

Report on producing the Information for Asylum Seekers Website

Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU)

*The UK Asylum Seekers Development Partnership - ASSET UK - is part funded by the European Social Fund under the Equal Community Development Initiative Programme.
ASSET UK mainstreaming activities are supported by the Learning and Skills Council.*



Executive Summary

This report is a summary of our experience of producing an information website for asylum seekers as part of our work for the Equal Development Partnership, ASSET UK. It is not intended for professional website designers but for advice and guidance practitioners who are creating information websites to reach those not able to use their services or as an additional resource for their clients.

This project gave us the opportunity to try something new. We learned a huge amount from the experience. Focus groups including asylum seekers and refugees, advisers, ESOL teachers and librarians gave us their feedback and we used much of it to make changes. The tips we would give anyone thinking of creating an information website would be:

- Don't be too ambitious – limit yourself and remember that everything you include will need to be kept up-to-date
- Test constantly but keep your main audience in mind when getting feedback and remember that you cannot please everyone all of the time
- Keep a balance (detailed accuracy/simplicity, information/advice etc)
- When planning, allow for plenty of time to rewrite, redesign, check external links and update because you will need it
- Build in any additional needs (e.g. translations) into your planning from the beginning
- Keep asking yourself whether it is useful and accessible and make sure that you aren't reproducing information if you could easily link to another website instead

Contents

Introduction	4
Why an information website for asylum seekers?	5
How did we get started?	7
How did it develop through the project period?	10
What did we learn?	14
How can it be used?	17
Conclusion	18
APPENDIX A	
Interviews in Birmingham	19
APPENDIX B	
Questionnaire about other ways of improving English*	22
APPENDIX C	
Material used to collect feedback*	24
APPENDIX D	
Examples of feedback received	29
APPENDIX E	
ESOL/information retrieval exercise example Unit 1 Improve your English*	33

* logos have been removed from all forms

Introduction

This is a short account of our experience of producing the website, 'Information for Asylum Seekers' (www.info-for-asylumseekers.org.uk) as part of our ASSET UK project. We had not worked on a website before we started this project, although, as an organisation with ten years' experience working with refugees and asylum seekers, we had produced information in other forms as part of our guidance work with clients and for our specialist courses for students.

Our usual client group at the Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU) is refugees and asylum seekers with higher education/professional backgrounds in the Greater London area so working on a website intended to be for all adult asylum seekers in the UK was challenging for us and we learned a lot through the experience. We made extensive changes to the website as the project progressed and towards the end of the project, we designed a second smaller website (www.heran.org.uk) intended mainly for staff in higher education institutions working with asylum seekers and refugees. In creating this second site, we benefited enormously from the lessons learned through producing the first.

This report is not intended for professional website designers but for advice and guidance practitioners who are creating information websites to reach those not able to use their services or as an additional resource for their clients.

Why an information website for asylum seekers?

We were interested in creating an information resource for asylum seekers because from the time dispersal started in 1999, we had received regular enquiries from asylum seekers around the UK and their advisers, wanting information about:

- who they could contact in their local area to get advice and guidance
- how to find out about professional re-qualification
- how to find out the UK equivalence of overseas qualifications
- how to access higher and further education
- whether they could find an APEL (Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning) programme similar to the one run at our university in their local area
- how to find funding for higher education or the professional re-qualification process
- where they could find specialist/advanced ESOL courses in their local area

We started to give some basic advice over the phone and sent information through the post but we realised that this was not adequate. Some of the asylum seekers we spoke to desperately needed advice and guidance as well as detailed information and contacts. In some cases we could refer them to a local organisation but in other cases there was little support available. Even when the support was available, it could be difficult to get the specialist information that they might need. We concluded that it would be very useful to have detailed information resources specially tailored to the needs of asylum seekers, including answers to questions they might have and useful links.

We wanted to produce the information in a form that could be easily updated so a website seemed an obvious solution. The other advantage of a website was that it would provide a good bridge to other resources on the Internet so that an isolated asylum seeker would be able to study English or IT and do extensive research to prepare for their future, as long as they had access to a computer and Internet. With the increasing availability of computers in community centres and libraries through UK On-line, this seemed a viable option.

When we looked at what information was already available specifically for asylum seekers, we found that it was limited. There were some orientation guides covering basic information translated into different community languages and there were websites aimed at refugees, overseas students and advisers. However, there was no detailed information on-line for asylum seekers. Furthermore, on general education or employment websites, or even those intended for overseas students, it was often difficult to find information specifically about asylum seekers. A notable exception was the UKCOSA site which has clear information about asylum seekers' eligibility although much of the more detailed information is more generic, aimed at students from overseas. We decided, therefore, that an information website directed to

asylum seekers around the UK with a good level of English who wanted to use their time well while waiting for a decision would be a valuable addition to existing resources.

How did we get started?

Once we decided that we wanted to provide an information website for asylum seekers, we needed to determine:

- what it should include
- how it should be organised
- what it should look like
- how we should get feedback from asylum seekers to improve it

What should it include?

