

Empowering asylum seekers to support the regional economy and local communities

**The report of a series of regional conferences
across England and Scotland in 2003-04**

**Fiona Aldridge,
Anne McLoughlin and
Sue Waddington**



The UK Asylum Seekers Development Partnership – ASSET UK is part funded by the European Social Fund under the Equal Community Initiative Programme Match funding was provided by the Learning + Skills Council and Scottish Enterprise

1: ASSET UK

This series of regional conferences formed part of a much wider set of activities of the UK Asylum Seekers Development Partnership – ASSET UK (Asylum Seekers Skills Empowerment and Training), led by the British Refugee Council. In 2002, the partnership was successful in gaining ESF and match funding to take part in EQUAL – a European initiative designed to test new ways of combating discrimination in the labour market.

The ASSET UK Development Partnership brought together voluntary and educational agencies working on a national level to develop improved ways of helping newly arrived asylum seekers in the process of social and vocational integration. Partners included the Refugee Council, NIACE, the Basic Skills Agency (BSA), LLU+, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU) and Sheffield College.

On a local and national level the partnership developed and tested new ways of working to enable asylum seekers to live as independently and productively as they can so that they are able to find meaningful employment in the UK once they receive a positive decision on their status. At the same time the partnership addressed the need to develop quality infrastructures within the dispersal areas in the UK so that professionals and practitioners working with newly dispersed asylum seekers were better equipped to deliver services.

By working with key agencies and employers and providing asylum seekers with a clearer understanding of the UK labour market, the partnership hoped to have a beneficial effect on public opinion to help improve community cohesion and to help reduce the risk of additional discrimination and disadvantage experienced by asylum seekers.

In addition to the regional conferences, ASSET UK was also involved in the following activities:

- Undertaking skills audits with newly arrived asylum seekers in the East Midlands and Northern Ireland and facilitating opportunities for learning and volunteering to utilise and develop these skills further;
- Working with employers to make them aware of the skills and qualifications that asylum seekers bring with them to the UK;
- Developing and testing ESOL and basic skills materials and models of delivery within the dispersal areas of the UK;
- Developing the skills of paid and unpaid teachers/trainers to use these new materials and to raise their awareness of the barriers that asylum seekers face;
- Developing improved orientation, advice and guidance packs so that local community organisations and agencies are better equipped to provide advice and guidance in dispersal areas.

NIACE has contributed to the work of the partnership in two main ways. Firstly, by organising and hosting this series of regional conferences, and, secondly, by developing and implementing a skills audit methodology with asylum seekers in the East Midlands.¹

¹ More information about NIACE's skills audit project can be found on the NIACE website at the following address: www.niace.org.uk/research/ASR. A policy report and a practitioner's manual have been produced as part of this project and they will both be available from NIACE from the end of October 2005.

2: The Conference Series

The aim of this series of conferences was to raise awareness, inform, collate and promote good practice and identify needs in working with asylum seekers, particularly in the areas of education and training. Each event had a regional focus, identifying regional strategies, services and projects that related to asylum seekers.

The events, which were free of charge, were designed to showcase good practice in working with asylum seekers; to provide information and resources to assist practitioners and agencies in working with asylum seekers; and to raise awareness of the work of the Development Partnership and its transnational partners. The events also sought to bring together, for the first time, the many different organisations working with asylum seekers across the regions.

The conferences took place during 2003 and 2004 and were targeted at practitioners and policymakers in the fields of education, training and community regeneration; statutory and voluntary organisations working with asylum seekers; social partners; regional development agencies and devolved executives.

The conferences all took a similar format, as follows:

- ASSET UK and the national context for asylum seekers was introduced by a representative from the Refugee Council;
- A representative from the relevant regional development agency spoke about the regional skills strategy and how asylum seekers and refugees fitted into the strategy;
- A representative from the regional consortium for asylum seekers and refugees spoke about the regional services for asylum seekers;
- A range of different regional projects working with asylum seekers and refugees were showcased.

This conference report will consider each of these aspects separately.

Two additional events took place during the course of ASSET UK using a different format from the series of conferences:

- A national event to officially launch the ASSET UK Development Partnership was held in Leicester on 18 October 2002;
- A stakeholders' event was held on 20 April 2004 in Leicester to disseminate the methodology, findings and impact of the ASSET UK project to key national and regional stakeholders.

This report summarises the proceedings of the conferences, which were held in the following regions:

Region	Location	Date
Scotland ²	Glasgow	5 March 2003
West Midlands	Coventry	25 March 2003
London	London	3 April 2003
Yorkshire and Humberside	Sheffield	9 April 2003
North West	Liverpool	13 October 2003

² A separate report produced by Glasgow City Council documents the Scottish conference in more detail. The report can be downloaded from the NIACE website at the following address: www.niace.org.uk/research/ASR.

Region	Location	Date
South West	Bristol	2 March 2004
North East	Newcastle	5 March 2004
Eastern	Peterborough	9 March 2004
South East	Ashford	27 April 2004

3: The National Context

The context in which ASSET UK operated is important in understanding the rationale behind the programme of activities. Research has shown that asylum seekers come to the UK from diverse cultural backgrounds and bring with them a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience – language, professional qualifications, the ability to adapt, resilience, industriousness and willingness to contribute to their host society. However, on receiving permission to remain in the UK, many refugees are often only able to find work that is short-term, low skilled, and which offers little opportunity to develop skills or gain vocational qualifications. A Refugee Council literature analysis found that although asylum seekers and refugees are often well qualified, with around one third possessing higher-level qualifications, the unemployment rate among refugees is around 70% and is coupled with the harder to document problem of under-employment, as many asylum seekers struggle to find employment commensurate with their skills. Of those in employment, around one third were found to be working part-time and half were in temporary employment.

This scenario arises as a result of the numerous barriers that asylum seekers face in maintaining, developing and using their skills, thus preventing them from fulfilling their potential, and integrating fully into the labour market and society more widely.

For example:

- The popular public perception of asylum seekers is that they are a burden, rather than people with the potential to make a contribution. A recent MORI poll revealed that the British public believe that 23% of the world's refugees make their way to the UK. In fact it is only 2%, with the majority of all refugees remaining in the developing world.
- Between 1996 and 2004, the UK has seen four major pieces of legislation concerning asylum and immigration, resulting in considerable change to the system, including a trend towards restricting access to mainstream services, and the reduction of the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers in order to deter new arrivals to the UK.
- Contrary to the rest of UK employment policy, which has sought to encourage and support all other groups within society to enter the labour market, in July 2002 the concession to work was removed from asylum seekers, preventing them from taking up employment.
- Access to education, training and employment opportunities is limited due to restricted entitlements around employment and vocational training, financial constraints and insufficient (and sometimes inaccurate) information, advice and guidance.
- The poor English language skills of some asylum seekers also restrict access to education, training and employment opportunities and access to appropriate ESOL provision is limited.
- There is no adequate national system for assessing and accrediting skills, qualifications and experiences gained outside of the UK.
- Asylum seekers often have little or no understanding or experience of the UK job market, while negative attitudes, racism and prejudice exist towards asylum seekers among some British employers.

4: The Regional Skills Strategy: How Do Asylum Seekers and Refugees Fit In?

In July 2001 the Government asked each regional development agency to lead on the development of a Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA). The purpose of the frameworks was to develop co-ordinated and collaborative approaches in order to identify key challenges and deliver actions to address regional employment and skills needs.³

As part of each of the regional conferences in England, a spokesperson was invited to talk about the FRESA and, in particular, to focus on how asylum seekers and refugees fitted into it.⁴ Although consideration of asylum seekers and refugees was generally weak within the FRESAs, the conferences provided an opportunity for representatives of the refugee sector to find out more about the regional frameworks and how to influence future policy and provision to better reflect the needs of those groups.

At each of the seminars, input was provided by representatives from:

- The regional development agency;
- The regional consortium;
- Projects working in the region with asylum seekers and/or refugees.

The content of the regional FRESAs is summarised below:

West Midlands

The West Midlands is one of the country's most diverse regions, the UK's manufacturing and agricultural heartland and the hub of the national transportation network. It has a vibrant economy and since 1992 there has been an almost 9% increase in total employment across the region with future growth areas expected to be in banking, construction, distribution, hospitality, healthcare, education, professional services, transport and communication. However, skills shortages and recruitment difficulties are already becoming apparent in a number of sectors including healthcare and construction.

The key challenges facing the region include raising the skill levels of the workforce; improving management skill levels; increasing levels of basic skills; addressing high-level skills shortages; and developing innovation and entrepreneurial skills amongst young people. Although asylum seekers and refugees are not specifically mentioned within the region's FRESA, the regional development agency, Advantage West Midlands, is keen to work with the refugee sector in tackling these challenges.

