

The National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages To Adults (NATECLA) would like to endorse the concerns raised in the TES about the cuts in ESOL (FE Focus 26 November). The cuts in FE funding, plus the loss of the 1.4 weighting for Skills for Life and the government's approach to ESOL outlined in its strategy 'Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth' document (16 November) are creating the most serious crisis for the future of ESOL that has ever been seen. The impact of these combined decisions is to jeopardise all the work that has been built up over the years in producing good quality and well-resourced provision and a trained workforce. There are already waiting lists for provision and if the government really believes that the English language is the key to integration - which it purports to support in its statements about citizenship - then the current decisions will even further deny people the right to learn it.

The current situation where ESOL has been co-funded has already seen some learners not able to access provision, but the loss of the 1.4 weighting will further raise fees, taking classes out of the reach of many learners. In addition to this, there will no longer be the opportunity for those on low wages to access free provision and the safety net of the learner support fund is apparently going to be removed as well. This will decimate provision and adults in priority groups such as beginner reader writers, new arrivals, spouses not in receipt of benefit and those with partners on low incomes, will become further marginalised as essential opportunities to develop language and literacy skills become even less accessible.

As well as the cuts in ESOL classes, those in the workplace will also suffer. Whilst NATECLA agrees that employers should pay for migrant workers to learn English, many of those ESOL learners in work are not migrant workers - they are from settled communities and often in low paid jobs. Many employers in the past have not been prepared to release, let alone pay for their employees to access provision and the current statement, unless it looks again at the definition of 'settled' communities and penalties for employers, will further exacerbate the situation. NATECLA is pleased to see that those who are on job seekers or ESA allowances will still be able to access provision but we are concerned that the programmes they will be referred to will have been transformed into a shadow of their former selves.

If the government truly wants people to integrate and be part of the 'big society' then language is the key. ESOL learners are keen to learn the language and integrate into society but in order to do this they need programmes that enable them to do so.

NATECLA urges the government to reconsider their decision and recognise and prioritise students of ESOL

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