

Refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants

**Steps on the education and
employment progression journey**

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INTRODUCTION

Steps on the education and employment progression journey

Experiences of education and employment: Agymah's story

Agymah came to the UK in 2002 from Eritrea. He had an MSC in Hydraulic Structures from Ethiopia and eight years' work experience with the Ministry of Natural Resources and a US company in Ethiopia and Eritrea. He arrived in London, but was dispersed to the North East. Once his refugee status was confirmed he moved back to London to be with friends. His story is typical of many of the refugees and asylum-seekers we spoke to during the research. It paints a complex picture of interwoven issues and challenges which we will pick up and explore further in the following chapters.

I had higher qualifications when I came here and my expectation was that my qualifications were fine... my Ethiopian qualifications, and that I'd get a job in my profession. So I didn't really consider higher-level qualifications like Masters or Bachelor degrees. I tried to enhance my education and what I lacked in terms of taking communication aspects and English courses. To enhance my engineering I did an 'autocad' course, a computer aided design course which is used in engineering drawings. Apart from this I haven't really done much education. I did an IELTS course. It was very useful. I also did an 'accelerate to work' course. It's mainly a numeracy and literacy course, which helps your English and how to do interviews... In the future I'd like to do some kind of management courses. From my view I think there is a very good opportunity of education in this country, especially if you live in a big city. Of course there are barriers and difficulties... financial barriers. It's difficult to get funding to do courses on a daily or full time basis, and depending where you are there's not always courses that you need.

I did some voluntary work while I was waiting for my status. I did Amharic and

Tigrinyan language interpreting for 1 year... A voluntary work placement was the basis for my current employment. I applied for 100s of jobs in my profession; out of all of these I only got one interview and I was unsuccessful at getting that job. So I found it very difficult to get a job. My problem was not having UK work experience so I wanted to fill this gap. The work placement was instigated by RAGU. It helps refugees and asylum-seekers to find work placements. They had a scheme to help people find a work placement. Actually it is a long process. Finally I was very fortunate to get a work placement with the Environment Agency, a Government body, for 6 months. It was very good experience because it was exactly in my profession so I had an opportunity to demonstrate my skills and to get a job. When I was in the work placement there was a job occurring and I applied. I was shortlisted and I got the job. So it was a very good breakthrough for me. Otherwise it would have been very difficult to get a job. I feel this is very important for those who have similar qualifications who are refugees and asylum-seekers. Everyone is asking you whether you have UK work experience or not.

I am happy to work in my profession. The positive thing is that I am able to work in my profession. If you are doing well and developing yourself you have the opportunity for promotion. If you do a job which you are happy to do that is positive...There are some difficult things...English is my second language. In terms of expressing myself and writing. My accent sometimes has an effect. Language can be a problem. Some people do not understand the cultural difference. There are problems of communication and problems of integrating.

When asked about barriers to employment Agymah responded:

Work experience. Employers prefer UK qualifications. Sometimes if you are over-qualified for a job they want someone less qualified. Lack of networks. Sometimes if you have gaps in your CV. If you have been unemployed for some time. I had planned to change my name. After applying for so many jobs and not being short-listed I thought that it might be discrimination. If your name is different from English. My name is African and perhaps that is why I wasn't short-listed. I thought if I had an English name perhaps I would have more opportunity. But even if you do change your name your CV tells everything about your background. Even if you do change your name and get past the first point you still have to have an interview.

So far in my job I haven't experienced any discrimination. I have to work much harder than the others because of the communication and my situation because I come from a different system [it's] a different country where the job, the system the process is different. For an English person for instance, it's easy: they know how to communicate, they know how to do the job in England. The cultural understanding is good. But for me it takes some time to understand the culture, the process. At the

same time there are language barriers. So I have to work harder than the others. There is a big challenge and I read a lot and try to improve my language skills. At the same time what I believe is good. I am now a graduate member of the Ministry of Civil Engineers. If I work hard in the future in the next few years I can become a Chartered Engineer. This gives me a very good basis. I will be more accepted and have more opportunity to be a real part of my profession.

I was sent to London initially and then told to disperse to Newcastle. I had 3 or 4 days warning; there was no time to prepare myself. It was not a good experience. Once we were there we had to adapt to a new environment, a new situation, to try and integrate. In a short time you go to another place which is different. It is an additional problem to you. It did affect integration to some extent, but finally in the end it was not very significant I think.

Agymah's story illustrates some of the research evidence which indicates that refugees and asylum-seekers face a number of complex barriers to accessing education, training and employment. There is a tendency in the literature to focus on individual deficit despite evidence of individual agency to the contrary. In the majority of cases there is also a clear institutional or organisational role that would help reduce the complexity and barriers faced by individuals. The main barriers highlighted in the literature include:

- lack of recognition of overseas qualifications (Aldridge and Waddington, 2001; World University Service, 2002; Jonker, 2004; Waddington, 2005);
- lack of competence in English language (Bloch, 2002; Strategy Unit, 2003) and difficulties accessing affordable higher-level language courses (Aldridge and Waddington, 2001; Jonker, 2004; Waddington, 2005);
- restrictions on courses which asylum-seekers can undertake while waiting for a Home Office decision on their application (Aldridge and Waddington, 2001; Jonker, 2004; Waddington 2005);
- unfamiliarity with the UK culture of employment and training employability and lack of appropriate information, advice and guidance (Dadzie, 1990; Refugee Council, 2003);
- difficulty obtaining overseas employment experience and a lack of UK work experience (Aldridge and Waddington, 2001; Hurstfield *et al*, 2004; Jonker, 2004; Waddington, 2005);
- under-employment and under-utilisation of skills and experience (Shiferaw and Hagos, 2002); and
- lack of social capital networks that connect with education and employment (Morrice, 2007).

4 Refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants

Despite previous educational qualifications and employment experience, refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants¹ do not automatically gain access to appropriate steps on their education and employment progression journey. The Refugee Progression and Employment Project (REP), funded by the Higher Education European Social Fund (HE ESF), focuses on the accounts of individuals with high-level qualifications who predominantly have experienced difficulties accessing suitable learning opportunities and underemployment. This not only undermines them as individuals but also inevitably restricts their opportunity to make a full contribution to society.

Research focus and report structure

The project involved Sussex University as the lead institution, Lancaster and Leeds Universities, and Wedgwood Memorial College in Staffordshire. All research partners have a history of working with local black, minority ethnic and refugee communities to develop community education programmes and address the educational barriers faced by these particular groups (see Appendix 3).

Four discrete regionally-based case studies were undertaken in the South East, North West, North East and in the West Midlands of England to explore the local context within an agreed framework of project aims designed to:

- explore and evaluate research and local refugee integration strategies developed to combat discrimination in education and employment as experienced by members of the target group, particularly those with higher levels of skills and qualifications;
- explore the education, training and employment experiences of members of refugee and black and minority ethnic communities through life history interviews, and to include their perceptions of opportunities and barriers as well as their views about the effectiveness of locally-based strategies to combat discrimination;
- engage with a range of stakeholders about the issues raised by the research, including refugee organisations, employers, education, and training providers, funding bodies and policy-makers; and
- inform future debates about policy and practice in this area through dissemination of research findings.

¹ We use the term “migrants” to refer to people from black and minority ethnic groups from countries outside Europe who have recently taken up residence within the UK. The term “refugee” refers to those who have been granted refugee status on grounds of the 1951 Convention on Human Rights and also those granted more temporary forms of protection such as Exceptional Leave to Remain or Humanitarian Protection. “Asylum-seeker” refers to someone who has applied for asylum but is waiting for a Home Office decision. Here, unless stated otherwise, the term “refugee” is used to refer to both those who have refugee status and those who are still waiting for a Home Office decision.

Individual regional case studies presented data in different ways according to what was relevant for their context. This combined report brings together a rich source of information obtained from 51 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants (collectively described as participants, except when the evidence only relates to one of the groups). Appendix 2 provides the gender and country of origin for individual participants. The REP project also included interviews with educational, employer, statutory and community voluntary sector (CVS) practitioners and policy-makers (collectively described as stakeholders).

The findings offer valuable insights into issues relevant to ongoing European Union (EU) and UK educational and employment initiatives, in particular the EQUAL programme that advocates partnership, encourages dissemination of social practice innovations as well as technological developments, and champions equality that is vital for individual empowerment.

Chapter 1 sets the context for understanding the experiences of the participants in the research by providing a brief review of the EU and UK policy context for the refugee integration strategy. It reflects on how issues of social capital, active citizenship, racism and discrimination impact on integration, involvement and isolation within education and employment contexts. Chapter 2 explores English language requirements and recognition of overseas qualifications. These were the two most significant issues raised by participants in our study, and as they impinge on participants' ability to access both appropriate education and employment they are considered here in a separate chapter.

Chapter 3 outlines the main educational barriers and factors that aid participation, including finance, information, advice and guidance, and considers how resources and factors influencing referral can shape the educational progression journey. Chapter 4 considers the barriers to employment and focuses on issues of equality, experiences of, and expectation about, the labour market. These include applying and preparing for job interviews, gaining work experience, and the frustration of under-employment.

Chapter 5 considers barriers relating to personal and practical circumstances and how these intersect with the wider policy context. Finally, Chapter 6 outlines the EQUAL principles of innovation, partnership, equality and empowerment. It summarises the main research conclusions and key messages, and offers recommendations to inform future educational and employment progression of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.

CHAPTER I

Policy and research

This chapter outlines the policy and research that together provided a framework for the REP research. The policy context encompasses educational, employment and refugee-specific issues and the more theoretical concepts of social capital, citizenship and racism, all of which are influenced by the wider European Union context.

Refugee integration: the policy context

The theme of refugee integration occupies an increasingly prominent position within both the UK and European contexts. At its meeting in Tampere in 1999, the European Council expressed its commitment to establishing a strategy for the integration of refugees and other ‘third country nationals’.

Despite the emphasis on developing a common European policy framework, integration remains a contested concept with inherent tensions and contradictions (Zetter *et al.*, 2002; Boswell, 2003). Many argue that refugees with professional skills and qualifications should be welcomed into a European labour market threatened by the consequences of a rapidly-ageing population. In contrast, public fears about the growing numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers are reinforced by a constant stream of anti-asylum and anti-immigration rhetoric from the media and right-wing political parties. A challenge for policy-makers, practitioners and individuals arises from the fact that although the European member states tend to adopt similar language and terminology in relation to integration, there is a marked divergence of approach linked to different conceptions of nationality and citizenship (Zetter *et al.*, 2002). Two distinct models of integration predominate. The first (as typified by Germany) is an assimilationist approach, based on an assumption that the minority group will adopt the values and culture of the majority and eventually become fully incorporated into the host society. A more liberal, or multicultural model (traditionally associated with the UK) views integration as more of a two-way process

and is characterised by a greater tolerance of cultural and ethnic diversity.

As with other countries, the UK context is not one of consensus about the virtues of the multicultural model or of its effectiveness in promoting integration for more settled black and minority ethnic communities. For some commentators, multiculturalism represents a difference of degree, but not of kind, from assimilation, with the primary focus of concern remaining on presumed deficiencies within minority communities themselves, rather than on structural inequalities or the impact of racism (Rattansi, 1992). A common concern and criticism of the multicultural model is its tendency to take the 'majority' white culture for granted and to define cultural difference in terms of 'otherness' or even deviance from the cultural norm.

The Parekh report (CFMB, 2000) on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, for instance, caused controversy by posing a challenge to unquestioned assumptions about a single common British culture, within which diversity is tolerated, but only within the confines of people's private lives or their separate 'communities'. The Parekh report argued that Britain, as a modern multi-ethnic, multicultural state, should 'rethink the national story' and adopt a more dynamic cultural pluralist approach which 'does not place the political culture beyond negotiation' (CFMB, 2000:43) and which recognises communities as 'essentially open-ended and developing' (CFMB, 2000: 44) rather than static and homogeneous. The Parekh report makes an important contribution to the debate about integration by posing some fundamental questions about the kind of society into which the REP participants are expected to integrate and about the services and provision delivered by learning providers and employers that inevitably have implications for the experiences of people seeking to live, learn and work within the UK.

Integration matters: The UK refugee integration strategy

The second national refugee integration strategy, *Integration matters* (Home Office, 2005a), places a stronger emphasis on access to appropriate education, training and employment as key indicators of a successful integration process.

The proposals outlined in *Integration matters* appear to be modelled on the 'holistic' approach encouraged by the European Commission, with an emphasis on social and cultural participation and citizenship rights, as well as more instrumental measures relating to access to services, education and employment. However, some of the concerns expressed by organisations working with refugees and asylum-seekers highlight the contradictory nature of the Government's approach and the potential for conflict with other policy areas, particularly in relation to asylum and immigration.

First, there is widespread disappointment about the exclusion of asylum-seekers from the strategy and the assumption that integration only begins on the day refugee status is granted, rather than on the day of arrival in the country (e.g.

NIACE, 2004; Refugee Council, 2003a, 2003b, 2004 and 2005b). This omission reinforces a misleading and unhelpful distinction between 'genuine' refugees on the one hand and 'bogus' asylum-seekers on the other. Such a dissonance between asylum and integration policies has been identified as a growing trend in a recent survey of European integration policies:

...our evidence suggests that attempts to mainstream refugee integration into the wider framework of policies for the integration of immigrants are breaking down against the backcloth of deterrence and restrictionism adopted by EUMSs [European Union Member States] towards asylum-seekers.

(Zetter *et al*, 2002:2-3).

Second, this predominant climate of 'deterrence and restrictionism' is further reinforced by the negative and hostile attitudes towards asylum-seekers generated by sections of the media, and encouraged by politicians increasingly eager to exploit 'moral panics' about asylum and immigration. Some commentators argue that a lack of cross-governmental ownership of the strategy is one of its main weaknesses and that the complexities of racism in our society can only be addressed through a more joined up and pro-active approach that is dependent on strong partnerships:

...racism against asylum-seekers from local communities is not simply a matter of lack of information...There are, in fact, deeper issues of prejudice which cannot be addressed within a refugee integration strategy, and is a further reason why the links between this strategy and the wider racial equality and community cohesion agendas need to be made more explicit and given greater concrete substance.

(South of England Refugee and Asylum-seeker Consortium
Response to *Integration Matters* 2004:5)

A third cause of concern is the negative impact of the policy of forced dispersal of asylum-seekers to different parts of the country and of recent measures to discourage those granted refugee status from moving away from their area of dispersal. As critics of the policy have pointed out, the availability of housing provision rather than the cultural, language or community needs of asylum-seekers themselves has influenced dispersal (Zetter *et al*, 2002). The dispersal policy and associated legislation are also in potential conflict with integration by restricting the choices of refugees wishing to move to a different area because of family or community connections or better access to services and support structures (Refugee Action, 2004).

Social capital

It has been suggested that social capital, i.e. the social networks and links with wider society, is a valuable resource which can enable particular groups and individuals to gain advantage in education and employment (Bourdieu, 1997; Heath, 2001; Office for National Statistics, 2001; Loizos, 2000, Morrice, 2007). Putnam (1995), Field (2005) and others, including the Office for National Statistics (2001), note there are differences between forms of social capital. ‘Bridging’ social capital, which links groups and individuals to others outside of their immediate network of family and friends, enables people to draw upon resources, ideas and information from contacts outside of their own social milieu. These networks, and the learning within them, are an important source of information and understanding about how systems work (Field 2005). Refugees and other first generation migrant groups can be particularly disadvantaged by a lack of this type of social capital. As relative newcomers to the UK, they face exclusion from the bridging and linking social networks and therefore miss out on the advantages gained from these resources (Morrice, 2005 and 2007). Not only are they likely to have had less time and opportunity to establish wider networks and links, but the policy of dispersing asylum-seekers to different parts of the UK had, in some cases, led to the truncation of the social networks that had been established. For several of the participants in our research this had resulted in social isolation and disrupted education and volunteering opportunities. These more elusive barriers, such as not having access to the necessary knowledge, information and skills to navigate around the systems of education and employment, worked to undermine confidence, self-esteem and a sense of empowerment.