From our daily work with clients and students, we already knew what asylum seekers in London wanted to know about and we had some ideas about what asylum seekers in dispersal areas were interested in from the telephone and written enquiries we had received since dispersal started. We supplemented this by running interviews with individual asylum seekers in Birmingham to find out what information they had before coming to the UK, where they received information, how they would like to receive it and what they wanted to know about (see Appendix A for details).

We also looked at a range of different information websites and asked for feedback from our clients at RAGU to find out which they found useful. Some that were mentioned were the MultiKulti site, the British Red Cross site, CitizensAdvice and the Refugee Council site. Finally we drew up a provisional list of topics including:

- Get into Further and Higher Education
- Volunteering and Preparing for Employment
- Getting Recognition for Qualifications and Experience
- Re-qualification

We had originally planned to cover ESOL in the 'Get into Further and Higher Education' unit but we soon realised that this needed to have a unit of its own. We called this 'Improve your English' and divided it into two parts: one about how to find an ESOL class and the other covering 'Other ways of improving your English'. We realised (partly from the Birmingham interviews) that many asylum seekers wanted to supplement their ESOL classes with further practice and also have suggestions and resources they could use to improve their English in the first few months of being in the UK.

We sent a questionnaire (see Appendix B) to refugee staff and students at RAGU to find out ways they had found to improve their English when they first arrived in the UK and we incorporated these into this part of the 'Improve your English' unit. One unexpected finding was how intimidating new arrivals had found libraries. We, therefore, included a section on libraries, explaining how they can be used, what information and resources are there and joining procedures. We also included a section on free on-line resources for different ages and levels of English in this unit. We felt this was particularly important

for isolated asylum seekers who might not be able to join an ESOL course but might be able to access a computer for self-study in their own time.

When we started to develop the further and higher education unit, we found that we were constantly having to explain details of the UK education system and this unit was becoming too unwieldy and complex. We, therefore, separated this out into three units:

- Understand the UK Education System
- Get into Further Education
- Get into Higher Education

We kept many links across these 3 units. The 'Understand the UK Education System' was particularly popular with parents who wanted to understand what their children were doing in school and how they could help them. We reinforced this through FAQs focusing on aspects of the school system that refugee parents might find unfamiliar and links to an external website 'ParentLine'.

How should it be organised?

When we first started to think about how we could organise the material, we thought it would be a good idea to have three layers of information at every stage. The first would be a short very general overview. This was intended to give an asylum seeker enough information to know what to do. Our initial feedback in Birmingham had suggested that asylum seekers wanted easy-to-understand short explanations of the UK system, but some then also wanted the facility to get more detail and to do some research themselves through being linked to other sites.

Some of those with excellent English also wanted to use their time to link up with professional bodies and plan for re-qualification or employment once they had a positive decision. So we decided to use a second layer of information to give more details and a final layer to link to other websites, making sure we gave a clear account of what could be found there and how to navigate, if the website was not easily accessible. Another reason we started with these three layers was that we knew from the beginning that we wanted to translate part of the site. We thought it would be sensible to design it so that the first layer could be self-standing and easy to translate.

Although we organised the first unit, 'Improve your English' in this way, it soon became apparent that this was not practical. As we found out more about how websites work and how people use them, it was clear that these layers and this 'forced route' through the site would not work. We also realised that the translation could not be a straightforward translation of one layer of text. As it was intended for a different audience with different requirements, it had to be re-written for translation. We then started to re-organise the material as we worked on the next three units and then re-organised further following our first round of feedback sessions.

What should it look like?

We were very excited about making the website look attractive. Our website designer, one of the RAGU team and a refugee herself, had lots of ideas and we started with a simple dramatic first page with a moving image that appeared once the programme had started. We soon realised though that this was not going to work. First of all, the image slowed down the computer considerably, an important consideration when many of our users would not be using the latest model of computer. Secondly, we understood (from our first consultation with a website expert and from looking at effective sites) that we needed to have everything that could be found on the site immediately available on the Home Page. Finally from our discussions with disability experts at the University and through increasing awareness of the implications of the DDA through the ASSET UK Equal Opportunities Steering Group, we realised that the moving image was a problem for accessibility. We therefore designed a different Home Page. We also removed another dynamic design feature that we had on the site. We continued to change and refine this page and the rest of the site until the end of the project, particularly bearing in mind accessibility issues and our knowledge that many of our users would not have up-to-date computers.

How should we get feedback to improve it?

From the beginning of the project we were keen to start getting feedback as soon as we had some material on the site so we started encouraging responses from the time the first unit was on-line. Once we had the first four units on-line, we started to arrange focus groups around the UK so that we could observe asylum seekers using the site and get feedback from them. We arranged a second round of focus groups once we had all units completed and had added the translated summaries in 8 community languages.

