners to complete Entry level 1, only the time spent on accredited programmes is represented in the calculations. The additional time spent in non-regulated provision before being registered for the qualification aim is not included. This creates a situation in which providers hold back from registering a learner for a qualification aim until they are confident the learner is ready to achieve within 12 months and national datasets which reflect 12 months as the average time needed. This is returned to in section 8.

From the AO perspective, non-regulated provision is also largely out of sight. AO data shows the length of time learners are registered on programme, but cannot capture preparatory work providers are doing with learners before this point. One AO, Trinity, aware of the difficulties some providers have in developing programmes for low level learners, has developed qualifications to support the basic literacy needs of ESOL learners. These are known as Steps 1 and 2 and were referred to by several providers at interview. Although they are not funded as approved qualifications, providers have used them to accredit non-regulated provision.

<http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/site/?id=1999>

¹ New recording arrangements were put in place from August 2013. The Agency has now streamlined the recording on non-regulated provision. From 2013/14 a single structure of class codes is being used to record non-regulated provision. The new class codes reflect the differing purpose of non-regulated provision by capturing the sector subject area, level and provision type, the funding band and programme weighting. These codes replace the old codes, such as, CBS, Z9OP, ZILSK. Detail of the codes and the associated funding rates are publicly available in the 2013/14 ILR (appendix H) and 'Simplified Funding rates Catalogue'

5 Jobcentre Plus (JCP)

Providers report that they are offering high volumes of ESOL for mandated JSA clients, largely at the lower Entry levels. JCP require shorter programmes of study than College mainstream provision, typically 10-12 weeks (see Table 3). JCP districts have discretion over the detailed arrangements and some have agreed to longer periods of study for clients with the lowest levels of skills.

JCP provision is largely being carried out as non-regulated provision and assessed using RARPA. Several Colleges are exploring ways of offering accreditation for these learners using a combination of language and employability. There are particular challenges in that many of the JCP referrals are those with the lowest levels of skills for whom more time is needed to achieve success in their learning.

The conflicting outcomes required by JCP (job outcomes) and those required for SFA success rates (qualification outcomes) continue to create tensions for some learners.

There is an expectation from Colleges that the volume of JCP activity is set to grow, coupled with anxiety that they may not be able to access the SFA resource required for this growth.

5.1 High volumes of low-level learners in short programmes

Table 1 shows the proportions of JCP learners in a range of Colleges and the language levels of these learners. DWP attribute the increase in ESOL referrals to:

- increasing numbers of new arrivals
- increasing numbers of people in established communities now coming forward to claim benefits. This may be due to the lower age of cared for children at which parents are expected to be in work or seeking work; and also because of the requirement for couples making joint claims to both be interviewed for skills needs.

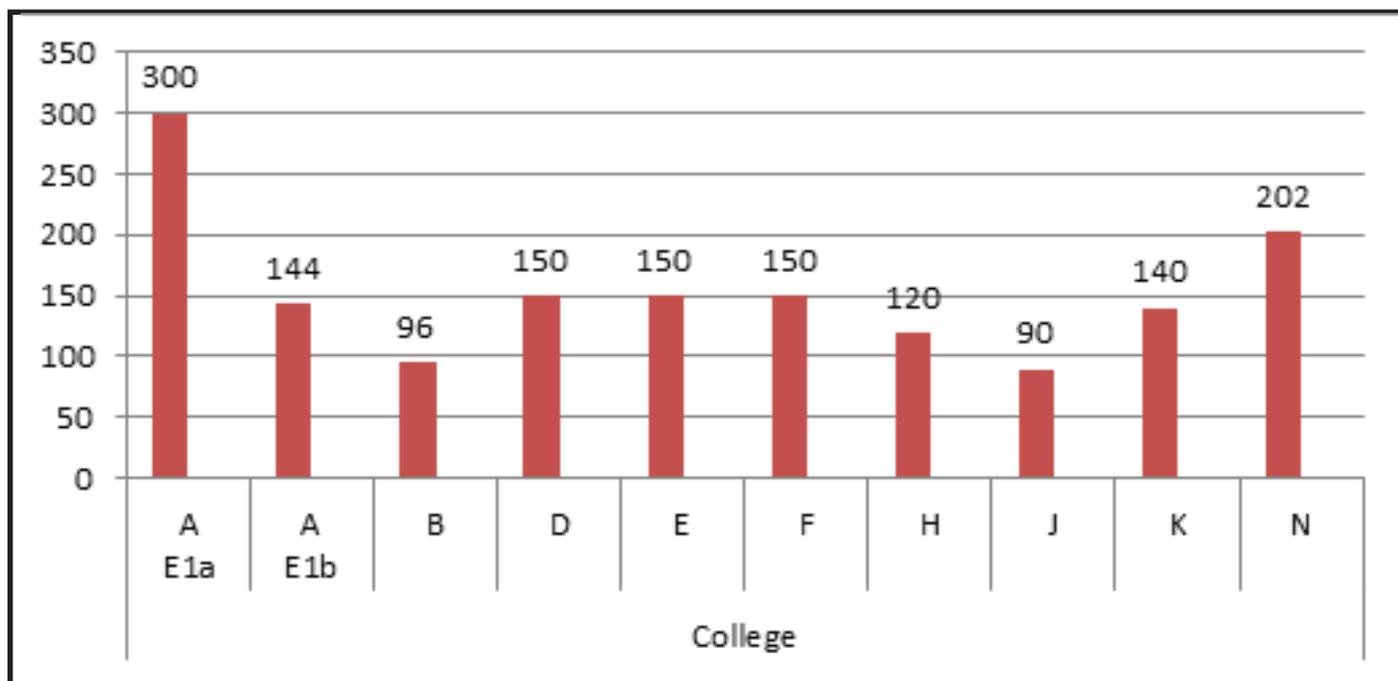
The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) announcement earlier this year on English language skills of job seekers is expected to produce more systematic screening at Jobcentres and to further drive demand for low level ESOL. Ministers are discussing a new language



test for new claimants to determine whether they need English language classes. Where identified, attendance at classes will be a requirement for a successful claim.

A typical pattern of provision for JCP-referred ESOL learners is very different from providers' mainstream courses, with 10 – 12 week programmes of about 12 – 15 hours per week. DWP's view on the length of course needed for JCP ESOL is 8 – 12 weeks. The number of hours delivered on JCP provision is shown in **Table 3** below.

Table 3: Intensive provision on short JCP courses



Excluding the first column (College A has a special arrangement of 25 weeks for its lower level learners) the range of GLH for JCP provision is from 90 to 202 with an average of 138 GLH.

Two Colleges in this research were found to have arrangements with JCP to run longer programmes. This had come about through in-depth discussions with JCP about best practice ESOL provision:

- College L takes JCP referrals into its mainstream provision of 37 weeks at four and a half hours per week for Speaking and Listening ESOL SFL qualification (166.5 GLH) and 37 weeks at five and a half hours per week for Reading and Writing (203.5 GLH) or onto an intensive programme of 37 weeks at ten hours per week for the whole qualification (370 GLH).
- College M runs discrete ESOL provision for JCP alongside, and at the same GLH as, its mainstream provision: 33 weeks at ten hours per week (330 GLH) having agreed with JCP that the mainstream provision offers the best quality ESOL learning which should therefore be replicated for JSA clients.

