Main Findings

- The number of learners undertaking ESOL classes in Scotland has increased from 14,500 in 2003-04 to more than 19,000 in 2005-06.
- The majority of ESOL learners in Scotland are female. Most learners are aged under 40 years. Over the last few years many more learners fall into the category ‘White’, reflecting increases in migrants from A8 countries.
- ESOL provision has grown in all areas except Central West, but it has not grown at the same rate. Where there had been little ESOL provision previously, such as in the Highlands/Western Isles, South West and South East regions, there has been the greatest growth in provision.
- Additionally, Community Learning & Development Partnerships and voluntary sector provision has grown substantially.
- Since 2003 the range of ESOL has expanded, with an increase in different levels of learning, from beginner to Cambridge Advanced; different levels of intensity, from short full-time five week courses to a few hours a week over a year.
- The number of courses offering accredited training and qualifications has increased.
- Urban centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh offer the widest range of ESOL provision, with limited supply and choice in more rural locations.
- The majority of providers surveyed in this study do not provide specific preparation for the citizenship test as part of their ESOL provision, and the test itself has not had a significant impact on demand thus far.
- A8 nationals undertake ESOL classes to improve their English to assist them with settlement and their career prospects either in the UK or their home country.
- Some providers have adapted their provision to learners from A8 countries who are in largely in work, for example by offering flexible timings for their courses or providing courses at employment sites in conjunction with support from employers.
- Most ESOL classes are full, with any places that become available through learners dropping out being filled from waiting lists. Most providers cannot meet demand.
- Providers are concerned about the sustainability of funding for ESOL provision. For many providers, some funds are for limited periods.
- Many providers are concerned about the ability to meet higher demand when there is a shortage of trained teachers.
ESOL is a key factor in the successful integration of migrant groups. Competency in English is known to help secure stable employment and improve the quality of daily life and welfare, as well as contribute to social inclusion, integration and active citizenship. The aim of this study was to help the Scottish Executive understand the current level of ESOL provision in Scotland, and gain an insight into possible future demand. The findings from the research are feeding into the development of future ESOL provision in Scotland.

This study focuses on publicly funded ESOL provision, concentrating on FE Colleges, Community Learning and Development (CLD) Partnerships, Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) Partnerships, and voluntary and community organisations, though to develop a full picture of ESOL, private providers and Higher Education Institutions (HEI) were also included.

About the study

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of ESOL providers and learners in Scotland, we undertook a multi-layered approach which included quantitative and qualitative research methodologies:

- **Data analysis**: analysis of datasets from the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Qualifications Authority who track learners on accredited courses; analysis of national datasets from the Office of National Statistics, and the Home Office as well as voluntary organisations such as The Scottish Refugee Council;

- **Online provider survey**: distribution of an on-line survey to over 200 providers to gather information on the courses they deliver and their capacity;

- **Telephone interviews**: 49 telephone interviews with colleges, other providers and stakeholders;

- **Qualitative fieldwork**: 30 face-to-face interviews with learners and providers to discuss their experiences of ESOL courses.

Key findings of the research

**Continued demand for ESOL**

From the research we found that there continues to be demand for ESOL from settled migrant groups and asylum seekers. The demand from A8 nationals has been significant in nearly all areas of the country and has stimulated new and additional provision in areas that have not traditionally had high rates of migration, such as Highlands/Western Islands. The largest growth in provision has been through CLDs, and ALNs and the voluntary sector. The considerable demand from A8 nationals has outstripped supply. In terms of estimating potential demand, we examined trends and the distribution of the main groups of people who might require ESOL learning and compared them to provision in 2005-6. In doing this, we found that all areas have potential demand that exceeds current provision by a considerable margin. The highest shortfalls are in Central West and South West. Furthermore, the pattern of provision does not closely match the distribution of A8 nationals. Considerable shortfalls appear in the more rural areas though these have all seen increases in provision since 2004.

**Supply of ESOL**

From the provider survey we have found that publicly funded ESOL provision has grown over the last few years. However, there is no evidence of any significant spare capacity. No providers in any sector reported courses without sufficient learners or any with spare places; only waiting lists and turning away applicants. Often providers use waiting lists to fill classes during the first few weeks of the course. Few providers have problems filling their courses simply through word of mouth.

