

MESH (Migrant English Support Hub)

Mini Conference, Friday 20 June 2014, Banqueting Suite, Civic Hall

The aim of the conference was to bring providers of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) in Leeds together to provide an update on the development of MESH and inform discussions on future steps.

The conference was well attended with a total of 32 attendees. The morning session focused on the development of MESH and progress so far with regards to the mapping stage.

Rachael Loftus gave a background of MESH and the issues facing facilitators and learners and stated how important it is to take a lead from learners. She was keen to see a collective voice that would raise the concerns. But, more importantly the return on investment that enhances the current work we do in order to make a better city. Leeds is the most diverse city outside of London with over 140 ethnicities residing here and therefore, we need to deal with the population it has rather than what we think it has. Political pressures can be solved if we give the right information such as the aims of what we hope to achieve and how this will save the city money but yet help all communities to integrate, be empowered and better informed. She also suggested we start to do the most basic action of networking and talking to each other to use this as a platform for a collective voice.

Clare joined the MESH project along with Natja in November 2013 taking on the role of development workers. They have met providers both in person and over the phone to gather important data that will form the basis of a free on line website. The next stage is to speak with learners on how they have, or would access an ESOL class.

Guest speaker Sylvia Perin from Hackney ESOL Advice Service (EAS) shared good practice and success to support the work of MESH. Hackney is the second most deprived local authority in England. Following the 2011 census they were able to decipher data regarding languages and found that 50% of the population in Hackney don't currently speak English. They initially found that a better recruitment system was needed in order to deal with under and over subscription, and multiple waiting lists. They then decided to create a paper directory of ESOL classes but realised that this was outdated as soon as it was published. A successful bid to the then Migration Impacts Fund allowed them to open an advice centre to allow for better recruitment and outreach in communities for better engagement. Hackney providers also set up a twice yearly coordination and planning group, the ESOL Working Party, which an Ofsted inspection highlighted as an example of good practice, value for money and partnership working. Sylvia advised that having an evidence based approach is helpful for managers to explore further and make decisions.

Questions and Answers

Q: How did you persuade providers in Hackney to work together and were there any conflicts between organisations in the public and voluntary sectors?

A: It came together as a collective approach and as the demand is higher than the provision, it was seen as a positive move. Not many private providers provide ESOL in Hackney.

Q: What would you say to politicians? How can you make them understand about the needs? About it being compulsory? Different needs to be taken into account? Pressures

from families, shift work patterns etc.? How can the government make a difference for people to learn English?

A: The Council exists to make life easier for the citizens. It is a very important journey for the local government and in Leeds a lot of thinking has taken place as to what we have to do and what will make it easier. We have already pushed MESH this far and it is a central point for us to take forward discussions with organisations such as Job Centre Plus and private employment agencies.

Q: ESOL in Children's Centres is cut by 50% and the demand is high, it is difficult to find other routes of funding as most courses are not accredited. How can we make a collective voice and get heard?

A: everyone needs to know this information to see what alternative provision there is. It is clear that all need to have a platform to share on such issues and one route is to take to the Migration Partnership.

A number of MESH brand/logo examples were displayed for participants to comment on what they think is the most appropriate. Two points were given as guidance:

1. Which do you think best describes what you have heard about MESH today?
2. Which of these is most accessible to someone with little English?

See attached document for feedback on branding

Six groups of approximately 6/7 people on each table discussed two questions:

1. What is going on for your organisation in terms of ESOL at the moment?

For feedback see appendix 1

2. How can we as ESOL providers be better co-ordinated in Leeds?

For feedback see appendix 2

A vimeo about MESH that was inspired by Newham ESOL Exchange was shown that highlighted funders, key partners and learners.

The morning session concluded with a discussion on the next steps. The first is to share partners email addresses to start a network for discussion, support and suggestions. In addition, to find out who needs to know about ESOL in Leeds such as politicians. Meeting the leader may be a good idea but must ensure facts and figures are presented.

The MESH launch planned for November 2014 may be the place for bigger conversations in the city.

The aim of the afternoon session was to raise the profile of MESH and the need for ESOL provision in a fun activity. Councillors Harrington, Venner, Mcneiven, Hussain and Urry attended as learners and supported the MESH project, they were also shown the MESH vimeo.

Appendix 1: Question 1: what's going on for your organisation in terms of ESOL at the moment?