We also collected feedback from our ASSET UK partners, libraries, refugee organisations and refugee assisting agencies, ESOL teachers and managers, university staff (through the Higher Education for Refugees and Asylum seekers Network), advisers, managers of careers and employment services and from RAGU staff (advisers and trainers). We used this feedback to make substantial changes to the website in appearance, navigation and content and have continued to respond to feedback from our users throughout the project. Some of the material used to collect feedback from different groups of users is at Appendix C. A selection of comments received and two reports on focus groups is at Appendix D.

How did it develop through the project period?

The website developed through the project period in response to:

- Immediate impressions from a range of users, but particularly asylum seekers through focus groups
- Our observations from focus groups of how people were using the site
- Our increasing understanding of how verbal and visual information worked on a website of this kind
- Our increasing understanding of accessibility issues and the DDA through the ASSET UK partnership Equal Opportunities Task Group work and through our website designer's research and contacts with the Independent Learning Unit at London Metropolitan University and other IT specialist within the University
- Our developing understanding of the different requirements, and therefore content, of the translated summaries compared to the full units

We responded to each of these in the following ways:

Immediate impressions from a range of users, but particularly asylum seekers through focus groups: We usually started the focus groups with a brief exploration of the site and then asked the users to come back to us as a whole group and comment on their first impression, who they thought the site was for, what they thought about the way it looked, whether they could navigate it easily etc. One of the first things that emerged from this was that we had not made it clear enough that the website was especially for asylum seekers. We had too much text on the first page with too much information about ASSET UK. We changed this to a short simple text explaining who the website was for (principally asylum seekers) and what it could help them with (information about education and preparing for employment).

Our feedback from asylum seekers was generally very positive from the beginning about the appearance and the navigation of the site. The only consistent comment we had in the early stages was that the font we used was too small. We felt that this positive response was partly because they were so delighted to have a site specifically for them that they were unwilling to criticise! Other users (RAGU staff, ASSET UK partners, libraries, advisers and staff at refugee organisations, for example) had more critical comments. Apart from the size of font used, they also felt that sometimes the text was too long, that the level of English was not appropriate, the colours we used were 'depressing' and that it was 'old-fashioned' looking and not dynamic enough.

We responded to these comments by increasing the font size, simplifying and shortening the text (although we then revised this again following further comments) and re-designing the site using a much bolder Home Page and brighter colours throughout. We did not respond to the suggestion from libraries to introduce dynamic elements and more icons because of consideration for accessibility.

Our observations from focus groups of how people were using the site:

Before we started our first round of focus groups, we consulted the University about how they tested websites with users. We followed this up observing them in a feedback session with students. The method they used was to give the students questions and then ask the student to talk them through how they looked for the answers on the site. One person would record what the student said and the other would observe and record what the student did. While we decided that this was not an appropriate method for our focus groups, this was a useful insight and underlined the importance of observing our users finding the answers to their questions.

For the initial focus groups we had enough staff to be able to observe asylum seekers using the site, to talk to them while they were doing this and to note down how they were using it. This was particularly illuminating as we noticed that this varied according to individual personality type as well as according to familiarity with IT (sometimes connected with age). We observed two extremes with most somewhere between these two. Some users progressed carefully through every section in a systematic way, as if reading a book. They were unwilling to use links to other websites because they were worried that they would not be able to get back to the main site. They tended not to use menus or links at the top of the page. Others did not appear to read at all, but immediately started looking for FAQs or links that might be interesting and moved readily between units and between our site and linked sites. Unlike the first group, they frequently missed crucial information because they were moving so quickly between pages and did not read the introductory remarks about other websites or the initial overview information on the first page.

In response to these observations, we made several changes. We made sure that if the 'anxious methodical' user linked to another website or to a table on our site, it would always come up as a window with the background clearly visible so that users would not have to worry about leaving the site. We also made sure that links to other sites or further information were in the text as well as in side or top page menus. For the 'confident information surfing' user at the other extreme, we revised the first page of the topics in each unit to include more embedded links so that these users could access everything from the first page. We made sure that users were always aware of where they were and had a choice of means to go elsewhere on the site. We also repeated some of the essential information at different levels on the understanding that some people would have skipped to the more detailed pages without reading the first page.

Another change we made from our observations was to try to avoid confusion in the items on the side menu. For example there was a confusion between 'costs' and 'funding' in the Higher Education page that we re-worded to avoid confusion. We also simplified some of the statements we made on the first pages, even though this sometimes meant a slight over-simplification. This was because we realised that, as we were covering all of the UK and local practices were sometimes very different, we were using too many 'mays' and 'mights' for some of our statements to be useful. We tried as much as possible to change these to 'usually' or 'generally'.

