

Language Training & Support for Offenders & Staff in East of England Prisons

UK

Language Policy



Good Practice Executive Summary

This dossier file is based on information provided by several government agencies and through multiple (approx, 30) visits to HMP establishments to talk to prison staff & offenders. The main focus is on ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) strategy & provision, which is delivered across England. However, the inclusion as best practice is due to a combination of ESOL provision and foreign language & culture support focussed on the development of prison-specific foreign language training resource, unique to the East of England.

The East of England's prison population includes a large proportion of foreign nationals. Dealing with issues relating to English as a second or other language is therefore a high priority. There is a huge diversity of languages among offenders and widely varying levels of English language skills, with the majority at a basic level (pre-Entry to Entry 2).

The primary aim of ESOL provision is to equip learners with the English they need to operate effectively within the prison, including the securement of employment both within the prison and once released. This in turn leads to reduced re-offending. At the same time, they should be helped to achieve formal qualifications. The pressure of numbers continually arriving adds a logistical dimension to the design and management of ESOL provision. Addressing these needs is a daily task for those responsible for induction, education and training, and delivery of work regimes in custodial settings.

The 2005-12 East of England Language Framework item 2.8 states that “The region’s public organisations, and in particular the police and prison services, face everyday challenges in communicating with overseas nationals. To ensure that our communities remain safe and our citizens protected we need to provide officers on the ground with the intercultural and language skills required to diffuse tense situations, provide guidance and manage communications. Support should be given at Coordinating level to all regional co-financing organisations and county councils.”

As part of training delivered under OLASS, the Offending Learning and Skills programme, ESOL training is delivered to the prisons. The foreign language & culture support to offenders forms part of the 2009-10 ESF Technical Assistance activity by RLN East for NOMS and JobCentre Plus (who also maintain a presence in the prisons).

On average, ESOL classes last 3hrs each and are run five times per week, once per day, either morning or afternoon, giving each learner a total of 15hrs language training per week. Morning and afternoon sessions are frequently divided by level. Each prison on average runs 1-2 classes per morning or afternoon, with group sizes of 6-12 (9 being the most common). ESOL is contracted through tender process and is currently delivered by the organisations Milton Keynes College and A4E. The latter supply 7 of the prisons, and the former 8 prisons.

To support the prison officers with communications with foreign national prisoners, and especially officers on reception, induction and wing duties, a series of language phrase booklets was developed and published. These were subsequently used as supplementary resource in ESOL classes. The English sentences were numbered the same across all language booklets, making easier reference for staff and tutors.

A further resource developed during 2010 is the storage facility for ESOL materials www.rln-east.com/lace/resources. These contain ESOL materials placed into 4 categories, most of which were developed using UK or EU funding. The Category 1 ESOL materials described in section 3 above were originally designed for migrant workers engaged in employment in the UK. These teaching and learning materials were developed under the UK Skills for Life programme as a result of a project commissioned by LSIS in March 2008.

As part of the Whole Organisation Approaches project, a simple framework was developed to embed Skills for Life in the planning, management and delivery of learning. The Skills for Life Framework likens the process of developing a whole organisation approach to a journey that starts with analysing local needs, and finishes with learners ready to progress to further learning opportunities. Each stage of the journey is represented as a 'stop' on the line. Each stop contains links to relevant information and to appropriate material.

Analysing the needs of learners - offenders and staff - throughout the prisons - is critical. Statistics show that a wide range of people with skills gaps and complex needs are currently in custody or on probation, and will therefore need Skills for Life support. Resettlement and staff development issues are also crucial in improving performance and reaching targets in this sector. For a whole organisation approach to Skills for Life, consistent systems for screening and initial assessment need to be in place so that reliable data is available. Analysis of that data will inform each department and programme of the learner profile.

1. Reflects current EU and regional policy on multilingualism

The dossier file needs to confirm how the policy addresses lifelong learning relating to contextualised employment needs. Some policies may limit the breadth of the training foresees on one language or sector, and therefore all limitations need to be clearly defined, with justification for their inclusion outlined.

You may choose one or more of the following:

- promotes a wider knowledge and use of all languages throughout the Union
- promotes lifelong learning and learner mobility
- ensures the provision of the necessary skills and qualifications for the world of work

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In the East of England the number/percentage of foreign nationals to the whole prison population varies. Examples are as follows: HMP Bullwood Hall 200 (100%), HMP Highpoint 168 (18%), HMP Whitemoor 100 (22%), HMP Littlehey 120 (16%).