Reviewing the experiences of individual stories in the REP project is helpful in understanding the narrowness of some individuals’ social capital network and also how previous experience inhibits the degree of trust they have in services intended to support them. Baron *et al* (2000) refer to the work of Fox (1974) who discusses ‘institutionalised trust’ that concerns the relationship between people according to the roles they fulfil. Fox’s work looked at the reinforcing nature of trust leading to deeper trust and of distrust leading to deeper distrust, and at the inherent power relationships and inequality that influence an individual’s level of trust. Individual stories within the REP project illustrated the complexity of their social capital networks and often the serendipity involved that allowed them to acquire the bridge to relevant information, advice and guidance.

Unfortunately, for many REP participants where informal networks existed they were usually closed; whilst this might give a strong ‘bonded’ form of social capital (Putnam, 1995), it inevitably restricted the source of contacts available for support. It was only when participants were able to extend their social capital networks to community groups with staff who were themselves well connected with a wider, more diverse network, that ‘bridging’ social capital became possible, and with it,

access to information, resources and contacts who were in a more advantageous position to assist.

The concept of social capital is useful because it shifts the focus away from the REP participants as passive recipients of basic skills training and takes into account their own motivations and experiences. The emphasis is placed instead on how to enable them to establish for themselves the social links, bridges and networks required not only to facilitate access to education and the labour market but also to settle into life within the UK (Ager and Strang, 2004; Castles *et al*, 2002).

The community voluntary sector organisations often provided connections and over a period of time were valuable in extending an individual's social capital network by providing:

[a] safe and comfortable environment where there will be people of a similar background. It is important to be in a secure environment, as people need to be happy to learn. Once in a community course they will make friends who may have used some of the mainstream services such as job centre, and then encourage them to use those services i.e. peer support and mentoring.

(Female, community practitioner)

It was through contact with a local community group that some participants were able to build a bond of trust, which is a common component of a social capital network.

Whilst community self-help can be enormously beneficial, it is not a panacea (Active Community Unit, 2000). The community and voluntary sector (CVS) has a reputation for helping to fill the gaps in statutory provision, and can often provide a holistic service that is responsive to the needs of a particular group. There were positive examples in all case studies of how the CVS had offered services that helped address social, health, welfare and education needs. However, a common concern related to the quality and range of services offered, with fluctuations within and between individual groups. Variations occurred depending on access to funding, which was often short-term, preventing the development of a longer-term strategic approach. The Active Community Unit (2000) identified ethnic minority organisations as playing a particularly valuable role. It also stressed that:

ethnic minority communities and voluntary sector are not homogeneous groups; they need to be understood in their cultural, political and social context.

(Active Community Unit, 2000 para 4.22)

However, as a male practitioner from a voluntary umbrella organisation pointed out, there is:

no methodical systematic service – we are not equipped as a collective to lend support to refugees, asylum-seekers, and new arrivals.

The absence of strategic thinking or work carried out among the CVS to support new arrivals in this North West town does, however, need to be placed in the context of an absence of a large refugee population which means that it is not high on anyone's agenda. Although the context was different in each of the case study areas, the degree of strategic and joined-up thinking was limited and where there was evidence of agencies working together this was often because funding arrangements at that time made it viable, desirable and opportunistic rather than because this was part of a wider plan. Social capital networks were not always enabling. Whilst 'migrants' spoke positively about how their friends and family supported and assisted them in pursuing further study or gaining employment, they were sometimes mentioned as the reason why individuals felt unable to enrol on a course, or accepted a job regardless of its suitability. Although this is often associated with Muslim communities, a community worker in the North East case study felt that it is really more of a class issue where less-educated families may view opportunities as a threat and more middle-class families are more comfortable for women to work outside the home. Her perception was that Middle-Eastern communities tended to be more open about this issue than some Asian communities in the North East.

Citizenship

The European Commission has published a communication on immigration, integration and employment which highlights the key elements of this strategy and the need for:

a holistic approach which takes into account not only the social and economic aspects of integration but also issues related to cultural and religious diversity, citizenship, participation and political rights.

(Commission of the European Communities, 2003)

Building on the Home Office reports *Full and Equal Citizens: a strategy for the Integration of Refugees into the United Kingdom* (2002) and *Integration Matters: The UK refugee integration strategy* (2005) advocates the centrality of citizenship rights within an overall holistic approach. The challenge for individuals as well as agencies supporting them is complex and the multiple interpretations of what it means to be a citizen complicates the situation further. Within Europe there is a diversity of opinion about what citizenship means, (see, for example, Coare and Johnston, 2003). For Lister (1997):

to act as a citizen requires first a sense of agency, the belief that one can act; acting as a citizen, especially collectively, in turn fosters that sense of agency.
(p38)

Arguably this requires a degree of empowerment, a sense of agency and a social capital network that provides stimulus and support for implementation of any proposed action. One of the most prominent factors facing all the participants in the REP project is how their sense of identity and agency as a citizen has changed since arriving in the UK. Reeve (2002) refers to the psycho-emotional impact of experiences on identity and future actions, whereas Brah (2000) explores how difference is not only experienced but is part of our social relations that also shape our multiple identities, in this context as citizens.

During the REP project the UK Government introduced a citizenship test (see BBC, 2005). In a BBC report the Immigration Minister Tony McNulty said:

this is not a test of someone's ability to be British or a test of their Britishness. It is a test of their preparedness to become citizens, in keeping with the language requirement as well.

(1 November 2005)

The significance of language and its role in accessing services, including learning opportunities, was often a key step in the process of becoming a citizen. However, as REP participants explained, their status was sometimes a block that restricted their access to services and fee remission that would help them become more independent. Earlier work by Bellis and Morrice (2003) shows how media images, language, insecurity, trauma and the 'culture shock' all influence interactions between refugees, asylum-seekers and the people they meet when they arrive in the UK. Another key factor which influenced the lives of participants was racism.

Racism

In all regional case studies there were significant differences between the definitions used by participants and stakeholders interviewed. Stakeholders were very clear that racism was a major barrier, while the participants were less ready to identify racial discrimination as the cause of any particular problem they had faced. In many cases this was because they tended to have narrower definitions of racism that did not include insidious, everyday, or indirect manifestations typical of institutional racism. Not surprisingly, where they discussed discrimination and racism explicitly (an example being the South East case study), it was much more likely to be in the interviews conducted by the refugee researchers, than by the university researchers.

Inevitably people's understanding of racism varied. Aba described racism as when:

people discriminate against you because you look different, dress different and they use that against you to make you feel bad.

(Aba, Nigerian woman)

Halima, also Nigerian, explained that racism was unfair treatment based on skin colour or religion; in essence it was “*when they are not ready to accept you for who you are*”. Ajit expanded on this lack of acceptance in his definition, describing racism as a form of discrimination that resulted from:

a lack of information and lack of interest in learning about people from other cultures ... and a general tendency for people to be grouped into a block.

(Ajit, Indian man)

Mary’s definition highlighted the insidious nature, explaining that: “*racism is underlying it digs at you... it is when one culture despises another out of hate or jealousy*”. Although Mary, who was from Jamaica, said that her experiences of racism within an educational context did not matter, her body language suggested that she felt downtrodden. There were examples of direct racism including verbal abuse and indirect racism that Bandhu an Indian man suggested people might not even be aware of doing, but was evident in people’s body language.

There was a general sense of the more widespread demonising of asylum-seekers throughout the right-wing press. The North East research team found that perceptions of Islamophobia were stronger among Muslim women than men, possibly because they are more visible by virtue of the Hijab. Again, cases of overt racism were rare but there was a general sense that discrimination exists towards Hijab-wearing women. This was implicit rather than explicit and many women reported that the headscarf seemed to mark them out as different and they felt others perceived them as uneducated, oppressed and foreign. Zainab, an Iraqi woman, explained how although she worries that newspaper reports about Islamic terrorists will affect people’s opinion of Muslims; she has always found the opposite as everyone she has met has tried to support her even if they are from a different religion and ethnic group. When questioned about their status, many clients still awaiting a decision were reluctant to describe themselves as asylum-seekers and only admitted this title after some prompting.

Stakeholders from refugee organisations were generally more ready to identify racist discrimination as well as institutional and endemic barriers to education and employment than the majority of research participants. Several raised the negative impact of racism and negative stereotyping of refugees and asylum-seekers in the media. The Government’s strategy document on *Integration Matters* (2005) identifies one of the key challenges to integration and community cohesion as the need to “*encourage alternative approaches to stereotyped and over-simplified portrayals*

of refugees, and better understanding of the issues they face” (2005: 23). However, refugee support organisations identify the negative perception and hostile media reporting of asylum issues as one of the biggest problems affecting the quality of life of refugees (ICAR, 2005).

Instances of institutional or indirect racism arising from the inherent systems and structures within an organisation appeared to be more problematic. This may be because, as Mary’s definition earlier illustrates, it is the underlying and ongoing nature of racism that influences levels of confidence overtime. This is, or should be a cause for concern because, according to Walters *et al* (2001), confidence is a prime indicator for engendering a sense of empowerment that is required to tackle everyday challenges including racism. The process and outward manifestation as well as the previous experience of racism all had a clear consequence on an individual’s ability to identify racism within their own lives.

Prior experiences of racism also influenced how individuals handled the discrimination that they experienced and the impact this had on their confidence, mental and emotional well-being. For example, as a member of a minority ethnic group in Singapore, where she lived before coming to the UK, Banni had already encountered racism frequently within her working life, and was not shocked to face discrimination within the UK. However, Marita from Montserrat, who had no previous experience of racism, gave numerous examples of racism as she described her experiences of life in the UK. Racism was obviously an issue that deeply concerned and affected her:

...the only thing that has shocked me... I was not brought up with racism, because we were always taught to treat people with respect.... I expected it because it is a bigger place... but with equal opportunities... it’s not like that.
(Marita)

Racism was not always an obvious black-white issue. It tended to be more complex. In some cases migrants felt that the discrimination was from people from another minority group and was due instead to their social class, religious beliefs or cultural background. For example, Halima shared how she faced discrimination from other Nigerians once they realised that she came from a wealthy Nigerian family. Anisha preferred to describe herself as Indian rather than Bengali as she felt that people had negative stereotypes of Bengali people and felt that this disadvantaged her when applying for posts. She described her experience of a job interview, saying:

when I went for a job, the person [interviewing me] couldn’t speak English and I thought, you are interviewing me and I thought how the hell on earth did you get the job.... I phoned back afterwards and said ‘could you tell me why I didn’t get it and who did get the job’. I found out it was a Muslim and the person

[interviewing] was a Muslim, I just knew. The gentleman I spoke to was English and he said, 'you just didn't have the experience'. I felt that was an excuse.

(Anisha)

Although it is difficult to prove Anisha's claim, what is clear is that she, like others, felt forced to 'fit in' with normative expectations, which resulted in them adapting their behaviour, and changing their identity, as far as they were able, in order to avoid what they felt was discrimination.

Racism within education

Within a college environment, racism took the form of verbal abuse from fellow students for two people. In both situations, the abuse came from younger students. Aba described her experiences of racism within the learning environment:

I wouldn't say it was direct, it wasn't from the teacher, but the students think that because you come from Africa you can't do anything. They say, 'how can you do this exam when you come from Africa?' or, 'you won't pass it, why do you come?' But on the exam I got a higher mark than them. I didn't talk too much because I realised I was ahead of them, because in Nigeria I learned English not an African language, so basically I felt I could defend myself ... I don't think the teacher knew they did it, it was in the break when the teacher wasn't there ... The first week they started this, there was an impact on me, I discouraged myself... I thought maybe I should give up because the exam is so hard.

(Aba, Nigerian woman)

Another concern related to tutor perceptions of their ability and possible tutor bias. Halima, also from Nigeria, felt that the tutor doubted she was able to reach UK academic standards and questioned whether her assignments were her own work. Halima felt this was because the tutor did not believe she could submit work of such a high standard. She also reported that when peers copied her work, they gained a higher grade. Atif shared a similar experience saying that he felt that he was marked lower compared to other students in his group for the standard of work he produced. However, he explained that he could not prove this, as it was more a feeling, or attitude that he felt the teachers had towards him.

None of the migrants reported discussing their concerns with tutors or support staff working at any of the learning providers. They seemed to either be unaware of the support systems available to them, or felt unable to talk to someone, for fear of making things worse. This mirrors Hoyt's (2003) findings based on the views of international postgraduate students within higher education. Instead, the migrants sought support and solutions to their concerns from their friends and family. Often this resulted in pursuing educational opportunities available within their local

community rather than the larger learning providers. Both Aba and Halima reported more positive experiences when they pursued community-based learning opportunities. Aba was full of praise for the support given to mature students in terms of flexibility (time and working at own pace), access to courses within local venues and the support given by community tutors. However, as these migrants' and learners' views reported in research by Patel (2002) demonstrate, there are inevitable problems when trying to find local courses at a suitable level that offer appropriate progression routes.

Given the hidden and sometimes indirect nature of racism within education, it is not surprising that learning providers remained largely unaware. While community provision was a partial solution for some, it was not a solution that suited everyone. A lack of awareness and confidence in formal mechanisms of support meant that people either did not report their concerns or only discussed solutions with members of their social network, whom they trusted. Although some outlet is better than none, it was evident that compared to some, the social networks of this group of migrants were often quite restricted and this limited the possibility of people being able to make an informed decision about what action to take when they experienced either direct or indirect racism. Accessing the reality of learners' experiences remains a challenge for all learning providers and needs to be a key feature of their race equality strategies.

Racism within employment

Racism within employment was also not always easy to identify or prove. Within all the case studies there was anecdotal evidence that employers sometimes discriminated against immigrants, regardless of previous qualifications and experience. For example, a female local authority worker described racism at her previous workplace:

sometimes you can't pinpoint that it is racism – institutional racism – you can't say that that person said that – unsaid and unseen things happen.

The invisibility of incidents not only makes it more difficult to report, but also results in individuals questioning whether they are experiencing racism. This self-doubt can also extend to questioning one's own abilities, as in the comments from a male community practitioner who reported that:

You are treated as if you are inferior, as if you can't do the job.

Although some participants felt that they had encountered racism at work, only two of them reported the incident or used the systems in place to tackle the issue. There was a multiplicity of reasons for not reporting racism to those in authority for

instance, a lack of information about their rights, fear of victimisation or not being believed, uncertainty that they would gain the support needed from management, feelings of apathy, and not feeling it was a big enough problem. Often it was the understandable fear of not wanting to do anything to jeopardise their job. As a male practitioner from the voluntary sector explained:

Once people are in employment, they want to get on with it. [This voluntary sector organisation I work for] has no official proof of mistreatment or [individuals] not being paid what should have been paid to them. However, from personal experience, people would be fearful, frightened to report any mistreatment.

Several practitioners associated with larger employers referred to Race Equality policies and related implementation plans including training, as a possible mechanism for bringing about changes in awareness, attitude and action. However, as one local authority stakeholder explained, they were concerned that despite training being compulsory, colleagues tended to tick the box: *'they go into their own mode, they aren't interested and think this is not our problem, so [the training] doesn't affect them'*.

The pervasive nature of racism influenced many, if not all, aspects of everyday life, and often exacerbated the challenges individuals had to overcome if they were to participate in education or gain a job. As Asal, an Iranian woman, explained: *"when I first came here [...] the first problem was staying alive ..."* (see Asal's story in Chapter 3)

There were other common factors influencing educational and employment progression, in particular English Language experience and the usability of existing overseas qualifications. Both affected access to, and participation in, learning.

CHAPTER 2

English language requirements and recognition of overseas qualifications

ESOL provision – English Speakers of Other Languages

English language skills were identified by nearly all as a major barrier, not only in terms of facilitating progression through education and employment, but also in terms of being able to socialise and communicate with English people generally. Despite the substantial ESOL programmes offered in all case study areas there were often waiting lists for courses and inappropriate referral to the courses that did exist. One representative of a major refugee organisation said that:

There are insufficient places on existing ESOL classes and many people have specific ESOL needs. They can communicate in English to a good standard but do not have English for particular tasks or jobs, and so need more technically-oriented ESOL classes.