Our increasing understanding of how verbal and visual information worked on a website of this kind: As we consulted more experts, read more, looked at examples of good effective websites and received feedback from users, we made more changes to our website. We simplified the images used and made the text much simpler. For the website designer and for the writers, at times this involved sacrificing style for simplicity and accessibility. We realised that text is not generally 'read' on a website as it would be in printed material and that the main interest in the reader is to get the information he/she requires in as short a time as possible. We also discovered that you have a very short time to engage your users. If they become frustrated by not finding what they want in the first minute of using the site, they will just log off. On the other hand if they find what they want and work their way through to the more detailed information on the site, they are willing to take much longer over it. One of our ASSET partners explained the '3 clicks principle' to us at our first transnational exchange visit with our Swedish partners: if the user has not found what they want in 3 clicks of the mouse, they will give up.

These insights and some examples of good effective text and examples of what to avoid led to extensive revisions in the text. However, there remained some tension between the amount of information we had, keeping the text short and simple enough and not having more than 3 clicks for the user. We tried to resolve this by putting enough information on the first page to satisfy the 'impatient' user with some FAQs at the end and then putting the more detailed information at 'lower' levels in the hope that by then the user would be interested enough to pursue it.

We tried to start with the conclusion on the first page of each topic on the menu if possible. This inverse pyramid style of writing works particularly well for websites as it allows even rapid browsers to get the main idea). We also started to use bold for the key information words. We had a mixed response to this from later focus groups but, because asylum seekers found it helpful, we have continued to do this.

Our increasing understanding of accessibility issues: These issues were discussed at ASSET UK partnership board meetings and we were also fortunate to have the manager of the Independent Learning Unit at our University who we could consult. As a result, we made changes to the colours we used and took out all the dynamic images. We made sure that the website was usable on low grade computers. We increased the font size and used larger images and text for each unit on the Home Page. We introduced a facility to enlarge the text size. Finally we tagged all visual items and made sure that the text was 'screen reader friendly'. We used a self-administered test to make sure it was accessible.

Our developing understanding of the different requirements of the translated summaries compared to the full units: Initially we wanted to translate the first 'layer' of information for all units. We started to write the text

with this in mind, keeping the first page of each item on the menu very simple and general. We soon realised that this was distorting the text and also that the needs of those reading the translated summaries would be different and would require different specially written texts. Once we had completed the first 4 units, we wrote summaries of each one for translation.

We started with the principle that most of the asylum seekers using the translated summaries would be doing so either because they did not have the English level needed to access the whole site or because they had the English but wanted a quick summary. We decided to aim the translations mainly at the first group. This had immediate implications for the length of the summaries. We decided that the 3 most important units for these users were 'Improve your English', 'Understand the UK education system' and 'Volunteering and Preparing for Employment'. We summarised the other units very briefly, making it clear in the 'Re-qualification' and 'Get into Higher Education' sections, for example, that if the person's English was at a level that made it impossible for them to read the English on the website, they were not at an appropriate level to start considering these options. We then just gave a simple overview and referred them back to the 'Improve your English' summary.

For the 'Improve your English' summary we concentrated mainly on 'Other ways of improving your English' as we thought this was the more interesting part for them and could really accelerate their language learning. For the 'Volunteering and Preparing for Employment' summary, we concentrated on the volunteering, making it clear that volunteering can offer good opportunities to improve English and also that there are options within in the refugee community organisations to use their own language while also working on improving English. The texts for all of these summaries use material from the website but are substantially different.

What did we learn?

This was a huge learning experience for us. We were pleased to hear from a website expert early in the project that it is important to keep websites flexible, continually consult users and change it accordingly. We made radical changes through the project period and, if we are able to continue with the website, we would expect to be changing it still more following new demands and further feedback. We were very lucky to have three people on the staff at RAGU working on the project. This meant that we could respond continually to feedback, making changes as we received suggestions for improvement. We could also afford to try out new approaches, test them and change again if they didn't work. This flexible, responsive method worked until the very end of the project.

We now realise how much we learned through working on this site. The following summarises some of the lessons we learned and may benefit those who are inexperienced and starting a new website.

Don't be too ambitious – limit yourself: We were very ambitious and unrealistic about what we wanted to put on the website. Our interviews in Birmingham early in the project confirmed that there was a need for information about local provision especially for ESOL and initial support and advice. We started off trying to provide full information for the cities and towns in the UK with large asylum seeker populations. We gathered information about refugee community organisations, private schools and colleges. We underestimated the difficulty of collecting and updating the information. It was especially difficult with community provision.

We finally decided to restrict the number of towns/cities (according to asylum seeker population numbers) and then to provide one initial point of contact wherever possible. Ideally this was a contact point where they could assist the asylum seeker to find a suitable ESOL course that was convenient and appropriate. Some had databases or directories of all courses in the area and could provide impartial advice on which would be best. Some could accompany the asylum seeker to enrol. If this was not possible (in the Manchester area for example) we included colleges suggested by other organisations in the area. The list is not comprehensive and it does not cover all regions of the UK. We have nothing for the South West of England, for example, due to relatively low numbers of asylum seekers. However, we felt that we had provided solid local links (and maps) for most of the main centres where an asylum seeker could go.