The RDA has already commissioned a feasibility study into skills for life and cultural exchange within the food and drink sector. The aim is to raise the aspirations, education and skills of workers as a means of tackling educational deprivation and social exclusion, and enhance career progression in the workplace. The work focuses particularly on the ethnic minority workforce, refugees and other recent migrants.

London

It is estimated that asylum seekers and refugees make up around 5% of the resident population of London and that 85% of the UK's asylum seekers and refugees live in and

³ The framework for each region can be downloaded from the website of the relevant RDA.

⁴ In the North East and South West regions, FRESA representatives were not available to attend the conferences, although the Senior Strategy Executive of One North East did attend a question-and-answer session as part of the event.

around the capital. It is therefore unsurprising that this region has given most consideration to where asylum seekers and refugees fit into the FRESA and other regional strategies. The economic case for doing so is clear: regional research has provided evidence of the wealth of overseas work experience, high-level qualifications and useful skills that refugees possess. With an estimated 46% of jobs in London likely to require skills at Level 4 and above by 2010, there is a clear demand for the skills of refugees to be utilised. The NHS in London already relies heavily on overseas labour and 9 out of 10 employers have said that they would be willing to take on refugees to meet skills shortages.

Absorbing the skills of refugees into the labour market is one of the strategic objectives of the regional FRESA, and a set of proposals to support this objective was put before the London Skills Commission in 2003. Work in progress includes a pan-London Migrants Qualifications project; a Refugee Routeway project; and the development of full-time ESOL provision at South Thames College, which includes portfolio preparation, information on the UK labour market, job search, work experience and IT training.

Yorkshire and Humberside

Yorkshire Forward recognises that a thriving region with a sound economy depends on having a healthier and more equal society, and therefore works across the region to help ensure that investments in business development and rural and urban developments deliver the maximum benefit to vulnerable groups and communities most in need of support including refugees and asylum seekers.

The FRESA aims to ensure that employment and skills are a priority throughout the Regional Economic Strategy objectives and are fully integrated into the strategy. Improvements have been made at all levels of education, learning and skills to bring the region closer to the UK average and the FRESA aims to maintain and grow this area of development to create a healthy regional labour market. The key objectives are:

- To create a culture in which education, learning and skills are highly valued by individuals and businesses;
- To improve educational attainment and vocational skills amongst labour market entrants;
- To raise the skills and flexibility of the region's workforce, so that it can more effectively adapt to change and respond to economic opportunities;
- and to increase the quality, flexibility and responsiveness of education, learning and skills provision.

North West

The North West region faces a number of key labour market issues that the FRESA seeks to address. These include:

- An ageing population that requires changing employment and occupational patterns over the next few decades;
- Poor levels of productivity reflecting a shift from high value-added manufacturing to low value-added service sector employment;
- Identifiable skills gaps and basic skills deficiencies in parts of the adult workforce;
- The need to engage employers' commitment to education and training;
- and low activity rates among some groups of adults including particular minority ethnic groups and adults with disabilities.

The FRESA does not specifically mention asylum seekers or refugees. Instead of listing a range of disadvantaged groups, the framework attempts to address issues that are relevant to all of them. However, two studies have been undertaken into the skills levels of the refugee population and their experience of the labour market as an evidence base on which to found future policy and strategy for this group.

East of England

The East of England's FRESA focuses on five issues of primary importance:

- Increasing participation in higher education;
- Responding to redundancies;
- Skills for employability;
- Workforce development;
- Young people and career choices.

While asylum seekers and refugees are not specifically mentioned within the FRESA, delegates at the conference were encouraged to hold lead agencies to account as to how the priorities affect those groups.

The RDA is already working to value and recognise the contribution of refugees to the economic prosperity of the region. This has involved research into employment pathways for refugees, work with the regional consortium, funding for regional conferences, involvement in the development of a training and employment strategy for refugees and developing a long-term strategy through their Investing in Communities programme.

South East

The regional economy of the South East is thought to be worth approximately £120 billion and between 1991 and 2001 the regional economy grew 45% faster than the rest of the UK. By 2006 the South East is estimated to need 60,000 more people with Level 1 skills, 280,000 with technical skills and 111,000 with higher-level skills just to maintain the regional economy at its current level. In parts of the region there are not enough people to do the jobs required, and this problem is exacerbated further by the problem of skills mismatch. The region is therefore faced with three options: it can either encourage people to stay in the workforce longer; it can encourage people to enter or return to the workforce; or it can encourage more people to move to the region.

Because of the high cost of operating in the South East, a low skills equilibrium is not a viable option for the regional economy, although many immigrants currently living in the region are often caught in this position. The region therefore faces the challenge of needing to capture migrants' skills by offering them appropriate employment. One of the key strategic objectives of the FRESA is to equalise opportunities for local jobs and skills and a network of champions has been established to take this forward with particular excluded groups. Delegates were invited to identify a champion for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants who would be able to assist the RDA in understanding the barriers facing these groups and how their needs can be met.

5: The Regional Consortia for Asylum and Refugee Support

In 1999, with the support and encouragement of the Local Government Association, local authorities and other interested voluntary and statutory organisations were encouraged to establish regional consortia for asylum seekers and refugees. All regional consortia are funded by grants from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and work in partnership with NASS to provide support, consultation, liaison and partnership-working throughout the country.

Regional consortia currently exist in all nine English regions, corresponding to Government regional office boundaries.⁵ There are also consortia for Scotland and Wales. Each consortium is described briefly below:

Scotland

The COSLA Refugees & Asylum Seekers Consortium was set up in December 1999 to manage and monitor the commissioning and provisioning of accommodation and other services for asylum seekers. Management of the consortium transferred from Glasgow City Council to COSLA in January 2004.

The consortium's objectives are:

- To promote the national service which the consortium provides to local authorities, the Government, statutory agencies and the voluntary sector;
- To improve the co-ordination of the activities of local authorities and protect their interests;
- To provide a strong collective voice for local government and the consortium in negotiations with the Home Office;
- To secure support from the Scottish Executive for the role of local government and the consortium in ensuring that refugees can help Scotland to balance its skills gap and ageing population;
- To ensure that local authorities, the Government, statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and the consortium are able to work together in common purpose;
- To facilitate the provision of services to asylum seekers and the integration of refugees into communities;
- To develop and implement an effective communications and media strategy for asylum and refugee issues.

For more information contact COSLA Refugee & Asylum Seekers Consortium, Room 107, Baltic Chambers, 50 Wellington Street, Glasgow G2 6HJ. Tel: 0141 248 7281 or visit www.asylumscotland.org.uk.

West Midlands

The West Midlands Regional Consortium (WMCARS) is funded by the Home Office and based within the West Midlands Local Government Association. Its key task is to oversee the dispersal of asylum seekers within the West Midlands region. It also works with partners to ensure the effective integration of people granted refugee status.

The Consortium Executive Group is made up of representatives from the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. It recognises the importance of sustaining a holistic approach to the planning and delivery of services to both asylum seekers and refugees.

⁵ The nine regions are as follows: the East of England, the East Midlands, the West Midlands, London, the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, the North West, the South of England and the South West.

The key objectives of the West Midlands Regional Consortium are as follows:

- To provide appropriate accommodation, support and access to local services for asylum seekers within the West Midlands region;
- To plan ahead for the implementation of the NASS Accommodation strategy post-2005;
- To respond effectively to the Government's formal asylum seekers dispersal programme (dispersing asylum seekers from London and the South East to regions across the UK);
- To ensure the region moves towards the integration of refugees through the development of a Regional Refugee Integration Strategy, and aiming to develop appropriate services;
- To support the development of a wide range of service provision to asylum seekers and refugees, creating effective partnerships with local agencies in the statutory, private and voluntary sectors, local authorities, health and police authorities, government departments and asylum seekers and refugees;
- To tackle social exclusion within the region.

For more information contact WMCARS, Regional Partnership Centre, Albert House, Quay Place, Edward Street, Birmingham, B1 2RA.

David Barnes, Regional Director,
Tel. 0121 678 1036, e-mail:
d.barnes@wmlga.gov.uk.

Cassie Manly, Regional Support Officer,
Tel. 0121 678 1036, e-mail:
c.manly@wmlga.gov.uk.

Farhana Sheikh, Policy Officer,
Tel. 0121 678 1013, e-mail:
f.sheikh@wmlga.gov.uk.