DWP is aware that the hours per week vary and that for some providers who wish to offer over 16 hours per week but are not allowed to by the Jobcentre there is an issue. DWP explained that this is at the JCP district's discretion: if people do more than 16 hours they have to come off benefits and are supported by JCP with a training allowance - if the JCP district has sufficient budget. Under Universal Credit (due to be introduced through a staged roll-out from October 2013 to 2017) the 16-hour rule will no longer apply and customers'

benefit will not be affected by the time that they are in mandated training. Conversely, there are Colleges who cannot offer the more intensive (16+) hours because they do not have sufficient SFA funding available. To offer more time to JCP customers would require them to turn others away.

DWP policy is to allow JCP districts freedoms and flexibilities to manage their own arrangements for skills training that meets local needs. They would not want to prescribe standardised work-focused ESOL programmes across the country.

5.2 Potential conflicts

JCP is focused on getting people off benefits – this is their primary target. They are not concerned with qualifications or the depth of learning; JCP want their customers to ‘develop sufficient work focused English language to be able to get a job’. With each customer they agree a short list of up to four prospective jobs (e.g. cleaner, care assistant) and only seek sufficient language development for the individual to be able to get into one of those jobs. Individuals need to achieve sufficient language development to be able to get into a job at whatever level. There is a particular tension for those people whose educational background puts them at such a low level in terms of learning English that they need far more time than a short course allows to begin to learn English. Some providers have agreements with JCP to allow for a further training period for such learners, as described above.

Providers note that JCP has considerable authority over their learners and enrolment practices as a result of benefit changes and mandation. Some JCP offices insist that any self-referred learners found to be on JSA/ESA work related activity group (WRAG) must not be enrolled independently by Colleges but referred back to JCP for mandation. Although many providers feel this intrudes on their enrolment procedures, there is a potential benefit as this will reduce the occurrence of losing learners to other JCP provision at critical points in a learning programme.

DWP is aware that the conflicting outcomes of jobs (JCP) and qualifications (SFA providers) is still an unresolved issue.

DWP reported that a success factor for JCP is where providers do not use qualifications but measure improvement and achievement of skills against the ILP. Bradford College has developed a proforma for this that they are willing to share. An internal group at DWP is evaluating the improvement in people getting jobs as a result of ESOL provision.

For Colleges the following concerns arise from these changes to the learner cohorts:

- The most vulnerable groups will be most at risk of losing out on ESOL provision (low level learners need longer to make progress, but through JSA receive shorter periods of learning).
- JCP’s needs will become the dominant driver in determining the nature of ESOL provision (length of courses, intensity of provision, employability and employment outcomes rather than language learning outcomes).

One provider reported that learners referred by JCP take the learning less seriously than when they self-refer and their behaviours demonstrate that “compulsion creates a barrier to

learning”¹. They have noted that several learners who previously self-referred to their mainstream provision, and were well-motivated, have now been mandated to the short JCP courses at the College and do not consider this ‘proper ESOL provision’.

Principals and senior managers anticipate that the demand for ESOL from JCP will continue and expect that it may well increase. They have concerns whether there will be sufficient funding to meet this demand. There is also concern that this provision may be funded at the expense of a College’s ‘mainstream’ provision for self-referring learners.

1 This is also evidenced in research:

O’Grady, A. and Atkin, C. (2005) Forced to learn or choosing to learn: challenges and concerns for non-voluntary adult basic skills learners. *RaPAL Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Journal*, 58: pp. 38–43.

O’Grady, A. and Atkin, C. (2006) Choosing to learn or chosen to learn: the experience of Skills for Life learners. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 11(3): pp. 277-287.

6 Qualifications

The ESOL core curriculum is broadly considered to be a sound and comprehensive basis for qualifications. There is demand for qualifications that are neither too big nor too small. Longer qualifications run the risk of losing students prior to completion as the ESOL learner community is unsettled and geographically mobile. At the other extreme there is uncertainty with regard to the new and very small 'stand-alone' units of assessment with regard to levels of administration and entry fees. There is, however, some interest in trying out combinations of these for ESOL learners.

There is demand for single mode qualifications: separate assessments for the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. This is particularly in response to frustrations where the 'spiky profile' of learners prevents them achieving in areas of strength while they work to bring other areas up to the same level. An example here was learners with no achievement (other than RARPA) in a given year in which they could easily have achieved in reading but were a fair way behind in writing skills .

For learners at the lowest levels of skills, particularly those with little or no educational background, there is a need to make it possible to mark achievement in a longer, slower process, either through smaller steps in qualifications or by finding ways to fund a 'slow track'¹. Identification of learners who need this approach could potentially be done via initial assessment.

There is also enthusiasm for an accreditation vehicle tailored to the needs of JCP clients who currently are not getting much in the way of formal accreditation of their achievements due to the different timescales and outcome targets.



¹ These are available as separate units, but for success rate purposes, Colleges need these as separate qualifications.

6.1 The current context

BIS is committed to using the QCF to offer the flexibility for provision that is appropriate to vocational education and training. The current Whitehead Review of qualifications is focused on improving the QCF. The challenge for ESOL is to move onto the QCF.

Principals are aware that BIS is committed to using only qualifications on the QCF and that ESOL qualifications are being developed now for the QCF. Their two main concerns are

- that the learning hours reflect the real length of current learning programmes
- that the new QCF qualifications are not too large as learning programmes.

The new ESOL QCF suite needs to comprise qualifications that are small enough to be manageable for E1a learners (in line with good practice in adult education), and are transferable so that ESOL students who are geographically relocated can continue their learning.

AOs reported a lack of detailed information about how long it takes learners at each level to complete the current ESOL qualifications to support the development of new qualifications. As discussed in section 3, because providers use a considerable amount of non-regulated provision to extend programme delivery of ESOL qualifications (often beyond the permitted SFA 'year-long' programmes) and don't register learners onto ESOL qualifications until they are sure that a learner has the potential to achieve, the data which AOs gather on the time period between registration and achievement does not include the non-regulated phases of learning and therefore does not accurately reflect the time a learner has spent on a programme.

6.2 Content of ESOL curriculum

In their feedback on current qualifications, providers found the content of the ESOL SfL qualifications at each level was an accurate reflection of the core curriculum. The difficulty was the huge variations in time needed by different learners to cover that content. Few felt that it was appropriate to run very long programmes for beginner learners so they try to split the content into smaller learning blocks using non-regulated provision. Some providers have used other qualifications to 'carry' the ESOL learning (Maths, Employability, English units). For some providers the advantage of using non-regulated provision is that it gives them the flexibility to move learners on to accredited provision when they are ready. One provider said that it is an "unwritten rule that staff move learners onto regulated provision ASAP".

At Entry levels the reading and writing aspects are seen as very difficult for some learners whose lack of understanding of exam requirements can be a barrier in the tests. Allemano (2013) explores these difficulties in her research, describing the errors ESOL learners make because they have no previous understanding of exam papers, their structure or how the questions are written.

Two providers said they would like to see more focus on writing in the Level 2 ESOL qualification as a better preparation for higher level study and one provider commented that at Entry level 3 the reading assessment is more difficult than the writing.

6.3 Progression routes

BIS and the SFA want to see clear progression routes from ESOL qualifications, enabling learners to succeed at Functional English and GCSE English which will satisfy employers' recognition of GCSE qualifications.

