

## Report on one-day training sessions for advisers and others working with asylum seekers

Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU) October 2005

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\* logos have been removed from these forms

## Background

From the time dispersal started in 1999 our unit, the Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU) at London Metropolitan University, started to receive regular enquiries from advisers outside London and the South East about issues affecting asylum seekers. There were about:

- Eligibility and access to education, training, volunteering and employment
- Ways of obtaining recognition and accreditation of overseas qualifications and experience
- Immigration status and Home Office documents – confusion about the different documents and apparent contradictions within the documents (especially on permission to work)
- Getting up to date information and keeping up to date given the frequent legislative changes in this field
- How to get support locally and nationally
- Getting good referral points for clients they could not assist
- How to find out more about projects and courses for asylum seekers and refugees that had been running for some time so that they could learn from these

We were also asked to do several training sessions for mainstream advisers outside London and realised that, understandably, advisers and others who had no experience of working with asylum seekers were finding it extremely difficult to cope with a sudden increase in demand. Those who had some previous experience were anxious that their information was out-of-date and that there might be issues that they were not familiar with. They were worried that they would be expected to train others and disseminate information within their teams.

In response to this demand, we decided to provide training sessions throughout the UK on working with asylum seekers and refugees. As we were working on our website 'Information for Asylum Seekers' ([www.info-for-asylumseekers.org.uk](http://www.info-for-asylumseekers.org.uk)) at the same time, we hoped that this resource would be a useful follow-up to the training.

## **Who was it aimed at?**

We wanted to work primarily with advisers in a range of organisations, including refugee and refugee community organisations although we were also interested in doing some training for ESOL teachers as we were aware that they are often the first point of contact for asylum seekers. We also hoped that we could involve managers and trainers so that the information could be effectively disseminated.

We wanted to have sessions in different parts of the UK. This was important for the project as a whole because, as our website was intended for asylum seekers throughout the UK, we wanted to collect together some local information and have an appreciation of the local situation for asylum seekers.

We were also concerned to make sure we offered these free training sessions in a way that would give a range of advisers (and others) around the country equal access. We finally decided that the best way to do this was through the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Partnerships as they include a wide range of small and large organisations in the partnerships and usually have premises for training. We also felt that having a clear point of contact with the manager or training manager would allow us to make the practical arrangements easily. We, therefore, sent out a letter to all IAG partnerships with an outline of the training we were proposing. We had rapid responses and were able to organise all the sessions immediately. We also had a waiting list in case the IAG partnerships who had expressed interest were not able to get enough participants.

The only disadvantage of this was that we were not able to aim a session at ESOL teachers. We rectified this by starting off with our first session at The Sheffield College (one of our ASSET UK partners) with ESOL teachers.

The timetable for the training is in Appendix A.

## **Aims and Objectives**

We wanted to tailor the sessions to the needs of each IAG partnership so initially we sent out a short questionnaire or spoke to them to ask them what they were expecting. Most responded that they wanted an introductory session as they had a mixture of people attending, some of whom had no knowledge or experience of working with asylum seekers. To start with we therefore designed a one-day session covering basic essential information, building in lots of opportunity for small group work and exchange of information and resources amongst participants.

After a few sessions, we decided that a better method of collecting information about what our trainees wanted, to have some idea about their knowledge and experience and to find out what local contacts they were using was to send a short questionnaire to them prior to the session (see an example of the questionnaire and the responses in Appendix B). We continued to use this for the rest of the training and, if completed, this allowed us to slightly tailor the basic training to meet the local/individual needs.

The template we used was as follows:

**Aim:** to equip participants with knowledge of refugee and asylum seeker issues as they affect IAG on education, training and employment

### **Objectives:**

By the end of the session participants should:

- Be aware of and understand different kinds of immigration status and the associated documentation
- Understand the implications of different kinds of immigration status for eligibility to education, training and employment
- Have an appreciation of the assets refugees bring and barriers they face in accessing appropriate education, training or employment
- Have had the opportunity to discuss some of the issues that arise in providing IAG for this client group and to share ideas and experience about practical ways of responding to these
- Know how to find out more and where to refer clients for more specialist information or advice.