The time spent and the difficulty of updating this list (after one year) led us to the conclusion that we had to be circumspect about any local information we included and we needed to be sure that it was not easily accessible elsewhere on the Internet or in hard copy. We also decided at the end of the project to put a form on to the local information page so that anyone who wants to add details can do so according to our template. This was partly in response to the disappointment people felt if their local area was not included or if their institution was not there.

Similarly our idea of having an on-line advice facility was too ambitious. In fact, any enquires tended to come to us through the 'Contact us' button rather than the 'Any questions for an adviser?' button, mainly because we asked anyone with questions for an adviser to fill a form in and we found that, as we had expected, asylum seekers were reluctant to do this. If we had received many requests for on-line advice, this would have been much more complex than we had anticipated. We realised through the project that parameters for this kind of facility have to be very clearly set from the beginning.

When we designed the second website for the project (www.heran.org.uk), we were much more realistic about what we could do. As a result, this website has been much easier to maintain.

Test constantly but decide who your main audience is: Initially we were trying to respond to all critical feedback. However, as the project progressed we found that we were getting contradictory feedback. Once we realised that this was from different groups, we felt much more confident in responding to it. We found that librarians and advisers were commenting that the site was not visual or exciting enough. They wanted a more interesting, interactive, dynamic site. They also said that much of the information was obvious and they didn't need to know it. The asylum seekers and refugees, on the other hand, did not want a more visually exciting site. Their priority was to find what they wanted easily. They also wanted explanations about the system in the UK (such as what goes on in school assembly or what volunteering means) and we tried to comply with this.

Keep a balance: Sometimes, even the requirements of our main audience seemed contradictory. For example, they wanted accurate information but they also wanted us to say clearly what they could do and not do. In many cases, this was not straightforward and we suggested asking locally. Our feedback showed that this was very frustrating for users and they asked us to help them by making clearer statements. To comply with this, we tried to use generalisations so that they would have an idea about what would generally happen, but we continued to reiterate the need to check locally.

We found that we were continually having to balance the need for clarity and simplicity and accurate explanations of the situations in various parts of the UK in all its complexity. We also had to balance the tone. We wanted to be positive but also realistic. We had to acknowledge the difficulty asylum seekers have in accessing provision and progressing within the system because of their immigration status.

We tried to maintain this balance through putting ourselves in the position of asylum seekers looking for information and wanting some friendly guidance.

Build in any additional needs (for example translation) into the original plan: We decided that we needed to provide translated summaries but, because we had not included this in the original plan, we had to do this as part of the second stage of the project. This took much longer and was more complex than we had anticipated. However, the feedback has been extremely

enthusiastic about these translations. It would have been good to have had these available right from the beginning.

When planning, take account of the time you will need for updating, re-writing and re-designing: We hugely underestimated the time it would take to do this. Updating is constant. A decision to change the text can also involve many days' work. We decided to make the text shorter at one stage (following feedback) and then decided to make it longer again so that we could have all essential information on the first page and put it more embedded links (following more feedback and observations of how people were using the site). We had already completed 5 units when we made the second change and this involved extensive re-writing.

Make it useful and accessible: In the end we decided that everything else was secondary. We spent a lot of time through the project trying to ensure that even people who had hardly used a computer could navigate easily and find the information they were looking for and understand it. This often meant sacrificing ideas about what would look good and what would sound good. We also kept asking ourselves whether the information was useful and necessary. If there was already a good accessible website with the information there, we preferred to link to that.

How can it be used?

Asylum seekers are using the website to get information and answers to their questions, to improve their English, to make links, to research options and plan for their futures. In the final phase of the project, we asked advisers, librarians, resource centre staff and ESOL teachers how they might use it. They suggested the following (in approximate order of importance):

- To give clients the website address so that they could access it themselves (frontline staff were keen to do this, especially if they felt unable to answer the questions the asylum seekers had)
- To demonstrate how to use it and then use it with the asylum seekers to answer questions and find information
- To use it in ESOL/IT classes (We devised a few short exercises that could be used in this kind of class. These would need to be further developed by ESOL teachers and made more interactive and visually attractive (see an example of one unit at Appendix E).
- To ask clients to use it before the first interview or between interviews so that they could explore some of their options and get some background information and then come with focused questions/issues to discuss with the adviser (We are currently trying this approach at RAGU with some clients with 3 guided website sessions sandwiched by an advice session at either end.)
- To download funding information for themselves and clients

Conclusion

Access to IT has increased over the project period. Early comments from asylum seekers about preferring other forms of information may still apply for some users, but the advantages of on-line information seem better recognised and people have become more accustomed to using the Internet. Ideally it is best to have information in both printed form and on-line. Our summarised information in English and 8 community languages have partly addressed this, but we would still like to do more. For our work with asylum seekers in the next round of Equal, as part of an orientation course, we will be producing more substantial orientation booklets to supplement and add to the information available on the website.

