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# Emerging findings for the Refugee Employment Strategy

A Synthesis Report to the Department for Work and Pensions

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September 2004

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## **Disclaimer**

The views in this report are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Work and Pensions.



# Abbreviations

BET	Basic Employability Training
CELTA	Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults
CV	Curriculum Vitae
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
FTET	Full-time Education and Training
IT	Information Technology
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LMS	Labour Market System – a computing system used by Jobcentre staff to record customer details and source information on training, eligibility etc.
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
RESTART customers	Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who have been unemployed and claiming benefits for six months
RETAS	Refugee Education & Training Advisory Service



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## 1.0 Introduction

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned this report to draw together recent research undertaken as part of a review of the service delivered to Jobcentre Plus customers, particularly refugees with needs in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). It draws together four pieces of research, all carried out during 2003.

### 1.1 Need for the Refugee Employment Strategy

It is widely recognised that as a group, refugees face disadvantage in the labour market. DWP, principally through Jobcentre Plus, has a pivotal role to play in delivering a refugee employment strategy. This report shows a widespread recognition among local staff that a well-resourced and co-ordinated strategy is essential, particularly in relation to enhanced interpreter services and work-focused ESOL. Even more fundamental is the need to ensure take-up of whatever provision is available:

“Traditionally few refugees take advantage of the early eligibility criteria for programmes – a 1999 study by the Refugee Council found that refugees were reluctant to join a programme with benefit sanctions for non compliance, and were unable to complete the course due to language or other needs that the programme could not address.” *Opportunities for All DWP 2003*

*To address these issues Jobcentre Plus Pilots were developed to:*

- *offer refugees support with housing and welfare issues alongside ESOL provision; and,*
- *provide ESOL training in a work context.*

### 1.2 Summary of research

In 2003, DWP commissioned four interrelated research projects into employment services for refugees and other clients with first languages other than English:

- **Providing interpreter and translation services to jobseekers.** This study aimed to provide information on the processes by which interpreter and translation services were being provided in Jobcentres. The research was also expected to provide some indications of the scale of need, and the costs incurred by individual Jobcentres, though did not set out to compile statistical information on the financial implications of delivering the service. (carried out by ECOTEC)
- **Research on BET/FTET ESOL provision for ESOL customers.** This study set out to better understand current processes and provision available for Jobcentre Plus customers with ESOL needs. The study particularly focused on a review of ESOL provision within Basic Employability Training (BET) and Full-Time Education and Training (FTET). (carried out by ECOTEC)
- **An evaluation of the Intensive Work-focused ESOL for Refugees - Prototype.** This project set out to look at how the new ESOL curriculum can be delivered within Work Based Learning for Adults. It examined whether there was a market for a 13 week ESOL course among refugees or others who might prefer a shorter work-focused course, and whether appropriate learning and work outputs could be achieved in the shorter time. (carried out by ECOTEC and LSDA)
- **Haringey Refugee Pilot: Refugee Integration for Career Opportunities (RIFCO)** was set up to offer immediate support to new refugees to oversee accommodation and other welfare support, establish an employment plan based on work and language assessments, provide or refer to appropriate and immediate ESOL and employment help. (carried out by BMRB)

### *1.2.1 Purpose of this Report*

The “Working to Rebuild Lives: a preliminary report towards a refugee employment strategy” (September 2003) recognised that a holistic view across government departments needs to be adopted to tackle refugee unemployment. The purpose of this synthesis is to inform the final strategy of how this might be achieved in practice. There are practical elements that will be of particular interest to the Home Office, the Department for Education and Skills and the voluntary sector. This document reports on best practice towards:

- increasing the participation rate of refugees in voluntary and statutory employment services and support to improve job skills and engagement with the labour market, especially that provided by Jobcentre Plus; and,
- providing refugees with a responsive, quality service that equips them with the skills they need to get jobs.

## **1.3 Report Structure**

The report reviews the key policy influences and then provides a synopsis of the four pieces of research. It gives a profile of the ESOL customer, referral and assessment processes, ESOL provision, outcomes, conclusions and recommendations.

## 2.0 Policy Influences

This section reviews briefly the key policy influences, including policy on integration, the potential untapped workforce and national curriculum reform.

### 2.1 Integration

Until very recently, the UK did not have an integration policy, but in 2002 the government produced a white paper on 'Integration'<sup>1</sup> following the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999. The integration strategy places great importance on promoting financial independence through access to paid work. A key goal is, therefore, to increase the participation rate of refugees and other migrants in voluntary and statutory employment services and support, to improve their job skills and to engage with the labour market, towards enabling them to find and sustain employment.

Asylum seekers are supported financially by the Home Office and are not permitted to work. Those whose asylum claims are successful may work from the date at which their status changes and the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions/Jobcentre Plus are working together to develop measures to encourage them to move quickly into Jobcentre support when they need it. Jobcentre Plus support is available to people who have received a decision on their asylum claim from the Home Office that gives them indefinite or temporary leave to remain in the UK and with it permission to work.

The Home Office grants the status that is appropriate to an individual's circumstances. Over the last two years; there have been changes to the names and descriptions of the statuses and it would be too complex to list them all here. For ease of reference in this report, those eligible for Jobcentre Plus support are all referred to as 'refugees'.

### 2.2 Untapped Workforce

A recent report by Greater London Enterprise (Regeneration and Renewal, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2003) stated that immigration into London was boosting the capital's economy by helping to plug the skills gap and increasing the small business start-up rate. The report stressed the importance of an appropriate education and training infrastructure being available to immigrants in order to harness these skills, illustrating the crucial role that ESOL plays in releasing untapped skills into the labour market. It also highlighted the need for additional funding to diversify the ESOL BET/FTET options available to customers and to improve their job outputs.

The Jobcentre has a role to play in ensuring the skills of this untapped workforce are utilised. However, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that those with high education levels and vocational skills, are perhaps more self-sufficient, so may not be claiming benefits nor entering the Jobcentre. Jobcentre Plus measures are designed to support all unemployed jobseekers back into work, regardless of their background or educational status. This may involve referral to specialist provision or to provision funded by the Learning and Skills Council where it is thought appropriate.

### 2.3 National Curriculum reform

The National ESOL Core Curriculum was introduced in 2001 and is now used by most providers. As part of the curriculum reform ESOL, pathfinder projects are currently being led by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit and TALENT (Training Adult Literacy, ESOL, and Numeracy Teachers). The Jobcentre Plus strand of the pathfinders is being conducted in Liverpool and is pioneering cultural and diversity training sessions for frontline advisers. Other pathfinders include evaluations of embedded ESOL programmes, diagnostic assessment, and flexible delivery in the work place and vocational and community provision.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Britain Feb 2002

The LSC Skills for Life Quality Initiative Professional Development Project is also developing modules that are targeted at equipping teachers from an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) background with an understanding of the social context of ESOL and its implications for teaching methods and materials. Given the current shortage of ESOL teachers, this is an important development and should enable the amount of provision to be extended.