The SFA published the following statement in February 2013 which summarises their strategic implementation plan regarding ESOL qualifications.

“The new generation of ESOL qualifications will be available for learners (including those learners with significant learning needs) from Entry 1 to Level 2 and should:

- *support progression to Functional Skills and GCSE so that learners can step off into mainstream English programmes at the point at which this is appropriate for them*
- *support employment outcomes and the needs of jobseekers referred to ESOL training by Jobcentres and hence focus on English language which is necessary for, and relevant to, work*
- *continue to be based on the National Standards for Adult Literacy and the ESOL Core Curriculum*
- *be designed for the Qualifications and Credit Framework and hence unit based and credit bearing.”*
(SFA, 2013c)

From the AO perspective, there has been uncertainty about whether the Functional English qualifications would be used for ESOL learners and more recently queries as to whether they would need to develop ESOL qualifications linked to citizenship (a consideration of the Ofqual review of ESOL qualifications, September 2012 to April 2013). Ofqual procedures require that all new qualifications for the QCF are completely and accurately documented before they can be reviewed and endorsed. For the AOs developing new qualifications for initial submission in early 2014 remains a very tight timetable.

6.4 New qualifications

Providers were very much in favour of unitised ESOL provision keeping close to the current unit structure. They felt that if each mode (Speaking and Listening; Reading; Writing) were listed on the QCF as a separate qualification, programmes could be designed around them in the context of their learner cohorts and this would additionally meet the needs of learners' spiky profiles. Furthermore if additional steps towards qualifications at each level could also be developed then the learners who need more time to achieve would have a clearer progression route.

Providers' views on using the small, 2-3 credit English units for some of their ESOL learners were that the cost in administration time and enrolment costs would outweigh the benefits if used on a large scale. There were also concerns from the perspective that language learning is holistic and not easily fragmented into discrete themes. If there were a way of building a qualification out of a group of optional units and just enrolling for that qualification, that might be effective. AOs have little evidence as yet about patterns of combination and how Colleges are using the stand-alone units.

To meet the needs of learners at Entry levels 1 and 2 through the QCF, some providers

suggested a Diploma length qualification to ensure the hours needed for the majority of learners. However, none were happy to offer big/long qualifications and were more in favour of having a broader spread of smaller ESOL qualifications. At Entry level the learning hours per credit are largely expected to be GLH. There is awareness that at low levels learners will have limited ability to manage self-directed study. The GLH reduce at Level 1, further at Level 2 and so on. This is not related to the size of the qualification (i.e. whether it is an Award, Certificate or Diploma). This may need to be reflected in the levels of funding for lower level qualifications.

One College felt it was important to have the ability to mix the more flexible non-regulated and ZUNA provision with full qualifications to cater for all needs. It is a more cost effective way of managing provision over a year. A year can be a long time for an ESOL learner to commit to: "It is often the case with ESOL learners that they have to leave or move away." Echoing this idea another provider does not like to put ESOL learners onto year-long programmes and prefers term-long courses because people move away, find employment or are moved onto JCP courses. With the 16-18 year-old cohorts they find that "social and personal difficulties can often cause them to disappear from learning".

Providers are using other qualifications, including Personal Social Development, Employability, ICT and Maths in order to avoid using non-regulated provision to extend the amount of ESOL learning hours for their students. Although these are all bona fide qualifications and may be useful for some learners, most are not designed with ESOL learners in mind and may bewilder and confuse low level learners as well as adding a huge administrative burden onto teachers and exam officers.

Questions on qualification development in the NATECLA survey generated three popular suggestions for Entry level 1:

- Units to meet the needs of low level Entry level 1 learners (34 representing 52%)
- Separate units for reading and writing (not a combined unit) (11, 16%)
- Small units as with the English/literacy curriculum (6, 9%)

6.5 ESOL with Employability qualification

For their JCP provision some thought a small ESOL with Employability qualification might be appropriate and save them having to use non-regulated provision, but there could be problems with JCP requiring other employability outcomes for their customers than the qualification offers.

AOs provided information about the suite of ESOL for Work qualifications developed in 2006 to support the Train to Gain programme (a training offer for employers who identified specific staff skills needs). These qualifications were initially welcomed by providers but in practice were found to be less useful than hoped and carried limited funding. With the demise of Train to Gain, use of the ESOL for Work qualifications has declined. These qualifications are only available at Entry level 3 and Level 1, with 150 GLH, and were designed for people in work or with some experience of work. They specify a basic level of literacy in the learner's own language. However, the current demand is primarily at the lower levels.



7 Initial assessment

Currently initial assessment is not logged on the ILR, although there are pilot programmes investigating the feasibility of this. For data on initial assessment (IA) to be useful for distinguishing between learners who would be appropriate for a slow or a fast track to the same qualification it will need to record the following data:

- Snapshot of current skill levels
- Highest level of qualifications achieved
- Number of years' schooling undertaken (particularly important for those who have no qualifications or may have had only a couple of years' schooling at most in their country of origin)
- Number of hours a person has available to focus on their learning (providers have found this to be useful in determining when learners are ready to go forward for assessment)
- Length of time in the UK (or in an English speaking environment)

7.1 A 'critical period' in the learner journey

The SFA has no records of the initial and diagnostic process, although providers keep this data on their own systems. Many providers use an extended IA period as a 'critical period' to determine the holistic needs and abilities of their learners and to place them accordingly on programmes.

AOs also only have data of the time taken to achieve qualifications from their enrolment and certification data, and do not see the use of extended initial assessment through

non-regulated provision. Characteristics identified by providers as the most significant factors that determined the most appropriate enrolment pathway to develop English, relate to:

- time in the UK. Findings from providers and research show that the sooner people can enrol onto ESOL classes on arrival in the UK the more quickly they learn. Their need is great to be able to access information and motivation levels are high. The longer people are settled in the UK the more they develop strategies to circumvent the need to learn English, e.g. through support from local community groups; integrating with established same-language communities; employment with SMEs where their first language is spoken (Baynham et al, 2007).
- previous education or employment in the UK. People with ESOL needs who have had previous education or employment in an English language context will generally progress more quickly.
- education background prior to coming to the UK. The higher the level of an individual's educational attainment prior to their arrival in the UK, the more likely they are to progress at a faster rate with English language learning.
- first language literacy. Where people are not literate in their first language the length of time needed to progress in ESOL is considerably extended. Where this is the case, people are also less likely to have developed study skills or knowledge of a learning environment.
- written form of first language (whether Roman or other script). Learning a new script is a challenge for all people and will extend the ESOL learning programme. Where this is coupled with a lack of first language literacy (see above bullet point) this is doubly disadvantageous.
- likelihood of practising English language skills outside the classroom (both time and opportunity).

Colleges report that they have developed good IA tools to determine programme placement. Through initial assessment, teachers draw up individual learning targets for students that are recorded and reviewed using Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and the RARPA process. They report that the process of placing learners can take up to six months, with the rate of progress being the most difficult aspect to estimate.

We try to get them onto the right qualification in the first six weeks. We can get the starting point but it's a big problem to guess the rate they'll learn. It also depends on whether they have the time or opportunity at home to practise. Many learners only practise in the class.

The use of in-depth diagnostic assessment takes account of a range of learner characteristics, and non-regulated provision to offer a rich portfolio of provision designed to meet a diversity of learner needs.