APPENDIX A

Results of one-to-one interviews

Birmingham, 9th October 2002

We carried out half-hour 1-1 interviews with asylum seekers who were attending the drop-in sessions at the Midland Refugee Council. Most spoke adequate English for the interview purpose but one had restricted English, making full replies impossible. Another interview was carried out in French. The clients were from Somalia, Burundi, Congo and Iran.

We wanted to focus on how and where they found information and what form it took. We also wanted to know how they would like to receive information and whether they would use on-line information.

The questions were as follows:

Before arrival in the UK

1. What did you know about the UK education, training and employment situation before you came here?
2. Where did you get your information?

After arrival in the UK

1. Where do you go to find information on education, training and employment?
(MRC, Colleges, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Job Centres, Action Teams, Libraries)
2. What difficulties do you have in getting information?
3. What form does the information take?
(booklets, Action Plans, spoken, on community radio – in your own language? In English?)
Could you understand it? Was it enough? Too much? At the right time?
4. Could you use it?
How did you use it?

In the future.....

1. Are there still things you feel you need to know but you don't know?
What are they?
2. In what form would you like to receive this information?
3. Do you have access to the Internet?

The results are summarised as follows:

Before arrival in UK: Few had any information about UK education, training and the employment situation. The information they had was from friends/contacts and was impressionistic 'jobs were difficult to get', 'the education system is better than in Africa'. One person had specific information about his professional field and had contacted the professional body before arrival.

After arrival in UK: When they first arrived, some received basic information through Refugees Arrivals Project (RAP) at Heathrow. Others were told that they would receive information once they arrived in the dispersal area. The first information most received was the Refugee Council booklet in their own language, although some had never seen this. They found it very useful as an introduction. Other sources of information were: friends, other refugees, Midland Refugee Council, CABs, Job Centre, Action Teams, contacts made through previous employment/education in country of origin, ESOL teachers at college, libraries and Internet.

Generally it was 'very difficult' to get information, although two people said they had experienced 'no difficulty'. Several commented that the main problem is 'you don't know where to get information'. Also even if they had addresses, they did not know the city well enough to find the places. Most suggested that maps and clear directions with bus routes etc. would be very helpful. Most emphasised the need for clear, simple instructions about how to access information.

Asked about whether the information they received was enough for their needs, they all agreed that it was not. They all felt that they needed more person-to-person advice and that just written information was not enough. They said that asylum seekers do not feel confident to use telephones, written information or computers without guidance and they need to have their questions answered. They also needed more specialist advice and information (e.g. on professional re-qualification, funding for HE). They also emphasised that they want to be able to find out about their specific situation, rather than lots of general information.

The form of the information they received was booklets, leaflets, reference books from libraries, Internet pages and spoken advice/suggestions. One interviewee had received help from a Burundi refugee community organisation. The others said that there were no refugee community organisations to offer help. The main source of information and support was the Midland Refugee Council. This was the main place they received one-to-one advice and support from staff and fellow asylum seekers.

Although the majority could use the Internet and had access to it through libraries, they felt that they would also like the information in hard copy or to have a booklet as well as the on-line information. Several people said they would have to pay to print pages. Others said they could do this for free.

Useful suggestions about making the on-line information user-friendly were:

- Distribute postcards with the website address on with VERY CLEAR instructions about how to get onto website – needs to be widely disseminated
- Make instructions about how to use the on-line information very clear and explicit, bearing in mind that some asylum seekers will not be familiar with IT
- Need to be able to find everything very easily – first page should be very simple -use simple categories and then break into sub-categories
- Should be interactive with facility for asking questions
- Need information about referral organisations – locally and nationally

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire on learning English

As part of the EQUAL project we are producing a website for newly arrived asylum seekers. Currently, we are writing information to help asylum seekers improve their English.

I would be very grateful if you would take 10 – 15 minutes to complete this questionnaire. The information you provide will be used to help us to write the information for the website, which will hopefully be accessed by many asylum seekers and refugees in the regions and London.

This questionnaire is designed to give us information about the ways in which asylum seekers and refugees can learn English **apart from going to classes**.

1. When you first arrived in the UK, what did you do (apart from enrol in a class) to try to improve your English?

2. Where did you go for information and/or materials, which would help you, improve your English?

3. Was there anything that you did (apart from enrol in a class) which really helped you to learn English after you first arrived, for example listening to the radio, reading newspapers, etc

4. What actions or activities in particular, improved your

Reading skills

Writing skills

Listening skills

Speaking skills

5. Is there any particular advice that you could give to newly arrived asylum seekers to help them improve their English?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your views and advice are valued by the EQUAL project team.

APPENDIX C

MATERIAL USED TO COLLECT FEEDBACK

Example 1

Questions for 1-1 discussion in focus groups

1) What information were you looking for?

Did you find it? (If not, why not? Not included? Not on list at right? Too hidden?)

Check it together and write down feedback from user.

If you found it, was it easy to find? (If not, why not?)

Check it together and write down feedback from user.

2) Could you understand the information?

If not, why not? (Use of language? Terms used? Cultural assumptions?)