The primary aim of ESOL provision is to equip learners with the English they need to operate effectively within the prison, including the securement of employment both within the prison and once released. This in turn leads to reduced re-offending. At the same time, they should be helped to achieve formal qualifications. The pressure of numbers continually arriving adds a logistical dimension to the design and management of ESOL provision. Addressing these needs is a daily task for those responsible for induction, education and training, and delivery of work regimes in custodial settings.

The 2005-12 East of England Language Framework item 2.8 states that “The region’s public organisations, and in particular the police and prison services, face everyday challenges in communicating with overseas nationals. To ensure that our communities remain safe and our citizens protected we need to provide officers on the ground with the intercultural and language skills required to diffuse tense situations, provide guidance and manage communications. Support should be given at Coordinating level to all regional co-financing organisations and county councils.”

There are 14 prisons in the East of England (including young offender institutions and all types of adult prison) holding in the region of 8,000 offenders at any one time. Up to 40% of offenders held in the region’s prisons will be released out of area and there is a varying but increasing number of foreign nationals (25%) who may be deported on release or resettled. HMP Bullwood Hall holds foreign national

prisoners and currently up to 60% are resettled rather than deported. 40% of the region's offenders serve their sentences out of region. Snapshot figures for the region's offenders in September 2006 indicate 2,155 offenders held in East of England prisons and 2,088 held elsewhere.

Data provided in the *Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment: Next Steps* published in December 2006 indicates that lack of education and skills is higher on all the following indicators:

	<i>General Population</i>	<i>Offenders</i>
Unemployed	5%	67%
No qualifications	15%	52%
Reading below L1	16%	38%

This shows that as offenders have fewer qualifications and lower reading levels than the rest of the population, levels of unemployment among this group are disproportionately high.

The East of England ESF Consultation Draft 2007-13 identified as a priority “activities to develop the employability and skills of offenders and ex-offenders to facilitate labour market entry and thus contribute to reduced re-offending.”

NOMS ESF aims to support the training (all subject areas) of over 10,000 offenders in the East of England. Training is badged under 3 main headings:

- Removing barriers to employment
- Integrating employment & skills
- Developing employability skills

The main focus is on male adults aged 18-24.

As part of training delivered under OLASS, the Offending Learning and Skills programme, ESOL training includes the following components, which are similar to those in other regions (such as nearby London):

- Devising a prison-related syllabus, based on the Adult ESOL curriculum but using language, topics, functions and grammar relevant to the prison environment in order to enable integration, including access to prison services, work areas and other classes in education.
- Developing authentic prison-related materials to support this syllabus (eg 'skills for prison life') including self study materials for those unable to attend classes.
- Developing self-contained classes to enable all learners, new and continuing, to learn something in each class, given the fast turnover of learners in remand prisons
- Providing additional language support to enable ESOL learners to access vocational training through embedded learning. This includes language materials, classroom support, and ESOL embedded in vocational syllabuses.

- Ensuring flexible provision (with its funding implications) to respond to sudden changes, eg a sudden increase in numbers of learners, or a sudden influx of a particular language group with widely varying levels of motivation.
- Use of The Big Word and Language Line interpretation facilities, translation of prison induction booklets and, in some prisons, development of digital induction training material or information pods.
- The large increase in numbers has a ripple effect on areas other than ESOL classes. These include the library, where there is a need for more dictionaries and foreign language books, although many prison ESOL classrooms have storage areas specifically for dictionaries.

The language & culture support to offenders forms part of the 2009-10 ESF Technical Assistance activity by RLN East for NOMS and JobCentre Plus (who also maintain a presence in the prisons). This was based on the following priorities:

- Develop a portal of English language materials, some for specific purposes, to act as support material for those delivering English language training
- Determine other forms of support English language training contractors would value
- Provide staff (prison & offender) with cultural information or training related to their priority foreign national groups
- Promote the delivery of ESF-funded training in the prison & probation service
- Take lessons learned from the ESF projects supporting English language training for company migrant workers & bring these to the prison/probation services

2. Includes incentives to enhance and sustain language learner motivation and employment benefits

The dossier needs to capture data on how outcomes for current employment context are clearly identified & responded to. It should identify the messages used to convey the benefits of possessing language & culture skills and how these messages are delivered (channels, timing, measuring of impact). This can include the following:

The prison has also created an Intranet to replicate the learning opportunities and information offered by the Internet. They have linked to the digital TV channel delivered using Internet Protocol Television (IPTV). Server based computers broadcast a menu-driven service to a television in each cell enabling multiple learners to address their own learning needs simultaneously. The initial focus is on ESOL, Skills for Life (SFL) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) where courses already exist in IPTV format. Other prisons, such as HMP Whitemoor, operate a Moodle-type facility in addition to an in-house TV system.