An ESOL tutor agreed, stating that:

Language is often a barrier to people. ESOL is very basic. A lot of clients have very good English, but need specific help, like more sophisticated grammar, or language for particular professions.

Both learning provider and community and voluntary sector stakeholders, in the South East case study, expressed concern that increased numbers of students from ‘new European’ countries following EU enlargement were beginning to put even more pressure on the availability of places and they were worried that some members of existing Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and refugee communities might be excluded as a result. According to a member of an FE College, one of the barriers to increasing ESOL provision was the inflexibility of the funding mechanisms. The new assessment framework within the LSC has also imposed

restrictions on ESOL from January 2005, meaning that providers have less scope to offer a breadth of provision:

From 1 January 2005 the only ESOL qualifications that are eligible for basic skills funding and which count towards the target for new learners are the Certificates in ESOL Skills for Life.

(LSC briefing bulletin 11/02/05)

As well as concerns about the quantity of ESOL provision, there were also issues relating to the fact that the majority of ESOL courses were only available at Level 1 or below, and that there was a general lack of English language provision at higher levels or which offered more than two to four hours' tuition a week. Particularly in the South East case study there was an overwhelming need expressed for more intensive and higher-level English language, such as courses leading to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and for courses which combined English language with vocational or academic study. The IELTS test is required for entry to Higher Education by foreign nationals who are not members of the European Economic Area. The course teaches academic and vocational English and tests the ability to speak, listen and write in English. Students enter themselves for the IELTS exam and must generally score 6 or 6.5 out of 9 in the academic module for entry to university and 7 out of 9 to register and begin to re-qualify as a medical doctor.

For many participants the financial constraints resulting from their need to prioritise earning money over studying made it difficult to manage the pressures of such an intense and demanding programme as IELTS. Many participants expressed concerns that this pressurised, exam-focused approach leaves little time for language practice and forces tutors and students to focus on passing the exam rather than improving their practical English skills. Learners felt that the course had not improved their English to the extent that they expected it could or should have done. In addition, entrants must fund themselves each time they sit or re-sit the exam – at the time the exam fee was £90.

There was certainly a consensus among participants and stakeholders who talked about IELTS in terms of the complexity of the course and the barriers inherent within the system. One college tutor who had taught ESOL and had a broad overview of IELTS summarised these difficulties by comparing it to her own experience as a European migrant to the UK:

A major issue is the requirement of IELTS grade 6 for university entry. This is not practical as IELTS assesses at a higher level than required of most people starting a degree for the first time. I would not have passed IELTS when I arrived in the UK. As an ESOL tutor, I know that most asylum-seekers start at

ESOL entry-level 2, so it would take them 5 years to work through the various levels leading up to IELTS and, assuming they achieve grade 6, progress to university. As a result, most asylum-seekers and refugees feel that HE is out of their reach and there needs to be more effort on the part of Higher Education Institutions to welcome these groups. FE and the LEAs have done much more for this target group in terms of offering accessible provision.

(ESOL Tutor)

One tutor felt that IELTS is extremely culturally-specific and disadvantages non-European students. In his experience, Asian and Middle-Eastern learners did considerably less well in the course and exam than those from Europe. The teaching and learning methods may be one reason for this, as many migrants described how they found group work and debates challenging as they had not experienced them in their prior learning. Some others felt that some groups of overseas students were 'taught' to do the test and achieved scores which did not accurately reflect their language ability. For this reason the Language Institute at the University of Sussex prefers not to run IELTS and instead has its own testing system for individuals. Zainab from Iraq, who wanted to continue her work as a doctor in the UK, questioned the relevance of IELTS for her purpose and described her frustration at the barrier it created for her in accessing education:

There needs to be a change in the requirement for doctors to get 7 in the IELTS exam. They are wasting time and their experience and the country needs them. It is something precious and the country should use them. The language will come as you work; you can practise and improve your English. It's a loss of time and money – having to support people through benefits. If I can work as a doctor I can support myself. I am happy to do medical exams – they need to know you are a good doctor, but the language exams are irrelevant as there's too much writing, writing essays and discussing topics like fox hunting. They could have a language exam linked to PLABS, like a practical observed medical exam with patients and a practical medical language exam.

(Zainab, Iraq)

IELTS courses are not eligible for Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding. Most advanced language courses are offered by private language schools and in the international student sections of colleges or universities and were therefore unaffordable to most of the participants unless they were in work, in which case they were unlikely to be able to fit the demands of the course around their work commitments. Very few of the participants had experienced a more intensive or advanced level language input or accessed English for vocational or academic purposes.

ESOL providers reported that they were trying to respond to the needs of a very diverse population of Speakers of English as an Additional Language, including refugees and asylum-seekers, people from more established BME communities and migrant workers from the 'new European' countries. The ESOL population was also diverse in terms of support needs (e.g. women with young children, part-time employees or shift workers) and aspirations, (e.g. English for citizenship, driving, social needs, vocational English, academic English, etc). Providers were very aware of the tensions created by these competing demands, but faced with limited resources this was an ongoing challenge. In all area case studies, stakeholders recognised the need for more clearly supported pathways into employment for students on ESOL programmes and the potential benefits of developing this provision in partnership.

An effective strategy was to link language learning for ESOL to other subjects such as IT and Business Studies. For instance, the South East case study outlined a linked skills course that included citizenship modules that could lead to NVQ-accredited progression routes within the FE curriculum in subject areas such as media studies, business studies, and health and social care. The presence of a bilingual language support team located within student services, who could offer language support in Chinese, Bengali, Farsi and Arabic, was also a successful strategy at facilitating progression into mainstream FE programmes. Although the need for progression routes into mainstream FE programmes was evident in all case study areas, this was only happening on a small scale at present.

Practitioners operating in a range of community and statutory contexts providing initial information, advice and guidance (IAG) often acted as gatekeepers. The assumptions of these gatekeepers often had serious implications on the range of services individuals received information about or were able to access. As Aba, a Nigerian woman, explained:

When I first arrived in the UK, I went to the job centre who gave me advice about where I could complete courses. There was an initial presumption that I would need to attend ESOL classes although I felt that my English was adequate.

Once she contacted the college, she found that she was able to bypass the ESOL provision and enrol on a computer course, which she described positively, explaining that the teachers were

particularly helpful [giving you] the structured times to complete extra work such as reading. The teachers [really] pushed you to achieve the highest standard you could possible gain.

(Aba, Nigerian woman)

There was also an example of a participant who, having found the ESOL classes at the local college ‘too easy’, was enrolled on level 2 literacy and numeracy classes (see Boman’s story, Chapter 6). Given Boman’s high level of English language and his educational background these Skills for Life programmes were clearly inappropriate to his needs. It is difficult to say to what extent this was a case of the college trying to meet Government Sfl targets and to what extent it was simply offering the only programmes it could while his asylum claim was being processed.

Limited knowledge of English was a primary barrier to accessing education or employment and in terms of being able to socialise and communicate with English people generally. Mehrak, an Iranian man, was typical:

As a foreigner I had loads of problems. It’s quite different from my country and culture. I mean especially English language and how to communicate with people. How to express your ideas and other things... I want to be such a free person in this country, to be sociable. There are many ways to get qualifications here, but there are problems, especially when you are a refugee. You have to get involved with people, with other people and especially English people, but it is not that easy to get involved with them. I think the main problem is that you have to communicate with English people; I mean the most important thing is English language so that is the big problem. I have good English skills now and I could get involved but it is difficult. It’s hard. You can do whatever you want here. But it depends on the person. I think I am a very shy person. I will keep trying and see what happens.

(Mehrak, Iranian man)

Many participants said that learning English was a priority and viewed it as key to establishing themselves in the UK. Harith, an Iraqi man, felt that his lack of confidence with speaking English and understanding cultural norms was an obstacle to accessing education and employment. To help build his confidence he planned to undertake voluntary work. Adil, also from Iraq, described how he had no real idea at first about what he was going to do. After his dispersal to the North East his first priority was to learn English. He soon found he was in a position to help others and had used his English to help advocate on behalf of friends. In contrast, Natiq from Azerbaijan felt his first two years in Britain were a wasted opportunity because the only available ESOL course was at entry-level which was too basic for him. There was no access to higher level ESOL classes at the local FE College: “*If you wanted to learn English, you had to go to Sheffield*”. At the time, this was beyond his means. Consequently, his language acquisition and subsequent integration were stalled. Many participants reported that even as they began to get to grips with English, they still found regional accents baffling and felt this impeded their understanding. Unfortunately, the person they were trying to understand was rarely able to empathise with their difficulty.

College and community tutors felt frustrated that students who attended ESOL classes to meet people and learn English often encountered more bureaucracy. The West Midlands case study reported that many asylum-seekers and refugees tend to ‘cling to English courses’ rather than opt for mainstream courses. They suggested that it was the safety of being with a group of people with shared language and social needs that perpetuated this situation and felt that for many participants moving to another perhaps more diverse learner group would mean moving out of this safety zone. Given the traumatic experiences and the other uncertainties in their lives it is not surprising that some participants were reluctant to take this chance.

Clearly, participants’ own perception of their level of English is very significant in determining their progress and influencing their expectations and future plans. An ESOL tutor reported that he frequently taught students who were so keen to progress either to university or employment that they wanted to “run before they could walk”. He emphasised that language acquisition takes a long time but was concerned that many of this client group enrol, believing that once they have completed the course they will “know” English. When students have unreasonably high expectations of a course, they often do not perceive that they need help. In contrast, a lack of confidence and failure to realise how much progress they have made holds others back. He felt that a poor level of English was often both the symptom and cause of a lack of confidence which prevented many people from seeking out opportunities and finding the necessary information to help them access courses or jobs.

Asal’s story highlights the complexity of an individual’s experiences, the contrasting context in which they find themselves when they arrive in the UK and the impact that their command and confidence in using English has on the available opportunities.

Educational experiences: Asal’s story

Asal was aged between 36 and 40 years old, a single Iranian woman who arrived in London in February 2004. She was dispersed to the West Midlands at the end of March 2004. At the time of the interview she was sharing a house with three African women, whom she found friendly and pleasant to live with. Her mother and three brothers were living in Iran and contact with them was very limited. Being born into a wealthy family, she grew up during the 1970s and 1980s to witness the disruption of her own culture as an element of the Iran-Iraq War. She described Muslim women in her culture as regarded as “half a man” and had made a conscious decision at an early age not to marry, as to do so would give her even less status.

In terms of education, Asal said there were no opportunities for most

people in Iran, with knowledge and education being far less important than “obeying the government”. However, despite women having even fewer prospects in terms of work, they were “allowed” to attend university and there was a higher ratio of female students compared to men, with around 60 per cent of women opting for university. Her route to university was not a particular easy one. In High School she described herself as being “emotional often” and “I said what I felt”. To gain entry into university people not only had to achieve a particular level of educational achievement (passing set examinations) but were also “tested” on their political ideologies. Although Asal achieved the highest marks in her cohort, she failed the political ideology test six times over the same number of years. When she was 24 years old she was “allowed to go” [to university] but had to sign a statement to the effect that she would not be politically active against the government’s regime. During the six-year period (from applying to university following High School to the time she attended), she continued to study and write, funding herself financially by working as a badminton coach.

After five years of full-time study at the National University of Iran, Asal graduated with a BA in French Literature and went on to achieve a IRIB¹ qualification, being equivalent to a Masters in Radio Production. Her ‘masters’ cohort consisted of 30 people (mixed sex) originating from different parts of Iran and she was the first one to pass. Whilst studying she worked as a part-time journalist and wrote articles for three Iranian magazines (two of which were closed by the government) and one magazine in Canada, *Zoroastrian*. She continued to coach badminton (she had become a badminton champion at university) and also taught French to fund her studies. Working with a professor at the university she wrote a book on the poet Baba Iaher and loneliness, which was published in 1999. Asal worked as a radio producer for seven years and continued to teach badminton and write poetry and articles, before she was destined to leave Iran.

Asal describes the West Midlands town as “friendly and lovely”, where she has made friends in the community, at a local BBC Radio station (where she partakes in free IT courses) and at the local FE College. The college has offered her the opportunities to improve her English (ESOL courses) and develop IT skills, as well as introducing her to a social network of students, tutors and other staff members. She had experienced a few difficulties in some classes as people were at different levels, which hindered progress and she felt some of the courses could be “better arranged”, but overall she found the classes very useful and enjoyable and the teachers very kind and helpful.

There are two priorities in relation to her immediate future: to attain a good level of English and the result of her Appeal Application for Refugee Status. These were key barriers in terms of her achieving her future aspirations regarding her continued education and prospects for work. Ideally she would like to continue with French Literature at Masters Level and identified a course which runs in London. She has come to the conclusion that there are more job offers and opportunities in London but felt the town in the West Midlands has a better social life. If she is granted Refugee Status, Asal anticipates being in a dilemma with regard to work and education and is uncertain “*which comes first? a job, or education?*”. However, she acknowledges that in comparison to “*when I first came here ... when the first problem was staying alive ...*” her current dilemma is not as serious.

Talking about her future aspirations, she explains that her first plan is to use some of her life experiences and “*write for myself ... poetry, stories and articles*”. She has also explored options which might be available to her if she is able to remain in the UK. Some of these include: working in her established field as a radio producer and expanding her knowledge of the area; teaching French; working as a journalist; “*or anything I can do*”. She has researched potential employers in London, such as the Persian Section of the BBC and Persian magazines.

Asal has made friends who offer her support, but she “*still feels loneliness*”. She received news by email of the death of her grandfather while she has been in the West Midlands, which was very distressing and increased her sense of separation from her home and family. Although she has plans and aspirations for her future career, she cannot put them into action until she has developed her knowledge of the English language, and received the Home Office’s decision concerning her status.

1 Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting is similar to the UK’s BBC

Existing qualifications

Understandably, participants were often frustrated at the lack of recognition, the cost and waste of time needed to repeat a course or qualification which they believed they had already acquired. A lack of recognition of overseas qualifications was a common problem facing refugees and asylum-seekers (ECRE, 1999, para 72-74).

Each party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education systems and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and

expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for accessing higher education, further higher education programmes or employment activities, even in cases where the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

Unfortunately, no EU country has ratified the Lisbon Convention, (Salinas, 2003 p49).

Many participants had higher-level qualifications from their countries of origin but these were generally not recognised at the same level as those acquired within the UK or European Union. Many reported experiences that they felt failed to take account of previous professional experience and involved downgrading of qualifications during the assessment for equivalence through the NARIC system. The National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC UK) is the official UK agency for providing recognition for overseas qualifications (see www.naric.org.uk for further details).

As one community practitioner explained, people enter the UK with qualifications at Level 3 and above, but they are forced to repeat levels of education due to NARIC habitually downgrading overseas qualifications. She perceived a particular bias with regard to some nations as NARIC systems repeatedly fails to recognise qualifications from specific countries such as India, Pakistan and certain parts of Africa. Ninety per cent of the people she worked with are qualified to at least 'A' Level and she believed that the system for assessing qualifications from other countries is hierarchical and bases its judgements on a Western bias, so that European qualifications tend to be more valued than others. A difference in educational values is one explanation for the downgrading. For example, in the UK there is greater emphasis on the importance of research and independent learning skills, whereas in Iraq more attention is given to the curriculum content.

Clarifying the level and credit value of qualifications was time-consuming. Some participants gave up and resigned themselves to repeating qualifications. Although participants appreciated the very real issues about occupational competences and the need to re-skill, they felt that the lack of recognition of existing qualifications gained overseas was unjust. They were willing to 'top-up' their qualifications and to re-train where necessary, but not to start from scratch. As Amadika, a female teacher from Zimbabwe, said:

How can we upgrade our qualifications and get jobs? According to this system our qualifications are not degree level. We have Bachelor degrees from our country but NARIC [National Academic Recognition Information Centre] says it is HND [Higher National Diploma], which isn't fair. We need help to find the way.

Basel, from Syria, saw the problem as linked to perceptions of the Third World:

I think it is difficult because most asylum-seekers come from the Third World and here in developed countries they are not considering their qualifications ... so when they come and even if they are well educated, well experienced, they still have... to do some courses, to undergo special courses, to qualify again, even to start from the beginning sometimes, they don't consider their qualifications because they think it's very poor ... the education in the Third World.