## What was the content?

The content varied slightly according to the trainees' background and expectations (for example we included a section on developing quality standards in guidance for refugees when we worked with a group of guidance workers). It also changed as we received feedback from the sessions and responded to these (see 'How did the training evolve through the project period?'). However, we kept the main elements and the order of the programme. We felt that it was essential to include: immigration status and definitions; updates on asylum legislation; an exercise to encourage trainees to think about asylum seekers holistically and appreciate the range of issues they face, as well as the assets they bring, and the implications this has for the guidance process; rights and entitlements to education and employment; useful contacts/referral points; and information about how to find out more.

We tried different ways of doing this and made changes in the basic programme until about halfway through the training. The final version of the basic one-day training programme was as follows:

Time	Activity
10:00	Introduction and Pop Quiz
10:25	Definitions and Legislation
10:45	Rights and Entitlements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Education/Training</li><li>• Employment</li><li>• Short case studies – how would you respond?</li></ul>
11:30	BREAK
11:45	What does it mean to be an asylum seeker in the UK? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brainstorm</li><li>• A life story as illustration (looking at barriers, assets, issues)</li><li>• Video (refugee talking about asylum process from start to appropriate employment)</li></ul>
1:00	LUNCH
2:00	Case studies
3:30	How to find out more/ where to refer
3:45	Conclusion and evaluation

We varied this according to demand and, as the project progressed, we were able to use our 'Information for Asylum Seekers' website in the programme.

We tried to keep a balance throughout the training of presentation of information and practising through case studies. We also wanted to encourage a slow build up in the complexity of the tasks through the day.

Starting with a quiz (True/False with facts and figures about asylum seekers) enabled us to rearrange the groups for later small group work if we found that

all experienced or all inexperienced participants were sitting together and it also gave us an idea about the level we needed to pitch the training. Next the brainstorming about what it would feel like to be in the UK as an asylum seeker led into a 'life story'. This included details of a woman's life before coming to the UK and also information about her life from the time she arrived until the present and her concerns about status, benefits, accommodation and what was happening with the family back home. The participants were asked to look at points where she received some advice and guidance, where it came from and whether or not it was effective. Following discussion, we looked at a short video where a refugee talks about her path to integration in the UK and factors that helped and hindered.

We then focused more on immigration status and eligibility for education and employment (using tables and copies of Home Office letters and other documents. After the lunch break we used case studies to combine the knowledge about eligibility and entitlement with an appreciation of the other issues that an asylum seeker may be facing that will have implications for the support and guidance they need and the decisions they make.

The final part of the training focused on information websites and other useful points of contact both nationally and locally. We were limited in what information we could provide locally but for most of our training sessions, we were able to add websites and contact points for the area and then ask participants to tell us about others they had found useful.

## **How was it delivered?**

The programme was generally from 10:00 – 4:00 with a break in the morning and for lunch. We asked for a minimum of 15 participants and a maximum of 25. It was delivered by one or two trainers (from RAGU staff) and we always ensured that the trainer(s) were qualified advisers specialised in guidance for refugees and with substantial experience working in this field. For some of the sessions, one of the pair was a refugee so could offer their insight from both points of view. This was very much appreciated by the trainees as there was usually an opportunity for them to ask questions following the general discussion about what it means to be an asylum seeker in the UK. If this was not possible, we used a video with a refugee relating her experience of the process of integration in the UK.

We were keen to involve trainees as much as possible in the training. Our feedback indicated that they often felt more confident in their understanding of the issues through 'testing' themselves when responding to the case studies. We also wanted to facilitate the creation of informal networks within the IAG partnership. Usually by the end of the session, everyone in the group was aware of who they could contact for questions they had about different areas such as further education, volunteering and benefits. So for every section of the training, except for 'How to find out more/where to refer', we included pair or group work and feedback.