## **2.4 Service Response and Innovation**

Jobseekers with language difficulties can have early access to employment programmes, such as New Deal and Work Based Learning for Adults, which provide full time and work-focused English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Support can be offered for up to 12 months through New Deal; Work Based Learning for Adults offers six months support, with the potential for extension to 12 months at the adviser's discretion. These programmes provide around 14,000 places a year, with a further 143,000 places funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

In common with other groups at some distance from the labour market, refugees face a number of additional social issues, which may delay their access to employment, and may also need support with access to suitable housing before they are able to consider moving into employment. Resolving these issues is an important factor in the process of enabling refugees to move positively towards work.

## 3.0 Synopsis of Research

This chapter provides a synopsis of each of the four pieces of research:

- Providing Interpreter and Translation Services to Jobseekers (Interpreters and Translators)
- Research on BET/FTET Provision for ESOL Customers (BET/FTET)
- Intensive Work-focused ESOL for Refugees - Prototype (ESOL Prototype)
- Haringey Refugee Pilot: Refugee Integration for Career Opportunities (RIFCO)

Three of the projects were completed by the time of writing (Spring 2004). The fourth, the RIFCO pilot is a three year project and was still in progress at that time. All four projects involved Jobcentre Plus Head Office and field staff. Staff from providers were involved in BET/FTET, ESOL and RIFCO; representatives of community organisations in the Interpreters and Translation Services study. Customers were involved in all but the Interpreters and Translators study.

### 3.1 Providing Interpreter and Translation Services to Jobseekers

#### ➤ Objectives of the Research

The perception that the provision of interpreting and translation services was an increasing requirement in a number of Jobcentres, and that the provision of such services either did, or was likely to, absorb a growing proportion of local budgets, led to this research being commissioned. The objective of the research was to review the processes underlying current practice, and the scope and type of existing provision of such services for jobseekers whose first language is not English. It was anticipated that the research would provide some indications of the costs incurred, but it did not set out to compile statistical information. The objective was more to assess the implications of current practice, and make recommendations about how a cost-effective and reliable service could be developed.

#### ➤ Methodology

The study took place in five districts in the UK, selected because they included areas with some of the highest proportions of people who were both born outside the EU and who did not speak English, Welsh or Gaelic (from 2001 Census data). Nineteen offices were involved in the research, and almost 100 Jobcentre and Social Security staff, 19 Business managers, 10 representatives of community organisations and three key stakeholders were interviewed for the survey.

#### ➤ Key findings

##### *Current Use of interpreter services*

*Four ways of providing interpreter services were identified: the commercial telephone interpreter service, Language Line; customers' friends and family; Jobcentre/ Social Security staff; and face-to-face professional interpreters. The last named was used much less often than the other three. Many Jobcentres used more than one method. For example, often an informal method was used first, such as friends and family, with use made of more formal methods such as Language Line if friends and family were unavailable.*

##### *Advantages and Disadvantages of the different approaches to the provision of interpretation services*

The advantages and disadvantages of the different methods are show below.

**Figure 1.1 Advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to the provision of interpretation services**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Jobcentre Staff (on site and face-to-face)	The use of existing staff was said to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- better quality interviewing</li> <li>- better quality information</li> <li>- customer understanding of their roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>	The disadvantages of using existing staff included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- limited staff availability</li> <li>- limited language ability – staff were concerned about the consequences of misinterpretation</li> <li>- reluctance to use because of impact on colleagues' workloads</li> </ul>
Paid interpreters (on site and face-to-face)	The presence of a paid interpreter was seen to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- better quality interviewing</li> <li>- better quality information</li> <li>- enhanced customer understanding of their roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>	The disadvantages of paid interpreters included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pre-planning - professional interpreters must be booked in advance, thus slowing the claim process</li> <li>- lengthy and potential need to book double appointment</li> <li>- 'edited highlights'<sup>2</sup></li> <li>- cost implications of professional interpreters</li> </ul>
Language Line	The advantages of Language Line included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- wide range and number of languages available</li> <li>- easily accessible</li> <li>- immediate</li> </ul>	Practical difficulties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no 'quiet' space to use speaker on the phone</li> <li>- no phones with two handsets</li> <li>- need to book double appointment because of the extra time needed for interpretation.</li> <li>- lose advantages of visual element of interviewing</li> <li>- lengthy</li> <li>- cost implications</li> </ul>
Friends and Family	Friends and family were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accessible</li> <li>- convenient</li> <li>- easy to arrange</li> </ul>	Disadvantages of friends and family included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tendency for friend and family to answer for the customer rather than interpreting and allowing the customer to answer for themselves</li> <li>- 'edited highlights'</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> 'Edited highlights' – in some cases responses to questions were not interpreted in full as a client might reply at length, but where the English version relayed to the Adviser is a much shortened version.

Little use was made of community organisations to provide interpretation services. If they were used it tended to be arranged by the customer. Staff who had some experience of community organisations reported a tendency for the interpreter to stray into advocacy rather than focusing on just interpreting.

#### *Need and demand for interpretation and ensuring equal access to services*

None of the Jobcentres or Social Security offices had a formal way of identifying a customer's need for interpretation. Customers rarely demanded or asked for an interpretation service. But all staff recognised that there was a need to provide such a service. Need was relatively high; among the staff interviewed for the research many estimated that they needed to provide an interpretation service at least once a week, sometimes much more often. Need was greatest at the 'fresh claims' stage and for mandatory interventions, and perceived as lower for case-loaded customers as they were expected to be work ready. Not all Business Managers and staff were confident they could ensure that equality of access to services was being provided in their Jobcentres for customers with minimal English language abilities, while most acknowledged that these customers were at a disadvantage in accessing job search help.

#### *Need and demand for translation services*

Staff participating in the research identified a number of reasons as to why they did not feel there was a need to provide translation services. First, the nature of the job and the type of interaction meant there was a greater reliance on verbal communication than on written materials. Second, staff perceived that many refugee customers were unable to read in their own languages. Third, there seemed to be a belief among some staff that translating letters might discourage customers from learning English. Last, there were concerns that the wrong message might be conveyed in translated documents, which could have repercussions for any mandatory requirements.

#### *Guidelines, training and costs/budgets*

Many of the staff who took part in the research were unaware of any Jobcentre Plus guidelines on the use of interpreter and translation services. Knowledge of legislation was also limited among staff. Business Managers found it difficult to give an indication of how much had been spent on providing interpretation services in the year 2002-2003, though they were aware of the impact on their staff resource of having to book double appointments for those who required an interpreter. A number of staff were concerned about the perceived costs of Language Line and professional interpreters, whether or not they themselves knew how much such services cost.