Was there enough information/too much/too little? (explain)

Check it together and write down feedback from user.

3) Did you use any of the links (internal and external)?

Did they work? Could you get back to where you were before?

Check it together and write down feedback from user.

4) What do you think of the way it looks? (colours, arrangement of pages, images)

5) Would you use it again? Recommend it to friends?

6) Can you make any suggestions to help us improve this site?

Example 2

Unit 1 - Improve your English

Use the website to try and answer the questions below. When you think you have found the answer please tell the member of RAGU staff with you so they can see what page of the website you are looking at. They are not there to help you but to see how you use the site. Please try as hard as you can to find the answers. If you cannot find them – don't worry! This is not a test. We just want to see how easily you can use the website to find the information you might need.

We would like to ask for your opinion of the website after you have answered the questions. Please tell us what you think is good and bad about the website. This feedback will help us to improve it for other users.

Use the first unit on the website, Unit 1 - Improve your English, to answer the questions below:

- 1) What types of places can you study English at?**

- 2) Where could you go to find out about ESOL in your city?**

- 3) Write down 3 things that you can do at your local library**

- 4) If you are interested in volunteering where could you go to find out more information?**

- 5) What type of news do broadsheet newspapers have more about?**

- 6) If you watch a 'soap opera' or drama on television how might the English be different to that you learn in the classroom?**

- 7) Who can you get advice from on choosing the right course?**

- 8) If you need help with childcare, which website could you use to find out more?**

- 9) If you are unhappy when you are on an ESOL course, which 2 people could you talk to?**

10)Where could you do a GCSE English course online?

Unit 1 - Improve your English Answers

1) What types of places can you study English at?

Improve your English > Where can I take it?

College, Adult Education Centre, Refugee org, Private language school

2) Where could you go to find out about ESOL provision in your city?

Improve your English > How can I find it?

Use select your city box

3) Write down 3 things that you can do at your local library

Improve your English > Use your local library

Any 3 from the list of bullet points

4) If you are interested in volunteering where could you go to find out more information?

Improve your English > Volunteer > More information about volunteering

Local volunteer bureau or centre

5) What type of news do broadsheet newspapers have more about?

Improve your English > Read > More information

Politics and economics

6) If you watch a 'soap opera' or drama on television how might the English be different to that you learn in the classroom?

Improve your English > Watch TV > More information

Faster. Have different accents

7) Who can you get advice from on choosing the right course?

Improve your English > Choosing a course > Questions and more

Question 10 from list. From RCOs or Student Services at the college

8) If you need help with childcare, which website could you use to find out more?

Improve your English > Costs? > More info about costs > Childcare

www.childcarelink.gov.uk

9) If you are unhappy when you are on an ESOL course, which 2 people could you talk to?

Improve your English > What can I expect? More info about controlling your own learning? > More info about sorting out problems?

Tutor, Student Services or ESOL Course Leader

10) Where could you do a GCSE English course online?

Improve your English > Online resources > More info about using online and self-study resources? > Other resources for learning English online >

Specialist / Advanced

Sheffield College

Example 3

First impressions

1. Who is it for?
2. What kind of information is on it?
3. Can you get any local information?
4. Can you link to other websites?
5. Can you get advice and ask questions? If so, how do you do this?
6. Who is responsible for producing this material?
7. What is ASSET UK?
8. How does it look? Home Page? Units? Colours? Text? Moving around?
9. How do you know when you change units?
10. How does it compare to other sites you have used?
11. Things you like/dislike about it?

APPENDIX D

Examples of feedback received in focus groups with asylum seekers – the first at the beginning and the second towards the end of the project – each focused on one unit. Following this there are some comments from trainers and advisers.

Example 1

Feedback from focus groups of asylum seekers – Unit 4 Improve your English

London 30th October 2003

List of people attending attached. Level of English was intermediate and above.

Main areas of comment:

Registration forms: Only one person said she would definitely fill this in. From looking at it quickly no one was clear what the benefits of filling it in were. All agreed that for their level of English, it was easy to fill in, but one person commented that it might be difficult for someone with more limited English and that they would not be able to fill it in on their own. A more serious concern was the purpose of the form. They asked why we needed it, who it was for, who would see their details. The explanation of this on-line was not considered adequate – they were still worried about confidentiality issues. Once they understood that they could have access to all the material without registering, they said they would not register.

Access: They were very pleased that they could access on-line resources and courses that were free through the links on this site.

Understanding the purpose of the site: Because it is currently possible to enter the first unit directly without reading any introductory material, some people were unclear about the purpose of the site. They thought it was ESOL teaching material or information about courses that RAGU was offering. Once they read more, they understood but this might be misleading – we need to ‘force’ users through the first introductory page.

Technical problems: Links to websites need to be re-checked.

Navigation: Easy to use – no problems

Level of English: Easy to understand

Translations: Point made that many asylum seekers don’t have enough English to benefit from this – needs to be translated. We explained that we had the funding for this.