One provider places all their learners at whatever level onto non-regulated provision, comprising an in-depth induction and diagnostics, for up to half a year. The diagnostics identify a target accredited learning programme and the learner begins their programme on non-regulated provision with individual ILP targets and RARPA recording of achievement. At the mid-year point, or earlier if a learner progresses more quickly, the majority of students are enrolled onto the appropriate SfL qualifications (Speaking and Listening; full qualification; Reading or Writing units using ZUNA codes).



8 Funding / time to learn

To cater for the learners who need much more time, as well as ensuring resources are efficiently used for those who can make more rapid progress, a mechanism needs to be found which allows funding to cater for the diversity of learner needs. It may for example be possible, on the basis of thoroughly recorded initial assessment, to identify which learners would benefit from a ‘fast-track’ route, and which would need to be allowed much more time to reach the same achievement level to make up for their lost schooling.

8.1 Research on ‘time to learn’

Vorhaus et al (2011) point to US research that suggests that additional learning hours are correlated with a higher likelihood of learner progress. There is evidence that across adult literacy, language and numeracy provision as a whole programmes need to provide at least 100 hours of instruction in order to enable 50% of learners to move up one US grade level¹. This same research suggests that increasing tuition to 150 hours increases the probability of improving by one grade level from 50% to 75%. Additional hours of instruction were also correlated with obtaining a GED (i.e. a secondary school graduation qualification), and appeared to offset the negative effects of individual characteristics

¹ American levels are more “compact” than England’s – i.e. compared to England, less progress is required in the US to move up a level.

associated with reduced likelihood of achievement: age, ability at the beginning of instruction, and receipt of public assistance. Based on these American figures, UK researchers have estimated that an average of 150-200 hours of instruction are required to progress one level in England (Vorhaus et al, 2011). These calculations do use averages, but are nonetheless useful in helping create benchmarks in this area.

These findings correspond to the guidelines produced by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) for learners starting from Entry level 1 needing to gain Entry level 3 for settlement and citizenship purposes. ESOL Entry level 3 is benchmarked at European level B1. ALTE (2013) suggest that while it is not possible to say with any level of certainty how long it should take most learners to reach a particular level, approximate guidelines suggest that learners starting from approximately Entry 1 should need roughly 350-400 guided learning hours to reach B1 (Entry Level 3). However, these approximate guidelines will vary greatly, depending on learner characteristics, prior experiences of education, language learning background, the intensity of the study, the age, as well as the amount of study/exposure outside of lesson times.

As previously noted in this report, the language skills acquired at ESOL Entry level 3 equate to the language skills acquired by a native English speaker at AS level in MFL studies (UCLAN, 2013)

8.2 Changes to funding

The system of ESOL funding up to 2012/13, according to the number of guided learning hours (GLH) on course, allowed providers to cater for the diversity of the ESOL learner cohort. Providers were free to register learners in need of more time for learning aims to be completed in two or more years, but in practice due to the pressures caused by success rate observance, few providers registered learners for more than twelve months. The recent and current changes have raised a number of challenges and issues.

ESOL SfL qualifications were initially set by Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) at 300 GLH per full qualification and 100 GLH per unit (Speaking and Listening, Reading, and Writing as separate units). In 2009 QCA reduced this to 180 (60 GLH per unit) to bring it into line with the schools' curriculum, despite concerns that it was inappropriate for adult learning qualifications to be measured with reference to a different learner cohort. During this period, these changes did not impact directly on ESOL provision as the ESOL SfL qualifications were 'unlisted' rather than 'listed' at the time.

In the transition to the new funding rates for 2013/14, the Skills Funding Agency developed a matrix using the 2012/13 and 2011/12 listed GLH rates and the qualification credit values. As the ESOL qualifications were not listed, approximations were made. This included a 'read across' to other existing English Qualifications. As the ESOL qualifications were not yet registered on the QCF, a value had to be set using estimates. These estimates were based on data available from the Individual Learner Record (ILR), which showed that the majority of learners took approximately one year to complete a level. It did not take into account the additional time learners were taking through non-regulated 'bridging' provision, as this is recorded separately on the ILR and is in addition to the learning undertaken towards the regulated qualification. Furthermore, the read across to other English qualifications did not fully take account of the fact that for one set of qualifications the target learners are native English speakers whilst for the other, they are not

In analysing the ILR data, the number of hours taken to complete a full (all modes) ESOL SfL qualification and separately a Speaking and Listening qualification was found to be the

same. This was initially surprising as the Speaking and Listening qualification consists only of two of the four modes in the full qualification, ie is half the size. However, as explained above the analysis did not bring together the glh for the combined regulated and non-regulated learning. . Because the nested Speaking and Listening qualification is one element of the full qualification as it covers only two of the four skill areas it could not be given the same credit value as the full qualification.

This led to Speaking and Listening being defined as an Award, with a value of up to 12 QCF credits with a whole ESOL qualification defined as a Certificate at 13 - 24 QCF credits.¹ Providers report acceptance in principle that the new qualifications will be in the QCF, but are concerned about the effect the single rates will have on their earnings from 2014/15 onwards. The new single rates are not comparable to the previous unlisted rates and do not necessarily reflect how long ESOL delivery can take for some learners. However, had it been known the extent to which non-regulated provision supported delivery of the full qualification, the analysis could have included this. Speaking&Listening were the more realistic of the two and a more appropriate designation might have been for a Speaking&Listening to be a Certificate and for the full qualification to be a larger sized Certificate in terms of the time actually needed for many of our ESOL population to achieve the levels.

At the time of writing the way forward is dependent on the yet-to-be-confirmed size and credit value of the new QCF-registered ESOL qualifications. The challenge remains to find a way to use funding to best effect, to ensure that learners in Allemano's third group (as defined on page 9) are given the time they need to make real progress and move their lives forward, while ensuring that 'fast-track' learners at the other end of the spectrum are not given more time than they need.