#### *Conclusions and suggestions for change*

The need for interpretation services is likely to continue to rise but the scale of providing an optimum service of professional interpreters (whether face-to-face or by Language Line) is potentially vast – in London, for example, some 300 languages are spoken. Staff also felt that a balance could be achieved between the provision of interpreter, and translation services, and the necessary requirement of customers to learn English. On the basis of the research it was recommended that:

- the allocation of staff within individual Jobcentres needs to take into account the potential scale of double appointment times so as to meet the needs of the local population;
- staff who use their language skills in the Jobcentre should receive a recruitment and retention allowance and appropriate training;
- developing local contact with community organisations who might be able to provide interpretation and translation services would be beneficial; and,
- staff should receive relevant (further/refresher) training on appropriate guidelines and legislation.

## 3.2 Research on BET/FTET Provision for ESOL Customers

### ➤ Objective

The main focus of the research was to increase understanding of the current processes and provision available for Jobcentre Plus customers with ESOL needs. The study particularly focused on BET and FTET provision in terms of the referral to provision, the composition and delivery of courses, characteristics of ESOL customers and issues associated with attendance, outputs and effective practice.

### ➤ Methodology

The research was conducted within four Jobcentre Plus Districts, selected for their high volume of customers with ESOL needs: Manchester, West London, Birmingham, and Bradford. Face-to-face interviews were undertaken with:

- Jobcentre Plus staff referring customers to ESOL, BET and FTET provision;
- providers delivering training, including both managers and tutors; and,
- customers on provision.

### ➤ Key Findings

#### *ESOL Customer group*

ESOL customers included a mix of refugees and people from established black and minority ethnic communities. Refugees' educational backgrounds were diverse and generally corresponded to three key groups: individuals from rural areas, with low levels of educational experience; those whose education had been repeatedly interrupted from an early age due to civil war; and those who were professionally trained, including doctors or academics. Length of residence in the UK was no guide to the extent of ESOL needs.

#### *Referral – Adviser-provider communication*

Advisers experienced difficulties communicating the assessment and referral processes to customers. Some customers were inappropriately referred to Basic Skills assessments that required a higher level of literacy than they possessed. Others, with no personal adviser to refer to for further assistance, were referred to provision by Restart advisers with little follow-up support. The majority of advisers and providers expressed a need for improved communication throughout the entire assessment and referral process to improve knowledge of processes and provision on both sides.

#### *ESOL BET and FTET provision*

Respondents queried the effectiveness of the standard 30-hour week in moving all customers towards the labour market at their chosen level. More encouragingly, the research found that a variety of teaching formats and methods is needed, which recognised the importance of taking into account the wide diversity found among refugees in terms of their educational backgrounds, work experiences and ambitions. This varied approach would provide the group with the opportunity to combine work and different types of language and vocational training. Pastoral support also emerged as an increasingly vital element in provision for customers.

### *Outputs and Outcomes*

The research found that the BET/FTET provision, in its current format, was not achieving its targets, whether measured in terms of numbers securing Entry 3 Qualifications or finding and retaining work during or soon after completing provision. Although respondents acknowledged improvements in their own English language ability, 26 weeks was typically regarded as too short a period in which to learn a new language and enter sustainable employment.

### *Recommendations*

Two key areas of recommendation flowing from the findings of the research concerned lack of communication skills and insufficient diversity of provision. On communication, the research proposed that advisers were not equipped as well as they might be with the skills to communicate effectively with ESOL customers, and would benefit from:

- basic ESOL screening and assessment tools devised by ESOL experts;
- diversity training and cross-cultural awareness training;
- guidance on suitable techniques for communicating with customers who can only speak basic English.

The report also reinforced findings about the need for DWP to improve translation and interpretation services.

On the diversity of provision, the report suggested that additional funding was needed to diversify ESOL BET/ FTET provision in order to capture the different skills and experiences of ESOL customers and thus improve learning and job outputs (e.g. language and vocational training).

## **3.3 An evaluation of the Intensive Work-focused ESOL for Refugees – Prototype**

### ➤ **Objectives**

The main aim of the prototype was to help refugees obtain English language skills and knowledge of the UK's working culture and environment. The evaluation case study set out to indicate whether a 13 week course of intensive, work-focused ESOL could bring about a measurable improvement in language skills, and help refugees to gain qualifications and move into sustainable work. To the extent that the approach appeared feasible, at least for some subgroups, recommendations could then be made for a larger-scale pilot along with calls for systematic, quantitative evaluation.

The Prototype was delivered by South Thames College in London and involved 39 participants. The course provided ESOL at three levels (Entry Level 2, Entry Level 3 and Level 1) over 13 weeks, with the opportunity for trainees to progress to the next level for a further 13 weeks. Most trainees moved on to the second course – some working at the same level as for the first 13 weeks, others moving up a level. The courses included two weeks' work experience.

The Prototype was originally designed as discrete provision for recently arrived refugees but developments during the referral and assessment stages opened up places for other migrants mostly from European destinations.

## ➤ **Methodology**

The evaluation of the Prototype involved:

- one-to-one interviews and focus groups with the participants on the course. Seven out of ten of the participants were asked for their experiences and views of the Prototype;
- in-depth interviews with the course providers, including the management and administrative teams, mentors and tutors;
- in-depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus managers and referral advisers;
- analysis of management information; and,
- session observation and scrutiny of teaching materials and curriculum plans.

## ➤ **Key Findings**

### *Referral and Initial Assessment*

Information on referral and initial assessment processes pointed to:

- the importance of communicating the purpose of any provision and details of the proposed target group to Jobcentre staff;
- the need to train advisers on how to communicate with ESOL customers;
- the desirability of recording refugee status and first language more formally on the LMS than was the case at the time the research was carried out;
- the advisability of carrying out assessments at the Jobcentre; and,
- the importance of developing an initial screening process.

### *Characteristics of Participants*

Most came from Africa, followed by the Middle East, Europe and South America. Reasons for coming to the UK were mainly non-work related (security and refuge) but all those from Europe had moved for work. Two-thirds had been resident in the UK for between one and five years, few were very recent arrivals. All participants were literate in their own language and 57 per cent had completed secondary school. Over two-thirds of men had worked in their home country, compared to a quarter of women, but only a handful had worked in UK and the type of work gained in the UK was 'elementary' compared to that in their home country.