East Midlands

The East Midlands Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Support (EMCARS) was established in 2000.⁶

The role of EMCARS:

- EMCARS works closely with NASS and other departments of the Home Office at a national and regional level to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are supported and helped to access services and integrate into society.
- A regional steering group brings together council members, senior officers, service providers and regional NASS officials to review plans and strategy.
- The project has also developed a range of sub-groups that share good practice and review problems within specific service areas across the region such as policing, health and education.
- The consortium's partners are local authorities and other agencies especially Refugee Action, Refugee Housing Association and other housing providers, health and education providers, police and immigration services, voluntary organisations and emerging refugee community organisations.
- In addition the project manager routinely represents EMCARS in an advisory capacity at multi-agency meetings in each local authority area.

⁶ The consortium used the acronym EMCASS until 2004.

For more information contact Helen Everett, Project Manager, EMCARS, EMRLGA, The Belvoir Suite, Council Offices, Nottingham Road, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, LE13 0UL. Tel. 01664 502555, e-mail: helen.everret@emrlga.gov.uk.

London

The London Asylum Seekers Consortium (LASC) acts as a coordinating body for thirty-three London local authorities on matters of refugee integration and asylum support. Its main areas of work are as follows:

- Commissioning value-for-money accommodation including support services for unaccompanied 16-18 year-olds seeking asylum which involves piloting new schemes for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people (UASC), all of which have been successful. With only a handful of boroughs making use of the piloted schemes initially, LASC now provides accommodation and support services for seventeen London boroughs.
- Monitoring of new and existing contracts for asylum seeker services to those supported by social services under the Immigration and Asylum Act interim scheme as well as under the Children Act.
- Information: providing a data collection and information service which includes maintaining a website to improve the content and quality of information made available to boroughs. As well as distributing the statistical information gathered, LASC thoroughly examines the implications of new policy such as the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 and disseminates guidance to London local authorities.
- Regional Consortia liaison: LASC continues to play an active role and works closely with regional consortia in committee and consultation meetings.
- Refugee Integration: developing and promoting a London-wide asylum seeker integration programme. LASC actively encourages partnership work between the DWP and asylum teams in local authorities to enable a smoother transition to benefits for asylum seekers leaving local authority support after being given a decision on their asylum claim. They also work closely with homelessness organisations and London boroughs on establishing rent-deposit and rent-in-advance schemes. LASC has been working closely with one London borough in developing a skills audit for asylum seekers to identify training, further education and employment needs, and is in the process of establishing a mobile advice service that will deliver professional training and employment guidance.
- National Register for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers: this is intended to make an enormous difference to local authorities and the Home Office by providing accurate data on UASC numbers across the UK, which in turn will assist in reducing multiple and fraudulent claims and providing a higher standard of service to unaccompanied young people.
- European Partnership Work: Working in partnership with the Greater London Authority, Greater London Enterprise, and partners in Rome and Berlin on the development of an observatory on refugee life in Europe for the purpose of refugee integration.

In addition to building on those main areas of work highlighted above, LASC will:

- Work closely with the NASS, its Indefinite Leave to Remain Programme and the London boroughs in order to plan and facilitate an exit strategy for the London boroughs' support of the destitute interim asylum seeker cases.

- Assist London local government to retain a specialisation with unaccompanied asylum seekers and immigration, post-exit, through the development of Persons from Abroad teams.
- Negotiate a strategy for the safe case transfer of UASC from London to local authorities in the regions.

For more information contact Jasmine Ali, Manager, London Asylum Seekers Consortium, Association of London Government, 59½ Southwark Street, London, SE1 0AL. Tel. 020 7934 9651, website: www.lasc.gov.uk.

Yorkshire and Humberside

The Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees was set up in 2000 by local authorities across Yorkshire and Humberside to co-ordinate the regional response to the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999 and the dispersal of asylum seekers to the region and to act as a conduit between the NASS and the local authorities within the region.

The consortium has three main roles:

- To negotiate and manage contracts with NASS for accommodation and reception of asylum seekers on behalf of ten local authorities;
- To assist regional stakeholders to develop accessible services for dispersed asylum seekers;
- To promote the integration of new refugees into the community and to develop an integration plan for the region as required by the Home Office.

The consortium is a voluntary stakeholder partnership of local authorities and organisations from the statutory, voluntary, community and private sector who provide services or otherwise work with, and on behalf of, asylum seekers and refugees across the region.⁷

For more information contact the Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Asylum and Refugees, Phoenix House, 4th Floor, 3 South Parade, Leeds, LS1 5QX
Tel. 0113 214 3953/3954, e-mail: HSG.React@leeds.gov.uk,
Website: www.refugeeaccess.info/y&hconsortium

North West

The North West Consortium for Asylum seekers and Refugees is divided into the East and West of the region.

The North West Consortium (East) consists of ten local authorities in Greater Manchester including Blackburn and Darwen in Lancashire. Manchester City Council is the lead authority. Its main aim is to facilitate the dispersal of asylum seekers within the North West Consortium (East) area. Working in partnership with other agencies, the consortium provides accommodation, support and assistance with settlement in a sensitive and balanced way. The consortium also has a strategic and enabling co-ordinating role for asylum seekers and refugees in the East region which includes a community cohesion project. The consortium is also actively participating in the Gateway Programme in certain local authorities and is piloting the Safe Case transfer from the Home Office.

⁷ The ten local authorities participating in the Yorkshire & Humberside Consortium are Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Kirklees, Calderdale, Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley, Doncaster and Hull. The lead authorities are Leeds and Sheffield.

The North West Consortium (West) represents local authorities across Merseyside and Cheshire.

For more information on the North West Consortium (East) contact Jules Harrison, Acting Manager, North West Consortium (East), 9-11 Copthorne Crescent, Longsight, Manchester, M13 0RA. Tel. 0161 248 0408, e-mail: jharrison@notes.manchester.gov.uk.

For more information on the North West Consortium (West) contact Darrell Stephans, Acting Manager, North West Consortium (West), Millennium House, 60 Victoria Street, Liverpool, L1 6JD. Tel. 0151 233 6803, e-mail: Jo.Mills@liverpool.gov.uk.

South West

In 1999 the South West region established a consortium to explore the possibility of contracting with NASS to provide accommodation and support for asylum seekers placed in this region. Unfortunately, a contract was not entered into and the consortium in the South West was dissolved.

In the absence of a consortium in this region, a group of lead officers from local authorities working with asylum seekers and the NASS Regional Manager formed a group called the South West Asylum and Refugee Forum (SWARF). The purpose of this group was to share information regarding policy and legislation, good practice, and to provide a link with the national forum.

For more information contact John Price, Regional Project Manager, Asylum Seekers, Gloucester Locality Social Services Office, Quayside Wing, Quayside House, Shire Hall, Gloucester, GL1 2RH. Tel. 01452 426003, e-mail: jwprice@gloscc.gov.uk.

North East

The North East Consortium for Asylum Support Services (NECARS, formerly NECASS) is a consortium of all local authorities plus other statutory agencies and voluntary organisations in the North East. NECARS was established in May 2000 to support the Government's programme of dispersing asylum seekers to the region. Currently ten of the consortium's local authorities have entered into a contract with the Home Office to provide accommodation and support to about 2,500 asylum seekers. Another major responsibility of the consortium is to seek to establish conditions within the region that will encourage successful asylum applicants to remain.

NECARS focuses on:

- Providing housing;
- Policy development;
- Liaison between agencies;
- Partnership working;
- Monitoring;
- Public relations;
- Co-ordination and best practice.

For more information contact Nadeem Ahmad, Regional Manager, NECARS, 2 Jesmond Road West, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PQ.
Tel. 0191 2116714, e-mail: nadeem.ahmad@newcastle.gov.uk.

East of England

The East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Integration is the regional body for the co-ordination of services to asylum seekers in the East of England and takes a lead on the regional work on asylum seeker and refugee integration. In particular, it seeks to co-ordinate activity by the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Its role is to provide support, advice and representation to organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees across the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. It also seeks to ensure that the needs of asylum seekers and refugees are reflected in mainstream policy development and service delivery.

Its primary aims are:

- To assist organisations to respond to the Government's programme of dispersal, accommodation and support for asylum seekers;
- To encourage a multi-agency partnership approach to meeting the diverse housing, health, educational, social, cultural and religious needs of asylum seekers, enabling long-term settlement for those granted leave to remain or refugee status;
- To assist in the development of effective consultation mechanisms to involve asylum seekers and refugees and their community groups;
- To influence national, regional and local policy;
- To take a proactive role in developing a positive public relations and media strategy to enhance the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into local communities.

For more information contact Robin Rennie, Regional Manager, East of England Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Integration, Flempton House, Flempton, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP28 6EG. Tel. 01284 728151, website: www.eera.gov.uk.

South East

The South of England Refugee and Asylum Seeker Consortium (SERASC) was set up in 2001. Southampton City Council is the lead authority for the consortium. Its membership includes eighteen local authorities from across the region, NASS, a number of police authorities, the Government Office for the South-East, Refugee Action and Migrant Helpline.