The RLN East language & culture ISend facility is a means of communicating and promoting language & culture news, resource & events, funded under ESF Technical Assistance. It is database-driven and is distributed to businesses, policymakers, business support organisations and prison diversity & education staff. Open rates for the ISend are 40%, and marketing staff can view which contacts had opened which pages or clicked on which links & resources. Further analytical information covers top links, geographic opens & details of activity.

The Skills Funding Agency and NOMS have jointly worked on the development of a Virtual Campus. In the East of England this is to be run initially in 6 of the prisons, namely Peterborough (where it was piloted), Bedford, Hollesley Bay, Chelmsford, Blundeston & Highpoint. The Campus is designed for self-study for offenders accessing dedicated secure PCs within the prison. It has also been piloted in the probation service.

A 'white list' controls access to internet sites, and the secure server searches automatically for key security-related phrases or words in a wide range of foreign languages. Key actors are a Learner, a Guardian, a Mediator and an Advisor. The Mediator is used for 1-1 study and advice, and is also used to act as an intermediary between offender and external training provider. The VC uses an embedded secure Moodle platform.

The content on the VC includes course materials (including English), learning resources and a job application facility. These are linked to external as well as internal job vacancies, and includes a 'CV Builder' which builds an e-portfolio of the offender which can be made available to potential employers. Currently there are 2,700 active learners across the UK, with a total of 7,000 since its inception.

3. Reflects regional strategy for employability and intercultural benefits

The dossier needs to reflect the extent to which the language policy builds on overall regional policy and the level of expected response to current regional priorities.

Of the 15 prisons in the East of England, HMP Bullwood Hall houses purely foreign nationals. Here ESOL is of importance. Bullwood Hall, which is located in southern Essex) houses around 200 adult male foreign nationals who are in the last year of their sentence. The men are all 'of interest' to the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) who will decide whether, at the end of his sentence, a man should be deported, allowed to stay in this country, or be further detained. Though many prisons in England and Wales hold foreign nationals, Bullwood Hall is one of two that provide only for this group. Typically, there are prisoners from every continent and, at any given time, some 50 first languages are spoken, though the 'top ten' are Arabic, French, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Urdu and Vietnamese.

Some prisoners have been in the UK for years, are orally fluent, have families in the UK, and are familiar with British culture. Others may have been convicted soon after their arrival and speak no English at all, let alone write it. When they arrive, they don't know whether they will be given leave to stay in this country after their sentence, so they don't know what language or other skills they will need on release. This means

that Individual Learning Plans are even more important and that bite-sized chunks of learning are essential. For some, the emphasis is on preparation for life after release. For others, developing the skills they need within the prison is more urgent. For example, men who have no English but are placed in the prison workshops need a crash course in vocabulary relating to health and safety.

The teachers have formed good working relationships with work party staff, so they can integrate language learning into the training context, where the men's poor language skills may hold back the development of their vocational skills. In partnership with outreach staff, they come up with many ideas. For example, they have made 'language boards' in their workshops, with photos of tools or equipment with English language captions.

The prison's 2007 OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) report confirmed the following:

Approximately 85% of offenders entering the prison were English speakers of other languages, of whom 42% had identified language skills support needs. Many of these ESOL learners improved their communication skills significantly, especially their spoken skills, and they were able to integrate more effectively into the prison community.

For learners completing literacy and numeracy courses the achievement rates were high; in literacy 89% of completers achieved the full qualification and in numeracy 98% achieved. Some learners made good progress and moved on to learning at higher levels. Attendance and punctuality are good. During November 2007, for example, attendance was 87%. Learners complete tasks with enthusiasm, displaying good knowledge and skills.

On the negative side (and this applies to most prisons) many offenders are released or transferred from the prison before completing their learning programmes.