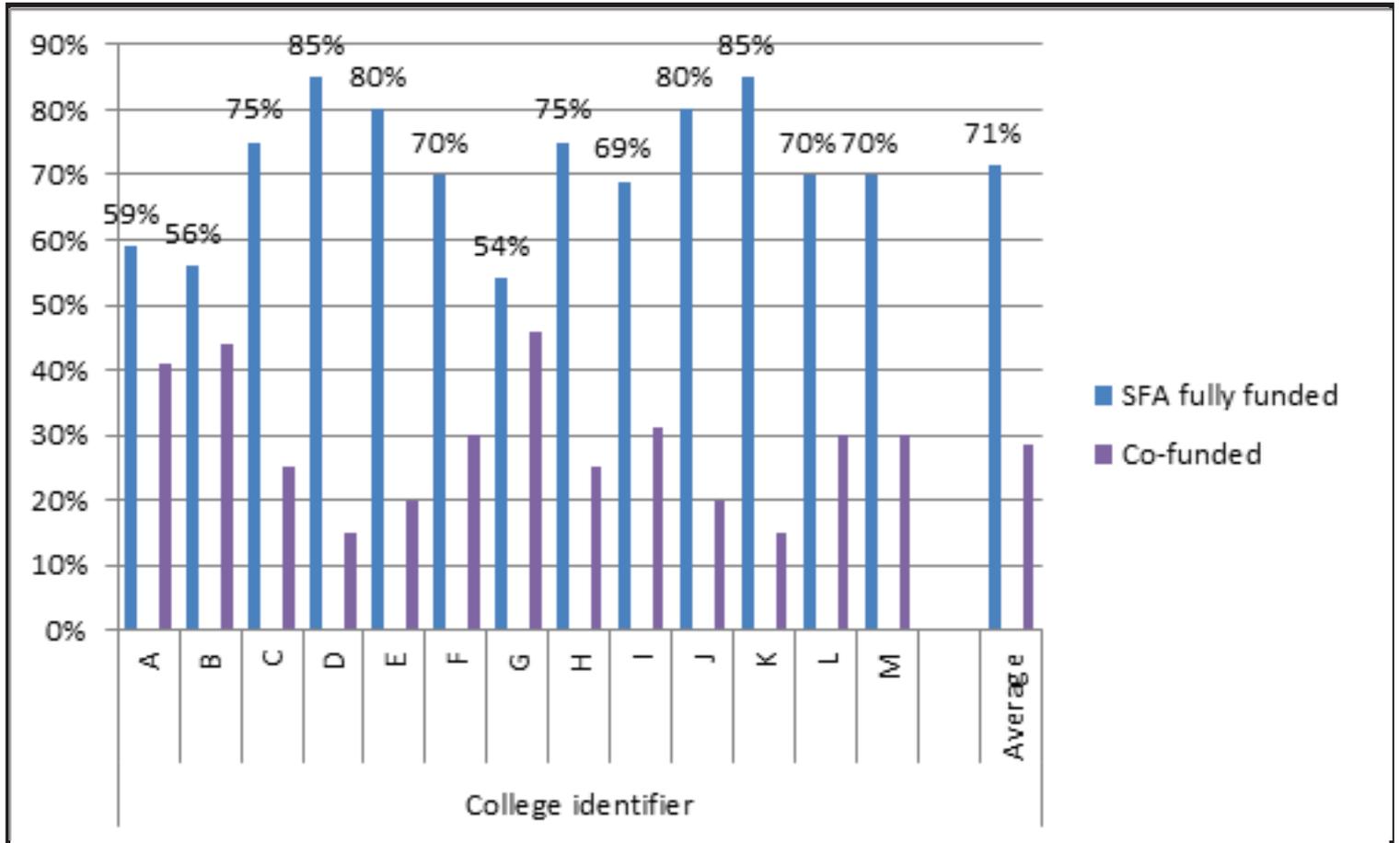
8.3 Benefit status and funding

Learners referred from JCP are in receipt of JSA or ESA and their courses are fully funded. Providers also reported the numbers of learners on various other benefits who receive full funding, at the Colleges' discretion, where language need has been identified as a barrier to employment. Once a person is in employment they can no longer access fully-funded ESOL classes. The proportion of learners not on benefits co funding their own provision ranged from 15% to 46% across daytime and evening provision. Table 5 shows the percentage of learners who are fully funded and co funded, with an overall average.

Learners on mainstream programmes in the future are more likely to be those people on non-employment related benefits or not on benefits at all (e.g. they may be employed). Those on non-employment related benefits will only be eligible for full-funding at the discretion of the provider with evidence that the ESOL need is a barrier to getting employment.

There is no funding available for ESOL training in the workplace.

Table 5: Proportions of fully and co funded learners across Colleges



9 Recommendations

These recommendations result from the research and a subsequent discussion at the project steering group. They are not to be considered as separate alternative measures but as a group of recommendations that complement each other in suggesting ways forward.

9.1 Smaller steps

Funding and qualification structures need to find ways that learners with high levels of need are able to mark their achievements in smaller steps.

Evidence both from research and practitioner interviews clearly points to the need for smaller funded learning programmes for those learners who need more time to complete a level, in particular at Entry level 1. Suggestions for how this might be achieved in the short term are: through unitised qualifications; by making separate qualifications of the current ESOL SfL modes; or by developing new qualifications separate from the ESOL SfL suite.

In the longer term a full review of the national literacy standards would be advisable. Many of the challenges experienced by learners and practitioners relate to the very big steps from one level to the next that are experienced by learners with minimal educational backgrounds. For these learners, the distance to travel to reach Entry level 1, and then from Entry level 1 to Entry level 2, represent huge chunks of learning.

This revision process should draw on the expertise in language assessment of the ESOL AOs and the experience of ESOL providers in preparing learners for assessment.

The facility to accredit progress in smaller steps or units would also meet the needs of employers who have reported needing shorter, more focused courses.

9.2 Resource to follow learner need

A flexible funding mechanism is required that can cater for the range of need in the diverse population of ESOL learners. Learners with minimal educational backgrounds have far more than a new language to learn, they need to learn how to learn and to become literate. Others, arriving in the UK with established study skills, need far less time at the lower levels and have other needs not addressed in this report. A funding mechanism that enables learners to practise and gain experience prior to a qualification route should be explored.

Providers need to be clear about all the resources that are available to support personalised learning. This resource needs to be flexible enough to support ESOL learners at different points, for example through low level ESOL to completion of Entry level 1; to consolidate learning when progressing from one level to another; for reading and writing support where these skills are less well developed than speaking and listening.

We have seen clearly throughout this research that there is no average ESOL learner. Many providers work with large numbers of low level learners who require at least a year to progress one level. Some, but by no means all providers are able to balance their funding with groups of fast track ESOL learners that can effectively release income for other learners who need a much longer learning programme. The expectation from the SFA that this will balance out at provider level is not carried thorough in the local realities of the geographical spread of different learner communities.

9.3 ESOL programmes to meet the needs of JCP clients

There is demand for qualifications and/or units that can be delivered through short intensive programmes to meet the needs of JCP learners. These may be aspects of the core curriculum that are brought together within a qualification or QCF unit/s after consultation with JCP. Ideally these learning units would be transferable to support progression as and when the individual is able to access further ESOL learning.



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Appendix 1 Colleges interviewed

Colleges	Principal	Deputy Assistant/ Principal	Director	Head of Faculty	Area Programme Manager
Barnet and Southgate College				Y	
Bradford College	Y				Y
City and Islington College			Y		
College of Haringey Enfield and North East London				Y	
Croydon College				Y	
Hackney Community College		Y			
Lambeth College			Y		
Leeds City College					Y
Leicester College	Y	Y		Y	
LeSoCo		Y			
New College Nottingham					Y
Sandwell College				Y	
Tower Hamlets College				Y	
Working Men's College				Y	
Totals	2	3	2	7	3

Appendix 2 NATECLA survey

NATECLA ran a short survey on the ESOL qualifications to supplement this research project at the end of July 2013. Within one week they received 92 responses which are analysed below.

The NATECLA survey data has been organised to show

- the provider types that responded
- the use of non-regulated provision and reasons for its use
- the most popular suggestions for new ESOL qualifications
- suggestions for structuring Entry level 1 ESOL qualifications

It is useful to have a response that includes a large number of Adult Community providers and some representation from smaller providers. The tables demonstrate that this feedback matches closely the feedback from the research interviews.