The role of the consortium is to share information, problems and good practice. It provides a forum for formal and informal networking. Its key aims are:

- To ensure that asylum seekers and refugees and their dependents can access statutory and other relevant services through promoting effective coordination and multi agency working between providers.
- To promote the integration and settlement of refugees within the South of England and promote the recognition and inclusion of asylum seeker and refugee issues within mainstream community cohesion and race equality agendas.
- To provide timely and relevant briefings and information regarding the support and other entitlements of refugees and asylum seekers and legislative and policy changes; and to gather information and data on asylum seekers from across the region to inform debate and identify gaps in provision and services.

For more information contact: South of England Refugee and Asylum Seeker Consortium (SERASC), Social Services, Gateway House, 39-41 Bernard Street, Southampton, S014 3NL.

Joan Ward, Regional Co-ordinator.
Tel. 023 8023 8884.

Duncan Hunt. Tel. 01424 717925, e-mail:
Duncan.hunt@southampton.gov.uk.

Rob Guile, Policy Officer.
Tel. 023 8023 8884, e-mail:
Rob.guile@southampton.gov.uk.

6: Practice Across the Country

Scotland

The Bridges Project

The Bridges Project was set up in 2001 by the Institute of Contemporary Scotland to promote the integration of asylum seekers, to break down the barriers they face and prepare asylum seekers and refugees for employment through work shadowing opportunities. By preparing asylum seekers and refugees for work, the whole economy in Scotland benefits. Given the long waiting periods that asylum seekers often have to endure before an asylum decision is made, useful experience can be gained during this period to keep these individuals empowered. Work shadowing is a means of providing a first-hand view of how a company/organisation works or what a job involves. Examples of successful work shadowing placements were provided at the workshop, including placements with such organisations as Laing O'Rourke and Argyll and Clyde NHS.

For more information contact Maggie Lennon, The Bridges Project, Institute of Contemporary Scotland, 2nd Floor, House 6, 94 Elmbank Street, Glasgow, G2 4PF.

Tel. 0141 204 2848, e-mail: icaadmin@contemporaryscotland.com.

Website: www.contemporaryscotland.com.

Glasgow Overseas Professionals into Practice

The project was established to respond to the shortages of nurses in Scotland and to enable asylum seeker nurses to experience work in the NHS. The project aimed to facilitate placements for asylum seeker nurses in appropriate clinical areas. The project is responsible for ensuring that those ready to progress into NHS work are of a high standard, by providing support and ensuring individuals' language skills are assessed through the IELTS examinations. If they are not ready for employment, participants are encouraged to develop their skills through work shadow placements.

For more information contact Ima Jackson, GOPIP Project Coordinator, The School of Nursing, Glasgow Caledonian University, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow, G4 OBA. Tel. 0141 331 8311, e-mail: gopip@gcal.ac.uk.

West Midlands

Coventry Adult Education Service

Coventry Community Adult Education Service organises city-wide ESOL provision for adults including both intensive and community based provision. The intensive provision is mixed and learners attend 12.5 hours of teaching a week. Community-based provision was set up to meet the needs of women wanting to attend single-sex classes. Learners in both types of class are also given the opportunity to attend other classes to improve English language skills in specific areas, e.g. ESOL ICT, English for Driving, Into Work.

For more information contact Margaret Cunningham, Adult Education Service, ESOL Programme, Harp Place, 2 Sandy Lane, Coventry, CV1 4DX.

Tel. 02476 520 321, e-mail: harpplace@esol.org.uk.

University of Birmingham Centre for Urban & Regional Studies

This workshop explored the findings of two major pieces of research undertaken in the West Midlands into asylum seekers and refugees and their employment, education and training needs. The study involved collecting the views of 1,300 asylum seekers and refugees to

discover their skills, qualifications, aspirations and potential. The research also involved a review of the UK employability initiatives, learning, training and studying provision and examined employers' attitudes, exploring the options available to asylum seekers and refugees and barriers and constraints to education and the labour market.

Having explored the research undertaken by the Centre for Urban & Regional Studies, the workshop set out a number of ways in which asylum seekers and refugees can be supported to reach their goals, the types of initiatives that are on offer in the UK and then recommendations were made about the development of a pathway to employment that could form the main focus of a regional employment strategy.

For more information contact Dr Jenny Phillimore, Centre for Urban & Regional Studies, School for Public Policy, the University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT. Tel. 07968 509 675, e-mail: j.a.phillimore@bham.ac.uk.

WATCH

WATCH is a community led organisation which was established in 1996 in the Hillfields area of Coventry to respond to the high unemployment rates and general decline and deprivation in this area. The area is multiracial and increasingly home to asylum seekers and refugees. WATCH operates a number of projects in the area including the following:

- An employment resource centre;
- A job brokerage project encouraging large employers such as Peugeot, Capita, and the NHS to recruit local people;
- Pre-vocational and vocational training;
- A training centre where local people can train in all aspects of ICT and have access to the internet;
- Youth work including young people excluded from school;
- Home work club;
- Environmental projects;
- and community capacity building initiatives.

The workshop aimed to discuss the project's experience of working with asylum seekers and refugees and facilitating employment placements for this group.

For more information contact Bill Hall, General Manager, WATCH, 10-12 Victoria Street, Hillfields, Coventry, CV1 5LZ. Tel. 02476 550564, e-mail: info@watch-hillfields.org.

London

ASSET UK, the London Language & Literacy Unit (LLLU) at South Bank University

LLLU is a partners within the ASSET UK Development Partnership funded under the EQUAL initiative as part of the European Social Fund. LLLU delivers professional development and consultancy to teachers and managers of ESOL, literacy, and numeracy education. The role of LLLU within the ASSET UK partnership is to improve the educational experience of asylum seekers in ESOL, literacy and numeracy classes through providing professional development opportunities for teachers through a process of training needs analysis and the development and accreditation of two new courses in adult literacy, numeracy, ESOL education and teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners. As part of the exit strategy, LLLU also aims to develop and pilot a 'training the trainers' course, so that teachers can learn to run the course themselves and train teachers in turn. LLLU has also taken on a consultancy role on the running of educational provision for asylum seekers which is offered

to organisations teaching ESOL to asylum seekers. This will be related to the implementation of the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum and could include issues to do with assessment and goal setting, syllabus planning, teaching techniques, monitoring achievement and external and internal accreditation.

In addition to this work, LLLU will provide organisations working with asylum seekers with a range of materials including videos, teaching materials, teaching notes and teachers' guides.

For more information contact Helen Sunderland, London Language & Literacy Unit, South Bank University, 103 Borough Road, London, SE1 0AA.

Tel: 020 7815 6290, e-mail: sunderhc@sbu.ac.uk.

RETAS (Refugee Education & Training Advisory Service)

The workshop focused on RETAS's services to help refugees and asylum seekers into education, training and employment (including self-employment) opportunities, and explored the issues and barriers faced by refugees and asylum seekers, the mismatch within the labour market and the models of good practice that RETAS have developed including professional requalification, job search techniques, mentoring for refugees, business 'start-up' and tailor made projects for doctors, other health professionals, teachers and engineers.

For more information contact Andy Gregg, RETAS, World University Service, 14, Dufferin Street, London, EC1Y 8PD. Tel. 020 7426 5802, e-mail: andy@wusuk.org.

Refugees into Jobs

Refugees into Jobs was set up in 1998 to provide employment services to refugees in North-West London. The service offers:

- Up-to-date free information on courses, education, employment and training;
- An initial assessment of refugees' needs through a drop-in service or arranged appointment;
- One-to-one careers guidance to discuss individual aspirations and goals, opportunities available and ways of overcoming the barriers;
- Computer-aided guidance.

Refugees into Jobs also runs a five-day training programme including presentation skills, self management, confidence building, interview skills, team working and motivation. It also includes sessions on how to approach the UK job market, analysis of job adverts, CV writing and mock interviews.

For more information contact Ms Shree Mandke, Contract and Development Manager, Refugees into Jobs, 3-7 Lincoln Parade, Preston Road, Wembley, Middlesex, HA9 8UA.

Tel. 020 8908 4433, e-mail: Shree.Mandke@Brent.gov.uk.

Yorkshire and Humberside

The Refugee Education and Employment Programme (REEP)

The Refugee Education and Employment Programme provides educational support and guidance to Refugees and Asylum Seekers to help them to integrate into the social and economic life of the community. The project provides careers advice and guidance and runs a mentoring scheme offering one-to-one tutorial support to students in ESOL, literacy, numeracy and study Skills. In addition, classes are provided in literacy, basic IT, study skills

and job search skills; ESOL classes are provided for new arrivals at Entry 1 and 2; and REEP provides a six-week course for survival language skills.

