

Welcome to the 2nd edition of the ASSET UK newsletter. This edition features articles on equal opportunities and empowerment, a basic literacy course run jointly by LLU+ (formerly the London Language and Literacy Unit) and Sheffield College and an article on ETG5 - Equal European Thematic Group for Asylum Seekers and updates from other partners.

'Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners' Course at 'The Sheffield College', October/November 2003: a collaboration between The Sheffield College and the LLU+.

In the last newsletter the LLU+ reported on the recent validation of the 'Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners' course as a London South Bank University accredited course. This course, which aims to fill an identified gap in ESOL teacher training, has been offered under ASSET to teachers of asylum seekers in order to improve the learning experience of asylum seekers who have basic literacy needs.

In October/November 2003, as part of the ASSET project, Fadila Taylor, Fatma Alioua and Clare Keen from The Sheffield College, and Pauline Moon from the LLU+ delivered the LLU+ course 'Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners' to lecturers at The Sheffield College. To prepare for delivering this training, Fadila, Fatma and Clare attended the same course at REEP¹ in Sheffield, in June 2003; this course was also run as part of the ASSET project by Helen Sunderland and Pauline Moon from the LLU+. The Sheffield College staff now have plans to cascade training on teaching basic literacy to other college staff.

This article reports on the evaluations and plans of course participants and trainers following the recently run course at The Sheffield College.

Lecturers at The Sheffield College acknowledged a need for a course focussing on teaching basic literacy. Prior to the course, as one lecturer noted, "we had to find and develop our own techniques, materials and styles". Participants welcomed the opportunity to gain a qualification in teaching basic literacy, which they felt was long overdue.

Participants reported that "sharing experience with other colleagues was very rewarding" and "the course gave us an insight on how others worked with their ESOL students". Wai Yee, a course participant said: "It is very interesting to be able to work as a team and have fun in doing all the activities and this has enabled to get to know each other better".

In addition to the end of course evaluation, participants evaluated the course for this article: "the delivery of the course was well planned and well prepared" and "the aims and objectives of each session were very clear". It was noted that the course "was geared towards individual learners' needs", and "was really useful and practical", that they "learnt a lot" and it "gave us confidence in what we were already doing in isolation". Some participants felt that "the most useful thing was learning styles and diagnostic assessments". Messaouda Hadjij, a course

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participant said: "I have found the course very useful, focussed and well planned. The practical activities were particularly welcomed".

Fatma Alioua, one of the Sheffield College trainers noted: "We would like to thank REEP for giving us the opportunity to participate in a training programme² run by the LLU. We were invited to attend the course with the aim of cascading it to the staff across the college. This has proven a very successful project in that it has been very productive in supporting and empowering our staff to improve their teaching skills and update their resources. Hopefully the delivery of the course is not the end of the process as we are planning to further support our staff in implementing what they have learnt, to create opportunities for us to share good practice and strengthen a cohesive approach to teaching literacy to ESOL learners across the college".

Fadila Taylor, a Sheffield College trainer noted: "This has been a much-needed and extremely valuable training. What I have valued most from the training is that my staff have become more aware of the reading and writing sub skills which underpin the processes of learning to read and write. They have also enjoyed the various ways of using the language experience approach. This process has equipped my team with the ability to make teaching materials and organise language activities which specifically improve ESOL learners' literacy skills".

Clare Keen, welcomed the opportunity to become a trainer on the course as she considered the course to be "a long-awaited and much-needed training for us". She said: "The course was really appreciated by College staff and we now intend to follow it through, seeking feedback on classroom practice and holding materials workshops throughout the year. Not only that, we hope in the New Year to start training a new cohort of staff and keep the process rolling".

Pauline Moon, from the LLU+, a trainer on both the Sheffield courses, said: "throughout the Sheffield College course, and particularly during the last session, there was a lot of discussion about how to take forward the work of teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners. This enthusiasm and commitment was demonstrated when, as a first step, the trainers and participants from the college decided to meet in the week following the course to take the work forward".

The course trainers, from the college and the LLU+, are planning to carry out a further evaluation of the course in the spring of 2004 to investigate what impact the course participants think that the training has had on their teaching and on learners in their classes.

¹ The Refugee Education and Employment Project

² Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners

Pauline Moon, LLU+ and staff from Sheffield College

Equal opportunities and empowerment

TES has continued its regional development with the EQUAL ASSET UK project. We now have 2 classes running for a group of asylum seekers from Sudan and some 1-1 sessions running at a local emergency accommodation centre, just outside Birmingham City Centre. These classes, and in particular the 1-1 sessions show how TES ensures equal opportunities and how we have helped to empower learners, community organisations and volunteer ESOL tutors.

The Sudanese asylum seeker learners have all arrived in the UK within the last six months and are part of a refugee community organisation called Windows for Sudan. The learners are all Entry 1 level, and have very pressing, everyday English language needs. We are developing a learning programme which addresses these needs and in doing so we are empowering this group of learners so they are equipped with the English they

require in order to function in everyday situations. We are also empowering Windows for Sudan as a refugee community organisation by providing them with qualified ESOL tutors and a learning programme that they can offer to their community members.