As expected the majority of respondents make use of non-regulated provision (64%) with main reasons for this being:

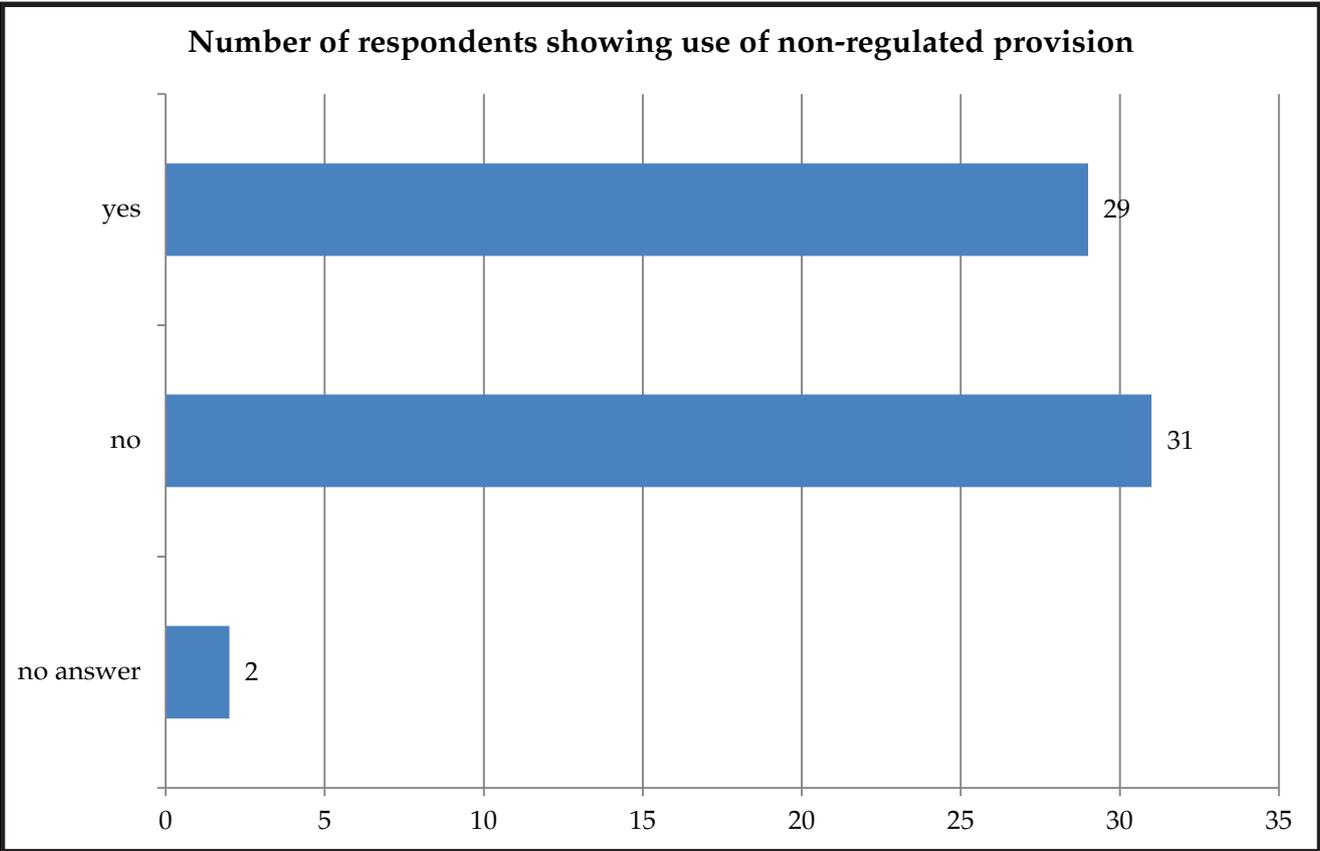
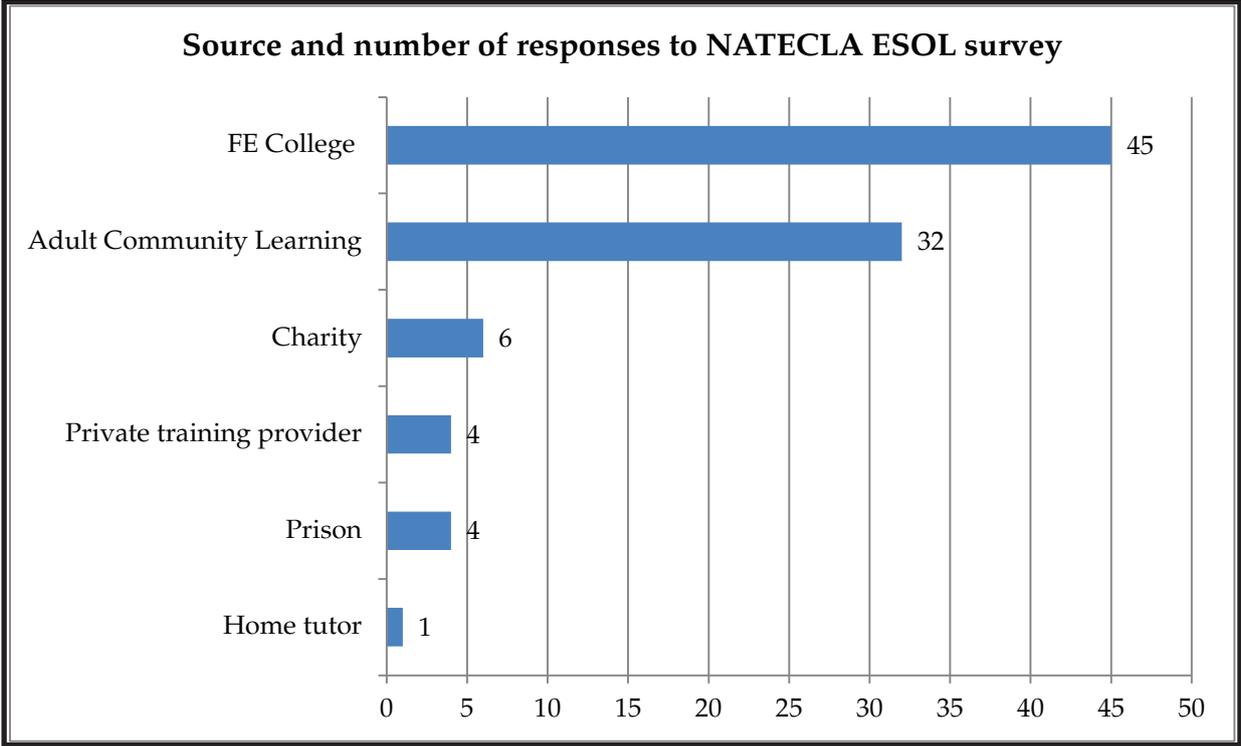
- Can't do E1 in a year (low level with literacy) (25 responses)
- Used at all levels to 'bridge' to the next level (12)
- Used for beginners from E1 to E3 (10)
- For JCP learners (5)