The workshop aimed to illustrate the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in relation to education and preparation for employment, the developments that had been made by REEP to cater for these needs and further suggestions were discussed including the need for longer courses to be made available, geared towards providing skills for work, volunteer and work placement opportunities and careers advice. REEP had created useful links with other agencies and partnerships and had set up an education strategy group where ideas could be shared and discussed. The influences and barriers that the provision was faced with were discussed including student needs and demands, funding and capacity, and the need to involve refugees and asylum seekers in decision-making.

For more information contact Maggie Proctor, Programme Manager, Alpha House, 10 Carver Street, Sheffield, S1 4FS. Tel. 0114 281 2113, e-mail: admin@refed.plus.com.
Website: www.refed.plus.com.

Overseas Health Professionals Project

The rationale behind the approach was to enable asylum seekers and refugees to access existing provision within the NHS as soon as possible in order to aid integration in the UK and to respond to the skills shortages within the NHS.

The workshop aimed to illustrate the background to the project, particularly the skills shortages in the NHS. The criteria for taking part in the programme included evidence of necessary overseas qualifications and documentation regarding status. The project offered a wide range of support for overseas health professionals to help them into employment, such as personal development and action planning, career counselling and advice, access to training and facilities such as library and IT facilities, and financial assistance for examination entrance fees where possible, help in finding work experience placements, language training for the IELTS examination, and medical examination training.

The barriers, outcomes and successes of the project were also identified. The barriers highlighted included passing the IELTS examination, and the facilitation of supervised practice places and clinical attachments.

For more information contact Christine Scaife, Overseas Health Professionals Project Manager, West Yorkshire NHS Workforce Development Confederation, Blenheim House, West One, Duncombe Street, Leeds, LS1 4PL, Tel: 0777 6066 575, Email: cscaife.westyorksnhsfdc@fsmail.net.

The Citizenship Project, Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Consortium is a group of ten local authorities that were contracted by the Home Office to provide accommodation for asylum seekers whilst they were waiting for their asylum decision. In addition, the consortium co-ordinates, shares information and develops services and resources for all asylum seekers across the region and develops and delivers settlement and integration strategies to new refugees.

The Citizenship Project, a regional partnership initiative funded by the Home Office's Refugee Integration Challenge Fund for one year, was set up in 2003 to assist new refugees to integrate and contribute to British society through attendance on a part-time course to gain an understanding of British institutions, society and culture and enhance job prospects, training

and voluntary opportunities. This approach was the first of its kind in Yorkshire and Humberside.

For more information contact Val Kay, Yorkshire & Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers & Refugees, 7th Floor West, Merrion House, 110 Merrion Centre, Leeds, LS2 8QB. Tel. 0113 247 5876, e-mail: val.kay@leeds.gov.uk.

North West

Asylum Seeker & Refugee Volunteering Programme, Mersey Volunteering Programme

The project aims to build capacity within organisations to take on asylum seekers and refugees as volunteers, facilitate volunteering placements and provide support for asylum seekers and refugees. The aim of the workshop was to increase awareness of the key issues involved for asylum seekers and refugees becoming volunteers in the UK including legal issues and trends. A new handbook, 'The A-Z of Volunteering and Asylum', produced by the National Centre for Volunteering, was circulated and discussed. Information was also given about the role of the Mersey Volunteer Bureau in promoting volunteering among refugees and asylum seekers. The barriers to volunteering and possible solutions were also discussed during the workshop, as well as the benefits of volunteering to individuals, communities, organisations and the regional economy.

For more information contact Lynn Wallace, Project Manager, Mersey Volunteer Bureau, 35 Lime Street, Liverpool, L1 1JG. Tel. 0151 707 1113, e-mail: enquiries@volunteercentreliverpool.org.uk.

Refugee & Asylum Seeker Guidance Project

Established in 2002 as a government pilot project, the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Guidance project was set up in Liverpool to help refugees and asylum seekers into learning and work, providing information, advice and guidance support to refugees and asylum seekers to help them into voluntary work or employment and improve their English language skills. The service is predominantly provided on an outreach basis to enable access to the service, and individuals from the community are trained to become mentors, providing support and acting as a link to the guidance team. The project also organised job fairs targeted specifically at refugees.

The main aims of the workshop were to inform delegates of the nature of the Asylum Seeker/Refugee project and the key issues involved, to share good practice and to highlight difficulties. The key issues discussed were the model of guidance, the nature and diversity of the client group and the barriers encountered.

For more information contact Zahra Sabbagh, Project Coordinator, The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Guidance Project, The Liverpool Lifelong Learning Service, Bridge Chapel Centre, Health Road, Allerton, Liverpool, L19 4XR, Tel: 0151 233 1870.

ESOL Pathfinder Project (Liverpool, Blackburn and Wirral)

The workshop reviewed the main activities of the ESOL Pathfinder project in Liverpool, Blackburn and the Wirral during 2003 to develop new approaches to language teaching to enable speakers of other languages to access education, training and employment. The main activities of the pathfinder project during this period included:

- The creation of a database of ESOL learners in order to inform the development of provision which included information about nationality, languages, qualifications and work experience;
- The identification of the needs of learners and a review of the current ESOL programme to meet these needs;
- Staff training to focus on alternative methods of delivery, assessment, review and evaluation including the development of training materials;
- The establishment of a student residential course focusing on preparation for work;
- and the creation of links with employers to develop appropriate workplace training programmes.

Links were also created with Jobcentre Plus to identify key employment and job readiness needs to develop materials mapped to the National Curriculum. The Pathfinder Project also aims to embed ESOL in six vocational curriculum areas and develop materials for each of these areas.

For more information contact Jan Luff or Michelle Karmy-Rowland, Pathfinder Managers, Liverpool Community College, Vauxhall Road, Liverpool, L3 6BN.
Tel. 0151 252 4590, e-mail: jan.luff@liv-coll.ac.uk or rowland@liv.coll.ac.uk

Access to Work Project

The Access to Work project is run by Manchester Advice and delivers bilingual advice, guidance and support services to targeted minority ethnic communities in Manchester who experience difficulty accessing appropriate employment and training opportunities. The groups provided with help included the following: the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the economically inactive, the low skilled and those over fifty. The workshop provided an overview of the situation in Manchester, including the characteristics of those most in need and the population of ethnic minorities within this area of the country. The barriers that this group of individuals were likely to face included the following: financial barriers; a lack of support in the working environment, particularly for those with carer responsibilities and other support needs; and discrimination amongst employers. The Access to Work project aims to combat these barriers through a number of measures, such as advice and support on how to claim benefits, such as in-work benefits, sick benefits, and student grants, and assessing whether the individual will be better off from taking up employment.

Clients are signposted to other services including agencies delivering employment and training initiatives, e.g. Connexions, Jobcentre Plus, Surestart and other support organisations.

For more information contact Elaine Mills, Project Manager, Access to Work Linkworker Project, Manchester Advice, Room 5064, 5th Floor, Town Hall Extension, Manchester, M60 2AF. Tel: 0161 234 4031, e-mail: emills@notes.manchester.gov.uk.

South West

Gloucestershire Action for Refugees & Asylum Seekers (GARAS)

GARAS is a charity that offers a safe place and help to asylum seekers and refugees in Gloucestershire, and informs service providers, decision-makers and the general public about their situation.

GARAS runs a drop-in centre offering activities, refreshments, food, clothing and household items, information and advice on health, housing, benefits, immigration, law and education, and access to other support agencies.

The aim of the workshop was to raise awareness of the various roles and stages required for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into the community and the barriers that this group of individuals are likely to face, including:

- Racial prejudice;
- Language barriers;
- Basic provisions including clothes and food;
- Health;
- Advice and guidance;
- Cultural differences.

For more information contact Adele Owen or Annette Hughes, Co-ordinators, GARAS (Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers), 111 Barton Street, Gloucester, GL1 4HR. Tel. 01452 550528, e-mail: info@garas.org.uk.

The Refugee Employment and Progression Project

This ESF funded project is led by the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Sussex and involves other partner organisations including the University of Lancaster, the University of Leeds and the Wedgwood Memorial College in Stoke-on-Trent. The project developed out of work undertaken with black and minority ethnic and refugee communities by the Centre for Continuing.

The aim of the project is to build upon previous research into the social exclusion and discrimination faced by refugees and asylum seekers in education, training and employment, especially those with higher-level skills and qualifications. The project also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a range of anti-discriminatory strategies through locally based case studies; explore the perceptions and experiences of members of the target group through life history interviews; and inform future debates about policy and practice in this area through dissemination of the research findings.