(Basel, Syrian male)

A female community development worker explained how having to repeat a qualification:

can cause some frustration for the women who come across as they regard themselves with higher expectations than what they are actually qualified to do. This causes them stress and tension as they are having to go back to college to spend a similar length of time to gain qualifications they feel like they have wasted their time.

Work with professional bodies and learning providers is therefore required. The focus is two-fold: first, to explore the development of specific training which would enable refugees to 'top up' their qualifications rather than start from scratch; and second, to raise awareness and understanding of the NARIC system. Until there is a greater understanding about the exchange value of different qualifications and more consistent response, institutions will continue to provide ad hoc responses that confuse and frustrate individuals with overseas qualifications. Understanding the NARIC system is crucial if educational providers are to help individuals to understand the value of existing qualifications and the reasons why they may need to 'top up' the qualification to gain an equivalent UK qualification. As one learning provider explained:

If students are not up to scratch and have to do other qualifications – most people are OK when it is explained why they have to do extra courses ... Odd students who feel their qualifications are higher than what we say – as long they understand that we are not saying we are judging them as being academically poor but that the level and education system is different then they are OK.

(Female, learning provider)

The attitude of each individual seemed to be significant in determining their approach to gaining new qualifications. The case studies illustrate how many of the

participants, despite coming to the UK with undergraduate degrees or higher, were expected to start from scratch on UK undergraduate courses.

CHAPTER 3

Education resources, referral and recognition

Barriers and strategies that supported access to learning and participation in education and training varied according to individual circumstances. Feedback from all categories of stakeholder suggests that they were often aware of these barriers but for a variety of reasons were not always able to address them. Alongside issues of language and recognition of previous qualifications, progression on the educational journey was often restricted because of

- a lack of *resources*, notably financial eligibility;
- inadequate *referral* systems associated with information, advice and guidance (IAG); and
- a lack of *recognition* of the differences between previous and UK teaching and learning environments and of the importance of on-course support.

These issues influenced the learning experiences relating to the course admission and application process; the cultural environment for course delivery, in particular courses outside a community context; on-course support mechanisms and differences in teaching and learning styles; and the attitudes of learning providers. The attitude and influence of family members also shaped decisions about what and where to study. Parents reported childcare as a common cause of concern. Other factors that influence daily life, such as accommodation and transport, also affected educational and employment progression. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of how these wider issues affect an individual's sense of identity, feelings of isolation and confidence to access social capital networks.

Inevitably the extent to which a particular barrier restricted an individual's opportunity to participate varied. Often it was a combination of factors that ultimately prevented or made it difficult for people to pursue their learning interests, whereas it was personal qualities, family support networks or chance encounters

with the right person that enabled them to overcome a particular barrier. In many respects, strategies to support or encourage educational participation were dependent on tackling the barriers. Possible solutions tended to depend on individual qualities (including resilience, motivation and access to personal support networks) or depend on learning providers and community voluntary groups developing and delivering relevant and ideally joined-up support mechanisms. In the majority of situations, there was greater success when individual and institutional obstacles were tackled together. However, there was a tendency to see solutions as either the responsibility of the individual or the institution. Although this divide is largely artificial, for the purposes of understanding some of the complexities of each issue we will discuss them separately.

Financial resources

Finance was the main resource constraint for participants wanting to undertake education or training and often resulted in them enrolling for free, short, low-level courses rather than longer, fee-paying courses which may have greater personal and economic relevance. Concerns about how to finance study included direct and indirect costs associated with the course.

Eligibility to enrol on a course and fee status differed between refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. For example, asylum-seekers were not entitled to any form of financial support for study at FE or HE level and were unable to pay fees at overseas rates. This meant that they were generally excluded from any form of learning other than ESOL or Basic Skills. Restrictions on the ability to work whilst waiting for a decision about their claim for asylum also exacerbated the financial barriers to learning (Aldridge and Waddington, 2001; Jonker, 2004; Waddington, 2005).

One ESOL tutor reported that financial concerns regularly affected people's ability to take full advantage of educational opportunities because they must prioritise earning money over studying. One participant described the constraints arising from a lack of finance:

Money-wise it's completely impossible when you first get here. Because until you have been legally here for long enough and you have residency, you pay, you know, five times more than a British person would pay, so that stopped me from doing everything I wanted to do; I could not afford to do the Diploma in Translations it was slightly cheaper ... but still. For a long time I lived here and I wanted to study but I couldn't because it's too much money.

(Flavia, Brazilian woman)

Flavia's concerns were echoed by Tawanda who was working in manufacturing rather than his own profession of teaching. He felt that the study he would need to undertake in order to re-qualify would put a financial strain on his family:

Money is the last barrier – how do you work enough to support yourself and your family while studying full-time, especially as there are no maintenance grants?

(Tawanda, Zimbabwean man)

Similarly, Bandhu, an Indian man, explained that although he wanted to complete further qualifications there was a conflict between funding education, covering the costs of living in the UK, and earning enough money to send back to his retired father in India. This point was confirmed by a female community practitioner who noted that “*for migrants the priority [is] to get a roof over their heads and food on the table*”.

In addition, many worried about the loss of income if they secured a place on a full-time course. Javeed, an Iranian man, referred to a vicious circle that meant that to get a job in computing he needed a relevant qualification, but to study to get the qualification, he needed to come off benefits and to do that he needed a job. Limited finances tended to restrict the opportunity to enrol on appropriate courses, in particular higher-level courses that would have enabled people to progress. For instance, Dharini, an Indian woman, explained that she could not afford to take the college courses at her local learning centre, but instead was able to do a ‘Women in Technology’ class part-time at the community centre because it was free. Kontar, from Afghanistan, explained how he felt obliged to make similar pragmatic choices. He opted for a free Higher National Certificate at the local college, rather than the degree course he had successfully applied for. He made this decision simply because he found out a month before he was due to start the degree that he would have to pay full fees as an international student.

Generally, higher-level courses had higher fees, and because many participants were not eligible for grants or fee exemptions this meant that the cost was prohibitive. These concerns relate to a wider issue of funding priorities in adult education, which increasingly limit the scope of available courses for those who cannot pay. As a 2005 review of adult learning provision in Further Education by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) revealed:

there has been evidence of an emerging crisis in provision for adults outside of programmes of study contributing to the Skills for Life and Level 2 targets.

(NIACE, 2005)

However, although Ajit (Indian male) spoke about courses being too expensive, this was an assumption based on anecdotal things people had told him. ‘I am not eligible for a grant because I have not been in the country long enough, but someone said it might change when I have been here three years’. While Ajit was vaguely aware of the ‘three-year rule’, he was uncertain about the reliability of this

knowledge and unclear about how and where he could confirm what was possible. The importance of IAG in addressing some of the misinformation and in exploring the funding of educational courses should not be under-estimated.

Many participants regarded financial constraints as a significant barrier because it delayed the process of settling. This state of limbo which many found themselves in has well-documented negative effects on health and well-being, and undermines the integration process by wasting time in these crucial first few months or even years. Moreover, it has a particularly strongly-felt impact on highly qualified individuals, as they become progressively de-skilled while awaiting the outcome of their asylum claim.

Jafar's story, below, highlights the financial difficulties associated with status and the sense of vulnerability associated with waiting for a Home Office decision.

Financial barriers – Jafar's story

Jafar was a Sudanese young man aged between 26 and 30 years who had lived in the West Midlands since October 2002, and was awaiting a decision on his asylum application. Leaving his home country as a result of persecution, he stayed for six weeks in the South East and then 'settled' in the West Midlands in an area which he described as "comfortable and friendly".

Jafar graduated in 1996 with a BSc Degree in Engineering. The award spanned over a period of five years and he completed it in his own language – Arabic. He had, however, studied English at Secondary and Intermediary Schools. He had not taken any other courses or training in his own country.

Once Jafar found himself in the West Midlands he was eager to continue some form of study with the intention of being able to work at some future point. He enrolled at a local FE college in September 2003 on a part-time basis, undertaking an HNC in Business Computers & Business Information Technology; Cambridge Certificate in English (consisting of 12 hours a week) and was working towards a European Driving Licence. He was aware that he was taking a course which was lower than his ability but said "*it keeps my mind occupied ... and is good practice for English language ...*" He felt sure that the best way to study English was to live with native people in order to develop communication skills.

Jafar had no difficulty accessing these courses, although he did report "*struggling with the language*". In terms of 'college-student life', he enjoyed the balance of daily contact and time for personal study. He welcomed the teamwork activities because they offered opportunities to get to know other people. Jafar felt more positive when focussing on his studies, saying: "*they are good for me*". He could not think of any improvements he would like to see at the college.

A bonus for him was the fact that he was able to access email facilities and make contact with his own friends. Internet access also gave him the opportunity to research postgraduate study “*possibilities for myself*” and thus increase the likelihood of progressing personal development plans. He approached nine universities in the UK including Staffordshire, where he received an offer for a place on the BEng (Hons) Electronic Engineering award. However, his status as an asylum-seeker did not allow him to apply for a loan, hence he was unable to proceed, due to lack of funding. Similar situations developed when he applied to Manchester Metropolitan, Liverpool, Birmingham and Aston Universities. The key barrier for Jafar was a lack of funding, due to his status. He was aware of the cost of fees and during the interview shared his knowledge of various administrative policies he had collected in respect of ‘how to get on a course’. However, he had come to the conclusion that in order to continue his academic career, he needed to locate funding and his solution lay with “*getting a work permit*”. He had made enquiries to the Home Office and discovered he was unable to work in the UK pending a decision from the Home Office concerning his status. He was aware of being able to work on a voluntary basis, but this would not help him to overcome the financial barriers facing him.

Jafar said he had a lot he could offer to society but he was “*stuck*” as his future was “*out of my hands*”. He had witnessed the experience of other asylum-seekers whose application to remain in the UK had failed. At such times he felt that “*education is secondary*” to the loss of friends which he described as “*a bad day in my life*”. Such observations triggered his own thoughts and he explained how he worried that it might happen to him. “*I wake up in the morning and hope the post is not negative ... there is no guarantee of what is coming in the post ... I feel worried if I see a Home Office stamp ... a letter could change your whole life ... stay or go ... this is the way asylum-seekers live ... spend their life and every hour of the day like this ... always in the mind. Every day you have the same plan or the same problem ... every day we see something which will affect your life in a different way ... newspapers ... television ... a few sentences on a piece of paper will make a big difference for you but this is not a big issue for the Home Office but for the receiver it will change everything, every feeling. You are at the neck of a bottle and the Home Office can push you out or send you to the bottom. For Muslims there is god. The Home Office is god. Every day is a trial ... waiting for the post but dreading a Home Office letter*”.

Through meeting people and talking to people on his course, he felt his confidence was growing in terms of his English-speaking abilities. He has

found in general terms when he is dealing with people in relation to his status and current issues affecting his life, that he tends to 'listen' more than 'talk'. Like many participants he said he was grateful for being given the opportunity to talk at the interview

There was an added complication for women, whose differential opportunities to pursue certain jobs outside the home tended to delay their settling in process. For example, a female community practitioner explained a common situation faced by some women:

they can't work because they need to speak English, the colleges charge £6.00 an hour for fees, their husband won't pay for education. Therefore there is a delay in education [and] employment for a further two years, because then their education becomes free.

There was a tendency for participants to enrol on free community-based courses. While these were useful in tackling isolation and building confidence, especially concerning use of English, they were rarely the ideal course in terms of academic ability. There was some variation in how strictly eligibility criteria were applied. Some providers required documentary evidence to prove eligibility; others were not as rigorous and described how some individuals who understood the system were able to gain a free place. As a male learning provider explained:

If they tick 'no' to being a UK citizen, they have to go to the international department and they get charged. What I find is that most people just tick the box (yes they are a citizen). I have not got an obligation to check this when enrolling on ESOL classes. ... [I know] community liaison teams give advice and guidance – there is not much you can say.

Another learning provider pointed out the irony of the alternative scenario: *"sometimes it is better if people don't understand the question or answer it incorrectly, because then I am unable to check out eligibility"*.

In response to this situation, one learning provider recommended that if finance is a problem, completing small modules rather than long programmes such as three-year programmes may help minimise the cost, particularly if individuals were approaching the 'three-year period'. This was because institutions calculate fees on the learner's status at the point at which they enrol onto the programme, which means that even if a student is classified as a UK citizen part way through the programme they will still have to pay international student rates.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

The lack of a single source of appropriate information, advice and guidance (IAG) and referral to the right organisation was a common concern of participants, especially during their first few months in the UK. Overall there were difficulties in accessing IAG related to both education and employment and consequently limited understanding about education and employment opportunities in the UK. This is a concern also identified by Aldridge and Waddington (2001), Jonker (2004) and Waddington (2005). The myriad of post-19 education and training courses in the UK does not help and makes negotiating the system notoriously complex and confusing.

Participants were often highly motivated as regards their own progression. Those who had been in the UK for some time were more likely to know about the services and opportunities available and were proactive in accessing appropriate support either with or without the aid of external bodies to support their referral within the system. Interestingly, once participants had been in the UK for a number of years, they were more likely to access information remotely, using the press or the internet and taking advantage of advice services in colleges or at the Job Centre. Many participants reported that they found it confusing that there was no single place to source all the relevant support. Their accounts suggested that they tended to find out about opportunities in a rather ad hoc way, through community organisations, advertisements or by word of mouth.

Overall, there was a general lack of Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) and effective referral between learning providers. This was partly due to the reliance on community groups who were dependent on short-term funding. Several community practitioners spoke about the tension and the need to achieve a balance between providing a service which people felt comfortable accessing on the one hand, and a quality service on the other. Although more formal services might have more current information, they appeared to be less readily accessed by participants.

There appears to be a mismatch in providing the features needed for an IAG service to be accessible and meeting the needs of the different communities. For instance, there was an assumption that once individuals received information they will be able to act upon the information in a rational manner. There was little recognition of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997) necessary to process the information to achieve specific goals, or the importance of trust derived from social capital, which many practitioners said was vital if someone was to act upon the information or advice provided. One community practitioner shared their frustration:

The problem appears to be that although funders appear to have the understanding of the importance of providing an advice and guidance service, they don't however share that community understanding of how communities operate. People tend to prefer to use services that they feel comfortable in. For

example, women-only environments, faith, cultural and the vicinity of the organisation all have an impact on where a person goes for advice. This means that providing just one service in one community organisation is not sufficient, it is also possible that it could be alienating a large sector of a community from accessing that service.

These sentiments reflect the findings from Houghton and Ali (2000) and Houghton and Sethi's (2004) work relating to community provision. All categories of stakeholder offering IAG to refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants commented on the need for longer-term one-to-one support and regretted that the target-driven nature of funding tended to restrict this possibility. Examples are the 28-day 'moving on' period for newly-recognised refugees or the restrictions associated with training programmes funded by New Deal.

Inevitably the majority of participants did not have the benefit of social networks to help them navigate their way around official systems (Morrice, 2007). This may explain why community-based provision was often easier to locate, and appeared less mysterious or official. Contact with community groups was initially a result of 'word of mouth' recommendations from friends and family. The community-based IAG workers were often from a similar cultural background, gender or faith, or were bilingual. These similarities appeared to make the process of developing trust easier. This ensured delivery of IAG within a holistic context, which according to Preece and Houghton (2000) is an important feature and recommendation for adult learners.

The inclusion of assessment within the guidance process was not common, although practitioners did recognise the need to support individuals in reviewing existing skills. Audit tools like those developed by Aldridge *et al* (2005) offer a practical tool for supporting individuals to assess existing educational and employment experiences. Another aspect of the guidance process that was often greater is that of advocacy where the levels of advocacy needed and provided by community IAG workers was often greater and involved taking an individual through the different stages of gaining education through to employment. For instance, there were examples of women in the North West and South East case studies getting a job and continuing to contact the community practitioners to ask for advice about how to do certain tasks. As one community development worker explained, often the women feel unsure about the expectations of their English employers and want to ensure that they do things the 'right way'. This uncertainty seems to relate to a lack of knowledge about 'English ways' that threatened their confidence and belief that they have the right to participate, which in turn potentially jeopardised their engagement with education or employment. By nurturing an individual's sense of agency the community development workers enabled individuals to believe that they could be active, which helped to develop their identity and confidence as citizens (Lister, 1997). This need for ongoing support was a

common theme with participants keeping in touch with ESOL tutors and community groups for many years.