### *Curriculum: Language and Vocational Elements*

Good quality language teaching was observed and the college attempted to integrate the new Adult ESOL Core Curriculum in to a work context. Work preparation and job search were covered. Although the use of IT and the provision of Learndirect was arranged, information was not provided about employers and the UK labour market more widely. The vocational curriculum was limited in its coverage and relevance. However, the work experience was invaluable for some participants and with greater planning could be a key element in future work-focused ESOL. Small teaching classes and mentoring support proved to be successful with high levels of retention and attendance. Participants also enjoyed working with people from a wide range of backgrounds. This meant that they had to speak English on more occasions than would have been the case in a more homogeneous group, which was regarded as a 'good thing' as it promoted learning.

### *Outputs and Outcomes*

Participants benefited from the intensity of the course (full time and five days a week). A significant outcome was that participants gained a sense of their own capability within the UK labour market. Almost a third had either moved up a language level or found employment after the first 13 weeks. In

total, a fifth of participants found employment as a result of the Prototype, comparable to the rate achieved by BET ESOL courses. Those that left the course early for jobs rarely secured sustainable employment.

Around 30 per cent were ready to move to a higher level after the first 13 weeks. Where detailed information was available on achievement in each of the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, at the end of the second course, it suggested that about half of the participants had made measurable progress. These results suggest it might be possible for some refugees to make progress in 13 weeks, but not necessarily across all skills; participants kept their 'spiky' profiles<sup>3</sup>. One of the most noticeable outcomes was an increase in the participants' ability to learn. Those assessed at Entry Level 2 made particularly significant progression in the initial 13 weeks, and then illustrated the benefits of the 26-week programme by performing at an even faster pace during the second 13 weeks. Progress in speaking was most marked, probably reflecting the fact that a number of participants had higher-level oral skills at the start of the course.

#### *Feasibility of Intensive Work-focused ESOL*

The concept of an intensive work focused ESOL course of 13 weeks appears to be most viable for those at an intermediate or advanced language level, looking for work below technician or professional levels, as a way of getting a foot on the UK employment ladder, and as part of a longer-term career strategy.

The Prototype offered many lessons to be learnt for future work focused ESOL. Key recommendations such future work focused ESOL pathfinders are:

- better communication to Jobcentre staff of benefits of the course (how it differs to BET ESOL provision);
- clearer guidance to Jobcentre staff as to the desired target group, in this case refugees, with an intermediate or advanced ESOL level;
- secure evidence of provider's capabilities to deliver innovative ESOL; and to,
- mirror the diversity of participants' educational backgrounds and work experiences in order to tailor the schedule of work to meet the needs of individuals.

### **3.4 Haringey Refugee Pilot: Refugee Integration for Career Opportunities (RIFCO)**

#### ➤ **Objective**

Refugee Integration for Career Opportunities (RIFCO) is a three-year pilot designed to support people recently given refugee status. It aims to provide a pathway into mainstream employment by establishing an employment plan based on work and language assessment whilst offering initial support with social, welfare, and training needs. The pilot is based in the London Borough of Haringey and began receiving its first clients in May 2003. This research provided some early findings on how the pilot was working during its first phase of operation in the summer of 2003.

#### ➤ **Methodology**

The research methodology involved in-depth interviews with:

- the refugees who participated in the pilot and its provision;

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<sup>3</sup> 'Spiky' profile means that people have different abilities in writing, reading and listening skills, and that these skills tend to develop at different rates. Learners can, therefore, be assessed as at different levels for different skills.

- the providers, RIFCO and 5E Ltd staff members; and,
- representatives from stakeholder organisations.

### ➤ **Key Findings**

#### *Characteristics of Participants*

Detailed information on the characteristics of the RIFCO participants was not outlined in the initial report since the pilot was in its initial stages and analysis of management information was not undertaken at this point. The participants in the research were selected to represent the range of pilot attendees, so:

- most of them were male, and aged between 17 and 30;
- most were Turkish and Somali, though about a third were from other countries of origin; and,
- in accordance with the qualifying criteria, all were refugees.

#### *Publicity and referral*

When the pilot was established it was expected that referrals to RIFCO would be from sources other than Jobcentre Plus. However, pilot staff found that clients who initially approached an external organisation were advised to visit their local Jobcentre for a referral to RIFCO. Generally, these referrals into the Jobcentre came from the local authority or from friends who had previous experience of claiming benefits. There were also a few referrals from Haringey Asylum Service (part of the local authority) and the Social Security Office to the Jobcentre, but no referrals at the time of the research from refugee organisations. Both staff and stakeholders had some reservations about the referral process via the Jobcentre, because they felt that refugees might be reluctant to approach the Jobcentre, which could reduce the number of potential referrals.

#### *Help with social needs*

Housing emerged as a key social need which had to be addressed before a participant could consider moving into employment. It distracted their attention away from the ESOL provision. Pilot staff expressed a high degree of frustration at the priorities and bureaucracy within the local authority housing department, which were felt to be significant obstacles in obtaining secure housing for their clients.

Other social support included: opening a bank account, registering with a GP surgery, and obtaining a National Insurance Number. The research suggested that many of the participants found this support invaluable. Although a 'mentor' was allocated to each individual, participants were unaware of the concept and none reported this being explained to them by RIFCO staff. The amount and extent of social support received, appeared to be dependent upon how proactive the participant was in approaching staff for help.

#### *Education and Skills*

Participants were referred to ESOL classes almost immediately. Mixed ability classes caused some participants concern; as did the fact that some teachers were not native English speakers, which some participants would have preferred. A number of participants thought the class sizes were too large, which reduced the scope for more focused, individual attention. Attendance was also affected by social needs such as attending meetings at the housing department or visiting GP surgeries for registration.

*Help with finding work*

Staff felt that for many participants it was generally premature to introduce the issue of employment after the first six weeks. Overall, participants echoed this view, feeling that they had to resolve their social needs, in particular establishing secure housing, before they could contemplate looking for employment. Many participants accepted that they may not be able to continue in their established professions and were prepared to consider undertaking work which was not commensurate with their education and employment history, in order to establish themselves in the UK labour market. Overall, there was mixed awareness of the initiatives available under RIFCO such as work experience, employment profiles, and reviews.

*Development of RIFCO*

- participants expressed the need for a formal forum to discuss concerns and progress;
- they were also keen on more social activities to help them get to know each other better;
- participants wanted to know more about their rights as refugees and about integration into British society;
- RIFCO staff suggested that a fast-track system to obtain benefits, NINO and housing would be beneficial;
- greater flexibility on attendance was suggested as being helpful as refugees can find it difficult to attend full-time courses in the early stages after arrival because of the need to attend to housing and other needs;
- closer working relationships with NASS and Home Office representatives, particularly in relation to referral; and,
- greater targeted publicity about RIFCO and its services – perhaps targeting specific groups such as women.



## 4.0 Profile of ESOL customers

### 4.1 Residency Status

All four pieces of research contribute to a better understanding of the characteristics of customers with ESOL needs who are claiming benefits through the Jobcentre.

