Ms Alison Robinson – written evidence (CCE0025)

ESOL Practitioner submitting information individually

1. A sense of belonging. Involvement in local community.

2. More work in schools on welcoming new arrivals. Funding for volunteer coordinators to get more society members involved with others. More integration and engagement activities locally.

3. A focus on people helping others who they might not normally work/meet with. More emphasis on the benefits of volunteering. Good for mental health, useful contacts...Young people to all get involved in volunteering.

4. I work with young people of 19 and 20 who earlier this year had to ask ‘what is a general election?’ These are people who’ve been through apprenticeships, or done A levels, and one got into University. This shocked me. How can you get through the whole of an education system without knowing such basics. Something is completely wrong! They had very little interest in voting. They don’t understand about MPs etc etc

5. Education has a massive role. Especially in these days of social media where young people’s news comes entirely from their newsfeed. Citizenship should be embedded throughout education from primary to University. There should be content on politics in the UK and the difference from other countries, especially where refugees come from. The function of democracy. Why asylum seekers come to the UK. What the difference is between an asylum seeker, a refugee and a migrant. Far more investment in EAL in schools. There needs to be a big change in funding of ESOL and the importance that it has in the education of adults. A national strategy and a national website bringing together all provision both voluntary and statutory. This could be one that organisations submitted their own information too which would mean monitoring it would be less onerous. Learning English is key but takes time. Those in work find it hard to learn and develop further. We are wasting people’s skills. Educated people are working in factories where they could be working in hospitals and schools etc.

6. I like the idea but know little about it. Could it be a separate subject in secondary schools taking the place of a GCSE for all. It could involve volunteering and some discussion, course work that was generic for all.

7. Far more funding for volunteer coordinators to work with mixed groups. Eg. host population helping develop English language skills. This sort of activity needs coordination (paid) for it to be fully successful and sustainable.

8. People at the bottom of society feel left behind. Often this is the white working class who then feel resentful of others. FAR more community workers, youth workers, addiction counsellors, debt counsellors, advisors etc etc working on the ground so that families are supported out of difficulties. These services are of course also needed by BME populations.
9. People lack support. They are alone, lonely, struggling. Children’s Centres have closed, youth clubs have closed. There are far less people looking out for the most vulnerable and nipping issues in the bud. With the emphasis on finding jobs, those who are bringing up families and not actively looking for work get left behind. ESOL access is difficult. Waiting lists mean those keen to learn have to wait. They are then confined to their homes largely and this means their mental health suffers, leading to further problems. Children have to help parents interpret. These children are denied the childhood they deserve. In many areas ESOL is patchy, especially rural areas unused to migrant populations but with the spread of asylum dispersal there will be a need for ESOL in all areas.

10. A lot of the time workplaces and schools are diverse but divided. People make friends with those similar to themselves. They stick with what is safe. Having fluent English for instance doesn’t mean that people integrate. I think the British people are quite closed. We are not an open society who throw open our doors to entertain people in our homes. Prejudices feed down to children and need to be tackled through the education system. We all need to feel valued. Helping others makes us feel valued. We need to have less of an attitude of ‘making people engage’. Immigrants need to integrate but the indigenous population have a massive role in this. Programmes in Sweden linking people together locally for meals, activities, hobbies, language learning, look really valuable.

11. Levels of English proficiency are very important. Funding regimes to not support intensive delivery of ESOL as well as they should. Due to challenges in their lives, refugees cannot always attend all classes. This may be a reason that colleges are sometimes reluctant to invest too much of their Adult Education Budget in this area, worrying about success rates. There is not enough ESOL. Waiting lists exist in most areas. There is a lack of national support – materials (eg. citizenship materials not updated), curriculum, training for staff, recognition of teachers as professionals. There is little national coordination. There is no long term strategy and plan. Often first generation migrants ‘sacrifice’ their lives and concentrate on the education of their children. The support that has been given to Syrian refugees under the SVPRS etc should be built on. People need support to make the most of their lives. They then benefit society.

12. The Syrian programmes are a good model. Methodist Asylum Project in Middlesbrough and Action Foundation in Newcastle both use heavy volunteer involvement to support English language learning thus creating bonds between the host and migrant populations. MIMA in Middlesbrough run a community day on Thursdays bringing people from all walks of life together for a free lunch and other activities all taking place in the one venue on one day.