We also included audio and audio-visual material (a tape of a client and a video) as well as a range of printed material and the 'Information for Asylum Seekers' website.

## What was the feedback?

We used one evaluation form for the first 5 training sessions and another for the remaining 6 (see copies of both at Appendix C). The first question on all evaluation forms was whether the training had achieved its aim. Of the X number of forms received all answered 'yes' except for 2. Of these, 1 commented that they had expected more information about local contacts in the Taunton area. The other did not provide any comments on the form.

For the first form we used for the first 5 training sessions, we asked the participants to rate the training under the headings of 'content', 'presentation', 'facilitation of group work', 'discussions' and 'materials used and handouts' on a scale of 1-5 (5=excellent, 4=very good, 3=average, 2=below average, 1=unsatisfactory). We received ratings of 3-5 from the majority of participants with most at the 'very good' or 'excellent' level (see full breakdown at Appendix D). The main general comment was that the session was very useful and that it would be good to have more time.

For both evaluations, we asked trainees to comment on how they felt the training might help with their day-to-day work. The most frequent comments were variations on the following:

- *It has made me more aware of services and where to refer*
- *I can use the information when seeing clients and I can disseminate to colleagues*
- *It has made me more aware of wider issues and now I have a better understanding about how to work with this client group*
- *It has clarified the status and implications for eligibility for education, training and employment*
- *The practical case studies and our discussion helped me to see how I can use this information with my clients*
- *I understand the specific issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers better now*
- *It makes me feel more confident/less apprehensive*
- *I feel I now know how to proceed*
- *It has brought me up-to-date with legislation and issues*
- *It will help me to focus my thinking about specific action I can take to be more effective in supporting refugees and asylum seekers*
- *It has highlighted issues I was not aware of and helped me to have greater empathy with this client group.*

Other comments were:

- *It has given me ideas about how to develop our library services to help refugees and asylum seekers better*
- *This training will equip front-line advisers with basic knowledge and also allow guidance workers to access specialist information – excellent!*

- *Now if a refugee or asylum seeker comes to see me for some basic job search advice, I will be able to help them instead of panicking!*
- *It will help me in my role as an advocate in schools and colleges*
- *It helps me to argue my case for 1-1 work and advocacy with refugees and asylum seekers*
- *I had bits and pieces of information already – this has helped to tie everything up*
- *It has helped to reinforce the knowledge I already had (mainly gained through our detective work) and has helped to fill in the gaps as well as making me aware of one or two important changes I didn't know about*
- *If dispersal takes place (postponed at the moment) I will be ready now with a good understanding of the issues and legislation*
- *A good feeling of a 'benchmark' meeting the requirements of the job*
- *I have a better understanding of progression routes for refugees and asylum seekers*

For the second evaluation form we used, we also asked the participants to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the training and to give us suggestions for improvement.

All participants who filled in the evaluation forms completed the strengths question. Some of the strengths identified repeat the points made in the comments above. The following additional points are representative:

- *Handouts – very useful for disseminating*
- *Detailed/extensive/in-depth knowledge of trainer(s) and the feeling that they obviously enjoy what they do and impart their enthusiasm*
- *Lots of participation and discussion – appreciated the 'hands-on' approach*
- *Information about websites, resources and contact points*
- *Clear explanations of complex issues, broken down into manageable chunks*
- *Getting answers to my questions*
- *Flexible responses to requirements of the group*
- *Lots of contributions and participation from the participants*
- *Delivered in understandable way for different levels*
- *Ease of understanding through skilful repetition*
- *Pitched well and responsive to our needs*
- *Applying the wealth of information and resources to practical case studies*

Other strengths identified included:

- *Sense of real issues and real people*
- *Very friendly atmosphere created*
- *Factual, informative, logically organised, to the point with no waffle (i.e. VERY unusual!)*

- *Looking at it from both sides – for example how an asylum seeker feels on entering the UK – thus challenging the beliefs we may hold from the media*
- *Trainers who actually know what they are talking about!*
- *Good pace, very informative with lots of activities and discussions*
- *Depth of insights and solidity of information*
- *Broken up into sections that were clearly explained and then linked to the next section*
- *At last – a course I found stimulating – pity it was so short!*

The following are representative of the comments on the weaknesses of the training:

- *Needed more time (this was the most commonly identified weakness – several suggested a two-day training)*
- *A lot of information at one time / I felt overloaded with information*
- *Pace was slow/too quick (we had a balance of these comments)*
- *The group introduction took too long/too many questions came up in the group introduction – this took away from the time available*
- *Too many case studies.*

Other comments were:

- *Over-emphasis on sympathy and understanding of asylum seekers' point of view*
- *I didn't understand the 'in-house' abbreviations*
- *Access to computers would have been good*
- *Sometimes couldn't hear the other participants/room was noisy/difficult to hear*
- *Didn't explore wider issues and attitudes – too many tangents – for example the question about the 16-year old homeless asylum seeker in North Somerset*
- *(Discussions) could have been 'chaired' better*
- *Too much to cover in a short time. It is sad that for those new to refugee and asylum issues, this will probably confirm their fears about how complex it is! A political will to simplify the issues and systems involved would have a positive impact on practitioners and do much to alleviate their fears when tackling these issues.*

56% of those who responded did not identify weaknesses. The percentage generally improved as we made changes to the training. For the final training session held this was 100%.

A final question on the evaluation form asked for suggestions about how the training could be improved. Of those who gave suggestions for improvement, the most common one about the timing. By far the most common suggestion was to make it longer (2-3 days); others suggested cutting out the introductions.

- *Have all participants from the same backgrounds (work they do)*
- *Split into groups so that those new to this area are mixed with those who have more experience*
- *Have all handouts in packs ready to hand out at the beginning of the session*
- *Send out packs before the training*
- *Cut out some of the case studies*
- *More case studies*
- *Could go slightly faster but not too much!*
- *More in-depth information about education*
- *More professional looking video*
- *More on welfare and benefits*
- *Cover young people as a separate topic next time/more on 16-18 year-olds and role of the social worker*
- *More time on the political and historical background*
- *Less time on background, more on referrals*

39% of those who filled in the evaluation forms had suggestions; except for the comments above, they were all about running a longer training.

## **How did the training evolve through the project period?**

We made some changes in response to feedback. These were:

**In response to comments about too much time taken on introductions, about not enough local information and about not covering subjects that we had never intended to cover:** we decided that it would be useful to send a questionnaire (see Appendix B) directly to trainees beforehand to ask about:

- their experience working with refugees and asylum seekers
- their expectations from the day
- any local contacts or referral points they had found useful in their work.

We could then gear the training more accurately to the level of the group and could let other trainees know about local contact points. We could also ask the IAG manager to speak to anyone who had different expectations so that they would not be disappointed on the day. The most common problem we had in meeting expectations was if trainees wanted information on benefits and immigration which were outside the remit of the project and our area of expertise. If the participants filled in this questionnaire, it made the introductions at the start of the training much shorter and gave us a simple way of disseminating information within the group.

**In response to comments about time spent giving out papers and ideas about sending the pack out to individuals before training:** We put all papers into the pack beforehand but did not send packs to individuals as this was not practical.

**In response to comments about local information:** We added a section at the end of our 'Useful websites and contacts' list on 'Local information'. Initially we felt ill-equipped to do this and hoped that we would be able to use the groups to collect the local information. However, we found that local knowledge was uneven and that participants found it helpful to have a short list of local contacts/resources as a starting point.