In general, the ESOL customers considered by the research projects were a highly diverse group. The courses included a mix of refugees and people from established black and minority ethnic communities. The balance of these two broad groups varied between different Jobcentres and provider locations. For example, the BET/FTET research found that Jobcentres and providers in Bradford and Southall had a higher percentage of Pakistani customers, whereas in other locations, ESOL customers were more likely to be recently arrived refugees from Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia and the Middle East. This latter pattern was reflected among the participants in the ESOL Prototype, while those taking part in the RIFCO pilot were primarily from Turkey and Somalia.

Advisers interviewed for the ESOL BET research reported that ESOL customers represented anything between 20 and 80 per cent of their caseloads, with variations according to the timing of 'immigration waves' and refugee relocations through dispersal policies. Jobcentre staff who took part in the Interpreters and Translation Services study reported that the frequency of needing an interpreter could be as much as once a day. As we describe in section 4.3, below, capabilities in English were not linked to length of residence in the UK.

### 4.2 Length of time in the UK, Integration and Refugee Status

The length of time the refugees involved in the research had been in the UK varied between only a few months and 40 years. For example, of those participants on the Prototype, two thirds had been resident in the UK between one and five years, and 16 per cent for over five years. Among those resident in the UK for longer periods, it was often difficult to establish their official status during interviews, even when this had changed.

Eligibility for RIFCO depended on status as a 'new' refugee. The RIFCO report found that although 'new' refugees were reluctant to approach the Jobcentre, the majority of Jobcentre customers had found their way there through referral by NASS or friends who were experienced with the UK system. This pattern was observed during the ESOL Prototype. It suggests that financial support may be sought from and/or provided by community and family networks for some time after initial arrival in the UK.

At the moment those with ESOL language needs, whether refugees, asylum seekers or migrants, are not classified as a separate group within the Jobcentre. Once they have received ILR status they become entitled to benefits and so are treated in the same way as any other claimants. All four reports indicated that there was a need to develop a marker on Jobcentre LMS to indicate the first language spoken of every non-English speaking customer and possibly whether the customer was a refugee. This was to assist the development of local strategies focused on the needs of specific groups. Of course, 'first language spoken' is not in itself an indicator of the extent of language support required, but a more formal record of this characteristic would provide detailed statistical information to enable assessment of trends in demand for support with specific languages. At the time the research was carried out the system relied on staff to comment in the notes section, rather than the use of more formal markers such as that used for ethnicity. This meant that the information was not recorded consistently and on occasions might not be there at all.

Across all four reports, social needs were highlighted as a specific characteristic of this customer group, including:

- **personal issues:** most often affecting refugees on leaving the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), including the need to open a bank account, register with a GP surgery and difficulties obtaining NINO;
- **housing:** this was the most significant need for many refugee customers, who often did not have a permanent place of residence;
- **ill-health:** including mental health issues such as depression and other mental health problems following traumatic experiences in country of origin;
- **anxiety:** some customers were anxious about attending provision at a large provider, particularly those with no educational experience - advisers highlighted the need for community based provision for these groups;
- **cultural/social norms:** a lack of single sex classes often dissuaded female ESOL customers (notably Muslim women) from attending provision;
- **caring and domestic responsibilities of Asian women** whose family restricted their entry into education and employment;
- **word of mouth:** negative reports of particular providers were quickly passed on within communities and would dissuade individuals from attending, particularly when this was not mandatory;
- **JSA requirements: customers who were already attending part time ESOL or other vocational courses were resistant to leave these to attend full time mandatory ESOL BET/FTET.**

### 4.3 Educational Background

#### *Capabilities in English*

As the BET /FTET report highlighted, and was also the case for a number of the participants in the ESOL Prototype, the duration of customer residency in the UK did not determine capability in English. The BET /FTET research found that although providers reported that the majority of customers entering ESOL provision were at pre-entry level or Entry Level 1 standards:

- some customers had been resident in the UK for forty years or more and only spoke limited English; whereas,
- some refugee customers, resident in the UK for as little as one year, had a good standard of English.

All four research reports documented how poor levels of English undermined communication during the assessment and referral processes, as well as hindering the delivery of services. This highlighted the importance of training those in contact with the customer (both advisers and providers) to assess ESOL needs, including whether customers needed an interpreter, and if they had ESOL needs. Many customers at the higher level of ESOL were overlooked as they were able to communicate verbally with an adviser but still would not meet employer's standards for work in terms of reading and/or writing skills for instance. The RIFCO pilot found a way of improving communication through the establishment of their base at a local centre where numerous languages were spoken. This meant that clients' language needs could be met without significant difficulty as some 35 languages were available just from the staff on site. Having made this point, it should be noted that the Interpreter and Translation Services study reported reservations about using bi- or multi-lingual Jobcentre staff to provide interpretation support because:

- staff were reluctant to increase the workloads of their colleagues where they did not have some sort of salary or time allowance;

- staff with additional languages were not always willing to provide services in case their skills were insufficient. They were worried about the possible repercussions should any advice be misunderstood.

The Prototype participants had obtained relatively high levels of formal education in their home countries. Almost everyone had some sort of formal schooling; the majority had completed secondary school and everyone was literate in their own language. Participants on the ESOL/BET pilot had more diverse educational backgrounds and generally corresponded to one of three key groups:

- individuals from rural areas, with low levels of, or no, education;
- those whose education had been repeatedly interrupted from any early age due to civil war;
- individuals who were professionally trained, including doctors or academics.

#### 4.4 Employment Background

Not surprisingly, employment backgrounds largely depended upon country of origin, as well as the age and gender of a refugee. On the whole more men had worked in their home country. The three main occupations of those on the Prototype fell into skilled trades, sales and customer services, process and machine operatives; on the RIFCO pilot manual labour, retail, financial and educational sectors were all represented. A few of the younger participants interviewed explained that they had left their home country when they had just finished their education and had not had time to find work.

#### 4.5 Aspirations/ Expectations

Customer motivation to seek work through ESOL BET/FTET training varied considerably according to individuals' work ethic / experience, educational background and social and cultural norms:

- **Work ethic / social and cultural norms:** the majority of the customers who took part in the ESOL Prototype, and a number of those involved in the RIFCO pilot were driven by a strong desire to find work - motivated by the need to support their families. When interviewed, refugees in particular often prioritised securing low-skilled work above learning English and were strongly motivated to work to provide for their families.
- **Educational background / work experience:** other customers involved in the RIFCO pilot prioritised learning English above job search and did not want to consider looking for work until their English had improved. This was also the case for customers involved in ESOL BET/FTET who wished to enter the labour market at a level that reflected their ambition, existing experience and qualifications. These customers saw ESOL BET/FTET as a stepping stone to further vocational or academic study. They were usually resistant to entering low-skilled, low-waged work.
- **English in order to work:** the motivations of the third group of customers were aligned with the ESOL BET/FTET, RIFCO and Prototype rationale, in that they both accepted the need to improve their English, and remained focused on securing work after the completion of six months of English language training.