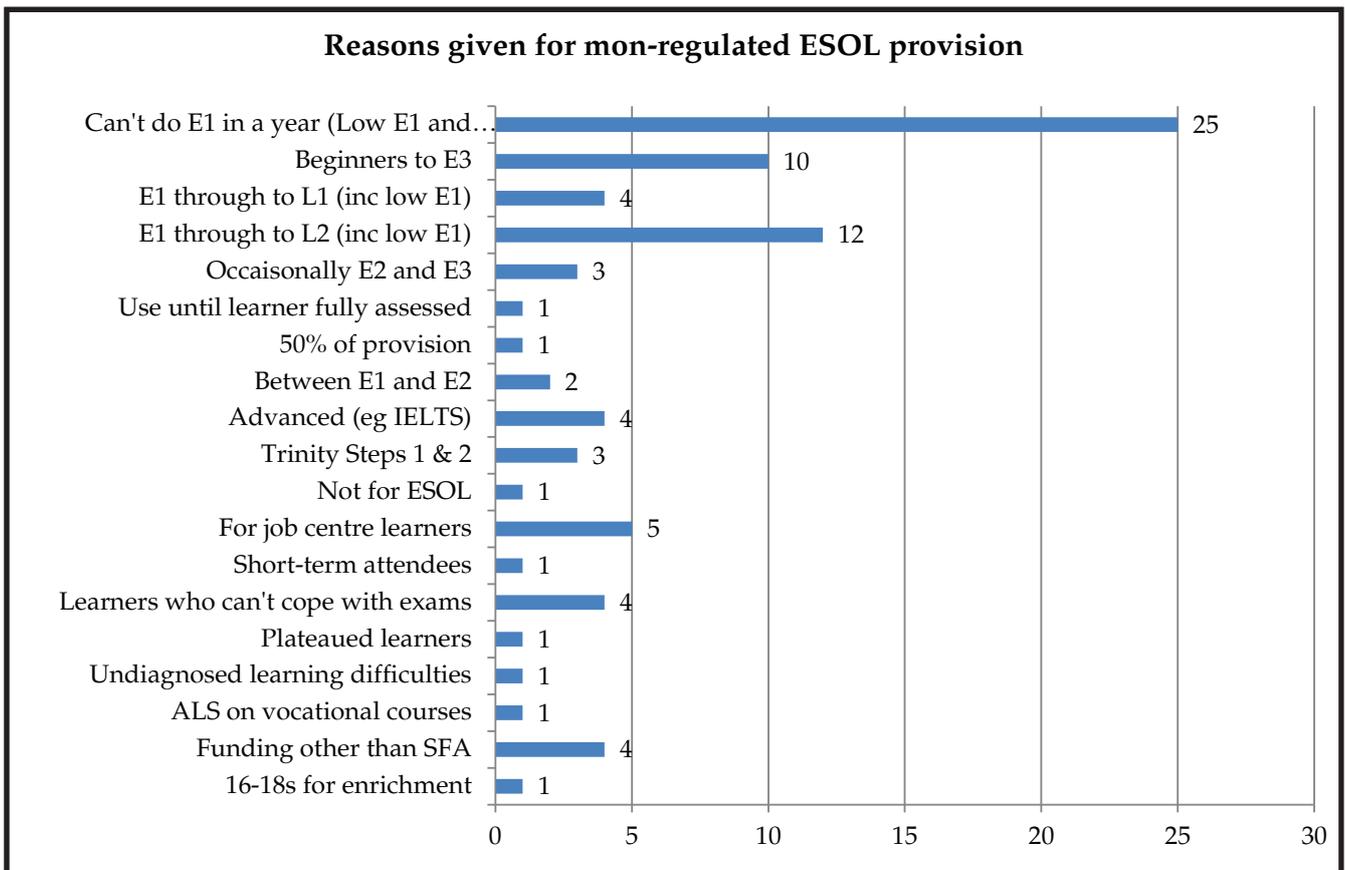
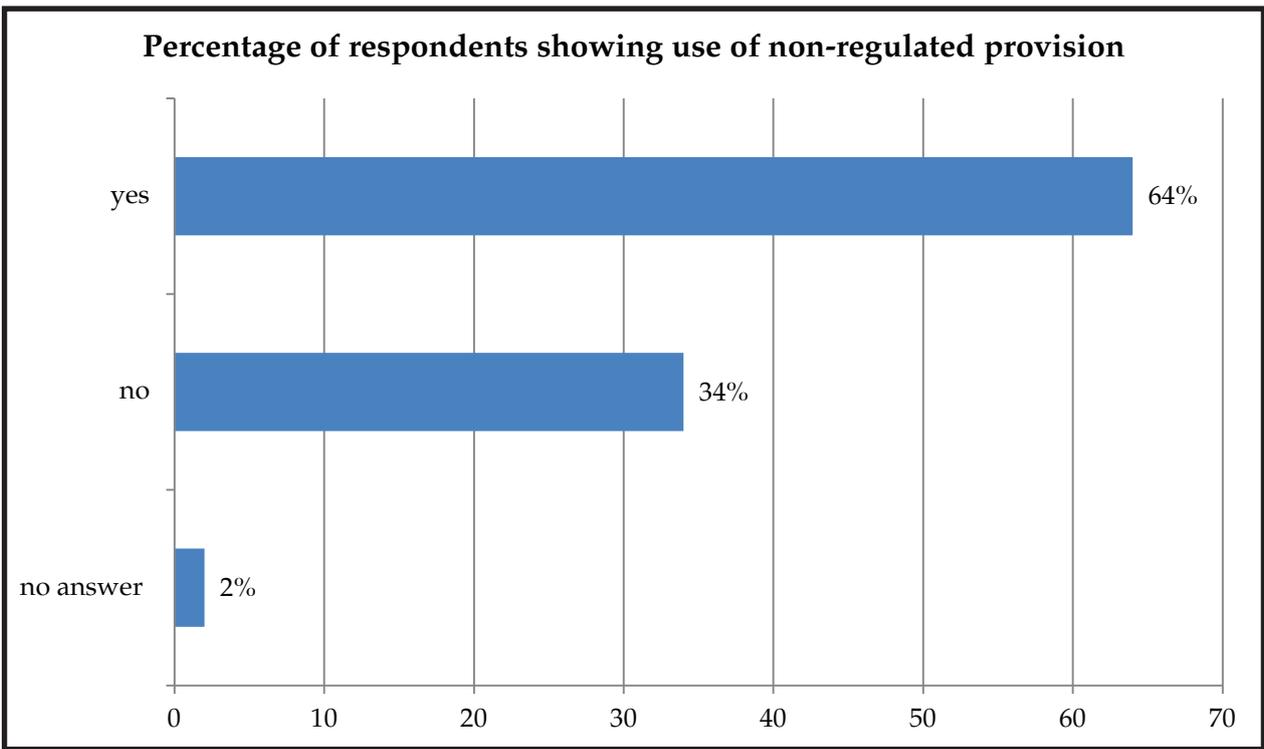
With regard to ESOL qualifications development 23 responses proposed that the three modes of the ESOL qualification should be unitised and separate qualifications with 16 responses for a separate qualification to meet the needs at the lowest level of Entry 1. This latter finding combines with 13 responses wanting to see more time allowed for low level E1 learners. A further 13 responses were made about improvements on the qualifications with regard to the AOs' assessment topics, methods and guidance.

7 respondents wanted to see the incorporation of work-based proficiency skills.

