

Introduction

This document reports on the activities undertaken by I'SE for receipt of a financial contribution to support the Birmingham and Solihull Professional Development Centre Costs.

1. Background and Context

I'SE (Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs) incorporating the Birmingham and Solihull PDC (Professional Development Centre) for *Skills for Life* as deliverers of *Skills for Life* (SfL) training and CPD (Continuing Professional Development) were contracted from September 2005 until 31st January 2007, by Birmingham and Solihull LSC to address the issues identified in ASPIRE funded research looking at local issues for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and the 'National context for ESOL Delivery for Asylum Seekers undertaken in Action 1 of Aspire. The aim was to improve the quality and accessibility of ESOL being delivered to asylum seekers.

2. Activity

- Train 10 teachers to develop awareness of language influences on use of English by new arrivals.
- Train ESOL tutors to develop the quality assurance (Pre-inspection) of ESOL delivery.
- Provide awareness raising and support to ling IAG staff to asylum seeker organisations.
- Hold 2 Master Classes on National Good Practice and new initiatives in ESOL that could support asylum seekers for example, Citizen Skills website and CD ROM, the ASSEST UK programme, Equal ASSET and ESOL pathfinders.
- Develop 8 Community Champions with Refugee Community Organisations (RCO's) to signpost to ESOL and liaise with mainstream providers (customising Level 2)
- Provide Training Needs Analysis, training delivery and support with 8 ESOL Protocol agency staff.
- Deliver 2 Master Classes for 8 ESOL teachers – programme dependant upon needs analysis e.g. skills and learning approaches, assessment, diagnostics, leaning delivery, linguistics, group management, pace and curriculum.
- Establish an ESOL and Asylum Seekers Network to support: information exchange, quality, learners who move between providers and professional development.
- Evaluate and disseminate findings on the above activities to the Development Partnership.

A menu of training sessions to support the aims of the programme was agreed following identification of the gaps for tutors delivering ESOL provision to asylum seekers that included:

- Sharing Good Practice – Coaching and Mentoring.
- Individual Learning plans
- Citizenship
- Enrichment Activities
- Customising Level 2
- Observation of Teaching and Learning and How to give feedback.
- Initial assessment and Diagnostic Assessment.
- Differentiation.
- ESOL and the Bi-Lingual Learner

Feedback from the training was extremely positive. Comments included “very well structured and delivered”, “It was a great opportunity to share ideas”, “the course has helped me to include a variety of enrichment activities in my course and on the project”, “I can now start to observe community teachers and improve departmental development”, “I am better prepared to offer advice/assistance”, “I can train other trainers using the materials from today’s session”, “exceeded my expectations etc. Over 50 individuals attended these courses

Customised Level 2 City and Guilds Adult Learner Support qualification was delivered with a number of individuals going on to successfully complete the qualification and gain the full award. Unit 1 of this qualification includes signposting and Awareness raising and is aimed at staff and volunteers who signpost and deliver IAG to individuals and organisations. For the purposes of this contract this qualification was customised to support those who provide services to Asylum Seekers. A total of 19 individuals attended the sessions gaining a City and Guilds unit of accreditation, with 16 going on to achieve to full City and Guilds 929 Adult Learner Supporter qualification (9295).

National Good Practice and new initiatives in ESOL that could support asylum seekers was included in all our customised training, for example, Citizenship. Tutors and supporters attending the sessions were made aware of and given access to the Citizen Skills website and CD ROM, the ASSEST UK programme, Equal ASSET and ESOL pathfinders. Resources were also purchased through our other funding programmes and distributed to RCO’s and tutors working with Asylum Seekers. Resources are also available for loan through the PDC resource centre.

Awareness raising and support to link IAG staff to asylum seekers was encouraged and informed through our training sessions, outreach activities and resource centre at every opportunity. Additional information, support and resources for example the DA toolkit with IAG information included, was distributed to RCO’s, ESOL tutors and individuals working with Asylum Seekers supporting them to signpost and support their clients.

ESOL Tutor Network was established for tutors working with Asylum Seekers in the community. The purpose of this was to discuss issues and concerns for tutors supporting Asylum Seekers and delivering ESOL in the following areas: information exchange, quality, learners who move between providers and professional development. The purpose for discussing these was to identify any issues or concerns and share best practice with other tutors across the city, with the aim of informing policy makers and funders through the ASPIRE programme and dissemination activities, to shape funding strategies and policy frameworks, make them more relevant and responsive to needs and priorities of learners, to develop a more coherent approach towards ESOL delivery, and offer individuals delivering

ESOL to Asylum Seekers the opportunity to network and build contacts for future support beyond the life of this project.