ESOL BET/FTET reported that advisers and providers suggested that customer motivation to work and their need to learn English varied according to the strength of community and informal economic networks which customers had access to. A further customer group was, therefore, identified in that research whose main motivation was to learn English to facilitate social integration and communication with friends and neighbours, as opposed to labour market entry. Hypothetically, the need to learn English appears to be greater the more isolated the individual, for instance, where individuals are not based within established communities.

On the whole, upon entering ESOL programmes, participants' aspirations were high; they hoped to improve their English Language and then get a job. Migrants as opposed to refugees had very high

expectations of getting a job which matched their qualifications and previous employment. They had come to the UK more aware of the UK labour market and were more likely to have worked in similar labour markets than the refugee participants.

## 5.0 Referral and Assessment Process

This chapter looks at the process from the point that a refugee enters the Jobcentre to referral to ESOL provision. All four reports contribute to a clearer understanding of how the process might be improved. The main findings are discussed below.

### 5.1 Jobcentre Staff

On the whole, refugees were referred to the Jobcentre from the local Authority, NASS or from friends who had previous experience of using the service. Referrals made by Jobcentre staff to ESOL courses were largely determined by availability in the local area and those providers that Jobcentre staff had 'tried and tested' before. This did not always satisfactorily match the needs of the customer.

Moreover, as not all refugees find their way to the Jobcentre, accessibility to provision is limited at present. Greater partnership working between government departments, NASS, community organisations and others in the non-statutory sector needs to be developed to ensure that 'new' refugees are directed into the Jobcentre.

### 5.2 Identifying need

Once in the Jobcentre, staff's ability to support individual customers, and match provision to need, appears to be hindered by the absence of any marker as to status and English language need. The absence of the marker meant that staff might not be aware in advance of any language issues and so not be able to provide the standard of service they wanted to.

Staff interviewed for the Prototype were in two minds as to the 'ethics' of a marker as they felt it was important to be aware of special needs but were also concerned about the dangers of discrimination that could arise through drawing attention to such characteristics. This was also the case for the staff who took part in the Interpreters and Translation Services research. Staff also needed support in how to identify ESOL needs as most customers had 'spiky' profiles, so might appear to have good spoken English but poor writing and reading skills.

### 5.3 Use of Interpreters with ESOL customers

As indicated earlier in the report, the accessibility and availability of formal interpretation services affected the use made of them. In addition, staff mentioned cost as a factor in whether or not they chose to use professional interpreters or Language Line but it did not prevent them using such services when it was not possible to do otherwise. Both Business Managers and staff were very conscious of treating people equally, but while only a small number of Business Managers took part in the Interpreters study, two thirds of them were concerned that they might not be providing an equivalent service to refugees, asylum seekers and others with ESOL needs.

### 5.4 Role of Providers in the Jobcentre

The findings from the BET /FTET research, the Prototype and the RIFCO pilot all imply that providing suitable ESOL provision needs to be seen as a joint responsibility: it appears to work best when Jobcentre Plus staff and ESOL staff work together. The Prototype and FTET/BET highlighted the role for ESOL trained staff to play in assisting in the identification of ESOL needs and to ensure that Jobcentre Staff were fully updated and provided with enough detailed information about the purpose and structure of the courses available.

#### 5.4.1 Publicising provision

Publicising provision proved to be an important aspect of achieving referral numbers and accessing the desired target group. The Prototype was designed to attract those above Entry level 1 ESOL and the RIFCO Pilot wished to target those most recently given refugee status. However, both pilots found it difficult to attract the desired match of client and the initial referral numbers required. Even the

RIFCO's well planned publicity including presentations, advertisements in local papers and posters in a range of public places such as the Jobcentre and the Social Security Office, did not necessarily encourage a detailed awareness among these organisations or a clear understanding of the purpose of the pilot by the participants. Publicity for the Prototype was much weaker than the RIFCO pilot, but it clearly demonstrated that the presence of tutors from the college was the most effective method in terms of communicating the purpose and target group of the provision to Jobcentre Advisers.

#### *5.4.2 Initial assessments*

The research into the ESOL Prototype suggested that most effective approach for initial assessments was to conduct them in the Jobcentre while the customer was present. Expecting customers to find their way from the Jobcentre to the Provider's site was not realistic. Communication between Provider and Jobcentre staff, especially information about the eligibility criteria, was necessary to ensure that the right people were being referred. Inevitably, it was difficult for staff to assess ESOL levels. Generally, customers felt comfortable being tested<sup>4</sup> but in some cases the absence of an interpreter made the process very difficult.

In order to determine the most suitable ESOL provision the following key recommendations have been made about assessment:

- initial assessment needs to cover all four skill areas separately in order to map individual attainment. This proved to be effective at ascertaining the appropriate level for each participant in the Prototype;
- the initial assessment tools due to be ready from the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit in 2004 should be used to determine the appropriate level of course for each applicant;
- tutors who are inexperienced in delivering initial assessment in an ESOL context would benefit from specific training in the administration, marking and interpretation of the tests, as well as in the best practices to follow for participant involvement and feedback. This training should be regarded as essential;
- assessing vocational expertise and aptitude is as necessary as assessing ESOL attainment if the vocational element is to be relevant and effective;
- learning styles should be assessed for those with previous education and for those who have never attended school and the results used to inform teaching methods in order to maximise learning;
- individual Learning Plans negotiated with participants should cover not only language but also employability goals.

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<sup>4</sup> Evident in RIFCO Pilot and Prototype

## 6.0 ESOL Provision

In the UK, there is an important distinction between ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language). The former is for those who intend to settle in the UK and the latter is for foreign students who want to learn or improve their English, obtain a qualification but ultimately return to their country of origin. EFL is a highly developed area, whereas ESOL is relatively new and trainers in this field believe that there are not enough specialist written publications which concentrate on ESOL provision at all levels. However, substantial attempts are currently being made to concentrate on ESOL teaching and to develop materials to be used for teaching English to refugees and asylum seekers.

### 6.1 ESOL tutors

ESOL itself is an integral part of the government's Skills for Life initiative. However, at present there is a shortage of trained, qualified ESOL tutors. As a consequence, one of the key elements of the ESOL initiative is capacity building and improving quality through professionalism of the workforce. The ESOL Prototype suggested that EFL teachers were able to teach ESOL to refugees, given the appropriate amount of support and assistance, and so long as they themselves were willing to adapt to participants with a wide range of backgrounds, abilities and prior experiences. EFL tutors will also not be familiar with the range of tutorials and support functions normally expected of an ESOL tutor, nor the range of personal skills required.