- Eastern European learners especially are often signed up to employment agencies who don't respect their class and just demand they come to work, fear of no further offers if they refuse.
- RETAS. Steps to settlement for beginners + English for settlement for intermediate level– English core of the courses.
- Levels
- Progression
- Assessment of students
- Aiming to keep classes oral and visual
- Independent classes 'freelance' + 'qualified'
- Volunteer-led classes, now funding dried up
- Cardigan centre – children and other projects, we get students from different centres, like schools, mainly women, refugees. Path project from Home Office.
- Leeds City College - ESOL in children's centre project cutting this year by 50%, 40 classes to 18 across the city
- Leeds City College – other funding streams struggling to bridge gaps as accreditation not appropriate for low level learners.
- Lots of government funded courses – but eligibility criteria
- New classes starting in September – long waiting lists
- Need qualified volunteers
- Money
- Cuts, cuts, cuts
- Learning materials
- Volunteer – led classes (supported by church)
- Lack of childcare to allow women especially to access classes
- Swarthmore provides ESOL at the centre and offsite. We have funded provision via Leeds City Council and the SFA. We provide both ESOL and /literacy plus a range of other accessible interest based provision
- St. Anne's – provide non-accredited classes with a variety of levels of ESOL (starting with pre-entry, entry 1, entry 2, listening and pronunciation, Literacy for higher level ESOL learners. We are currently bidding for the next academic year funding.
- While provision offered e.g. ESOL pre-ent, ent 1, ent 2, Listening and pronunciation, read and write, but we still have spaces during term time
- The underlying issue is lack of money
- Bureaucracy
- Needs of children in school
- Inability to pay or family unwilling to pay for a woman to learn English
- Qualified teachers volunteering, but admin burden high
- We have students who need ESOL provision to support their studies in HE at pre-entry in order to progress in their studies

- Woodhouse Community Centre run by Oblong provides ESOL every Thursday for 2 hours
- Family pressure on women especially to stay at home, so not in class
- Leeds Language College. Primary private students. 18-30 European mainly, Middle East students, 70% are on a temporary courses
- St. Georges English Class. Free class for anyone work with no funding , well provided with funding
- Job centre+ snatching learners off courses half way through to undertake their courses
- Cost to the council/the country of not providing ESOL e.g. interpretation + translation costs/ and social costs – everyone should be able to speak the language of the community they live in
- SRC training – we've been delivering the EIF Programme, the ESOL Programme by Path Yorkshire, the Home Office funds a number of students , payment is by result, students should be given what they have come for, some students pay for courses from their own pocket
- Teaching ESOL under the banner of other subjects e.g. cooking, childcare
- Consult and involve providers before making decisions, support local initiatives, (venues, funds)
- Job Centre+ and Leeds City Council arbitrary attitude, not easy to refer

Appendix 2: Question 2: How can we as ESOL providers be better coordinated here in Leeds?

We asked this question and people gave feedback in small groups then put notes of their thoughts onto a flip chart. These notes have been collated below. They have not been edited - they are as they were written. NB the comments do not follow on from each other - they are all responses to the question above.

- a one stop portal like Hackney's would be brilliant
- the MESH website is VITAL (several of us thought today's event was the launch of the website) - the sooner the better; this needs regular maintenance - who?
- use the power of the big institutions e.g. university, college etc
- need a cross-sector including the 'for profit'
- get smart about politicians
- need a big advocate for this
- need the big players on board
- need more resources to capacity build
- organisations need to know where to send people to
- start with the learners perspectives
- central coordination and funding for this
- being able to filter a database
- sharing our resources - people, time, stuff
- we do need the big picture
- creches
- MESH could have/to have an advisory and advocacy role quantify the value of ESOL
- I want a better idea of how it would work
- links for support
- the local authority to be involved
- share information
- one website to coordinate efforts
- the job centre and Leeds City College have targets and are reluctant to cooperate
- central bidding for tenders and central information on available funding for providers
- what happens when council focus changes?
- apparently the Hackney project is monopolising the provision of ESOL and destroying little centres
- engage through social media
- website
- info leaflets
- minutes and reports from regular MESH meetings to have a straightforward route for representation to the council
- knowing the answers to help people i.e. where can I send my disabled daughter? will this affect my benefits?
- we should get a quantity report from different organisations
- website ESOL
- monthly meeting for ESOL Leeds community
- approaching people through the community centre like Hackney
- advisory services out in the community
- referral from job centres
- UK Border Agency for Asylees ???
- have an evidence based approach

- are there going to be reports
- getting feedback - central information about tenders/funding
- learners feedback