The quality of teaching and learning was considered good. Teachers prepared well and lesson plans clearly identified learning objectives which were understood by learners. They provided varied tasks, often contextualised to relevant topics, stimulating learners' interest. In one ESOL class, for example, learners were able to practice their language skills discussing job adverts and writing job applications. For groups with learners of mixed ability teachers prepared different tasks in line with learners' needs. The use of information learning technology in classes is good and learners appreciate this and use it well.

Relationships between curriculum staff and those in the workshops were considered very supportive. Staff in different areas worked well in partnership to provide learning support for those who did not attend education. Learning support had been introduced into many areas of the prison and this had widened participation in learning. Offenders working in the kitchen and orderlies in the gym, for example, received weekly one-to-one language and literacy support within the vocational context.



This support complemented their practical training and helps them to complete written work and prepare for assessment. Classrooms provide stimulating learning environments and are brightly decorated with information posters and examples of learners' work. Individual learning plans were identified for further development and focus.

On average, ESOL classes last 3hrs each and are run five times per week, once per day, either morning or afternoon, giving each learner a total of 15hrs language training per week. Morning and afternoon sessions are frequently divided by level. Each prison on average runs 1-2 classes per morning or afternoon, with group sizes of 6-12 (9 being the most common). ESOL is contracted through tender process and is currently delivered by the organisations Milton Keynes College and A4E. The latter supply 7 of the prisons, and the former 8 prisons.

To support the prison officers with communications with foreign national prisoners, and especially officers on reception, induction and wing duties, a series of language phrase booklets was developed and published. These were subsequently used as supplementary resource in ESOL classes. The English sentences were numbered the same across all language booklets, making easier reference for staff and tutors.

The booklets were produced in April 2009 in Chinese, Vietnamese, Polish, Portuguese & Romanian, with Lithuanian added in August 2010. Content for the

booklets was based on direct input from HMP Bullwood Hall and HMP Highpoint, supported by evidence from a series of 22 prison visits during late 2008 and early 2009. Feedback from both staff and prisoners has been positive, as below:

“The sets you sent have been greatly appreciated by staff.”

“The books have been very well received by staff.”

“I would like to take this opportunity to say how useful they are.”

“If we had more copies available to us this would be very beneficial to both parties - the prison and the prisoners.”

“The little blue books have proved an invaluable source of reference. It shows the prisoner that we are trying to help them. It must be extremely daunting to be moved and asked questions, especially if you don't speak or understand the language. These handy little books enable staff to make the experience less stressful by helping with communication.”

The booklets have enabled some prisoners with poor English language skills to feel less isolated. The vocabulary they contain can be matched by tutors to specific topics, such as ‘asking for help’ (‘Is anything worrying you?’, ‘Do you need help’, ‘Do you require an interpreter?’) and ‘understanding instructions’ (‘Do not write on the walls’, ‘Please come with me’, ‘Please stand over there’, ‘Please listen to me’, ‘Please wait here’). The use of the booklets makes an assumption that a prisoner can read in their own language. They contain 93 sentences, divided into 3 sections: induction, reception, general.

Although designed & published by a commercial company, further re-prints have been done through prisoners themselves, based in a Norfolk establishment.

A further resource developed during 2010 is the storage facility for ESOL materials www.rln-east.com/lace/resources. These contain ESOL materials placed into 4 categories, most of which were developed using UK or EU funding. This is then promoted by the iSend facility to ESOL tutors in the prisons.

Category 1: sector-based ESOL for levels Entry 1 to Level 2, divided into agriculture, catering, cleaning, construction, healthcare, ICT, transport, manufacturing, health & safety.

Category 2: prison phrase booklets.

Category 3: business English materials, some of which are joint language eg: Polish-English and Bulgarian-English.

Category 4: links to EU project websites focussed on the development of EFL materials, mainly sector-based (marine, automotive) but with some focussed on business.

The resources enable prisoners to acquire the vocabulary needed to find employment within the prison. For instance, a prisoner will find it difficult to work in

the kitchens if he does not possess the necessary health & safety or kitchen-based vocabulary.

In addition, some staff have undergone short-term language training in Chinese (HMP Bullwood Hall, 12hrs in the pleasantries) and Russian (HMP Peterborough, a crash course of 4hrs in the pleasantries) to learn the basics of these languages to show commitment to developing communications and understanding what is being said to them.