The workshop aimed to provide information about the aims and activities of the project, discuss the barriers faced by refugees and asylum seekers in accessing education, training and employment, and the effectiveness of strategies designed to address these, and provide an opportunity for delegates to share information and experiences.

For more information contact Anne Bellis, Lecturer in Continuing Education, Centre for Continuing Education, The Sussex Institute, Essex House, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 9QQ. Tel. 01273 877888, e-mail: si-enquiries@sussex.ac.uk.

CLEAR (City Life Education Action for Refugees) Project

The CLEAR project was set up in 2001 by City Life Church to support and respond to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Southampton and to empower refugees to become independent, self-supporting members of our communities. Links have been established with other statutory, voluntary and faith groups in the area. The project provides advice and information on finding accommodation; completing forms and other practical help; support and befriending; a drop-in support group with involvement from local agencies; a bike workshop where bikes are repaired and given to clients; and a training and employment project.

Skills audits are undertaken to obtain information about previous education and employment, discover aspirations for the future and provide an action plan based on advice and guidance.

A business network meets regularly and is attended by employers, advice agencies, refugees and asylum seekers. CLEAR also runs a micro business project providing targeted training for people hoping to set up businesses and obtain business loans.

The workshop aimed to provide an overview of the project's work in relation to developing employability skills and helping refugees into employment; discuss and exchange ideas about good practice in relation to working with refugees in the field of education, training and employment; and raise awareness about the barriers refugees face in finding employment.

For more information contact Nicola Wootton, Project Manager, CLEAR project, PO Box 237, Southampton, S014 3XA. Tel. 023 8022 1111, e-mail: admin@clearproject.org.uk. Website: www.clearproject.org.uk.

North East

The JET Project, Newcastle ESOL Team

The Jobs through ESOL and Training (JET) Project was developed in January 2001 in response to the need to improve education and training opportunities and provide outreach support for refugees and asylum seekers in the West End area of Newcastle.

Since it began, the JET Project has operated alongside the Newcastle ESOL Team ensuring a link between English language learning and the progression onto further vocational training and employment. It provides:

- English language tuition;
- Basic skills and personal development training;
- Vocational training courses;
- ESOL-based employability skills tuition;
- Access to voluntary work / work experience / work placements;
- Job search;
- Employer liaison work;
- Community development / local regeneration programmes.

The main aims of the project are to share information and best practice on ESOL, training and bridges into employment; to break down barriers in order to improve employability and promote the social integration of asylum seekers; and to facilitate cross-sector partnerships in working with asylum seekers.

The workshop covered the role and activities of the Newcastle ESOL team and the JET project. The JET project offers a variety of support systems and strands to help asylum seekers into employment. Personal careers advice and guidance is provided including job search, help with completing application forms and CVs, interview techniques and career development training. Through the facilitation of voluntary work placements and work experience opportunities, asylum seekers are also able to gain an insight into the UK work environment, obtain UK references and boost their employability.

For more information contact Sue Keeton or Lydia Sukumar, Project Co-ordinators, The JET project, c/o The Newcastle ESOL team, Westgate Community College, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 9LU. Tel. 0191 241 0211.

Stockton Volunteer Development Agency

Stockton Volunteer Development Agency (SVDA) works with voluntary sector groups and organisations, offering them training and support in all aspects of volunteer development. SVDA also runs a volunteer bureau service, helping people to find out more about how they can get involved with their local community through volunteering.

The workshop sought to explore the many reasons why asylum seekers volunteer, such as to develop and share their practical skills; to develop their language skills; to build confidence; to make new friends and as a means of gaining work experience and UK references. The workshop also involved discussion of the kind of issues covered by an inclusive volunteering policy, and participants were provided with organisational guidelines containing top tips for involving volunteers.

For more information contact Nehemiah Moyo, BME Volunteer Coordinator, Stockton Volunteer Development Agency, 27 Yarn Road, Stockton, TS18 3NJ; Tel: 01642 355292; Email: c.withers@stocktonvda.org.

Middlesbrough Adult Education Service – Supporting ESOL learners

Middlesbrough has a population of 150,000, 5% of whom are from black and minority ethnic communities. about 1,700-1,800 of this group are asylum seekers, many of whom are Kurdish. Working closely with a local college, Middlesbrough Adult Education Service (AES) provides ESOL for about 300 learners. The AES focuses on pre-entry learners, while the college delivers more advanced provision.

The AES has sought to develop learner-centred provision which includes:
an initial interview and assessment;

- A classroom-based diagnostic assessment;
- The development of individual learning plans;
- One-to-one tutorial time with the class tutor to provide ongoing review;
- and support for progression to more advanced provision at the college, volunteering and employment opportunities.

The AES provides financial support for travel costs and childcare, and because a roll-on, roll-off system has been put in place, there is no waiting list to access provision.

Because of the wide range of barriers that asylum seekers face in accessing and succeeding in education and training, the AES has sought out and made use of the support offered by other agencies in Middlesbrough, including refugee community organisations, housing providers, health services, charities and voluntary organisations.

The workshop aimed to demonstrate how ESOL learners are supported within Middlesbrough, enabling participants to compare this with their own experience in other parts of the region. Materials developed by the AES, including the initial assessment, the individual learning plan and the ESOL learner record, were made available to be shared with workshop participants.

For more information contact Helen Weir, ESOL Co-ordinator, Middlesbrough Adult Education Service, The TAD Centre, Ormesby Road, Middlesbrough, TS3 7SF. Tel. 01642 225911.

East of England

‘Build Up’ ESOL for Construction, Peterborough Regional College

As part of ASSET UK, Peterborough College, in collaboration with the Basic Skills Agency, has been working to develop and disseminate a model for English language programmes that enhance the employability of asylum seekers, especially for those with skills and experience relevant to the construction industry. The provision, which has been developed in partnership with awarding bodies and construction colleagues involves classroom workshop demonstrations; industry guest speakers; the use of interactive learning materials; site visits; group work and portfolio building.

For more information contact: Louise Cottom, Project Co-ordinator, Peterborough Regional College, Park Crescent, Peterborough, PE1 4DZ. Tel. 01733 767366.

Norfolk Learning Partnership –Raising the Skills and Aspirations of Speakers of Other Languages

Norfolk Learning Partnership (NLP) seeks to raise educational aspirations and promote collaborative working at both an operational and strategic level. From October 2002 to September 2003, the NLP received funding from the Department for Education and Skills to run and assess ESOL initiatives. A variety of ESOL provision was established to test what works, including outreach activities, intensive provision, residential provision, vocational tasters, and vocationally embedded provision in subjects such as marketing and retail, catering, photography, ICT, business and job search. A key conclusion of the work was that learners are clearly motivated through learning skills and language that are relevant to their role in society and the job market.

The workshop aimed to enable participants to understand how ESOL projects and initiatives can be used to generate skills and other benefits; to inform them of current ESOL initiatives to improve learners’ skills; and to explore what works and the reasons behind this success.

For more information contact: Ian Lain, NLP, St Andrews House, St Andrews Street, Norwich, NR2 4TP. Tel: 01603 629318, e-mail: ian.lain.nlp@btconnect.com.

Peterborough Red Cross

The Refugee Orientation Project was established to ensure equal access to services for asylum seekers and refugees and empower them through local orientation and integration activities. The Refugee Orientation Project helps refugees experiencing difficulties with benefits, healthcare, clothing, completing forms and housing benefits. All information is given in confidence and the service is free of charge.

The workshop aimed to inform delegates of the work of the Refugee Orientation Project and the work that Peterborough Red Cross does in raising awareness of the issues affecting refugees.

For more information contact: Leonie McCarthy, Co-ordinator, Peterborough Red Cross, Refugee Orientation Project, Brassey Close, Lincoln Road, Peterborough, PE1 2AZ; Tel: 01733 557472

Peterborough Women’s Centre

In February 2003, the Peterborough Women’s Centre initiated a new pilot group, WRAP (Women Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Peterborough) to bring together refugee and asylum seeking women from all over the city to help highlight their skills and address their

needs. The group offers a range of services and activities, including language support; liaison with statutory agencies such as social services; arts and crafts; a social forum; crèche facilities; and education opportunities such as ESOL classes first aid and basic food hygiene courses.

The workshop aimed to explore how UK professionals can work to empower refugee and asylum seeking women to begin making a contribution to the society they have joined. The workshop highlighted the high level of skills and qualifications possessed by many of the women. The activities of the WRAP project were discussed and a range of case studies was used to illustrate the skills and abilities that WRAP's clients possess.

For more information contact: Swapma Mazumdar, Black and Ethnic Minority Women's Education & Development Co-ordinator, Peterborough Women's Centre, 107 Lincoln Road, Peterborough, PE1 2SH, Tel: 01733 311564, Email: pboro.womens.centre@btclick.com.

