



City of Dublin Education and Training Board
Supplementary Submission for the 10-year Adult
Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy – a focus on
plurilingual learners

23 December 2020

1. English language and its relevance to the 10-year strategy

Access to appropriate and timely language training is cited in the literature¹²³ as the main enabler of integration. It is essential that the 10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy places a focus on the language and literacy needs of learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds and in doing so considers the wide-ranging profiles of learners who fall within the category of “language learner”. In developing the ALNDS, it is critical that the recommendations from previous reports in this area are taken on board.

The recent SOLAS⁴ review of English language provision in publically-funded adult education programmes found a lack of consistency across and indeed within Education and Training Boards in relation to provision, staffing and pathways. Its recommendations mirrored those outlined in previous research⁵ calling for the development of a national strategy for ESOL which would address such issues.

“Policy initiatives and guidelines in relation to ESOL provision and curriculum should be accompanied by the development of a designated ESOL framework in all ETBs, incorporating all existing provision and managed and coordinated across the ETB.”⁶

While acknowledging and welcoming the current project being undertaken by SOLAS to develop guidelines for initial assessment of English language, there remains a need for a national strategy and policy for ESOL that goes beyond initial assessment. In the absence of such policymaking, the lack of consistency in models of provision and the types of supports available in FET will continue.

Research in the field of second language acquisition since the late 1970s highlights the differences between conversational ability and academic language, or what Cummins calls BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency)⁷. While many second language learners will develop BICS relatively quickly, i.e. two years for a school-going second language speaker, it could take an additional 5 years for the same learner to acquire the same level of CALP as their peers. It could take considerably longer for an adult learner depending on their circumstances and the number of barriers they face in accessing and/or attending English language provision.

Mature applicants for FET places are less likely to have developed CALP in English unless they have been educated through English at second level or have already completed previous studies. Indeed, even in the case of applicants progressing directly from second level, it cannot be assumed that there is sufficient level of CALP to engage with studies or training in FET.

¹ European Commission (2016) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *Action plan on the integration of third country nationals*. Brussels

² Kaida, L. (2013) Do host country education and language training help recent immigrants exit poverty? *Social Science Research*, 42, 726-741

³ McGinnity, F., Fahey, É., Quinn, E., Arnold, S., Maître, B. and O’Connell, P. (2018a). Monitoring report on integration 2018, Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute/Department of Justice and Equality.

⁴ SOLAS (2018). English language provision and language assessment for low-skilled and unemployed migrants. Recommendations for good practice at NFQ levels 1-3 in ETBs.

⁵ Horwath Consulting Ireland (2008) *Development of a National English Language Policy for Legally Resident Adult Immigrants: Final Report*, Office of the Minister for Integration and the Department of Education and Science.

⁶ SOLAS *ibid*

⁷ Cummins, J. (1979). ‘Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters’, *Working Papers on Bilingualism* 19, 121–129.

Indeed it is unclear how newly-arrived migrants are coping in the second-level system and whether post-school transitions are affected by the limited language supports available in schools since the introduction of the General Allocation Model.

Recent studies⁸ identify some areas of concern regarding educational outcomes for particular national groups, noting higher instances of early school leaving among East Europeans compared to their Irish peers or other migrant groups (ibid). Meanwhile, international literature^{9,10} identifies lower employment and educational outcomes for young people from migrant backgrounds. This has particular relevance for the targeted interventions for early school-leavers available through the Youthreach programme and Community Training Centres (CTCs) which have not traditionally provided an education pathway to migrant learners.

2. CDETБ's background in the provision of programmes and supports for linguistically diverse learners

CDETБ has been working with learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds for almost 40 years and has developed considerable expertise in working with plurilingual¹¹ learners of all ages and profiles who speak English as a second (or additional) language, including learners who are developing literacy for the first time through English.

Research commissioned by CDVEC and County Dublin VEC and conducted by Tanya Ward in the early 2000s initially informed and shaped CDETБ's provision of supports for learners of asylum seeking and migrant backgrounds and resulted in the appointment of a designated ESOL Development Officer for the ETБ.

The full-time ESOL Development Officer has responsibility for the development and implementation of policy and establishing good practice in ESOL provision in Adult and Further Education while providing support on demand to CDETБ second-level schools.

- Adult Education Service (AES)

The Adult Education Service offers a comprehensive range of English language and literacy programmes and supports for learners in a range of settings, using both blended and face-to-face delivery modes, at different times of the day throughout the year to respond to the needs of learners.

Classes are offered at different CEFR levels, from pre-A1 to B2 and where appropriate include opportunities for QQI certification. Typically, learners receive in the region of 120-140 hours' tuition at each of the lower CEFR levels (pre- A1, A1, A2) and 160-200 hours at B1 and B2 levels respectively. In the main, classes are timetabled for 6-10 hours per week.