**Changes to provision**

Providers reported that they are regularly assessing what they are offering in relation to demand and often revise provision including the mix and timing of courses and mode of learning. Providers have also commented that they often prioritise specific types of learners, adapting the content of courses to include elements of the citizenship test, or changing the curriculum based on the needs of certain migrant groups such as women with specific ethnic backgrounds or asylum seekers. With respect to the citizenship test, it has not had a significant impact on overall demand for ESOL, though there is potential that it will fuel future demand for those who want to settle.

**Impact of funding**

The majority of funding is from the SFC for FE providers. This has not grown significantly. The majority of non-FE providers receive funding from local authorities through CLD and ALN Partnerships. Almost a quarter of non-FE providers also receive funding from sources such as the European Social Funds (ESF). ALN partnership funding has meant that there has been an increase in ESOL literacy courses which may not be appropriate for learners who do not experience literacy issues in their native language.

Providers reported that the amount of funding received will be a major factor in their ability to meet additional demand in the next few years. While there are some complaints about
the unit of funding in FE there is no evidence that it is insufficient. The short term nature of funding in the non-FE sector is of greater concern for long term planning of provision, often leaving staff feeling insecure about their future. Funding levels in the non-FE sector can make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified ESOL teachers. Some providers have commented that their provision is also being affected by the growth of private providers, who they feel are able to pay their teaching staff higher salaries.

**Conclusions**

The number of learners undertaking ESOL in Scotland has increased in recent years, as has the nature and amount of provision available. However, a lack of empty places, busy waiting lists where they are kept, and the scale of potential learners indicate a need for further provision. Although the majority of demand remains in urban centres, the growth in numbers of A8 nationals indicates that areas where there was previously little demand, need to sustain and grow ESOL provision as well. The introduction of the UK citizenship test appears to have had little impact on ESOL demand thus far.

From this study it can be concluded that A8 nationals – the high number, origins, needs, and the areas where they work – have significantly increased demand and already had a significant impact on provision.

There are a number of issues arising from this research which should inform future development of the Scottish Government’s ESOL strategy and the allocation of funding.

**Ensuring a range of provision in all regions:** while this will not be practical in all areas, this may require funding to FE colleges in areas where ESOL provision is largely met from local authority and voluntary and community providers. For the entry level and intermediate courses a range of providers are needed who can run courses close to where people live and work and tailor them to different communities.

**Progression routes:** many providers will need to map out their course provision in relation to qualifications both to show that learners can progress to higher levels and assess achievement. They may need some guidance on qualification levels as well as curriculum development, especially for some voluntary providers who have not had experience with SQA levels.

**Planning and coordination in all local authority areas:** while the ESOL strategy is already addressing this, and coordinating works effectively in some areas, it would help considerably if coordination of provision and referrals between providers could be more actively managed.

**Fee levels:** while it could be argued that basic English skills are necessary to sustain employment and provision should be free, this is less so for higher level courses. FE colleges might be encouraged to provide some courses with lower subsidies and to approach employers for contributions to tailored work place provision.
If you have any enquiries about social research, please contact us at:

Scottish Government Social Research
Enterprise, Energy and Lifelong Learning Analytical Services Division (EELL-ASD)
3rd Floor
Meridian Court
3 Cadogan Street
GLASGOW G2 6AT
Tel: 0141 242-5454
Fax: 0141 242-5455
Email: socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

The report, “Examining the Impact of EU Enlargement and the Introduction of the UK Citizenship Test on Provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in Scotland”, which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications pages of the Scottish Government website at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent

This document (and other Research Findings and Reports) and information about social research in the Scottish Government may be viewed on the Internet at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

The site carries up-to-date information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government. Subjects covered include transport, housing, social inclusion, rural affairs, children and young people, education, social work, community care, local government, civil justice, crime and criminal justice, regeneration, planning and women's issues. The site also allows access to information about the Scottish Household Survey.