South East

Access First Employment and Training Project, Refugee Resource

The Access First Training and Employment Project ran from December 2001 to December 2003 during which time it worked with seventy-two refugees and asylum seekers with permission to work, offering a sixty-hour work preparation course, one-to-one advice and guidance, unpaid work placements and access to a resources area with computers, newspapers and other materials. In order to engage employers, the project has produced guidance material for employing refugees and asylum seekers, which includes information on the benefits and challenges of employing refugees and asylum seekers; who can work and how do you know; barriers to work and how employers can help; as well as guidelines on recruiting refugees, interviewing candidates and gaining references. The project also offered a telephone information and advice service to employers.

By the end of 2003, forty-six of the participants had moved into full- or part-time employment, nine into education and training, three into voluntary work, while only eight remained unemployed. Key success factors were considered to be:

- That the work was shared by refugees and asylum seekers;
- The level of collaboration and partnership working with other local providers;
- Finding out individuals' strengths;
- Understanding employers needs and motivations;
- Working in a positive climate and keeping the climate positive.

The workshop aimed to identify the barriers faced by refugees and asylum seekers with permission to work in accessing paid work; to look at effective strategies to overcome these barriers; and to enable workshop participants to extend their range of support for asylum seekers. Following a discussion on the effects of media hostility, the workshop also explored key tips for working with the local media.

For more information contact Rachel Wiggans, Access First Employment and Training Project, Refugee Resource, 2nd Floor Hoppoer House, 3 Collins Street, Oxford, OX4 1XS. Tel: 0845 458 0055, e-mail: info@refugeeresource.org.

Kent Refugee Action Network

In April 2002, the Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN) set up a mentoring project to assist the integration of refugees into the community through the services of volunteer mentor on a

one-to-one basis,. The project focuses on empowering refugees to succeed in education, training and employment by matching the experience, skills and interests of mentors and mentees and offering training; funding for expenses; and ongoing support.

The workshop aimed to help participants to understand the benefits to refugees of mentoring; to identify the education needs of refugees; to identify the individual and structural barriers to education faced by refugees; and to assist workshop participants in identifying ways in which refugees can be supported to overcome these barriers.

For more information contact Annet Lukkien, The Mentoring Project, KRAN, PO Box 294, Dover, Kent, CT17 9GY. Tel. 01304 240041, e-mail: kran@actionnetwork.freereserve.co.uk.

Kent Refugee Support Group

The Kent Refugee Support Group (KRSG) was established in 1996 by a small group of volunteers in response to a lack of service provision for newly arrived asylum seekers placed in Thanet and other port of entry towns in Kent. KRSG is dedicated to community development work promoting the social inclusion of refugees in reaching their full potential. KRSG works to improve understanding between local and refugee communities and to promote appreciation of the special contribution that refugees can make. KRSG also provides the following services:

- A drop-in advice and information office;
- A pool of certified interpreters and translators;
- Social events and activities;
- Clothing distribution;
- An outreach service;
- Integration summer programme;
- ‘Kick it out Football’;
- Workshops on citizenship, refugee and asylum issues.

The workshop aimed to explore a series of media images to illustrate the negative messages that local communities are receiving about asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, before going on to provide facts and figures to counter claims that asylum seekers are in the UK illegally; that all asylum seekers are criminals; that the UK is ‘a land of milk and honey’ for asylum seekers; that Britain is the number one destination for refugees; and that failed asylum seekers are ‘bogus’.

For more information contact: KRSG, Omega House, 7 New Street, Margate, Kent, CT9 2EG. Tel: 01843 280732, e-mail: krsrgroup@aol.com.

7: The Way Forward

At each of the regional seminars, participants were asked to propose ideas and initiatives for future action. A summary of the proposals is listed below:

1. The need for a holistic approach and interagency cooperation

The seminars illustrated the need for a more holistic service for asylum seekers, including more effective partnership working between agencies dealing with welfare support for individuals and their families such as housing and childcare support, health services (mental and physical), skills for life support such as confidence-building; and awareness-raising regarding cultural differences; support into employment, training and education, including language skills, work experience, UK references, and combating the barriers to employment such as discrimination from employers.

2. Engage employers to combat prejudice and increase awareness

Projects should seek to develop relationships with employers. Employers are often misinformed or unaware of the eligibility of asylum seekers to participate in work-orientation activities, and therefore barriers are often put up. Through engaging employers and raising their awareness of the issues involved, and being exposed to the target group through work-orientation opportunities, work shadowing placements and internships, prejudices can be broken down and the public image of asylum seekers improved. Public image is important to employers, and employers are keen to be seen to be following the race relations' amendment act and equal opportunities measures. By supporting asylum seekers and refugees, employers can create a positive image of their organisation.

3. Develop positive images

There is a need for more awareness raising activity and positive images work to be undertaken with the local, regional and national media and with local communities to demonstrate that asylum seekers can make a positive contribution to the UK. This could be done through local community induction programmes within dispersal areas, the creation of links with journalists, and identifying individuals, both employers and asylum seekers, who would be willing to be interviewed by the media.

4. Reconsider the withdrawal of the concession to seek employment

Asylum seekers possess skills and talents that could ultimately benefit the UK economy, both in unskilled and skilled areas. By allowing asylum seekers the right to work, we can tap into these skills for the benefit of both the individual and the UK.

5. Increased involvement of relevant organisations in strategic development and implementation

The series of conferences highlighted the need for strategic agencies to inform the sector about the processes and procedures for developing and implementing regional strategy in order to allow input from organisations, agencies and groups representing asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Where direct representation is not possible, a champion for this group should be identified who can coordinate the responses and feedback information to the relevant organisations.

6. Faster processing of asylum applications

The process of waiting for a decision to be made regarding an asylum application can be lengthy, which can result in asylum seekers becoming demotivated, particularly if they are unable to use their skills, qualifications and experience.

7. More accurate information regarding asylum seekers' entitlements to education and training is needed

It is important that accurate information is provided to both asylum seekers and to education and training providers and voluntary organisations, through effective IAG support and guidelines to avoid barriers being created that prevent asylum seekers from taking up opportunities.

8. Further support and improved ESOL provision is needed to cater for asylum seekers' needs

ESOL courses need to be designed to respond to the learning needs of asylum seekers and encourage higher retention and achievement rates. Staff training is required to ensure a high level of service is provided and further funding is required for additional support for ESOL learners. Restrictions on ESOL provision should be lifted to ensure the service is accessible to everyone, e.g. families, spouses, those on short-term permits as well as further provision and support for individuals at entry level who are illiterate in their first language.

9. Greater emphasis should be placed on helping refugees into jobs commensurate with their skills and abilities

10. Continued communication at local and regional level to share good practice

In Middlesbrough, the wide range of barriers that asylum seekers face in accessing and succeeding in education and training has resulted in the Adult Education Service coordinating the support offered by other agencies in Middlesbrough including refugee community organisations, housing providers, health services, charities and voluntary organisations.

11. Longer-term funding is required to ensure good practice is sustained

Short-term funding delivers short-term projects that are often unsustainable. Longer-term funding needs to be made available in order to mainstream and sustain the good practices developed by projects.

12. Empowerment of asylum seekers and refugees

It is important to raise the aspirations of asylum seekers and refugees and involve them in the development of any provision.

13. Integration

Integration begins on arrival and therefore funding to support integration should be made available to work with asylum seekers as well as refugees.

