

## News release

July 1<sup>st</sup> 2008

### **Demand for ‘English for Speakers of Other Languages’ (ESOL) courses outstrips supply**

**Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, has today published a review of English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) provision.**

Wales has seen a significant increase in the number of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers entering the country over the last decade. The ability to speak, read and write in English is vital in helping people to settle and to communicate confidently in communities and in the workplace. ESOL qualifications are considered a key step toward this.

Estyn found that the overall quality of ESOL courses has suffered because of the increased demands placed on providers, with almost half of all inspections highlighting some shortcomings in the quality of course delivery and many finding poor standards of teaching. There is evidence of a steady decline over the last 2 years.

Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector said: “Studying for an ESOL qualification is a sign of a commitment to learn English and can prove an important gateway into society for many individuals. It is encouraging that the demand for courses is so high, but must work harder to deliver the quality of training that is necessary.

“Whilst this report does highlight some problems with ESOL provision, it also shows us that the drive for immigrants to learn English and integrate is high. It’s positive that, at 70%, attainment rates of ESOL qualifications in Wales are still well above the 50% UK’s general attainment level.”

Estyn found that for most providers demand for courses is outstripping supply, with waiting lists being introduced in some areas of Wales. In spite of this, in the majority of inspections, attendance and completion rates were only poor to adequate.

Often, ESOL is delivered in workplaces, although the experience learners receive is varied. Learners are very positive about the benefits of being able to learn English at work, with all providers having delivered at least some form of ESOL in the workplace.

By learning in this way, employees understand the culture of a workplace and perform more effectively when they are better informed. Employers are able to convey important messages, including those about Health and Safety and improve internal communications with managers and colleagues.

ESOL delivered in the workplace is often a key part of an employer's commitment to 'The Employer Pledge' – part of the Welsh Assembly Government's Basic Skills Package aimed at improving literacy and numeracy for adults.

Estyn recommends that:

- ESOL providers should work to improve attendance, completion and attainment rates so that more learners achieve full accreditation. One possible way forward could be greater use of computer-based learning.
- The Welsh Assembly Government urgently reviews the funding arrangements for ESOL, so that providers are better able to plan for, and respond to, increases in demand.
- Providers set targets which encourage ESOL to be delivered more in workplaces and ensure greater commitment from employers.

**ENDS**

## Notes to Editors:

- Estyn, the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, provides a high quality inspection and advice service.
- Estyn's report, 'English for Speakers of Other Languages: The impact of increased demand', has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- The Basic Skills Employer Pledge has been developed as part of the National Strategy to reduce the substantial number of adults in Wales with poor literacy and numeracy skills. It is intended for all private and public sector companies and organisations, whatever their size. It allows them to demonstrate their commitment to the National Strategy in a concrete way.
- The evidence base for this report includes:
  - Inspection reports and other relevant documentation and data;
  - Visits to providers
  - Visits to workplace provision and meetings with employers;
  - Interviews with ESOL learners; and
  - Meeting with other agencies such as trade union representatives.
- Full copies of inspection reports are available on Estyn's web site at [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)

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