**Other changes made:** We made some additional changes as the training sessions developed following our own observations.

We included more 'real life' situations to allow advisers to test whether they had fully absorbed/understood the information presented in the session. For example, we added some short case studies to the section on 'Rights and Entitlements to Education and Employment' so that trainees could work in pairs using the handouts in their pack and feel confident that they had a full grasp of the information.

We took out a section where we had used an adapted 'real' CV as a way of understanding the issues faced by asylum seekers and we replaced this with a 'life story'. This was because we could see (and feedback confirmed) that advisers were focusing more on the problems of the CV and found it confusing to use the CV as a vehicle for discussing more general issues in an

asylum seekers' life. It also took too long to explain this exercise and, as this was a packed one-day session, we could not afford this.

**Suggestions for change we did not respond to:** Some of the suggestions for change contradicted other suggestions and we were not able to accommodate any subject areas outside our remit. Neither were we able to make the training longer as we wanted to cover as many areas in the UK as possible within the funding constraints so that the information could be disseminated.

## **What would we change if we were to run this kind of training again?**

We were able to develop a basic training for those working with asylum seekers and refugees in the areas of education and employment, testing and refining it as we received feedback and learned from the sessions. However, if we were to do this again, we would like to make the following changes:

- Build in more time for sessions. General feedback was that the training would have been better over a 2-day period. This could then be followed by a second 1-day session about 6 months later at a more advanced level with the same participants. We could then follow up and discuss issues that had arisen in the interim.
- Use the opportunity to develop local networks. In some cases, this had already happened and in others the training provided the opportunity for participants to gain a better understanding of local expertise and contact point. Exchanging e-mails allowed for future informal networking. However, we felt that, especially in areas where the participants did not know each other and were sometimes spread over a wide area and were working in different settings, we could have facilitated the more formal development of a network, possibly through a website and an e-mail discussion list. We discussed various ways of doing this but there was not the time or resources within the project to do this.

## APPENDIX A

### Training timetable

<b>ASSET UK training sessions and where they took place</b>	<b>Date</b>
The Sheffield College – ESOL tutors and coordinators, Sheffield	7 <sup>th</sup> March 2003
City Pride IAG Partnership, Manchester	26 <sup>th</sup> March 2003
Gloucestershire IAG partnership, Gloucester	19 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
Wigan Borough IAG partnership, Wigan	18 <sup>th</sup> September 2003
now! Network Lancashire, Preston	15 <sup>th</sup> October 2003
Lincolnshire and Rutland IAG partnership, Lincoln	4 <sup>th</sup> November 2003
Wiltshire and Swindon Steps to Learning IAG partnership, Tidworth	4 <sup>th</sup> December 2003
Lincolnshire and Rutland IAG partnership, Lincoln	16 <sup>th</sup> January 2004
Black Country IAG Network Partnership, Walsall	20 <sup>th</sup> May 2004
Somerset Information and Guidance Network, Taunton	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2004

## **APPENDIX B**

Pre-training questionnaire and example of responses

**Name:**

**Organisation:**

**Your role in the organisation:**

**e-mail address** (this will be shared with others in the group unless you specify otherwise):

**1) What is your experience of working with asylum seekers or refugees?**

**2) What do you hope to get out of this training?**

**3) Have you come across any useful resources, local reference points or contacts that you would like to share with colleagues who are attending this training?**