### 6.2 Delivery

The Prototype was described as an 'intensive' work-focused ESOL course, and delivered five days a week, for a full day. Participants liked the intensity of the provision as it helped them learn faster. The participants also gained from the mixture of nationalities and languages represented among their fellow students since this provided them with plenty of opportunities to practice their English. The role of the tutors was also important in facilitating learning; the students described them as enthusiastic and committed, and valued the amount of one-to-one support they received. Attendance and retention was high, probably as a result of the support received.

The RIFCO participants were referred to ESOL classes where needed, or Short Intensive Basic Skills (SIBS) and Computer Literacy and Information Technology courses if they were able to speak English. For the ESOL classes, students with different levels of English were encouraged to help each other, with the teachers keeping a check to ensure the stronger students were not neglected and the weaker students were learning correctly. While staff thought this method of teaching was successful the students were not as convinced, and had some reservations about being grouped in mixed abilities as they felt it affected their ability to learn. They also felt the class sizes were on the large size, which reduced the amount of personal attention. They were happy working in a multi-ethnic environment.

Interestingly, the RIFCO participants faced rather strict rules on attendance and had to leave if it fell below a set level. The RIFCO staff raised this with the Jobcentre who responded that such allowances would not be made if a participant were in work, which the pilot was supposed to reflect. However, the pilot was also working with people who were at a relatively early point in their residence in the UK with a number of personal and social issues to sort out. Some flexibility here may, therefore, have been desirable to facilitate resettlement.

The BET /FTET provision was based on a standard 30 hour week, which was not always successful in moving all customers towards the labour market at their chosen level. Once again, the 'spiky profiles' of students was an important factor in the amount of progress made and it appeared that a variety of teaching methods and mix of vocational and language elements worked best.

### **6.3 Innovative elements**

The report has outlined a number of innovative service responses and elements, including social support, integration, community and employer involvement, vocational training and work experience and intensive fast track programmes. The four research projects provided some information on each of them as follows.

#### **➤ Provision of Social Support– health, housing, well being**

We described at the outset of the report the importance of the provision of social support. The RIFCO pilot has built this into its format. The key area of support is with housing, and the participants who took part in the pilot needed fairly intensive support to deal with the bureaucracy of the housing department, in part a result of the lack of priority afforded to RIFCO's largest group of clients - young, single men. Other social support is provided to help participants set up bank accounts, register with GPs, make benefit claims, and obtain a National Insurance number. Each client has a mentor, though when the research took place, participants were not aware of this fact. Levels of social support also varied according to how proactive the participants were in requesting it.

The ESOL Prototype did not set out to provide support with issues around benefit and housing in as explicit a fashion as did the RIFCO pilot. But the tutors doubled as mentors, as did the course administrator, and provided such support. The participants valued the provision of advice and guidance on personal and practical issues such as benefit receipt and housing.

The BET /FTET report also noted that pastoral support was a vital aspect in provision.

#### **➤ Integration**

Participants on the ESOL Prototype did gain a sense of their own capability within the UK labour market, and valued the support they received with the production of CVs and initial job search. A number of the students also took part in job placements, which provided invaluable experience of the working environment.

The RIFCO pilot was most successful at supporting participants' social integration, in terms of housing and financial inclusion. Since these needs were the immediate priority, and students received tailored support, less structured information was provided on the world of work. As a result, there was a more patchy awareness of the UK labour market and the rights of refugee employees.

#### **➤ Community involvement**

It was expected that refugee community organisations and community networks would play a significant role as sign-posting agents and introductory facilitators into the 'welfare to work' system. In practice their role was minimal and could be further developed to encourage 'new' refugees into the system to reduce the time they spend unemployed and unsupported by benefits.

Community organisations might also be able to offer help with the provision of interpreter and translation services. However, the research suggests that few Jobcentres have engaged community groups in this way. Furthermore, where they were being used, Jobcentre staff had some reservations as to their efficacy; staff's experience was that community representatives could easily move from objective interpreter to personal advocate.

#### **➤ Employers' involvement**

Participants on the ESOL Prototype were able to go on a two-week work placement. Employers who took part in the placements were willing to do so but had not been briefed as to the purpose of the Prototype when asked to provide the placements. When this was explained, employers suggested that

they would have valued detailed briefing as to the purpose of the Prototype to enable them to design a more structured work experience.

➤ **Vocational training for refugees**

The results from the BET /FTET research, and the two pilots, suggest that vocational training is valued but that three key considerations need to be taken into account:

- it must be tailored to the needs of individuals, though this can be difficult to do given the variety of abilities and experiences within any one group;
- the timing of the training is important; for some of the participants it was made available too early, at a point when they wanted (and needed) to concentrate on improving their language skills first;
- even so, being able to learn language within a work context works well as the practical experience promotes learning and facilitates the move into sustainable employment.

➤ **Work experience element**

The results of the research suggest that a work experience element is a valuable experience for clients, provided it is not introduced too early, both in terms of English language ability, but also in the context of the overall ESOL provision. On the ESOL Prototype, the participants who gained the most were those at the highest level; they also took part in the placement after at least 11 weeks of tuition, and provision of information about working culture and practice. This helped facilitate the placement.

Work experience was available through RIFCO, but few of the participants were aware of it at an early stage in the project.

➤ **Intensive, fast-track programmes**

The concept of fast-track programmes is to give those who are ‘nearly ready to work’ the skills they need to be able to work, but the results of the different initiatives, suggest that the picture is complicated. For example, the ESOL Prototype showed that overall language levels could improve in 13 weeks, though not across all skills equally. Those at the higher levels were most likely to make measurable improvements within 13 weeks. The rate of progress for those at lower levels was slower but still accelerated in weeks 14 – 26. The RIFCO pilot reflected these findings. Staff felt it was too soon to introduce the concept of employment, even work placements, after six weeks of ESOL provision. The first group of RIFCO participants tended to have lower language skills and had not gained sufficient confidence in that time. The BET /FTET research even suggested that a 26-week course was not long enough for customers to learn a new language and enter sustainable employment.

These findings suggest, therefore, that a variety of provision, ideally, tailored to the needs of individuals, is needed to meet the diverse range of ability, experience and confidence levels.



## 7.0 Outputs and Outcomes

In this section we draw together the findings on outputs and outcomes concerning progress in language level, job outcomes and soft outcomes such as confidence and self-esteem.

### 7.1 Language level

The RIFCO pilot did not formally measure progress in terms of language level, but received feedback from participants as to their progress. Most felt that they had benefited from structured language classes, though there was some indication that those benefiting most had been resident in the UK longest. This perhaps implies that their English language ability had been above the minimum, providing something of a head start.

