

## English Teaching: Immigrant Workers

**Lord Quirk** asked Her Majesty's Government:

Whether, in view of the Audit Commission report of January 2007, *Crossing Borders*, they will ensure good provision of English language teaching for immigrant workers.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Skills (Lord Adonis):** My Lords, the Government recognise the vital importance of English skills for those who come to live and work in the United Kingdom, which is why we have trebled the funding for this in the past six years. To further improve provision, we will introduce new, specially focused ESOL for work qualifications from this August.

**Lord Quirk:** My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for that response. I applaud his wish, which he expressed in the debate on 26 February, to target teaching resources on the neediest and least skilled. But is there not a Catch-22 here, that those who are neediest and least skilled are the very ones who are least able to demonstrate their needs? In the recent debate, the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, spoke of a,

“15-page form to fill in, which would challenge the most fluent of us”.—[*Official Report*, 26/2/07; col. 1442.]

Does the Minister not agree that as well as benefiting the migrants and immigrants themselves, a good knowledge of English makes them more valuable to our economy and that depriving them of that participation serves no interests other than those of gang masters and the BNP?

**Lord Adonis:** My Lords, we are very mindful indeed of the issue the noble Lord raises. We are considering—and will be announcing shortly—proposals which will specifically help three groups which meet the criteria the noble Lord has set out of being vulnerable with a high demand for English-language skills but unable to meet existing criteria. Those three groups will be: spouses who do not have access to funding or to family benefit documentation; workers on very low wages and not in receipt of working tax credits; and asylum seekers whose cases take much longer than the Home Office targets, or who remain in the UK as a result of a Home Office or a High Court decision. I hope that the measures we announce will meet precisely the concerns the noble Lord has set out.

**Lord Geddes:** My Lords, in asking my question I declare an interest as chairman of Trinity College, London and congratulate Her Majesty's Government on the considerable success of their Skills for Life programme. Will the Minister confirm that adequate funding will continue to be available in order that this very successful programme can continue, bearing in mind that its participants are not able to afford it?

**Lord Adonis:** My Lords, as the noble Lord will know, funding in this area has trebled over the past six years. I can give a commitment that we intend to sustain the currently available funding, but of course we want to see that as many people as possible are helped by it; hence the changes we announced recently.

**Lord Anderson of Swansea:** My Lords, does my noble friend agree that the response from English UK was very refreshing? It accepted that the current rate of increase in government expenditure was not sustainable, but said that, to be effective, there should be more intensive courses. Is that view shared by the Government?

**Lord Adonis:** My Lords, we very much share that view, which is why from this August we are introducing these new, more work-focused ESOL courses. They will be shorter and more focused on the English language needs of those going directly into the labour market.

**Baroness Walmsley:** My Lords, on the Government's proposals for cutting the number of people who are eligible for free ESOL courses, why did they not conduct their racial impact survey before, rather than after, announcing their proposals? Furthermore, will this assessment also cover the impact on women?

**Lord Adonis:** My Lords, the impact assessment will cover it, and we intend to publish it very soon. As I said in response to the noble Lord, Lord Quirk, we will also announce measures to address specific concerns that have already been raised with us.

**Lord Naseby:** My Lords, is it not nonsense that medical staff from the EU who neither understand nor speak English adequately are recruited into posts in the NHS? Does that not put patients' lives at risk, and are the Government urgently reviewing this terrible loophole?

**Lord Adonis:** My Lords, I think the National Health Service is very mindful of the issues that the noble Lord has raised and is taking steps to address them.

**Lord Alton of Liverpool:** My Lords, is the Minister aware of the continuing concerns of people such as Asylum Link Merseyside, on whose behalf I wrote to his department at the beginning of last month, that there will be cuts affecting asylum seekers and refugees? What does he have to say to them about the detrimental effects that this would have on community cohesion and integration? When does he expect to be in a position to reply to my question of 6 February asking to quantify any financial savings that the Government think they might make by making the kind of changes that were mentioned by Mr Bill Rammell in his article in the *Guardian* in January?

**Lord Adonis:** My Lords, I expect to be in a position to reply very shortly to the noble Lord's question. As he will have heard in my response to the noble Lord, Lord Quirk, we intend to address precisely this issue of asylum seekers whose cases take much longer than the Home Office targets or who remain in the UK as a result of a Home Office or

High Court decision in the new measures that my honourable friend Bill Rammell will be announcing very shortly.

**Baroness Shephard of Northwold:** My Lords, the Minister has told us that he is due to announce new measures shortly, and he has described the groups which will be helped by the new measures. Will he be certain that measures will be introduced in such a way that the people in those groups will be aware of them? One of the greatest problems for migrant workers is that, precisely because of their language difficulties, they have not been aware of the help that is available to them.

**Lord Adonis:** My Lords, we intend to work with community groups which deal with such people to see that there is greater awareness of the opportunities that are available. Further education colleges play a big part in this, too. They market their courses very widely in their communities, including in the different ethnic minority groups. So I hope that there will be a rapid awareness of the opportunities made available.

**Lord Roberts of Llandudno:** My Lords, given the BBC's World Service and world programming, what consultation is there on media such as television channels being used not only here in the UK but also worldwide to bring about instruction in English?

**Lord Adonis:** My Lords, that is more a question for my noble friend Lord Triesman, who I see on the Front Bench and who has responsibility for the World Service. I cannot give the noble Lord a direct answer on the role that the World Service can play, except to say that it does an enormous amount of very valuable work to spread English language skills. I will come back to the noble Lord with more specific answers after I have consulted my noble friend.

**Lord Elton:** My Lords, is the Minister aware that when I was last in China, I was stopped three times in two days by local Chinese who wanted to practise the English that they had learnt through the BBC World Service?

**Lord Adonis:** My Lords, it might have helped them to practise on someone who could give them better advice on how to come into this country.