In the North East case study there were examples of participants serving their local community by acting as informal advocates for friends and their wider community, particularly as their language skills and knowledge of the system improved. As Juhan, an Iraqi male, explained:

They do not come to me through the organisation, but people come to me personally, referred to me through friends or people I know. If someone has a reputation of speaking a little English and knows something about the system here, they become the front line for people to talk to. Rather than going to an organisation, they find it easier to go to that person, especially if they are able to understand their language.

Although these relationships occasionally transcended the boundaries of nationality, it was more usual for them to focus on specific national groups. For example, Yasin, an Iraqi Kurdish male, regularly advocated for other Kurdish refugees at appointments relating to their asylum claim. Similarly, Tawanda from Zimbabwe provided a range of support services to other members of the Zimbabwean community. This casual arrangement had in the second case led to the founding of a new refugee community organisation, revealing how informal support can evolve through community development into a more structured service with the capacity to reach more beneficiaries.

Overall, highly qualified professional individuals were generally more empowered to seek out the information or services they needed than those with lower level skills. Nevertheless, those applying for higher-level courses mentioned the complexity and lack of consistent information about the Higher Education system. This was a particular problem for highly-qualified professionals who required specialist information on re-qualifying and securing employment in a specific field. The South East case study revealed that while agencies with the right institutional expertise and appropriate skills and knowledge to address specific questions do exist, they are rare, usually under-resourced and often located in London.

Finally, accessing a relevant service was more difficult because of restrictions regarding the target audience for a particular service. As Isabella's account of trying to access careers guidance illustrates:

I've been living here for a bit and I'm changing my career now, and I need someone to advise me how to write my CV, what to do and what to target ... and I would explain to them ... "ah, no, no, I know what you mean, yeah, yeah, but no, I'm sorry we don't have anything like that" ...So I called the library and they said there's this organisation and they do that, and they gave me the

number. And when I called this organisation they said: “well, we do it, but we only do Level 1”. Because I have a degree I’m over the level they’d help, and people would say “Oh, 26”, or something like that, so I was over the age as well. But then, part of the company or maybe it’s another company, I don’t know ... but they ... we found this other place where they do, if you pay, so you can pay for this service and it’s the only choice I had. So I had to pay, but at least he really helped me. Financial problems, it’s always there because if I’m looking for work it’s because I don’t have money.

(Isabella, Brazilian woman)

Progression into mainstream education and training programmes

The importance of on-course support mechanisms should not be under-estimated. Participants often described individual staff working with refugees and asylum-seekers as showing a great deal of commitment and offering support which was beyond what might be expected. Although welcome, this may be problematic because it results in a support system that is fragile and dependent on individuals’ goodwill, commitment or personal responsiveness, rather than embedded in institutional practice.

For participants who did access higher education there were numerous practical, academic and social hurdles to overcome. Unlike fee-paying overseas students they were not entitled to access the wealth of language, social and other support provided for international students.

As Catherine’s account of studying for an MA illustrates, the experience can be isolating and confusing:

It was like when you first send a child to nursery. It was very frightening ... finding my own way... I had never had experience of using big libraries...not big or small... I never used library. I did not know how to find the books, which section and where... it was quite difficult in the first six months particularly.

(Catherine, Pakistani woman)

Catherine’s attempt to seek help from the Students’ Union resulted in invitations to a host of social events which she mistakenly thought were a compulsory feature of the course. Therefore, despite being tired and coping with the academic requirements she forced herself to accept invitations even to events she felt uncomfortable attending, until she realised these were optional. Understanding the academic and social conventions, especially when these differed from previous higher education experience, was often a culture shock.

Experiences of studying in higher education varied according to an individual’s prior experiences of education. Many participants’ previous experience involved a more passive teacher/student relationship and less interactive learning. For

example, Adil, an Iraqi male, found many aspects of a Masters degree in International Studies difficult because of differences in teaching and learning methods. *“[In Iraq] you get much more directly from the teacher, whereas the emphasis here is more on self-directed research. This was quite scary at first ... [I] still find taking notes difficult though, as it wasn't something [I] had to do in Iraq”*.

Some participants perceived that their lack of familiarity with styles of teaching had a negative impact on their chance of succeeding in their course of study. For example, Mingmei, a Chinese woman, said that she found significant cultural differences in the styles of education in the UK and China. Whereas in China the teacher does more work for the students, she felt that in the UK teachers give the students very small clues and then expect them to do the work to find out more. Catherine, describing her experiences of the Pakistan higher education system, felt that, compared to Britain, Pakistan was an under-resourced learning environment, with limited access to library resources and learning technology. This meant she felt unprepared for studying in the UK.

Technology was a big issue ... I did not have at all experience of technology, the area I was working in [had] no telephone, or computers there... electricity it is there, if it goes off...6 months we can be without electricity...so TV and these things we did not have at all. So when coming here the technology, the use of machinery, and the use of how to handle things, and cultural difference was a barrier.

(Catherine, a Pakistani woman)

Catherine's initial experience of studying in an English university was thus a bewildering and frightening experience; she was not alone in finding differences in the teaching and learning experiences. Avizeh's story illustrates just how isolating and traumatic the experience of the education system can be for refugees who are not familiar with the academic conventions and expectations of the Higher Education system.

Differences in teaching and learning: Avizeh's story

Avizeh, an Iranian woman, has a BSc in Nutrition and worked for 12 years as a nutritionist in a hospital before being forced to leave her country. She came to the UK in 2000. Her first employment in the UK was in a nursing home as a care assistant, but her English wasn't very good and she found it difficult to understand the patients. She was able to transfer to the kitchen and worked there as a catering assistant for four years. An ex-ESOL tutor introduced her to a Black and Minority Ethnic community organisation that employed her

as a community worker for 13 months. When this contract ended the same tutor again supported her application to work as an Outreach Learning Advisor for the local college; this again was a fixed-term contract.

Avizeh was keen to practise as a nutritionist in the UK and believed that the MA in Nutrition offered at a London HEI could provide her with a route into that profession. She applied and was accepted on the course. This interview took place after the first year of a two-year MA. She was living on the south coast and had been commuting to West London two days a week: hugely expensive, not only in the course fees which were almost £2,000 a year, but also in travelling costs. This distance also contributed to her sense of isolation.

This is what she said about the course:

It's very interesting and I like it, but I wasn't looking for something interesting I was looking for something to guide me into work. It's a taught course and I enjoy it a lot and I'm learning new things. But up to now I haven't seen a hospital and really I don't know what a nutritionist does in the UK. I don't know...It's a 2 year course and I've finished the first year but I'm not sure about the second year because if I can't gain any experience of work...I mean I don't need a new certificate. Well I need one but the most important thing for me is to find some way of finding a job. I think there is a high demand for this job and it's very competitive and I'm not optimistic about finding a job.

She went on to describe her experience of being a student:

It was very difficult for me really and for the first term because it was the first time that I wanted to study scientific material in English and I didn't know how to start. For the first month or two I used to translate from English to my language and then I read it in my language but then I couldn't express it in English so I couldn't work. I have learnt a lot. It has been a lot of work, a lot, a lot. I worked from 6 o'clock in the morning 'til 10 o'clock at night. Especially in the first term I didn't know how to write essays. It was the first time. I didn't know I had to reference any of my writing so I had to re-write it...I had a letter attached to the essay saying there are no references...They didn't show me how to write them. They also said that the paragraphs are not friendly [sic]. I didn't know I could use sub-titles in my essay because in the English course I learnt that when I write an article or something I don't have to use sub-titles. But I do need sub-titles in an essay to make the parts separate. Then I read essays from different journals and I compared it with myself and my essay; I used to write at university in my home country, but it was very different. I didn't have to reference everything I used to write references at the end

only, not for all the sentences in the middle of the essay, not in the text.

Also, presentations were very, very, very difficult. The first presentation I didn't know what is a presentation. 18 years ago we had presentations in [...], but we didn't have PowerPoint or overheads. It was very embarrassing the first time. When I wanted to do my presentation I didn't have PowerPoint on my computer I used overhead slides. I was very nervous, I couldn't finish it because I was shaking ...[laughs]...Yes, I was shaking, my voice was shaking and I couldn't remember where the overhead was, it was on the ceiling and people couldn't see it, but I was very embarrassed. I couldn't look behind and control it and see where it was, on the board or on the wall. I couldn't finish that first one. But the second one I had experience. I asked my tutor to attend presentation of other students in other subjects and courses and it was very helpful. I took notes and then I understood that I had to have introduction and this and this and this. And then the second time I used PowerPoint. It was better; I think I got ...59% [laughs].

I'd never done presentations like this before! At the same time it was a very difficult time in my life and then I had to study so hard and this added to it. I felt isolated on the course because I didn't know anyone. I tried to make good communication with other students... [pause] ... but I wasn't successful and I felt completely isolated. Yes, it was very difficult. I lost 8 kilos. Yes, it was from everything. I studied from 6am to 10pm. I had to write, for example, 4,000 words; it was the first time I wrote a review.

There was an option course in Health Science which I wanted to do. When I read the paper it was written that it was in Autumn and Spring; so I thought I'd do it in the Spring. When I went to start the course it had started in September and I didn't have chance to go to the class to learn how to write a review. I had to do the whole course in just 2 months. I had two 15 minute meetings with my tutor and then I used the computer to try and find out how to write a review. I had almost written 4000 words when I showed it to my tutor; she took away 3000 words. She said that you don't have to write a lot of information about the topic that you want to present, that they already know, for example, about 'free radicals' so you don't need to write it. So I started to write it again. I started again. It was very difficult, but I finished it. I'm waiting for the result now.

When I finished my essays I didn't know how to correct my English mistakes and I couldn't find anything in the university because as I said I used to go just 2 days. I found someone to help me at the college. I paid £80. I gave her £80 to look at two essays and correct my English. However, when I had my results it said that I mixed UK and American English [laughs]. I had a bit of difficulty in that course and the other people had a very high level of English so I had to listen very, very carefully to

understand and sometimes I couldn't. I wanted to buy a tape recorder but you know the course was very expensive and I had to pay for everything. My travel was expensive; sometimes I had to pay £40 for the train because I had to be there at gam. It was very, very expensive. I had a little bit of savings but I spent them all this first year. If I can find a job and if I can save until September [it was June at the time of the interview] I can continue with my studies. I applied for a loan from the bank, but who trusts a refugee who doesn't have any job and any money in their account?

Many of these issues are common to all international students; it is interesting for those involved in teaching this learner group to reflect on the possible differences in the institutional response to fee-paying international students and those seeking entry following their experience of being a refugee or asylum-seeker.

Previous experience was not the only factor to influence higher education study. Even when a student overcomes the financial barriers of enrolling on a course, finances continued to influence course-related decisions. For some, their financial circumstances meant they had to work part-time while studying; others felt unable to pursue additional opportunities, such as work experience.

Ali from India described how he had to work part-time throughout the course, because his qualifications were not from the UK he was told he had to go onto the Year 0 programme, which is an access course for mature students who have no formal qualifications and want to progress onto to a combined honours degree. Following the Year 0, he progressed onto a BA in Marketing and Public Relations, achieving a grade 2:2. One of the attractive features of this course was that it contained an option to have a one-year placement within a company. Although he felt the UK work experience would be helpful in securing a job, he did not take up this opportunity because this would have involved an extra year to pay course fees. On reflection, Ali commented how he felt this decision had disadvantaged him when he began to compete for graduate jobs.

There was some overlap between the services identified as important to help refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants succeed in their studies and the services already offered, which suggests that in some situations support is already available, but not well- or perhaps appropriately advertised. This is, however, a perennial problem and concern of many adult learners and those who seek to support them. Many of the barriers to education mirrored those experienced by participants who sought employment. For some participants, the experience of trying to access and study for a qualification would shape their expectations about employers and played a major role in helping or hindering their progression journey in employment.

CHAPTER 4

Employment

Barriers to employment for refugees and asylum-seekers – literature

The national refugee integration strategy places a strong emphasis on access to appropriate education, training and employment as key factors in facilitating successful integration into UK society (Home Office, 2005). However, findings from previous research have demonstrated that race and ethnicity are significant factors in discrimination in the labour market, with unemployment rates for members of black and minority ethnic communities two to three times higher than for the white population (2001 census). The refugee population faces disproportionately high levels of unemployment, around six times higher than the national average (DWP, 2003 and 2005). Other research studies have argued that the figure is much higher, for example, Shiferaw and Hagos (2002) suggest that 75-80 per cent of refugees in the UK are either unemployed or under-employed. Rates of unemployment for refugees are, according to (Bloch, 2002), significantly higher than for other ethnic minority groups and are disproportionately higher for refugee women (Peabody Trust, 1999).

Others have highlighted the high levels of skills and qualifications which many asylum-seekers and refugees bring with them from their countries of origin and argue that this untapped economic potential is going to waste (Carey-Wood *et al*, 1995; Knox, 1997; Shiferaw and Hagos, 2002). Substantial evidence of the skills, talents and occupational experience among the asylum-seeker and refugee population exists in skills and qualification audits carried out in various areas of the country (e.g. Aldridge and Waddington 2001). Despite qualifications, experience and skills, under-employment is common, it is also a situation that appears to contradict the Home Office (2005) commitments outlined in *Improving opportunity, strengthening society: The Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion*.

Many participants in the REP project came to the UK with high expectations of

gaining comparable employment to what they did in their country of origin. However, it was not often achievable in the short term, and many had to accept lower status, and less well paid jobs. This led to personal frustrations. As indicated at the end of Chapter 3, there were similarities between the barriers associated with education and employment. These included access to information, the importance of previous experience, and impact of time and funding. As already discussed, the importance of securing an income often prevented them pursuing further or appropriate qualifications, which in the longer term may have been more useful in securing appropriate employment.

Barriers when applying for jobs

The job application process involved a series of potential hurdles that included developing suitable curriculum vitae (CV), preparing for, and getting through the interview. Community and voluntary groups played a key role in offering the informal advice that enabled participants to become aware of the cultural and contextual differences that they needed to take into account during the job application process. Not surprisingly there is a lack of familiarity with the UK culture of employment and training; this is a frequent barrier to labour market progression cited in the literature. Some studies point out that a particular problem is lack of familiarity with the culture of job-seeking and the notion of ‘selling yourself’ to a prospective employer. As a result, refugees benefit from specialised guidance and support to help them navigate their way around the system, unfortunately this is not always available. Shiferaw and Hagos identified a shortage of easily accessible information, advice and guidance (IAG) as a major issue: *‘Systematic tailor-made services for refugees are very limited and tend to be London-based’* (Shiferaw and Hagos, 2002: 16). In addition, confusion and ignorance among service providers about the entitlements of refugees and asylum-seekers lead, in many cases, to denial of access to services which could improve employability (Refugee Council, 2003a and b).

This is a longstanding and widely recognised concern. Dadzie (1990), from a national perspective, and Houghton (1998), within a Lancashire context, both emphasise the importance of adapting guidance for particular groups who have specific requirements and obstacles to negotiate. As this example from a community development worker illustrates:

when I have worked with qualified overseas people, I have found their CV to be 6-7 pages long and to be very technical and subject focused. I have had to reduce these to 2-3 pages and to be more person focused on their human qualities.

One North East community development worker described how this unfamiliarity

with employer's expectations and procedures could impact on individuals' chances of finding work:

Some people from abroad don't know how to fill in application forms. This isn't a criticism, it's just true, but it's not in anyone's remit to help. Also, most refugee job applicants are not aware of equal opportunities and don't know their rights. If they're discriminated against they don't know how to appeal.