Participating Organisations

Scotland: Glasgow, 5th March 2003

- Anniesland College
- Careers Scotland
- Centre for Human Ecology
- Ethnic Minority Enterprise Centre
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- Glasgow City Council
- Glasgow College of Building & Printing
- Glasgow College of Food Technology
- Glasgow Interpreting Service
- Glasgow North Ltd
- Govan Initiative
- Institute of Contemporary Scotland (Bridges Project)
- Jobcentre Plus
- John Wheatley College
- Langside College
- NIACE
- North Glasgow College
- Paisley Partnership
- Phoenix House
- Quarriers
- Queens Cross Housing Association
- Reid Kerr College
- Rosemount Lifelong Learning
- Scottish Asylum Seekers Consortium
- Scottish Enterprise Glasgow
- Scottish Executive
- Scottish Refugee Council
- Scottish Wider Access Programme
- South Lanarkshire College
- University of Stirling
- Working Links
- WOSCOF

West Midlands Region: Coventry, 25th March 2003

- Advantage West Midlands
- Birmingham Adult Education Service
- Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council
- Black Country Learning and Skills Council
- Bourneville College of Further Education
- British Refugee Council
- COM-ECON
- Community English SchoolWarwickshire College
- Compass
- Connexions
- Coventry & Warwickshire Learning and Skills Council
- Coventry City Council
- Coventry University
- Employment Service Jobcentre
- LARC
- Learning and Skills Council London East
- Leicestershire Learning and Skills Council
- Midland Refugee Council
- NIACE
- Nino Associates
- Peterborough Central Library
- Refugee Resource
- SEMUF (Sandwell Ethnic Minority Umbrella Forum)
- South Birmingham College
- Stoke-on-Trent College
- TLC College
- Training Development Resource Unit
- University of Birmingham
- University of Warwick
- University of Wolverhampton
- Warwickshire County Council
- West Midlands Local Government Association

London Region: 3rd April 2003

- Abingdon and Witney College
- Al-Muntada Al-Islami Trust
- Basic Skills Bulletin
- Brent Adult and Community Education Service
- British Refugee Council
- City & Guilds of London Institute

- City and Islington College
- City of Westminster College
- Community Systems
- Department for Education and Skills
- Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College
- East Berkshire College
- Enfield College
- Ethnic Minority Project
- Folkestone Migrant Support Group
- Government Office for London
- Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute
- Hastings College of Arts and Technology
- Hastings Trust
- Highbury College
- Kent Adult Education Service
- Kent Guidance Consortium
- Learning and Skills Council London North
- Lewisham College
- London Asylum Seekers Consortium
- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
- London Central Learning and Skills Council
- London Language and Literacy Unit
- London Probation
- London West Training
- MbA Training, Research and Development
- Metropole College
- Mid-Kent College of Higher and Further Education
- MOSAADA
- NIACE
- North London ItEC
- Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit
- Refugee Education and Training Advisory Service (RETAS)
- Refugee Resource
- Refugees Into Jobs
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- Rycotewood College
- Sandwell College
- Siri Behavioural Health
- Southcote IT Experience
- The Asphaleia Project
- The Portsmouth Foyer
- Transtec Training
- Trinity College London
- Victoria and Albert Museum
- Women's Education in Building

Yorkshire & Humberside Region: Sheffield, 9th April 2003

- Action Space Mobile
- Asylum Seekers & Refugees
- Barnsley Voluntary Action
- BBC
- Bradford College
- Bradford Community Broadcasting
- British Refugee Council
- CIDA People
- City Community Forum/Voluntary Action
- COM-ECON
- Dearne Valley College
- Goodwin Centre
- Government Office for Yorkshire and The Humber
- Hull College
- Humberside Learning and Skills Council
- Jobcentre Plus
- Learning and Skills Council for West Yorkshire
- Leeds Careers Guidance
- Leeds College of Technology
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Link Up Sheffield
- Liverpool Asylum Seeker and Refugee Development Partnership
- London South Learning and Skills Council
- NHS Workforce Development Confederation
- NIACE
- North Lincolnshire Council
- Northern Refugee Centre
- Park Lane College
- Positive Images
- Refugee Education and Employment Project
- Refugee New Arrivals Project
- Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
- Salford City Council
- Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA)

- Sheffield City Council
- Sheffield College
- Sheffield Futures
- SSCAT Foundation
- Stride Ltd

- Thomas Rotherham College
- Ufi Ltd
- Wirral Borough Council
- Yorkshire & Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

North West Region: Liverpool, 13th October 2003

- AccommoDATA Ltd
- Asylum Support Team
- Barnados
- Blackburn College
- Blackburn with Darwen Volunteer Bureau
- Building Positive Action
- Business Link North Manchester
- CDS Housing
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- City College Manchester
- City of Liverpool Adult Guidance Service
- Congolese Association
- East Manchester Neighbourhood Wardens
- Employment Services
- George Howe Trust
- Glaxo Neurological Centre
- Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council
- Hugh Baird College
- Inter- Nation Roma
- Jobcentre Plus
- Kosovar - Albanian Intergration Group
- Kurdish/Turkish Community Organisation of Liverpool
- Lancaster University
- Laser
- Learning Northwest
- Liverpool City Connexions Centre
- Liverpool Community College
- Liverpool John Moores University
- Liverpool Lifelong Learning
- Liverpool Translation and Interpreting Service
- Mainstream Imagine
- Manchester Advice
- Manchester City Council
- Mersey Volunteer Bureau
- Merseyside Refugee Support Network
- MRHPU
- National Tenants Resource Centre
- New Leaf Salford Foyer
- NIACE
- North Trafford College
- North West Development Agency
- Northwest Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- Nottinghamshire County Football Club
- RAPAR
- Refugee Action
- Refugee and Asylum Seeker Guidance Project
- Refugee Council
- Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
- Routes To Employment
- Salford Foundation
- Salford Foyer
- Salford LEA
- SEEDA
- Sefton CVS
- Sefton LEA
- Sheffield College
- South Sefton Adult Education Centre
- St Helens College
- Tandem Ltd
- The Big Life Company
- The Edge Regeneration Ltd
- The Refugee Council
- West Cheshire College
- Wigan Early Years Team

South West Region: Bristol, 2nd March 2004

- Barton Hill Settlement
- Bristol City Council
- Bristol Community Education Service
- Bristol Racial Equality Council
- Centrepont
- City & Guilds of London Institute
- CLEAR project
- Exeter CVS

- Gloucestershire Action for Refugees & Asylum Seekers
- Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology
- Gloucestershire Learning and Skills Council
- ISR
- Learning Action Dorset
- Newport & District Refugee Support Group
- NHSU
- NIACE
- Open Doors International Language School
- Race Equality West Midlands
- Reading Voluntary Action
- Refugee Action
- Refugee Advisory Bureau
- Refugee Support Group – Devon
- South West Regional Assembly
- Southampton Social Services
- Support into Work
- The Refugee Council
- Trident Housing Association
- University of Sussex
- West of England Learning and Skills Council
- Worcester Racial Equality Council

North East Region: Newcastle, 5th March 2004

- Black Health Agency
- Bury CVS
- Centrepont
- Chinese ICT Open Learning Centre
- City of Sunderland College
- Easington District Council
- Job Linkage
- National Tenants Resource Centre
- NECASS
- Newcastle City Council
- Newcastle Learning Partnership
- Newcastle Literacy Trust
- Newcastle upon Tyne YMCA
- NHSU
- NIACE
- North of England Refugee Service
- Northumbria Churches Training Consortium
- Northumbria Police
- Northumbria University
- NTMBC
- One North East
- Open University
- Pecketwell College
- Phoenix Enterprises
- Refugee Integration Service
- South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
- Springboard
- St Augustines Centre/Pecketwell College
- Stockton Volunteer Development Agency
- Sunderland Adult and Community Learning Service
- The Cathedral Centre
- The Refugee Council
- The Scarman Trust
- Voluntary Organisations' Network North East (VONNE)
- West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council
- Westgate Community College
- Wheatsheaf Trust
- Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Eastern Region: Peterborough, 9th March 2004

- Apex Leicester Project Ltd
- Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team
- Basic Skills Agency
- Birmingham Voluntary Services Council
- Careers Essex
- City College Norwich
- Connexions
- Counselling Service
- Derbyshire Learning and Skills Council
- EECASS
- Greater Nottingham Learning Partnership
- Islamic Resource Centre
- Kings Lynn Asylum and Refugee Support

- LASC
- Leicester City Council
- Leicestershire and Leicester City Learning Partnership
- Leicestershire Learning & Skills Council
- NIACE
- Norfolk Learning Partnership
- Norfolk Training Services
- North Warwickshire & Hinckley College
- Norwich & Norfolk Voluntary Services
- Pelcombe Training Ltd
- Peterborough City Council
- Peterborough Red Cross
- Peterborough Regional College
- Peterborough Women's Centre
- Race Equality Sandwell
- Sheffield Foyer
- St Augustines Centre/Pecketwell College
- Support into Work
- SureStart Gladstone
- Teamgate Learning Centre
- The Refugee Council
- The Salvation Army
- University of Central England

South East Region: Ashford: 27th April 2004

- Adult Education College Bexley
- Bournemouth University
- Cardiff Council
- Careers Development Group
- Coleg Morgannwg
- Ealing Family Refugee Support Project
- East Sussex Asylum Team
- Harmony House
- Hastings Trust
- Kent Adult Education Service
- Kent County Council
- Kent Refugee Action Network
- Kent Refugee Support Group
- Lifeline Community Projects
- Migrant Helpline
- Newham College
- NEWTEC
- NHSU
- NIACE
- Praxis
- Refugee Action
- Refugee Resource
- SEEDA
- South East Consortium for Asylum Seeker Support
- South East Essex College
- South of England Refugee & Asylum Seeker Consortium
- The Refugee Council
- The Salvation Army
- The Seniors
- Thurrock CVS Volunteer Bureau
- University of Sussex