In addition to open enrolment courses, CDETБ offers a range of targeted courses for specific learner groups, including learners with complex needs.

⁸ McGinnity et al, 2018a ibid

⁹ OECD&EU, 2018 ibid

¹⁰ European Commission (2016) ibid

¹¹ *Plurilingual* the term endorsed by the Council of Europe to refer to learners who speak or can use several languages to different abilities will be used throughout this paper

Learners affected by homelessness

The Foundations Project, an education service for learners affected by homelessness, offers ESOL courses for learners living in temporary accommodation in Dublin city centre, including learners who have recently left direct provision. These courses generally focus on the development of oral and aural language skills and additional supports are provided for learners who are developing literacy for the first time in English.

Parents of school-going children

The AES provides English language courses for parents in conjunction with Home School and Community Liaison (HSCL) Co-ordinators in primary schools across the city. The purpose is two-fold - to support the development of parents' English language skills and to enable parents to understand and become involved in school life.

CDETB works in partnership with a range of organisations in the community to provide ESOL courses on-site. One such example is the South Circular Road mosque where ESOL and drama classes for women attending the mosque have been in operation for over 10 years. ESOL classes are offered at pre-A1 to A2 level, after which learners progress to mainstream ESOL courses.

Learners accessing homeless and addiction services

Recently CDETB has partnered with Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) to provide ESOL courses for service users of the MQI night café. The language programme was designed around the specific language needs of MQI's service users to enable them to understand and interact with the homeless and addiction services.

Learners progressing to mainstream FET

Progression courses for learners planning to move from ESOL to mainstream FET and/or into employment have been available since 2015. Delivered on an intensive basis (15 hours per week), learners are supported to develop the cognitive academic linguistic proficiency (CALP) needed to engage with curricular content in FET.

The Adult Education Service also provides language support classes for FET learners in a number of FE colleges across the city.

Workplace ESOL

The CDETB Workplace Unit provides on-site English language classes for employees of Dublin-based companies and employers.

- Youth and Education Service for Refugees and Migrants

CDETB has been providing an education and youth service for newly-arrived young people seeking asylum and other young refugees since 2002. This programme is the only one of its kind in Ireland and was awarded the European Language Label in 2013. The service provides an access programme focussing on English language, literacy, maths and life skills for newly-arrived teenagers before they transition to mainstream school.

It also provides a basic education programme (English language, maths and IT) for young people aged 18-23 many of whom have had interrupted or limited education in their countries of origin due to conflict. Many learners are developing literacy for the first time in English. Learners often progress from this programme to Youthreach or Community Training Centres.

- Further Education Colleges

CDETБ has been providing vocationally-oriented ESOL programmes through six of its 22 FE colleges for almost 20 years. Learners can enrol on part-time or full-time programmes and undertake full awards or partial awards including English as a Second Language at Levels 4, 5 and 6 of the NFQ. These courses are often progression courses for learners who have completed a general ESOL course in the Adult Education Service.

- Education Service to Prisons

ESOL programmes are available to learners accessing the Education Service to Prisons in each of the six Dublin prisons.

- Staffing

CDETБ's ESOL tutors are highly qualified and experienced language professionals. Several ESOL tutors have diverse mother tongues.

Literacy ESOL tutors are qualified ESOL tutors who have had training in adult literacy through the ETБ's Adult Literacy Service. CDETБ is currently in the early stages of developing a professional development programme in Literacy for ESOL.

Each of the five regional AES teams has a part-time ESOL co-ordinator who is responsible for recruiting, assessing, placing and referring learners in addition to providing support to tutors in relation to assessment and teaching materials.

Reporting to the Adult Education Officer in their region, the co-ordinators liaise with a range of internal stakeholders (e.g. Adult Literacy Organisers, Community Education Facilitators, Adult Guidance staff, Workplace Co-ordinator, FE colleges) and external stakeholders including organisations working with migrants, e.g. Pavee Point, Focus Ireland, One Family, MQI, mosques etc.

The local co-ordinators work closely with the ESOL Development Officer to ensure that there is consistency of approach, delivery and assessment across the city.

- Intercultural awareness

While language support is one of the key educational priorities for migrant learners, so too is intercultural support. CDETБ has been involved in numerous initiatives in intercultural education, including stakeholder training and the development of resources. A joint initiative with (then) County Dublin VEC in 2010-2011 involved a Training of Trainers programme in Interculturalism with up to 30 staff members receiving comprehensive training in this area, resulting in whole-staff training sessions on interculturalism and equality in FET centres.

- Language-aware teaching

As part of an EU-funded programme in 2010-13, CDETБ designed and delivered in-service training around the country for second-level and FET teachers on language-aware teaching methodologies. This training was designed to support teachers and practitioners to use methodologies which would enable plurilingual learners to develop their English language skills while engaging with curricular content. CDETБ has continued to provide this training on-demand for its own centres. In 2018 CDETБ was invited to work with Department of Education's Social Inclusion Unit, LCETБ and Limerick Education Centre to deliver similar training to schools and centres in Limerick city with very diverse student populations.