A number of participants corroborated this perspective. Juhan, an Iraqi man, explained how:

For immigrants, the [job application] processes are unfamiliar, such as: writing a cover letter, approaching an employer or making a good impression. I had to improve my personal skills to help my chances.

Adil, another Iraqi man, described how he was consistently unsuccessful in applying for jobs until someone from within the organisation took him through the application in great detail. After this experience he decided that it was a skill which he had to learn. Nevertheless, he felt that the process remained somewhat arbitrary:

You have to know what to write. You have to read that person's mind who is going to read the application.

Ajit, an Indian man, described how he benefited from feedback on his CV that was offered as part of the REP interview process. It was something that Ajit and others welcomed. A related problem with preparing a CV concerned the equivalence of overseas qualifications; a useful strategy employed by one community development worker was to include the equivalence in brackets. However, as one learning provider explained, it is important to "*avoid a culture of dependency, and try to encourage people to have a go and to be independent*".

For many refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications was a major obstacle. Evidence from earlier research (Refugee Council, 2002a and 2003b) suggests that many employers are discouraged from employing refugees as they feel unable to assess overseas qualifications and experience and are generally concerned about people's legal status and whether they will 'fit in'.

There was a general perception that qualifications acquired outside the European Union were not valued at the same level as UK and European qualifications. One research project investigated this problem of non-recognition across a number of European countries and concluded that:

... the great difficulties refugees face throughout the process of recognition and the under-valuation of their original education and training, result in massive loss of labour potential and lend force to misrepresentations of refugees as an unmotivated, unreliable, unskilled source of labour.

(World University Service, 2002)

Generally there appears to be little consideration of highly-educated and skilled asylum-seekers and refugees and the value they could contribute to society. Some employment agencies offer refugees work based on completion of a written test. This approach works on an underlying assumption that asylum-seekers and refugees are only suited to low-skilled work despite any evidence that they may be highly-skilled.

One area where some did have a lack of qualification or competence was in English language, which has been highlighted as a major cause of labour market disadvantage for refugees, as well as for other first-generation migrant groups (Bloch, 2002; Strategy Unit, 2003). The Government's integration strategy paper places emphasis on the provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) as a key policy priority in addressing the need to improve English language skills (Home Office, 2005a). However, research by Bellis and Morrice (2003) into the experiences of refugees and asylum-seekers in South East England questioned the emphasis in Government policy on a narrow curriculum of English and citizenship classes for this target group. They argued that this approach was an inadequate means of facilitating access to employment or further study, and failed to address the range of educational needs required by a diverse refugee population.

Despite the level of qualification and the lack of recognition for existing qualifications many participants showed great ingenuity when applying for jobs. Samina, a Bengali woman in the North West case study, adopted a very independent and proactive approach, using strategies she had found successful in her home country. However, without the same social capital network, she acknowledged that this was a more challenging task. Successful strategies adopted by Samina for gaining employment included using her initiative to visit workplaces and to ask personally about job vacancies. Until she found her job, the typical response she received was that she was over-qualified or did not have the right qualifications or experience. Although she took a proactive and personal approach to gaining employment, the fact that she did not know which personnel to contact in a large institution was a major obstacle to pursuing certain avenues of employment.

Knowing how the system works and what to expect had a knock on effect on self-confidence and self-esteem. Lukina, a Ukrainian woman, applied for many jobs as a medical doctor. Although highly qualified and previously employed in the Ukraine, she found the lack of response to her applications difficult to understand:

When they give you permission to stay they should give you information about how the employment system and things like that work, and what to expect. It might be OK if you have a computer or if you know lots of people here, but if you don't ... I applied for many, many jobs [as a doctor] but I didn't get any replies. I don't know why. Now I know that they don't reply, that's normal, but it made me very down... it was my self-esteem, it was very low.

(Lukina, a Ukrainian woman)

Like many of the refugees interviewed, Lukina did not know why employers rejected her applications or what she could do to increase her chance of gaining employment. The sense of feeling 'lost' or 'stuck' were themes which ran through a great many refugees' stories of life in the UK. For many their experience had simply compounded the loss of status and professional identity which had accompanied their migration to the UK.

Barriers when preparing for job interviews

A community practitioner in the North East case study revealed how many forced migrants fall foul of interviews. They suggested that:

Interviews are often a problem for refugees and asylum-seekers. First, language problems get worse with interview nerves. Second, there are often cultural barriers. Many other cultures are not comfortable or are not aware that they need to sell themselves in a job interview. This is particularly the case with clients from Middle Eastern, Chinese and other Asian communities.

Harith, an Iraqi man, also described having limited experience of job interviews and felt he had a lack of understanding of the culture of interviews within a UK context. When he attended a job interview, he was unprepared for the broad questions he was asked, such as "what is your history?", and found that answering this type of question was personally uncomfortable. Also his general difficulties with communicating in English meant that he would get very nervous in an interview situation, which in turn affected how he presented himself and thus undermined his chances of getting the job.

Consequently, there were numerous examples of community workers playing a key role in helping to prepare participants for job interviews; this included practical advice relating to cleanliness, smartness, posture, and eye contact. For example, some women are culturally and religiously discouraged from looking someone in the eye. In the North West case study current advice from community and voluntary groups focused on enabling migrants to change and fit in rather than present their cultural, linguistic, religious and personal experiences as ones an employer might actively seek. With many employers now stating that they are committed to

celebrating diversity within their workforce, it will be interesting to see how long it will take for this shift in attitude. Change, especially attitudinal change, is a slow process. According to Sanglin-Grant (2003) in a Runnymede Trust briefing paper about equality of opportunity and diversity:

a yawning divide exists between our stated intentions, both verbal and written, ... organisations express high values and aspirations so long as individuals do not have to change what they do. (Sanglin-Grant, 2003: 1)

The contradiction between theory and practice is a concern that also relates to initiatives in the public sector regarding Race Equality Schemes. See Chapter 2 for a discussion about racism and discrimination.

Challenge of gaining relevant work experience

Although many participants have acquired occupational experience in their countries of origin, the majority of employers seemed to take little account of previous employment and only seemed to recognise work experience gained in this country. For instance, Catherine's first job was as a Care Assistant for 'housebound people'. Not only was the pay low, but also the level of responsibility was limited and not commensurate with her previous employment. However, she explained how she was willing to take this more basic job because it got her out of the house and gave her an opportunity to get to know the area and "opened the path for me into the community".

One community practitioner highlighted a gap between the expectations of employers and future employees and how this mismatch arose because of the differences in ICT systems and resulted in the potential wastage of human capital. They explained how

... the British Embassy encourage people with teaching, nursing and IT qualifications and experience to come to the UK. People therefore come with high expectations but when they come to the UK they realise that it is a completely different scenario ... there is no support and their qualifications are not recognised. For the IT people their experience is worse they are very highly qualified and experienced, but they still have problem gaining employment. Some of the IT packages they have used e.g. Oracle and Pascal are not used within the Western world, but still they are technically highly skilled in IT.

This was a vicious and frustrating circle that many migrants experienced and which policy-makers, community and public sector practitioners all confirmed was disempowering and could lead to getting trapped in low-paid and low-skilled jobs. Coping with the challenge of having to start 'on a lower rung of the ladder' was,

according to one community practitioner, dependent on people having a:

‘can do’ attitude, ... they will do what they have to do they have always been like that, whereas other people stumble at the first hurdle, they have the attitude of it’s fate that they are not meant to have a job. You need to work step-by-step with these people.

Difficulties obtaining appropriate documentation, such as job references, posed another obstacle, especially for refugees and asylum-seekers who were frequently unable to produce written evidence of their previous employment experience (Hurstfield *et al*, 2004).

An opportunity for work experience: volunteering

Many participants gained work experience by volunteering within a community or workplace setting. For Agymah (see Chapter 1), it provided a crucial opportunity to demonstrate his professional skills and abilities, ultimately leading to employment in his profession. Voluntary work provided valuable opportunities to develop communication skills, and gain a cultural understanding or knowledge of working practices within the UK. Involvement in voluntary work was generally a result of initially accessing that service as a client, building a trusting relationship within the organisation and subsequently gaining the confidence to carry out voluntary work.

Marita, a Jamaican woman, felt it was important “to give back” to the community group who helped her because they had given her so much support. A community practitioner highlighted how many Muslim migrants who were qualified schoolteachers overseas took advantage of opportunities to teach Arabic classes within mosques, and saw this as a means of gaining experience and getting a ‘foot in the door’. This approach was typical and illustrates a valuable role played by voluntary organisations that can provide an alternative to employment and a mechanism for operating as active citizens and thus gaining a voice.

There were numerous examples of research participants making an active contribution to their community while developing relevant work-related skills. For example, in the East Midlands there was a framework for learning, called Learnability, developed by the community and voluntary sector. This project used an accessible structure for volunteering opportunities, as a means of developing confidence and self-worth and enabling individuals to gain voluntary experience that might lead to paid employment and at the same time fulfil the needs of the local economy and society. The Learnability project achieved this by involving volunteers:

- using multi-lingual and teaching skills to assist other people with different languages, for example Farsi (requested by potential students at the FE College);
- as interpreters for health, legal, educational and housing issues;

- as peer educators, something regarded as especially important for women, who would benefit the female asylum-seekers and refugee population living in the area
- to participate in local drop-in centres and organisations who work with asylum-seekers and refugees in teaching, health advice or general befriending.

The CVS is often ideally placed to work proactively with refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants to build on existing good practice to engage people into a learning framework with clear paths for progression.

Whilst recognising the benefits for some of work experience through volunteering, it is not necessarily the most appropriate preparation for work in the UK. As Archer *et al* (2005) note in a research study looking at the patterns of unpaid voluntary work among refugees in London, voluntary work is often pursued because there are difficulties in obtaining work experience in the mainstream employment sector. This can lead to confinement within a volunteering 'ghetto' which may be hard to escape. The Refugee Council recognises the importance of developing paid employment opportunities that might enable individuals to draw on their personal experiences and insider knowledge. It states that:

For refugee workers a first hand knowledge and experience of exile will equip them well to address the needs of their clients. The embodiment of this principle in the recruitment policy and practices of refugee assisting organisations is essential both for the integrity of organisations and in order to set a good example to others.

(Refugee Council, 2002)

Experience of employment: under-employment

Unfortunately, as one local authority representative noted, participants represent a group of people that often:

don't get appointed to the level of their qualifications, they have to work their way up. The perception [is] that they have to work twice as hard, [although] I don't know if that is the reality.

The South East and North East case studies explicitly raised the negative attitude of many employers towards refugees. Some felt that government threats of fines for employing illegal overseas workers and a general lack of understanding about eligibility status reinforced the general reluctance to employ people from refugee backgrounds. Employers frequently insisted on the production of references and other documentation which refugees were not able to access. To address this lack of awareness several stakeholders suggested the introduction of a programme of

raising awareness among employers that could focus on the potential benefits of employing refugees.

Where participants gained employment there were examples of under-employment or exploitation within the workplace. One community practitioner described how a person with poor language skills would typically end up in the textile industry which, she felt, was “really bad”. Despite the introduction of the minimum wage, this was not always adhered to. In the North West study several community practitioners and a local authority employee described examples of employers coercing employees, including migrants, to sign documents saying that they are paid within the legal requirements and have received staff training, even when they have not. Feedback from all categories of stakeholder indicated that under-employment was common, a finding endorsed by others including Modood (2004).

As noted in the South East case study, under-employment is another consequence of this under-utilisation of refugees’ skills and experience. Because of financial pressures and the huge barriers they face, there is a tendency for many refugees to enter into low-skilled, low-paid employment regardless of previous skills levels. There is also evidence that refugee employment has become concentrated in particular low-skilled occupational areas such as catering, mini-cab driving, factory work, security, cleaning, and supermarket work (Shiferaw and Hagos, 2002).

One public sector practitioner felt very strongly that positive experiences were often too dependent on an individual champion who informally checked if employment equality policies were working. They felt that improvements depended on the allocation of resources for formal monitoring of policy implementation. *“If policies are put into practice this will remove lots of barriers for refugees and migrants ... it needs the infrastructure in place”*.

Community practitioners in all case studies mentioned the benefits of recognising refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants as a source of expertise. The idea of employing participants as researchers, a strategy used in the South East case study, was also endorsed by a North West community development worker as a means of recognising *“their specialist cultural understanding of working with the community, of their ethnic origin was one way in which people gained employment”*. They believed this was a useful strategy because it enabled people to make a wider contribution to implementing policies.

Aba, a Nigerian woman, welcomed the opportunity to use previous skills in this way. She felt valued and useful in her job because it enabled her to give meaningful support to other people that allowed them to lead a sustainable life. Not only did Aba operate as an active citizen, but also through her work she encouraged and supported others to help develop the resources of the local community. Similarly, Bandhu, an Indian man who works in a voluntary capacity as a community tutor, explained how he was motivated by the learning opportunities he has undertaken and wanted to pass on this experience to other disabled people. These two examples

illustrate how work experience not only benefited the individual but also provided the impetus and opportunity for migrants to operate as more active citizens (Lister, 1997).

An alternative for some unable to access paid employment was to pursue self-employment. Anecdotal evidence in the South East area suggested that many refugees choose to enter into self-employment as this route can present fewer barriers (e.g. retail businesses, taxi-driving, community interpreting, etc). As micro-businesses and freelance work are distinctive features of local economies such as Brighton and Hove, there could be more dedicated support in such areas for refugees wishing to set up their own businesses.

CHAPTER 5

Personal factors

Personal and contextual factors have had negative effects on individuals' integration and their engagement in education, training, the labour market or wider society. Factors such as accommodation, day-to-day life, disability, faith, social networks and racism (see Chapter 2) that often contribute to the initial trauma, social isolation and impact of dispersal faced to varying degrees by asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants.

Trauma, social isolation and the impact of dispersal

It became clear during the REP fieldwork that the situations which forced migrants to leave their countries are a persistent and real influence in how they live their lives. This is either because these situations themselves are ongoing, or because they have long-term implications on the individual's physical and mental health. One worker emphasised this:

It is important not to underestimate the impact of past traumas in preventing refugee and asylum-seekers accessing work and learning. In fact, for many, the traumas that they are escaping from cannot be left behind, since people know the fate of family members and friends.

Thus, Natiq from Azerbaijan said that moving to the UK has had an adverse effect on his health and standard of living and he became depressed shortly after arrival. Kontar, an Afghan man, added:

Emotionally it is sad as I miss my family and they miss me and there is no telephone system where they live so we can't communicate by phone. It is sometimes a bit sad.

Isolation for some asylum-seeker and refugee women can have a long-term effect on any potential educational opportunities and their ultimate entry into the workforce. There were examples of reliance on partners and in one case the language skills of children to communicate. Cultural values and their role as ‘wife and mother’ appear to influence the extent to which some women can develop bridging social capital links. Staff at a local training and education centre noted that where there are reservations about women in the workplace, schools and certain council jobs are perceived as non-threatening work environments for women whereas jobs working in mixed-sex hospital wards or involving alcohol or gambling are seen as more questionable. To try and reduce a sense of isolation there needs to be positive encouragement for women to attend small, safe centres located in accessible neighbourhoods. More confident women could train as peer mentors to encourage women in their neighbourhoods to participate. Organisations such as Sure Start where women with children under five years old are the target group that could develop a strategy to encourage the participation of asylum-seekers and refugees. To gain the support of family networks it is important to plan activities to take account of their concerns and develop them in a culturally appropriate manner.

As illustrated by some of the individual stories, a constant theme running through many of the interviews was a sense of prejudice against refugees and asylum-seekers. Many hid their identity as asylum-seekers and refugees, and some saw their identity as making it difficult to make friends and socialise with English people. The desire to meet and mix with English people was a recurrent theme irrespective of whether the participants had a social network of family and friends from their own community.

Flavia from Brazil, who had been dispersed to Brighton, described her sense of loneliness and isolation at not belonging to a community and having friends around her. She also describes her sense of disappointment at not being able to foster friendships with British people.

First you feel lonely and you feel like an alien. If you don't know anyone, even the people you know, you've known them for so little time that you don't know if you know them. It's quite hard at the beginning because you don't have someone that you think: 'these are my friends' ... or you know, you don't know where to get information about anything ... if you need to call someone you don't know anyone ... but as the years go you start meeting people.