Name, organisation and e-mail	Experience of working with asylum seekers or refugees	Expectations of this session	Useful local contacts/reference points?
XXXX College Senior Guidance Officer	None	Where to get information Where to refer to	
XXX Community Network Basic Skills Tutor	Many drop-in learners are R/AS who are accessing ESOL	Better understanding of the process to help learners more effectively	Hope others will have info to share
Careers Service Adult Adviser	Small group about getting into work	Better informed on rights to work, effect on benefits etc	
University of XXX	Helping with queries about HE entitlement and funding	Keen to extend knowledge to help clients more effectively	University has new project running working with asylum seekers
Adviser XXX College	R/AS coming to college looking for help with English and other education, training and employment options	Broader understanding about range of support networks and their roles Information about status and help with practical issues	
Adviser Careers Company	Working with AS/R across the area – one of the first of local staff to work with refugees following dispersal	Upskilling – agenda seems to be constantly in flux – need current situation update to be able to function more effectively	Responsibility for updating and annotating information for staff in our office. This resource is borrowed by staff dealing with R/AS
College Courses Co-ordinator	None	Broader knowledge of issues and information to know whether we can engage with our organisation	No

Name, organisation and e-mail	Experience of working with asylum seekers or refugees	Expectations of this session	Useful local contacts/reference points?
Principal Officer XXX Community Association	Minimal – although personal contact with some members of community who use our facilities	Greater understanding of needs and aspirations	
Co-director Training provider	Very little	Current legislation and other information that will enable us to provide the best service to our clients	
Guidance worker Training provider	Worked with ESOL students as a guidance worker	Current legislation and other information that will enable us to provide the best service to our clients	
Adviser Adult Education College	Brief experience as adviser for NACAB	More in-depth understanding and contact points/referral agencies, how to assist R/AS generally	
Training Provider Manager	R/AS referred to us by JCP	Better understanding of the problems associated with working with this client group and the problems they encounter	Referrals have decreased – involvement now is minimal but would like a better understanding of this client group
College IAG Officer	Some on a daily basis	Legislation, rights and entitlements and referral	XXX Asylum Refugee Support Organisation and XXX Housing
Advice Worker/Supervisor	Very little	View of the bigger picture and information about the best way to deal with issues	No

Name, organisation and e-mail	Experience of working with asylum seekers or refugees	Expectations of this session	Useful local contacts/reference points?
Adviser XXXX Resource Centre	Referrals to us for support with English, IAG	Information about legal aspect – status etc	XXXX and Local Jobcentres
Community Education Advice Worker/Deputy Project Officer	Limited now but hope to widen experience to provide service for those with additional needs	To be able to provide the best possible service for clients	

## APPENDIX C

Evaluation forms used

### Evaluation Form 1

For this training session, our aim was to equip participants with knowledge of refugee and asylum seeker issues as they affect IAG on education, training and employment.

Did the training achieve its aim?

Yes  No

If no, please explain:

Could you say how you think this training might help you with your day-to-day work?

Please rate these aspects of the workshop on a scale of 1-5. Please comment on any of these aspects in the space below.

5=excellent 4= very good 3= average 2= below average 1= unsatisfactory

Content

5            4            3            2            1

Presentation

5            4            3            2            1

Facilitation of group work

5            4            3            2            1

Discussions

5            4            3            2            1

Materials used and handouts

5            4            3            2            1

Any other comments?

**Thank you for filling in this form.**

## Evaluation Form 2

1) For this session, our aim was a) to equip participants with knowledge of refugee and asylum seeker issues as they affect IAG on education, training and employment and b) also to share ideas about how to network and keep up to date in this rapidly changing field.

Did it achieve its aim?

Yes  No

If no, please explain:

2) Could you say how you think this workshop and the on-line information demonstrated might help you with your day-to-day work?

3) What were the strengths of this session?

4) What were the weaknesses?

5) Do you have any suggestions for next time we run this kind of workshop?

**Thank you for filling in this form.**

## APPENDIX D

Summary of responses to the first evaluation form

	Excellent	Very Good	Average	Below average	Unsatisfactory
<b>Content</b>	45%	44%	11%		
<b>Presentation</b>	42%	45%	13%	1%	
<b>Facilitation of group work</b>	35%	53%	11%		
<b>Discussions</b>	42%	48%	10%		
<b>Materials used</b>	56%	32%	10%	1%	