3. Recommendations for inclusion in the 10-year strategy

I. *ESOL as a distinct area of expertise*

While ESOL provision in the ETB sector emerged from a response by the literacy services over 30 years ago, the new strategy should recognise that *“ESOL is primarily concerned with the provision of English language tuition and should be recognised as a distinct area of expertise.”*¹² As such, policy at a local and national level should be informed by ESOL experts.

II. Implementation of recommendations from 2018 SOLAS report

The development of a national ESOL framework and the implementation of the recommendations from the 2018 report combined with an action plan with clearly defined targets would be transformational for learners and for FET provision.

III. *Teaching qualifications for ESOL*

There are no specific qualifications or teaching standards for teaching ESOL and Literacy ESOL in Ireland. This should be considered within the new strategy and would address some of the concerns raised in the 2018 report.

IV. Development of high quality ESOL teaching resources

To support tutors and teachers in their delivery of high quality teaching in ESOL, funding should be ring-fenced to develop high quality ESOL teaching and learning resources. While practitioners will also develop their own materials to respond to their learners', access to Irish-centred materials, particularly audio resources would be hugely beneficial.

V. *Targeted programmes and interventions for young adults*

The CDETB programme for young people aged 18-23 outlined earlier in this report is a model that could be replicated in other areas of the country. Equally, consideration should be given to the extension of the Youthreach programme to allow plurilingual learners a longer time to complete the programme.

VI. Vocationally-oriented ESOL programmes

There is scope to develop vocationally-oriented language programmes similar to those developed in countries like Sweden, e.g ESOL for taxi drivers.

VII. *Recognition of learners' mother tongues*

The strategy should recognise the importance and value of learners' mother tongue (L1) and ensure that the language of deficit discourse is avoided. While ESOL learners may be at different stages of developing English language competences, they already possess a mother tongue, or indeed several other languages in which they are fluent. Learners who are developing literacy for the first time in English are still fluent in at least one language.

Learners' L1s are an asset to the learning process, in terms of language, literacy and critical thinking skills. Valuing learners' L1 sends a positive message to learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds who may be struggling with their new identities in Ireland.

¹² SOLAS (2018) *ibid*

The development of L1 initiatives at a national level would be most welcome including a promotional campaign and initiatives for International Mother Language Day, a UNESCO day celebrated annually on 21 February since 1999.

VIII. Recognition of learners' prior qualifications and experience

The strategy should acknowledge that migrant learners in Ireland, regardless of their English language competencies, have wide-ranging life and work experience and that many are highly qualified and skilled. Conflating language ability with skills level is harmful at both an individual and societal level.

IX. "One-stop shops" for ESOL learners

It is worth considering the potential of one-stop shops for ESOL, e.g. ESOL assessment hubs in urban areas as central points of contact to assess and assign learners to appropriate provision, enabling a co-ordinated approach to ESOL provision across providers (e.g. ETBs and other community-based providers) and helping to reduce waiting lists.

This could also facilitate the English language assessments necessary for plurilingual learners to demonstrate English language competence as part of the admissions process for apprenticeships and other FET programmes.

Examples in other jurisdictions include: Regional ESOL Assessment Hubs (REACH) in four Welsh cities¹³.

A more ambitious approach could involve the establishment of one-stop shops like those established in Portugal¹⁴ which provide information on employment, social welfare, education, recreation, health, rights and entitlements and specific services including intercultural mediation.

X. Funding to remove barriers to participation in ESOL courses

Female migrants are more likely to face structural or institutional barriers to participation in FET due to caring responsibilities¹⁵ and regardless of their previously acquired qualifications and work experience, are ten times more likely to work in domestic work than their native peers¹⁶. The availability of subsidised or free childcare supports should be considered within the strategy.

Transport costs associated with attending regular classes can be a barrier to participation for learners on low incomes. Subsidised or fully funding travel costs for adult learners enrolled on ESOL programmes would address this.

XI. Acknowledgement that plurilingual learners engage in programmes across FET

Plurilingual learners may need to avail of language supports across FET, not only as part of dedicated language programmes. This has an implication for the development of policies on learner supports in addition to the resourcing of supports. It should also be considered in relation to the professional development of FET practitioners and ancillary staff.

¹³ <https://reach.wales/en>

¹⁴ <https://www.acm.gov.pt/-/cnae-centro-nacional-de-apoio-ao-imigrante>

¹⁵ Chadderton, C. and Edmonds, C. (2015) 'Refugees and access to vocational education and training across Europe: a case of protection of white privilege?' *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 67 (2), 136-152

¹⁶ Organization for Economic and Cultural Development /European Union (2018), *Settling In 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration*, OECD Publishing, Paris/EU, Brussels, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264307216-en>.