The effect of dispersal is to make the process of settlement and integration more difficult, particularly as there is significant overlap between dispersal areas and the 88 most deprived wards identified by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (Refugee Council, 2005a). Isolated asylum-seekers are then placed in areas where the local people themselves have scarce resources. The net result is to promote the perception

of refugees as a burden on the community rather than as an asset (Loizos, 2000). Trying to establish and build friendships and social networks between refugee and non-refugee communities in this context is difficult, and yet research commissioned by the Home Office found that for both refugee and non-refugee communities the development of 'social connections' between communities was seen as the core mechanism for securing integration and were crucial to community cohesion (Ager and Strang, 2004).

Accommodation

Gaining a sense of belonging was closely associated with finding suitable accommodation. However, securing somewhere to live was not simply about finding a roof over one's head; it also shaped the level of involvement with different communities and groups located outside individuals' communities. Community involvement seemed more prevalent when people were not living in hostel accommodation. In the West Midlands case study, some asylum-seekers found that YMCA accommodation where racism was rife proved to be particularly detrimental to their process of integration. In contrast, when they moved out to a settled community, their white neighbours made them feel welcome. This pattern was noticeable throughout the research, and where people did remain in hostels they displayed signs of withdrawal and isolation.

A few participants in the South East case study described problems of finding accommodation after they gained refugee status. Their difficulties were often a consequence of, or exacerbated by, the dispersal system introduced under the Immigration and Asylum Act (Home Office, 2002). As once refugee status is confirmed, they have just 28 days to leave accommodation provided by the National Asylum Support Service and find their own accommodation. The challenge of finding accommodation was more difficult because of a lack of affordable housing in an area that is associated with the high numbers of homeless people and rough sleepers (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2004).

The problem is not restricted to the South East. A recent study in Leeds suggested that:

The statutory provisions available are failing to meet the basic housing and financial needs of many forced migrants.

(Dwyer, 2005)

Inevitably most refugees are dependent on local authority housing once their asylum claim is successful, as they do not have the economic resources to enter the private sector. Unless they have family or friends in other cities this means that they have to stay in the dispersal area regardless of the existence of any kinship or community group and regardless of whether there is suitable employment or

training in the area. At least two participants in the research believed that opportunities to re-train in their professional field were limited compared to opportunities available in larger cities such as London.

An ESOL tutor described how the pressures and complexities of life for many of his students had a negative impact in other parts of their lives, including on their studies:

Housing can also be an issue, particularly for asylum-seekers who can be moved at short notice to another part of the country as a result of the dispersal system. The lack of control of their housing situation can make it very difficult for asylum-seekers to complete courses of study, and there have been cases of students who have disappeared from the course because they have been held under immigration law or even deported.

Bomani's story of the precarious accommodation situation also shows how important serendipity and individual goodwill can be in avoiding a vicious cycle. His account showed how accommodation influenced the chance of securing work and demonstrates that some individuals are open to meeting and mixing with others and do not want to be automatically grouped with people from their own country of origin.

Personal factors: Bomani's story

Bomani arrived in the UK in December 2004. His refugee status was decided in just six weeks and so he had not experienced the waiting period with few or no opportunities to use his time constructively that usually characterises the refugee experience. In his home country he had attended an Italian elementary school, run by nuns and taught in English. He also attended a German school so when he came to the UK he was fluent in both English and German. After High School he completed a two-year diploma at Commercial College. He then travelled abroad and spent some time in Sudan and Eritrea. He says he had a lot of white friends and white teachers.

When Bomani arrived in the UK he described himself as being comfortable and at ease with both the language and the culture. He was keen to integrate and mix with British people and saw few barriers standing in his way.

It was not my choice to come to Brighton, NASS sent me here. I arrived in Brighton on 24 January having spent two weeks in London [his point of arrival] and two weeks in an induction centre in Ashford. In Ashford I was housed in a large building which used to be a care home with 20 other asylum-seekers. Most were Kurdish people and the rest were Habesha. I was given three meals a day and was briefed

about England. Some people stay there 3 months before being dispersed others stay for just two weeks. I think it was a good place to stay. You make many friends. I met many people I didn't know before. I was dispersed to Brighton with one other person, but he moved straight away to his family in Nottingham.

There is not much of an Eritrean or Habesha community in Brighton, maybe 10 or 20 people. Most of them are young people. Maybe there are families here. I met one person on the street or it might have been at college. Honestly speaking I wasn't very interested. I don't like to mix too much from people from my own country. I am in England now and I have to mix with English people. If I keep always with my people I won't learn anything. I want to learn English language better and I want to learn English culture and mentality. I want to mix and be part of this society, but if you keep always with your own people it is very difficult. They drag you back and you will never improve because most of the things they know, you know.

For me I think it easier than most people because I have English. When I first arrived I went to college everyday. I completed a computing course and Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy Level 2. The courses were very easy. Actually I never went to the classes I just went there to practice exams. I couldn't work or go to college to study what I wanted to so studied adult literacy and numeracy. The English language courses which were on offer were too easy and I finished them quickly so the tutor suggested literacy and numeracy.

I live in a room in [...]; I have a room mate he is from Syria. Actually I have to leave this place now because I am a refugee. I am in another system, but it has been difficult for me to find accommodation. I haven't found anywhere yet but the accommodation provider is lenient, he's very kind. He knows the kinds of problems people get after they get status. He's letting me stay, but officially I'm not allowed to stay. According to NASS's rules I'm not allowed to stay.

My intention was to move to London because I wanted to study finance and business and I wanted to work at the same time. There are more opportunities in London, but until now I have not been successful. For now I think it is better to stay in Brighton and find accommodation here, because they say it's easier to find accommodation in London if you have your own address in Brighton.

I went to Brighton Council and they were very helpful. They said it will take about 1 month to find me somewhere to live and they asked me if I had somewhere to stay for 1 month. That's when my provider said I could stay there and pay him some money. In 1 month they will find me somewhere. They usually only find you somewhere if you are here for 6 months. If it is less than 6 months they say that they don't have responsibility for you. I was only here for 5 months because I got my papers quickly; they said it wasn't my fault so they would help to find somewhere. For most

people finding accommodation is difficult. I have relations and they send me money. If you don't have money it's very difficult until you get into the system. I have applied for a National Insurance number so that I can work, but it's been 3 weeks now and I still haven't heard anything. Then I will get Job Seekers Allowance. How do people manage if they don't have friends or relatives who can help you? My status was confirmed quickly. My neighbour has lived in the same room for 4 years, he can't work and he can't study. He doesn't know where he is going and he can't do anything.

People don't like asylum-seekers. They don't like you if they know you're an asylum-seeker. At college some people are not very friendly. When you want to join a course and they tell you how much you have to pay, then you show them your papers so that you can pay less – the same amount as a British person they are not very friendly.

I lived in a city in my home country. What I don't like is prejudice. Sometimes I go to Church; one day a man came up to me and he asked if we had cars in my country. People have only one perception of Africa. They have seen starving people on the TV, but it is only a small part of the picture. We were never hungry. I know people don't like asylum-seekers and they don't like foreigners, but I haven't had big problems, just unfriendliness. Some people think that we're coming here to take their jobs and benefits.

Childcare

Participants with children frequently mentioned a lack of sufficient and appropriate childcare provision as posing a significant barrier and restricting the steps along the educational and employment progression journey. Unfortunately, learning providers often found it difficult to identify enough funding for the type of support migrants required. As one learning provider explained:

the Learning Skills Council do not fund non-accredited courses, ... we therefore have to subsidise the courses, there are problems providing crèches if they are not cost effective, sometimes we have to pay for a crèche worker [who] may only look after one child. They can only look after a child for two hours according to legal guidelines. The person also has to drop off the child in one place and then go to another place for the course. It wasn't ideal or cost effective. What we do now is that those who are on accredited courses will be given a voucher to pay for childcare with a registered childcare provider. [We] can also claim most of the money back from LSC using this voucher scheme ... mothers feel better being able to choose their own childcare provider.

The changes within the system and the range of arrangements for childcare offered

by different learning providers make it difficult to get a sense of the system. It can be very confusing, especially when there are mixed messages from the providers themselves and well-meaning practitioners from the community whose knowledge is not always up-to-date.

Community and voluntary sector workers noted that access to appropriate childcare is a major obstacle, especially for women. The implication was that within this already disadvantaged target group, women experience an even greater degree of exclusion as a result of their childcare responsibilities. One community worker stated that in her experience, refugees and asylum-seekers were not comfortable leaving their children in nurseries or with childminders whom they did not know and preferred to pay a friend or family member, or have children in a crèche in the room with them. However, these arrangements require a degree of social networks and support which most newly-arrived forced migrants do not have. Furthermore, child protection policies in the voluntary and statutory sectors often require the use of registered childminders and nurseries, meaning that women cannot access funds for the more informal arrangements that they tend to feel more comfortable about.

Day-to-day living

Research in the North West (McMichael, 2000; Patel, 2002) indicated that personal confidence in speaking was an important factor with respect to individuals' sense of belonging and ability to pursue educational and employment goals. Milbourne (2002) also identifies confidence in communicating in English as a potential obstacle to participation in education and employment. Several practitioners believed that there was a close link between levels of confidence and a person's ability to communicate and engage with public organisations including educational establishments, local authority, health and social services. One public sector practitioner said:

confidence comes with communication. There are issues for the BME community whether they are a migrant or been here 40 years, one is the difficulty in understanding public sector language. This raises problems with consultation documents, which are written in organisation speak, ... members of the community organisations are expected to understand language. They wonder why people don't respond to consultations.

Participants provided numerous examples of how confidence and competence in their use of English played an important role in accessing services in everyday life. For example, when Bandhu first came from India he realised that he understood more English than he could speak or write and felt that this acted as an obstacle. Catherine from Pakistan reflected on how some might regard her use of English as a problem:

I am too direct in language. English for example, I do not go round and round, they think is polite. If English is my fourth language I won't be going round and round, 'oh please'... making things longer...I would go to the point...maybe people think I am too direct.

Communicating about everyday issues such as accommodation, but also to access other services, was initially a greater priority. As one North East community worker confirmed:

Meeting immediate needs is more important than education and employment. One of the main barriers facing asylum-seekers and refugees is the need and effort required to meet primary needs.

Although many forced migrants reported that they had felt welcomed by British people on their arrival in the UK, it was common to hear stories of confusion regarding day-to-day encounters. As Zainab, an Iraqi woman, explained:

Things in this country are different, in how they are done and even how people think. You don't know the right thing to do. You need to get engaged with people to learn more.

(Zainab, Iraqi woman)

Zainab went on to offer an example of how she had recently given up her seat on a bus to an older woman as she would have done in Iraq, but said she had encountered hostility and abuse from the woman. Meanwhile, Yasin who also came from Iraq described how after a year in Britain, he was still coming to terms with common advertising styles. He described how those not used to this approach could easily misinterpret ideas:

There is vague advertising for anything and everything, which makes sense to natives of Britain but less so to new arrivals. For example, a slogan which says "improve your life" could be interpreted by a foreigner as referring to advice or courses to help you decide your future, but it could just as easily be for a gym or a religious course.

(Yasin, Iraqi man)

Faith

Religious beliefs and faith commitments varied in their importance for, and impact on, how individuals lived their lives and responded to the situations in which they found themselves. The introduction of EU equality legislation on faith is likely to gain in prominence. This was a topic explicitly explored in the North West case

study with migrants due to earlier work with the community groups involved in the study. For some participants and stakeholders, their religious beliefs influenced decisions about work and how they approached other people. This was, however, something that was personal and did not necessarily affect how others interacted with them. Halima, a Nigerian woman, did mention that wearing a headscarf made her stand out, and although it was difficult to prove, she felt that it was something that influenced how others treated her.

One public sector professional highlighted the importance of people in the workplace gaining an understanding of the cultural needs of their customers and colleagues. They explained how Christian morals have traditionally driven organisational strategies, and stressed the importance of diversity within the public sector. An example of the type of shift that is happening within the hospital and larger learning provider context is the move from a Christian chapel to a multi-faith centre. It is these structural changes that can make it easier to adjust to life in the UK.

Disability

In the North West case study seven of the migrants declared a disability, which is probably because one of the community gatekeepers belonged to a minority ethnic disability community group. Two of the three migrants connected with this community voluntary group reported discrimination based on their disability, which they felt was a more significant factor than their ethnicity. For example, Deepak explained that after a back injury he had to leave work. After this he found it difficult to gain employment due to his disability despite numerous applications. Generally people said they were reluctant to disclose their disability in case it prevented them studying or gaining employment.

For some, having a disability or health condition also influenced their decisions about what work might be suitable. Samina, for instance, explained how she had declined suggestions to seek promotion, believing that she would find the increased responsibility and additional hours too much. Although, Samina did not discuss this during the interview, it is probable that she was unaware of support available for disabled people in the workplace under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995 and 2005).

Shropshire (1999) noted that adults from minority ethnic groups are often less aware of their legal position and entitlements, and Fieldhouse (2002) reported that young people from minority ethnic groups are less likely to be aware of the support available. The increased use of friends and family as sources of support and information is also likely to reduce the likelihood of their awareness of support available for disabled employees. According to research commissioned by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC, 2004) employers fall into three categories with respect to employing disabled people, 'nearly there – good neighbours',

'potential partners – thoughtless neighbours' or 'naïve discriminators – nuisance neighbours'. Thirty-two per cent of SMEs (from a sample size of 1,000) fall within the naïve discriminator category. These employers lack awareness of their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and are more likely to discriminate against people with a disability who come from a minority ethnic community. Forty-two per cent of the naïve discriminators think it would be difficult to employ someone from a minority ethnic background and regard disabled employees as a demand on their finances (37 per cent) and their colleagues (33 per cent). This negative attitude is one that migrants had experienced, with one suggesting that this was the reason for their difficulties in gaining employment.

Learning providers also felt that students did not disclose a disability because they feared rejection; however, non-disclosure limited the range of help and support they were able to provide. None of the disabled participants were aware of the support they were entitled to within an educational context under the Special Educational Needs Disability Act (SENDA, 2001). In essence, a lack of awareness or possibly trust of the system placed some migrants in a more difficult and less supported position.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: EQUAL principles and REP recommendations

EQUAL Principles

EQUAL is a major ESF-funded programme that “tests and promotes new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, both for those in work, and for those seeking work. EQUAL also includes action to help the social and vocational integration of asylum-seekers” (EQUAL, 2007). Within the complexity of the EQUAL programme there are four principles that guide action, all of which can be illuminated by findings from the REP project.

The principle of partnership

One of the obvious challenges in addressing steps on the educational and employment progression journeys of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants is the need for voluntary and public sector organisations to work together. The individual stories in this report highlight how the complex and multiple personal factors interact and in many cases exacerbate the barriers associated with engagement in learning and the labour market. It is this complexity that necessitates the need for multi-agency collaboration. The European Commission, however, recognises that:

complex, multi-dimensional problems in the social and employment arena can be solved more effectively and efficiently if projects are structured around a partnership, rather than one organisation acting on its own (EU, 2006a: 6)

Stakeholders within the REP research readily identified the potential benefits of working together and often subscribed to similar visions for systems that would enhance the steps on the educational and employment progression journey. However, there were tensions about who determined the vision and the challenges of working in partnership for example, the time required, the differential power dynamics involved in discussions about competing or conflicting agenda.

Practitioners often recognised the role of other partners but at times felt constrained by systemic issues that impacted on their ability to act collaboratively. For instance, many of the participants in the REP project identified the community and voluntary sector as a crucial first point of contact and entry into the system. Through this contact, individuals began to extend and transform their bonding social capital networks into ones that included bridges to wider and more useful networks to enable them to move along a wider range of educational and employment journeys. Often shared experiences, language, cultural background, faith or existing members from their country of origin enabled the staff and volunteers working in a community organisation to gain the reputation of being a trusted agency that would provide the connection to other services and support. Community practitioners were quick to point out the constraints on the type of work they could undertake, but did appreciate that by connecting with other agencies they often played a key role in building up individuals' sense of agency and empowerment. The European Commission stresses how:

Partnership and empowerment ultimately ensure holistic and sustainable solutions to labour market issues

(EU, 2006a: 2)

One of the additional benefits of working in partnership is the way in which it supports the exchange of good practice and innovation.