The learners in the emergency accommodation centre have equally been empowered through their English language learning. Many asylum seekers are part of further education college ESOL programmes, but still find they are not receiving enough English on a weekly basis. By going out to the centres and delivering ESOL there, we are providing asylum seekers with an opportunity to further develop their English language skills, without having the concern of travel expenses. It also allows learners to access English provision who otherwise would not have done. For example, one of our learners has a 2-month old baby, and could not access local ESOL classes at all due to the issue over childcare. We are providing her with a 1-1 ESOL session with a female tutor at times which suit her and which take into account her and her young baby's needs. She has told us how she has taken her child to the doctors but the doctor would not see her without an interpreter, and she feels that she lacks the confidence and language skills in order to communicate with a doctor anyway. In response to this, the tutor is focussing on her conversation skills in situations that she experiences on a daily basis.

It has been very encouraging to see this sort of empowerment taking place, and to be meeting the specific needs of asylum seeker learners. We also have some new volunteer tutors on the team, 2 of who are newly qualified in the field of English language teaching. It has been very satisfying to provide them with teaching opportunities which directly benefit asylum seekers, and which give them the experience of working with these people in their own surroundings, meeting their individual learning needs.

Katie Evans, Regional ESOL Co-ordinator, TES, Refugee Council

European Thematic Group for Asylum Seekers Second ETG5 Event - Education, Training and Advice - Haarlem Netherlands 18 -20 November 2003

Three Asset UK partners, NICEM, NIACE and RAGU had the opportunity to attend the above conference, which focused on Education, Training and Advice.

RAGU

RAGU is producing on-line information and orientation units for asylum seekers. They hope this will be a useful resource, especially for isolated asylum seekers in the regions who may not have access to specialist advice. RAGU have completed the first unit on 'Improving your English' (www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/asset) and are now working on the second, focusing on access to further and higher education, the APEL process, preparation for employment, volunteering and professional requalification. Users can e-mail advisers with specific questions if they register. Once RAGU have completed the third of six units, they will be going to the regions to hold focus groups to see how asylum seekers are using the material.

The on-line information is a simple way for asylum seekers to get basic information about education, training and employment in the UK, also providing the resources for them to be able to do more detailed research. The language used is simple and the 'voice' is that of an adviser speaking to a client. The information should also be useful for advisers, and RAGU hope that ESOL staff and any reception staff working with asylum seekers will find it a useful resource and be able to support asylum seekers in using it.

RAGU will train some asylum seekers who are working in refugee community organisations so that they can support other asylum seekers in their communities to use these resources. RAGU will also translate the basic information into several community languages.

RAGU's experience is that it is crucial that asylum seekers receive the right information at the right time. Many of our clients tell us that they had very little information when they first arrived in the UK and did not know where to start. The advantage of this resource is that people can visit and re-visit and take in the level of information they need at the time. As it is on-line, it can be updated regularly (crucial when legislation changes so frequently) and even changed quite radically according to feedback.

Unit 1 has been relatively easy to design and seems to work. A big problem has been the databases - the difficulty of getting responses and then needing to update continuously. Local politics and making decisions about what to include are also problems.

With hindsight, RAGU needed much more time to prepare the first unit.

RAGU are collecting their information on specialist provision in the regions through the on-line orientation and information and also through their training sessions for advisers in the regions and their university network for those working with asylum seekers. Through the network, RAGU are collecting case studies and examples of training programmes / information material that have worked well. Through transnational activities, RAGU have been able to benefit from the expertise of partners in producing on-line material and partners' experience in preparing clients for work, working with employers and APEL. This will inform future units of RAGU's on-line resources.

The benefits of skills audits

To date some 300 audits of asylum seekers' skills have been undertaken. The target is to undertake 850 skills audits by the end of Action 2. 80% of beneficiaries then move on to a variety of placements, including education and training, volunteering and work orientation activities. The beneficiaries are advised about options open to them for particular careers, and the training and qualifications necessary. Learning and volunteering opportunities are tailor-made for individual beneficiaries and relate to their interests and aspirations. The benefits of the activities to the asylum seekers include the development of self-confidence, experience and knowledge of the UK labour market, in order to achieve integration and orientation opportunities. The benefits from this process to voluntary sector organisations and employers are that they are able to experience positive features of working with asylum seekers and are provided with information on the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers in the UK.

To date the project has received considerable positive publicity which is illustrated by an increased interest by public sector organisations such as police forces, health authorities, local authorities and education and training providers in the region, and their recognition that asylum seekers can make a contribution to UK society. As a result of identifying asylum seekers' skills NIACE is facilitating the development of interest/occupations groups, such as a group of asylum seeker civil engineers who were recently shown the reconstruction of a bridge by Leicester City Council. The strengths of the project include the provision of an evidence base which illustrates the skills, qualifications and motivation of asylum seekers.