On the ESOL Prototype, more formal assessment was made of progress, though the usefulness of this was affected by the absence of an agreed diagnostic tool. Participants completing the first 13 weeks were assessed as to their readiness to move to the next level; around a third were deemed to be ready. However, this is not to imply that others did not progress at all - one of the most noticeable aspects was the increase in their ability to learn. So while they did not move up a level in 13 weeks, they made significant progress, improving at an even faster rate during the second 13 weeks.

The BET /FTET findings also suggested that participants moved on an incremental basis, from one level to another. As a consequence, setting the goal of moving all customers to Level 3 was not practicable, and did not acknowledge the progress made by customers.

### 7.2 Job Outcomes

The results on job outcomes were variable.

On the ESOL Prototype just about a fifth of those who took part in 13 weeks provision found work, though it is not known to what extent this was sustainable employment. A number of participants left before the end of the course as they had obtained work, but none of them had secured sustainable employment as most did not stay in the jobs for any length of time. A handful of participants gained employment as a result of their work placements.

The BET /FTET research found that even the 26 week long provision was insufficient to help participants secure sustainable employment. Providers found the job target of 20 per cent hard to achieve as it did not reflect the different educational starting points of ESOL customers or the multiple barriers many of them faced to entering the labour market. However, in one case, a London-based provider with a dedicated careers adviser did get over a third of its customers into employment. This was, in part, the result of the local economic conditions, but the dedicated support is also likely to have made a difference.

Participants taking part in the ESOL Prototype and the RIFCO pilot were strongly motivated to find work, to improve their current income and through a desire to be financially independent. While some were concerned to improve their English as much as possible before seeking work, others were driven more strongly by the desire to work. In these cases, both staff and participants were concerned they would accept employment in potentially exploitative working environments or in establishments where progress learning English would be limited.

### 7.3 Soft Outcomes

The three initiatives had a number of soft outcomes:

- in all cases, the confidence and self-esteem of the participants increased alongside their ability to speak English. This also gave them more confidence to socially interact in English-speaking environments;

- also important, was the increased ability to learn which grew with time. This meant that progress was faster as the amount of time on the course increased;
- provision which focused on the UK labour market and working culture helped participants develop realistic aspirations and expectations as to their probable employment prospects;
- increased motivation and the ability to make job applications.

## 8.0 Conclusions

### 8.1 Key messages

This review of research confirms that the Jobcentre has a crucial role to play in providing a service for ESOL customers. This service is needed from the first point of contact at the Jobcentre, and is needed for some time while customers 'find their feet' and settle into their new life.

Ideally, all contact with non-English speakers at the Jobcentre should be facilitated by a professional interpretation service, whether face-to-face or via a service such as Language Line. This is the optimum solution but raises considerable issues of cost and scale. One option is to work closely with local community organisations and develop their abilities as interpreters; another is to specifically employ staff with language skills, but properly trained and remunerated with dedicated job descriptions.

Another important issue is the quality of communication between Providers and Advisers at the Jobcentre. This is especially important to ensure that appropriate provision is suggested, matching individual needs as much as possible. Advisers need to be trained to be able to screen for ESOL levels at an early stage, again to ensure a match between need and provision; and to gather more information about previous experience, skills and job history in the country of origin, and about the job aspirations of customers. This implies use of an interpreter both at the first claim stage, but also at the six and 12 month interviews. Advisers cannot assume that a customer's English will have improved enough by then to make such support unnecessary.

Social support with the range of resettlement issues running alongside language provision is a crucial element in ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers especially are able to concentrate on learning English. It should not be delivered just at the beginning but throughout provision using a mentor. Acute resettlement issues, such as adequate housing, need to be identified before classes start and addressed as a matter of priority as this instability is one of the largest barriers to learning for refugees.

Refugees as a whole are a very diverse group and arrive in the UK with very different levels of qualification, work experience and aspirations. One of the issues identified by both the ESOL Prototype and the RIFCO pilot was that very often their aspirations were unrealistic and based on an inaccurate image of the UK labour market. Intensive work-focused ESOL provision was an important element in promoting understanding of the labour market, and helped re-focus aspirations to open up job opportunities which would not have been considered initially. The refugees who took part in both pilots were keen to work to gain their own financial independence and to support their families. Importantly, the Interpreters and Translators research suggested that Advisers want to support ESOL customers to learn English so as to enable them to find suitable and sustainable employment, and have a chance to 'get on', rather than accepting low paid jobs where English was not an critical issue.

Even so, simply referring people into whatever provision is available is a temptation for Advisers. Often they will have little choice over where to send such customers anyway due to the limited provision available in any area. Limited choice may also be compounded by the difficulties in assessing language ability. Clearly Advisers cannot be expected to be experts here and it is easy to misinterpret an individual's learning ability, cognitive learning style, background and motivations. 'Spiky' profiles complicate matters, as ability in spoken English may not be reflected in written ability. So, to ensure fewer misinterpretations are made, the quality of assessment needs to be more controlled, structured and reliable as possible. Ideally an interpreter would be present to ensure that detailed and accurate information is obtained, particularly in terms of background and previous experiences. Providing interpreters at yet another stage within the process will add to individual Jobcentre costs, but may reap dividends if the correct provision is found for each customer.

The research suggests that intensive work-focused ESOL is best suited to Entry 3 ESOL but as this group have greater ability they are more difficult to identify as in need. This adds further weight to the argument that Jobcentre staff in areas with high ESOL needs should be trained in the assessment process. ESOL clearly provides a strong basis for overcoming labour market disadvantage, refugees face major barriers to effective participation in adult learning. As the RIFCO and Prototype pilots indicate, refugees' status is an indicator of multiple disadvantage and ESOL courses may fail to achieve intended impacts without a successful resolution of any legal, housing, financial and health problems.

Work placements appear to be useful in facilitating language acquisition and knowledge of local working conditions. But, they must not be too soon (after six weeks looks to be too soon), nor for people at the very basic levels. As an example, one of the participants on the ESOL Prototype was found a placement as a delivery driver, with inadequate English and poor knowledge of London, so barely lasted a day. It is, therefore, important that advisers and providers are well briefed as to the purpose of the placements to ensure their success.

## **8.2 Recommendations**

A number of recommendations emerge from the overview of research:

- there should be a professional interpretation service (whether face-to-face, Language Line or nominated staff), for the first 12 months of any claim;
- training for advisers is needed in the identification of need and the basis of assessment;
- support with resettlement issues is essential;
- intensive work-focused ESOL does provide information on the labour market and working culture, which is important to bring aspirations closer to probable outcomes;
- the length of the ESOL course is critical. If the aim is to enable people to enter sustainable employment, a 13-week course appears to be too brief for all but those who are almost at Level 1. Everyone else needs at least 26 weeks, and, ideally, 39 weeks to enter the labour market in suitable, sustainable employment.