Example 2

Feedback from focus groups of asylum seekers – Unit 5 ‘Volunteering and Preparing for Employment

Sheffield, 22 March 2005

Knowledge about volunteering

Some of the participants had been involved in volunteering in the UK and one in their country of origin. Others had no experience of volunteering, but most were interested in finding out more.

Some questions that the group had about volunteering included:

- What is expected from volunteers in the UK?
- Can I get a qualification after volunteering?
- Can I get help with travel to my volunteering?
- If I volunteer can I get a job there later on?
- I think that asylum seekers cannot do paid or unpaid work, so how can they volunteer?
- Now that I am working part-time, can I volunteer or not?

Observations as the participants looked at the website (Unit 5)

In the first group they all read the first page and then clicked on ‘Can I volunteer?’ Some went down the menu in order.

The questions in the menu (Unit 5) were confusing for one person who did not immediately realise that they were links to further information.

1 person was using a pocket dictionary to check words as he went through the site.

3 participants with refugee status started on pages about preparing for employment.

In the second group, one participant had already started looking at the website, as participants in the first group had given him the address during the lunch break.

Feedback about Unit 5

“I found that it is useful because there are so many people who don’t know if they can volunteer. If they use the website they would find out they can do these things.”

“You need time to understand (the information), but I can use a dictionary if I need to check things.”

“The time of volunteering is not clear. Weekly hours etc. For example I am a family man and I need to know if I can volunteer and look after my family.”

“I already found the answer to my question.”

“I like the preparation for employment (section) as I now have permission to work. It is helpful for me to read.”

“The information about communication skills is very helpful.”

“I know more about volunteering now.”

“I can understand some (of the information) but it is still difficult for me to understand.”

Feedback about the translated summaries

Languages looked at: Arabic, French and Tigrinya

One participant was a French speaker, but had a particular dialect, so that he could not understand all of the translation, but he said that the information was still useful to him.

Other French speakers thought that there was no problem with the translation. Similar positive feedback was received for both the Arabic and Tigrinya.

Several people said that the summaries should also be available in English. Plans are to add these to the site as soon as the PDFs are ready.

Languages of the participants that we do not currently offer as translations include Dari, Portuguese and Bengali.

Observation of the participants as they used the rest of the website

In the first group 3 stayed reading the translations and 2 looked at Unit 2 (Education System) for information about their children's education.

The 'back to top' link needs to be in the text as well as the arrow, as several people clicked on the text and it did not do what they were expecting.

Useful quotes from feedback forms (given at end of the session)

“I love the website. It was interesting.”

“I will use it again and recommend it to my friends, because it was very easy to read.”

“I learned something today. Many people in asylum didn’t know that they can do any voluntary work or they can study before they get their permission to stay in the UK.”

“It is very good, especially translated by own language that is easy to understand, because most people don’t understand English language.”

“Of course it is very important for us, so I give this website to my friends.”

“I can use it again and I recommend it to my friends.”

“I like to talk about it to my friends.”

“If you can include all information from Home Office about asylum seekers. Many asylum seekers do not know about law in the UK.”

“It is a good idea, by website you can find out more information. What you want to know or what you are going to do.”

“The website is a good idea because it makes it easy for people to get the information they want.”

Other feedback from focus groups with asylum seekers

“My favourite thing is the range of information available.” – Asylum seeker, Sunderland

“The information is better for us (asylum seekers) as it is true information, specific information.” - Asylum seeker, Washington

“It is very simple to get the information we need, to improve ourselves as asylum seekers.” – Asylum seeker, Middlesbrough

“It is not a boring website. If you are interested to find out more there is a product for you.” – Asylum seeker, Middlesbrough

“Would be good to have information on where to find legal help as an asylum seeker.” - Asylum seeker, Sunderland

“The link to where to find courses means that I can find a course to do locally.” - Asylum seeker, Sunderland

Feedback from advisers and trainers

“The site is extremely useful for advisers, who could use the site themselves or ask the client to do research.” – Adviser, London

“As an initial guidance tool, this website is very useful and I will be promoting it to the students on our courses, especially as part of their IT training.” – Training provider, Liverpool

APPENDIX E

Questions for ESOL classes

Unit 1

Look at Unit 1 to see what kind of information is there. Then see if you can use the information and website links in this unit to find the answers to any of the questions below that interest you.

1. What further information would you want if you have several ESOL courses to choose from and you have to decide which would be best for you?
2. How can you find out what ESOL courses there are in Birmingham? Do you see one that looks good for you? Why?
3. What usually happens when you go to enrol on an ESOL course?
4. Have you tried any of the suggestions for improving your English by watching TV? Which ideas have worked for you? Why?

5. Choose 2 items you could take with you as proof of identity if you want to join your local library.

6. What would you like to use your library for? How could you find out if this is possible?

7. If you do not have a computer at home, is there somewhere nearby that you could go to use a computer to study ESOL on-line?

8. Which of the 'General English' websites do you think would be best for you? Why?