NIACE are collecting considerable amounts of information, statistics and case studies, and testing a variety of approaches in their work. The transnational opportunities provided by EQUAL have enabled us to compare NIACE practice with those of other organisations who are working in the field of skills audits.

Equal European Thematic Group for Asylum Seekers - ETG5

The EQUAL Thematic Groups bring together elements of EQUAL transnational activity to facilitate EU level mainstreaming. The Asylum Seekers Theme within EQUAL has specific characteristics. Firstly, it is closely linked to the EU policy on a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) being taken forward by DG Justice and Home Affairs, a policy area which goes beyond Employment and Social Affairs. Secondly, activities within the Theme address a diverse target group living within changing policy and legislative contexts that vary markedly between Member States.

There are also four other ETGs that may relate to refugees, bringing together DPs along the following the themes:

1. Employability
2. Entrepreneurship
3. Adaptability
4. Equal Opportunities

The European Thematic Group established for the Asylum Seekers Theme (ETG5) aims to play a role in the identification and dissemination of good practice and policy lessons that may help asylum seekers to integrate. The lessons deriving from these EQUAL activities will be used to promote horizontal mainstreaming (sharing good practice between geographic, sectoral or political contexts) and vertical mainstreaming (informing policy developments within the EU).

The three priority areas of ETG5 work are:

- Education, training and advice (covering issues related to training for integration and reintegration, language and cultural training and motivation)
- Employment (including employer relations and working conditions, & their recognition of the skills and qualifications of asylum seekers)
- Capacity building (including interface with the local community, influencing systems of 'service providers', and empowerment)

In order to achieve its aims, the ETG5 has developed a work programme that includes:

- The organisation of events for practitioners. The first of these was a workshop on 'Effective trans-national cooperation' held in June 2003 in Brussels. ASSET UK was represented by the Refugee Council and RAGU. A second one took place in the Netherlands [Haarlem, November 18-20 2003] looking at promising practices in Advice, Education and Training, together with a working group on skills audits. ASSET UK was represented at these by the Refugee Council, NIACE and NICEM.
- Other practical events are foreseen on making EQUAL links with the New Member States, & on Capacity Building (March 2004) and Engaging Employers (provisionally November 2004)
- A larger event to show-case the good practices within the Theme to influence policy-makers is foreseen in Dublin in March-April 2004.
- The creation of working groups to develop some of the priority areas: currently there is one active on Skills Audits. Additionally some development partnerships are involved in working groups planning the various ETG5 events and activities.
- Research and other dissemination activities.

The European Commission can give more information by email: empl-equal-etg5@cec.eu.int, or look at their website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/index-en.html and then proceed to EU Thematic Groups then 5. Asylum Seekers

The British Refugee Council through David Hudson represents ECRE on the steering group of ETG5. The steering group includes the Commission [DG Employment and Social Affairs , DG Justice and Home Affairs], and representatives of the Dutch and Swedish governments.

Please contact david.hudson@refugeecouncil.org.uk about this or ring 020 7820 3106.

David Hudson, EIP Manager, Refugee Council

News from other Partners

BSA: The CD Rom on Citizenship has been commissioned in partnership with the BBC. The mini-website is due to go live in December and will be used to share and pilot materials. Feedback is welcomed from partners. The researcher appointed has been working on the project since mid-October and is producing summaries on policy and good practice in ESOL provision relevant to asylum seekers for the Basic Skills Agency Observatory website. BSA are working with Peterborough College and producing materials on Construction. The Welsh organisation have opted out of the project. BSA is now working with Cardiff LEA to develop ESOL programmes for parents with pre-school children modelled on the Language and Play programme and on an Introduction to the British School system for asylum seeker parents, modelled on the Keeping up with the Children programme. This will include input on job-seeking skills with a focus on the Care Sector. BSA would also like to include the development of a bridging course for 16/17- year-olds.

Sheffield College: Andrew Oatridge is the new contact for the ASSET UK project at Sheffield College. The new IELTS course is established and running and the programme of Professional Development for the college's ESOL tutors has continued with a training course delivery by LLU+ in collaboration with College trainers. Sheffield College will be piloting a Citizenship course which will be developed over Christmas.

Equal ASSET UK events - Spring 2004

Empowering Asylum Seekers to Support the Regional Economy and Local Communities

Tuesday, 2 March 2004 - Bristol

Friday, 5 March 2004 - Newcastle

Tuesday, 9 March 2004 - Peterborough

Tuesday, 27 April 2004 - Ashford

For further details contact Gurjit Kaur, NIACE on 0116 204 33

Do not hesitate to contact us for more information on the work of the ASSET UK Project

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Future events

- ☐ Equal 'Working for Equality and Diversity' Conference on 30 March 2004 at Commonwealth Institute, London
- ☐ 31 March - 2 April, 2004 (Ireland) Equal Showcase Event