Information Exchange – issues and concerns

- ❖ Information across the city for different ethnic groups is fragmented or hard to get and the quality depends on where the learner goes for help in the first instance.
- ❖ Finding information in languages other than English at different levels is difficult.
- ❖ Signposting to relevant courses needs improving as the information received by learners is mainly incorrect.
- ❖ Most information exchange is by word of mouth for asylum seekers, refugees, tutors and organisations.
- ❖ Information transfer between providers does not happen generally as learners need to re-enrol, re-produce evidence of entitlement and because of provider competition/targets.
- ❖ Clarification and transparency of qualifications of learners is needed to ensure they are on appropriate courses and are aware of progression routes.
- ❖ Access to up to date information for support workers, tutors, sign-posters, IAG workers and managers is needed.

Quality – issues and concerns

- ❖ A lot of provision is provided in unsuitable locations with poor facilities and equipment.
- ❖ Resources are inadequate e.g. books, storage for personal data, computers to develop language through ICT.
- ❖ There is little liaison between providers when learners move on and as a consequence support needs and previous achievements may not be recognised.
- ❖ Recognition of learner difficulties (SpLD) is very limited.
- ❖ Provision for professionals needing to learn English for work is limited especially by Guided Learning Hours (GLH) requirements.
- ❖ Qualification system and funding (GLH) is holding learners back.
- ❖ Funding issues on the whole impact on quality of provision.
- ❖ General delay in certificates from awarding bodies means learners may have moved on before receiving them.
- ❖ Teaching is of a poor quality in some locations due to unqualified tutors and lack of training and administration support.

- ❖ A large percentage of tutors are hourly paid leading to inconsistency of group development.
- ❖ The constant movement of the goal posts regarding funding and provision causes confusion both for learners and providers.
- ❖ Learn Direct drop in centres are not always putting learners on appropriate courses.

Learners who move between providers

- ❖ A personal learning file similar to a Record of Achievement would benefit individual learners and organisations alike. This should include Qualifications from country of origin, Naric equivalent, prior learning in England, CV or personal profile, progress or development review.

Professional development

- ❖ Still confusion over standards/qualifications required.
- ❖ New standards for Specialism from September 2007 are still not clear.
- ❖ Demand outstripping supply encourages use of agency staff.
- ❖ Lack of funding for teacher training. It is difficult for part-time agency staff to acquire funding/release for training.
- ❖ Lack of stability of part-time/sessional /agency staff within ESOL provision means that there is a reliance on goodwill for tutors to develop themselves. If they attended training they are very often not paid.
- ❖ The nature of the provision within the community also means that tutors are often isolated and not aware of professional development that they may be able to access.
- ❖ Supervision and monitoring is also generally poor with most tutors only being observed once per year and therefore CPD is not identified.
- ❖ More teacher training/support to support/signpost traumatised students if applicable.

3. Feedback:

The sessions were used to provide clarity, share information and best practice and update participants on current practice and thinking. Although the group were disappointed by the numbers of tutors attending (9) that the meetings had been very worthwhile. Also not only had they discussed the issues surrounding ESOL provision in Birmingham but had arrived at some interesting conclusions between them supported by others' research and more importantly produced tangible solutions for the benefit of all.

The group produced:

- ❖ A mock up Information folder for which they would try to seek funding opportunities to take forward.
- ❖ PAR (Personal Achievement Record – Draft) as a tool to resolve issues of movement between provider concerns, and more importantly to empower and develop learners' self esteem and to ensure that they are on the right programmes.
- ❖ A commitment to continue the tutor network by using a free web resource to set up an ongoing ESOL forum.

The tutors they valued the opportunity to meet, talk, discuss their practice and “Brainstorm problems and ideas and explore possible solutions” with other tutors doing the same job a them, in a variety of environments. They felt that the topics they discussed were sometimes different to the topics discussed within the colleges and this was very useful and more relevant to them as individuals. They felt at ease with each other because they could share ideas and others were interested in their comments. They learned that they share similar issues because of the environments in which they work, that there is a need for more communication within the city regarding ESOL learners, the opportunity to share information is important, and leaning where to obtain resources that were recommended was very useful. They can now use this information to take their practice forward and inform others.

Conclusion:

The above range of activities has been extremely successful. The opportunity to continue this locally and nationally either through training, seminars and conferences, forums and or one to one meetings would be beneficial.

Additional classes in teaching methodologies, approaches for tutors and trainers delivering ESOL, Cultural Awareness and Working with refugees and asylum seekers for example as well as additional training in using ESOL resources would be extremely useful.

The dissemination of Skills for life training will continue through our regular mail outs particularly targeting ESOL tutors and individuals working with Asylum Seekers if appropriate. Other activities and information outside of training if appropriate will as part of our marketing strategy also is made available through the Birmingham and Solihull PDC.

Nora Darby
Information, Training and Resources Manager - Birmingham and Solihull PDC