Culture awareness workshops have also been run focussed on Nigerian culture (Mar 2009) & Lithuanian culture (Aug 2010), the latter of which was delivered by Lithuanian interpreters, culture experts and prison staff from the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice. All prison staff receive diversity training as part of their basic training.

4. Addresses local language minority and migrant community language resources

The dossier should capture data on the extent to which the resources offered by migrant communities can be utilised to assure economic growth (particularly in relation to international trade) and greater intercultural understanding.

The Category 1 ESOL materials described in section 3 above were originally designed for migrant workers engaged in employment in the UK. These teaching and learning materials were developed under the UK Skills for Life programme as a result of a project commissioned by LSIS in March 2008. The reading, writing and speaking and listening modules will support migrant workers from Entry 1 – Level 1 in seven occupational sectors: agriculture, catering, cleaning and facilities management, construction, health and social care, manufacturing, and Transport and aviation. Guidance for practitioners on using the Speaking and Listening materials has also been developed. They are all available on the Excellence Gateway (www.excellencegateway.org.uk) in addition to the website www.rln-east.com/lace/resources.

The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) in its publication 'Whole Organisation approaches to Skills for Life: Making the Case' (prison version) highlights the need for ESOL training to ensure higher rates of employment. It quotes: "Poor literacy and numeracy can prevent people from taking an active part in the community. Poor literacy and numeracy leads to low productivity, fewer training opportunities and greater health and safety risks at work. The cost to the individual, the taxpayer, business and the economy is enormous."

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5. Provides for international networking and/or mobility

The dossier file should capture data on how traditional classroom-based language training can be supported by periods of learning in a country of the target language and through elements of distance learning.

This is a difficult issue to address, as prisons by nature are not intended to allow mobility. However, the focus is on migrant offenders in the UK and their ability to secure employment if either repatriated to their home country or released into the community.

6. Incorporates the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with transparent validation/ credits

The dossier file needs to include details of whether qualifications are an output of any programmes developed as a result of the policy. Where it does not make reference to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) you will need to provide details of credit and other qualifications-related systems and transparent levels for target qualifications.

The ESOL levels are approximately:

- Pre-entry No English language
- Entry 1 Beginners English
- Entry 2 Elementary English
- Entry 3 Pre-intermediate
- Level 1 Intermediate
- Level 2 Upper Intermediate

On many courses the main qualifications you can take are ESOL Skills for Life Certificates (including Trinity, Cambridge, Edexcel, OCN awarding bodies).

There 10 ESOL classes delivered by Milton Keynes College. Two are Pre-entry level and eight are multilevel Entry (of which two are for spoken English only). Most men are working towards Entry 1 or 2. Men who are assessed at Level 1 and above attend Adult Literacy classes. There is also a substantial amount of outreach work where teachers work one-to-one with men on the wing and in the various work parties in the prison, such as the kitchens, workshops and laundry.

Not all Pre-entry learners can learn in a group so the prison works one-to-one through outreach. Following initial assessment (for example, in a two-month period, we received 29 new admissions at pre-entry level) we identify the best way to meet needs. This might be outreach before progressing onto a Pre-entry group or a mixture of both.

Initially, there was a problem with accreditation, as staff needed a form of accreditation that suited the fact that many men were there for a short and unpredictable period. Now they use the City & Guilds system which provides single modules of assessment that fit the 'bite-size' provision. It is much more motivating for the men to achieve 'little and often'.

The prison (as with most other prisons) uses RARPA (Recognising And Recording Progress and Achievement in non-accredited learning). It is favoured because it values 'distance travelled'. Every bit of progress is a milestone for them and they can achieve recognition of that progress regardless of the time they are here. The prison recognises that target-setting is not always about accreditation, and RARPA has helped them to become even more learner-centred.

RARPA) describes a particular approach to a significant part of the quality assurance systems of providers in the post-school sector for non-accredited provision. The RARPA approach consists of two interlinked processes:

- The application of an explicit and common staged process to the recognition and recording of progress and achievement.
- The validation of the consistent and effective application of this staged process through a range of judgements about the application of the staged process.

These two aspects of the RARPA approach are often referred to as the shorthand terms 'staged process' and 'National Validation System (NVS)'.

7. Can be readily & usefully implemented

The dossier file should capture data on whether the policy can be realistically implemented, and should show linkages between recent employer surveys and planned implementation of activity.