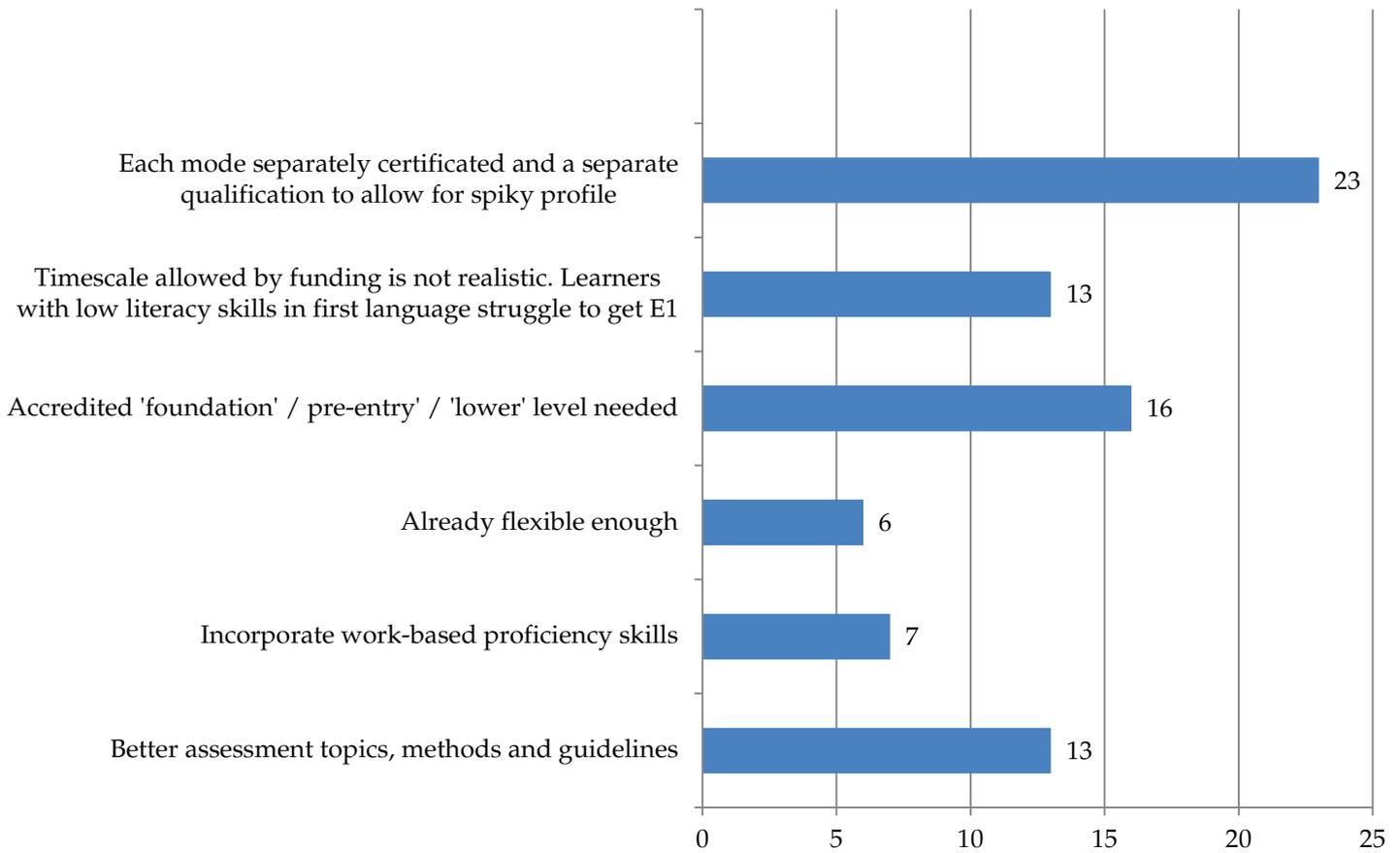
In response to a specific question related to Entry level 1 and whether it should be further broken down, the three most popular suggestions were for:

- Units to meet the needs of low level E1 learners (28 plus 6 representing 52%)
- Separate units for reading and writing (not a combined unit) (11, 16%)
- Small units as with the English curriculum (6, 9%)

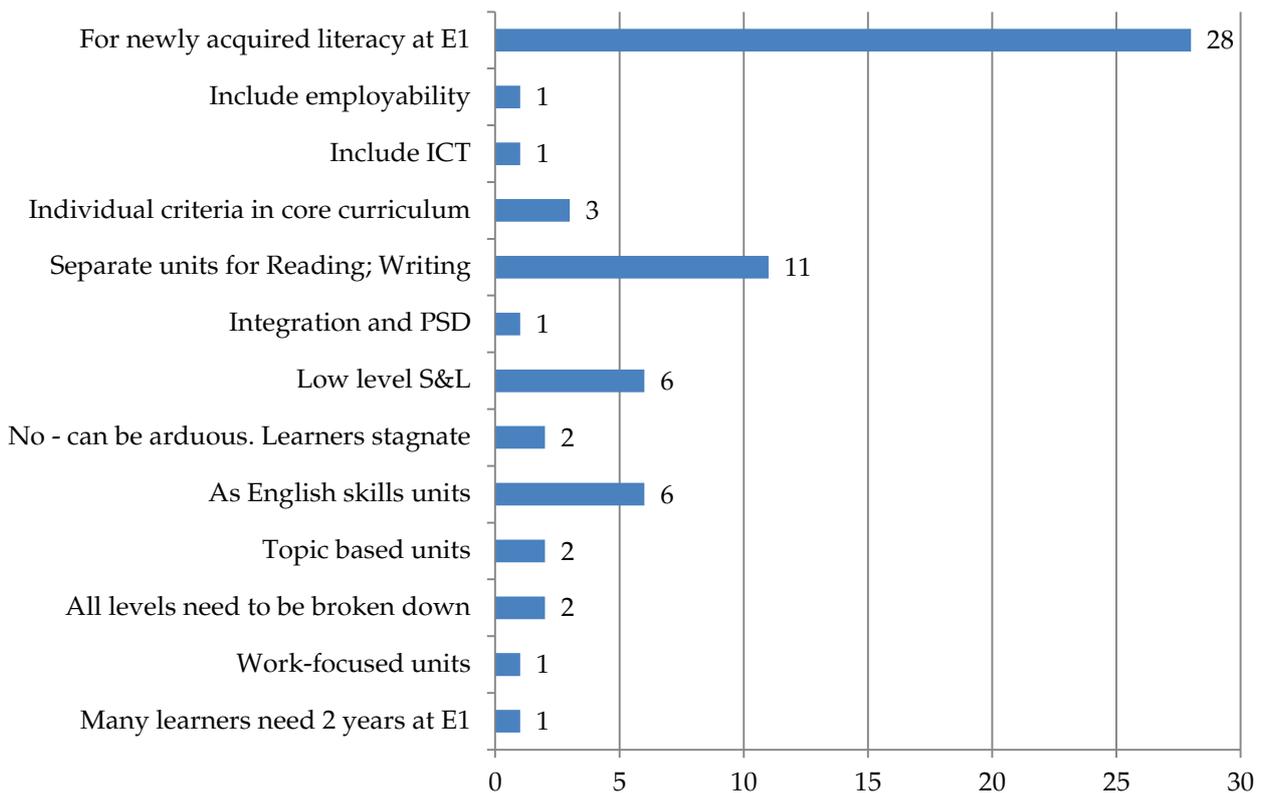




Most popular suggestions for new ESOL qualifications (total 86 responses)



How respondents would like to see Entry level 1 unitised





© Association of Colleges 2013
2 - 5 Stedham Place, London WC1A 1HU
Tel: 020 7034 9900 Fax: 020 7034 9950
Email: projects@aoc.co.uk Website: www.aoc.co.uk
 [@info_AoC](https://twitter.com/info_AoC)