The principle of innovation

As the EU *ad hoc* working group paper on innovation makes clear:

innovation is by definition not a standard activity and does not follow a standard procedure.

(EU, 2006b: 8)

The emphasis within EQUAL is on a broad definition of innovation that encompasses and highlights the importance of social innovations that will modernise the economy and continue to enhance employment and social inclusion policies. Innovations, in particular social innovations, are evident in two contexts:

The modernisation of the economy, and in particular its transformation into a knowledge-based economy requires not only investment in new technologies, but also investment in organisational innovations facilitating the acquisition of skills and competencies, the adaptation work organisation and business routines, or the establishment of business networks and partnerships between stakeholders.

Implementing policy reforms to meet the Lisbon targets by stimulating employment, promoting social inclusion, and activating knowledge and learning requires investment in policy innovations, developing and testing new policy approaches and new ways of delivery.

(EU, 2006b: 3)

In promoting and developing innovation it is necessary to target real policy needs that help to ensure relevance of purpose for a given context. When seeking to share innovative practice it is necessary to assess the feasibility, suitability, transferability and acceptability of the innovative solution, and explain clearly the potential benefits in comparison with existing practice.

There are some very clear messages emerging in the findings of the REP project that might form the basis for future innovations to aid progression into education, training and the labour market of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. The contrasting but complementary case studies present a number of common concerns that together constitute a real need for change at both a local and national level. Exchange and adoption of innovation is dependent on effective partnerships that include individuals and organisations committed to the principle of equality.

The principle of equality

Equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the Community and, according to Article 2 of the Treaty, it is one of the tasks to be actively promoted by the Community. Article 3 lays down the principle of gender mainstreaming by stating that in all its activities the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote the equality of women and men. Furthermore, Article 13 provides for pro-active measures to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

(EU, 2006c: 2)

The recognition of wider equality is important within the context of the REP report because of the inter-relationship of factors impacting on individuals' circumstances, the decisions they can make and the action they can take to access education and employment. Individual stories highlighted the additional difficulties faced by women who were usually the primary care givers and who described how family responsibilities influenced educational and employment decisions. The influence of gender was evident in all contexts and is a factor that learning providers and employers need to take into account if they are to move beyond lip service to the principle of equality to demonstrating an informed commitment. Equality perhaps more than any other principle is dependent on the effectiveness of partnerships between statutory,

community and voluntary and employers to help address equality issues in education and employment. The connection with other EQUAL principles is that:

Gender inequalities are often a result of the structures of society and these cannot be changed by a single institution but only by all relevant actors in co-operation. (EU, 2006c: 6)

Within some contexts it is through the exchange of innovative practices that equality can be achieved, this may be particularly important when trying to transform and apply innovations relating to gender to encompass the cultural and linguistic needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Finally, enabling individuals to achieve equality connects with their individual sense of agency and for that reason the importance of empowering individuals is vital. The EU working party for gender equality acknowledged the connection between equality and empowerment and recommends that the two principles are inter-linked:

Both at programme and project level it means that the principle of empowerment is not limited only to incorporating target groups into the planning and decision-making processes, but also that both genders of target groups are empowered. In practise this fact is too often ignored. This is an important aspect as inequalities exist and there are different needs of men and women in the target groups as well.

(EU, 2006c: 7)

The principle of empowerment

Tackling individual empowerment is a longstanding goal within ESF initiatives. The European Union's Thematic Focus Group (1999) stressed the:

need for the excluded individuals to take responsibilities (*prise de responsabilité*) or to decide for themselves (selbstbestimmung). From this viewpoint, self-help and self-employment can be starting points. The chance to take initiatives to improve one's situation is sometimes considered as a chance to become an active citizen (*approche citoyenne, burgerzin*). This approach capitalises on a desire to play a full part in improving the quality of life in the local community.

(Thematic Focus Group, 1999: 5, cited by Walters *et al*, 2001: 19)

Walters *et al* (2001) identified 14 prime indicators of empowerment that illustrate the breadth of individual qualities, contexts and services required if someone is to be empowered. Their list not only generates a potential agenda for future projects by learning providers and community organisations but also suggest changes in practice and institutional processes that may be necessary to allow individuals to

realise their potential. Accessing services that might lead to empowerment is, for many, dependent on or at least influenced by an individual's social capital network.

Individual stories showed how refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants often perceived obstacles as personal and practical barriers that it was their responsibility to overcome. Although they attributed failure to overcome obstacles or difficulties in realising their aspirations to themselves, they often explained success in terms of 'luck' – for example, in meeting the right person or finding the right service. There was frustration at the lack of opportunity to utilise their existing skills, experience and qualifications to gain access to suitable education, training and employment. At the same time, evidence suggests that participants resigned themselves to what stakeholders described as racist incidents. Willingness to challenge discrimination was influenced by an individual's sense of empowerment and the extent of their social capital networks.

REP recommendations

Although not having to face the challenges of seeking asylum or gaining refugee status, migrants shared many of the real and perceived barriers to education and employment. Findings from the four case studies suggest that there are practical steps that learning providers and employers might take in order to improve access to education and employment. We report the REP recommendations under some general headings of communication, recruitment, progression, empowerment, community engagement and partnership.

Communication – Information, Advice and Guidance	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
<p>a To ensure gatekeepers working within LPs, CVGs and staff with personnel responsibilities are aware of opportunities offered by partner institutions in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform migrants about the range of support and services available and redirect them appropriately; • Reduce the number of people migrants have to contact before they stumble across the 'right' person or service. 	✓	✓	✓	
<p>b To develop services that recognise the longer-term IAG and support needs of refugee clients; this might be achieved by funding specialised guidance and more flexible funding on mainstream employment programmes.</p>		✓	✓	

*Employer = Emp; Learning Provider = LP; Community and Voluntary Sector = CVs; Job Centre Plus = JC+,

	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
c To improve access to Information, Advice and Guidance, it is important to secure funding that guarantees a quality assured continuous service that is located within the community. To achieve this, one suggestion is for CVGs to submit a joint bid to employ staff who can deliver an IAG service in a variety of community outlets. With funds from LSC			✓	
d To improve quality assurance mechanisms relating to advice and guidance services regarding education and employment opportunities within the UK provided for potential migrants whilst in their country of origin. In particular detailing pre-requisites of qualifications required or would have to be gained within the UK to be eligible for the HE or employment opportunities they wish to pursue.		✓		
e To use plain English in publicity and to keep format simple. For further advice see http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/ and for advice about written material for people with dyslexia http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk/main/information/extras/xogfrend.asp	✓	✓	✓	

Progression	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
a To offer an increased range of ESOL provision and develop better progression pathways into mainstream FE and HE LP, LSC		✓	✓	
b To facilitate progression it is vital that LPs and employers recognise the diversity of refugee, asylum-seeker and BME communities and their previous educational and work experience in order to provide a wider range of educational pathways into employment (e.g. volunteering, work placements) and more flexible part-time forms of provision.	✓	✓		

*Employer = Emp; Learning Provider = LP; Community and Voluntary Sector = CVs;
Job Centre Plus = JC+,

	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
c To use existing systems such as learning agreements and staff development or appraisal processes to provide migrants with opportunities to develop and demonstrate relevant skills.	✓	✓		
d To support study at higher level by providing a bursary or discretionary grant that could be made available for those migrants who are particularly disadvantaged and can not meet the cost of course fees. With funding Local Authority, LSC, etc.		✓		

Recruitment	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
a To actively engage employers within integration strategies e.g. by putting the 'business case' for diversity as well as promoting equal rights within employment.	✓			
b To improve training and monitoring of small businesses' recruitment and equal opportunities policies.	LSC, County, City and Borough Councils			
c To raise awareness of the systems for recognising alternative qualifications, which may benefit from LPs working more closely with employers LP, Employers, Job Centre.	✓	✓		✓
d To establish a network of staff within organisations with an interest in developing more straightforward systems for recognising alternative qualifications in order to improve systems for recognising overseas qualifications and offer better support for the 'topping up' of professional qualifications.	✓	✓	✓ IAG	✓ IAG Staff
e To recognise the importance of offering advice and guidance regarding the preparation of CVs, letters of application and interview techniques, this might involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning providers, Community Voluntary Groups, Job Centre etc. offering to review CVs and letters of application LP, CVG and Job Centre 		✓	✓	✓

*Employer = Emp; Learning Provider = LP; Community and Voluntary Sector = CVS; Job Centre Plus = JC+,

	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers making it explicit the level of detail and type of information they expect or require – a strategy likely to benefit all applicants. Employer 	✓			
f To consider the adoption of the Skills Audits for Asylum-seekers and Refugees (Aldridge <i>et al</i> , 2005) or an agreed adaptation of this model to provide a consistent approach and common output which the migrant could use as a basis for discussion with staff in other services they come into contact. LP, CVG and Job Centre plus other guidance providers		✓	✓	✓
g To appreciate the valuable role that CVGs play in providing a first point of contact and explore how to keep them informed about new courses, work experience, job opportunities and changes in law affecting migrants.	✓	✓		
h To publicise ‘upskilling’ training programmes which might enable individuals who already have skills in the areas of labour shortage to build on or develop new areas of expertise.		✓ LSC		

Empowerment	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
a To assess the negative impact of the dispersal policy on social networks and access to education and employment opportunities,	✓	✓	Local Authority NASS	
b To develop advocacy or ‘buddying’ schemes within education establishments in particular Higher Education to meet the emotional and practical support needs of new students recently arrived within the UK.	✓	✓		
c To respond to a need expressed by some research participants and suggested by some CVGs to encourage learning providers to offer ‘citizenship training’ which includes opportunities to identify rights and legal obligations, cultural awareness training of the British culture and details of support networks for their own cultural/faith background.		✓	✓	

*Employer = Emp; Learning Provider = LP; Community and Voluntary Sector = CVs; Job Centre Plus = JC+,

Community Engagement	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
a To recognise through the provision of longer-term funding and capacity-building the role of community-based initiatives in providing training and employment opportunities	LSC and Funding Bodies			
b To provide opportunities to involve families within adult education guidance interviews as this will encourage greater understanding and respect for the benefits of lifelong learning which is necessary to secure appropriate employment. This more inclusive approach will allow families to make informed decisions, for example, evaluating the financial pros and cons of investing family funds to cover course fees.			✓	
		✓		

Partnership	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
a To encourage funding bodies to support partnerships between CVS, statutory, business and enterprise sector to raise awareness of legislative changes and project initiatives that ensure services are meeting the needs of the target group. Ideally, this should be integrated into a strategy of valuing diversity and community cohesion, and should be an ongoing agenda item alongside other issues of inequality such as disability, race, age, sexual orientation and religion.	LSC and Funding Bodies to support partnerships to include and involve CVG			

Racism	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
a To use formal Race Equality policies to promote a more inclusive organisational culture.	✓	✓	✓	✓
b To raise awareness among all staff about organisational policy relating to racism and, perhaps more importantly, enable staff and students to understand what constitutes racism and how this impacts on individuals. Ideally, this should be undertaken within a context of dealing with other equality issues to avoid marginalisation.	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Employer = Emp; Learning Provider = LP; Community and Voluntary Sector = CVs; Job Centre Plus = JC+,

	Emp	LP	CVs	JC+
c To explore developing and delivering staff development session for LPs and Employers based on insights and feedback from migrants.			✓	

*Employer = Emp; Learning Provider = LP; Community and Voluntary Sector = CVS; Job Centre Plus = JC+,

These recommendations are intended to foster individual empowerment and ensure equality of opportunity for the target group who themselves face other barriers in addition to their UK citizenship including their age, gender, disability, religion, sexuality. There is already a wealth of expertise and practice which could form the basis of social innovations which are likely to be more successful if institutions and the individuals within them work together in partnership. Although REP recommendations focus on steps directly related to education and employment progression journeys we would want to stress, as many of the participants and stakeholders have done, that addressing primary needs such as accommodation is vital if individuals are to be able to focus on entering the labour market. Progression routes and experiences vary according to pre- and post-arrival experiences and opportunities. There is a wide range of personal factors as well as the attitudes and systems they will encounter and negotiate. However, education and employment are an important part of an individual's journey as well as the journeys of their family and the people they meet along the way.

APPENDIX I

Research methods

Overview

The REP project was located within the broad framework of action research and reflects a commitment to challenging social inequalities and to promoting social change rather than claiming to adopt a 'neutral' stance to the issues under consideration. Our approach reflects those of critical theorists and feminist inquiries who are often change-centred, and believe that researchers have a moral duty to improve situations where it is possible to do so (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997; Knight, 2002: 143). The researchers in all case studies recognised the politically contentious nature of research relating to the policy areas of refugee integration, immigration and asylum and believe it is important to make explicit our research perspective. The decision to include this in an appendix was to allow us to explain in more detail the background to our approach and the differences as well as similarities adopted by the four case studies.

There were four case studies located in the South East, North East, North West and West Midlands. All case studies included four types of data collected:

- **Desk-based research**, consisting of previous research literature on barriers to education and employment for refugees and asylum-seekers; the theoretical and policy context of refugee integration and other influencing theoretical concepts such as social capital and citizenship;
- **Documentary evidence**, covering national, regional and local statistical data relating to demographic and labour market information and policy documents which provided the wider context that was particularly important for local dissemination of individual case study reports;
- **Questionnaires** encompassing standardised closed questions about migrants and practitioners / professionals;
- **Semi-structured audio-taped interviews** with 51 research participants and 59

stakeholders, where the emphasis was on gathering qualitative in-depth accounts.

Questionnaire

Each case study gathered some data using a questionnaire designed to capture personal profile information as well as details regarding arrival and initial experiences in the UK, pre- and post-arrival experiences of education and employment, support mechanisms, barriers and issues of racism. Issues of language level were not a major point of concern, either because participants were confident in using English or because the interviewer completed the research participant questionnaire during the interview, using it as a guide for the overall structure of the open-ended discussion. Although space for interviewer notes was available, in most cases the only information recorded during the interview were answers to closed questions on the questionnaire and the spelling of names.

In the North West case study stakeholders also completed a questionnaire that included: personal details, types of involvement with the black and minority ethnic community, and an overview of their perceptions about the barriers and support mechanisms experienced by migrants. The purpose of this questionnaire was to introduce topics of interest and provide a focus for the semi-structured interview rather than generate comparative data.

Interviews

The format of the questionnaires shaped the overall structure of the interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews provided the freedom and flexibility for the participants to talk about their experiences relating to pre-arrival expectations of the UK, arrival experiences, interactions with educational providers, employers as well as community and statutory bodies relating to housing, health, social services and in many cases their children's education.

Our interview approach described by (Webb, 1932 in Silverman, 1993) as 'conversations with a purpose' provided us with an opportunity to listen to the life history and stories of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants who were actively encouraged to tell their story and recall events, actions, thoughts, and feelings with a view to countering widespread myths and misconceptions about refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) the semi-structured interview facilitates discussion about motivations, feelings and thoughts that results in a more naturalistic, interpretative approach that is concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to their actions, decisions, beliefs, values. In addition, the interviews allowed interviewees to make comments and offer additional explanations about their actions as well as the actions of other people with whom they interacted. Many participants were experiencing a high degree of isolation as a consequence of their status, and were keen to establish a rapport with the researcher and share their story. Not surprisingly, the interviews included a

number of comments that did not seem directly relevant to the educational and employment focus of the research. However, as Bryman points out, it is inevitable that:

the interviewee will ‘ramble’ and move away from the designated areas in the researcher’s mind. ‘Rambling’ is nevertheless important and needs some investigation. The interviewee in rambling is moving into areas, which most interest him or her.

(Bryman, 1988: 46)

Whilst the direct relevance of some comments was not always immediately obvious, closer analysis revealed underlying areas of concern that participants seemed reluctant to vocalise more explicitly. Reasons for this are inevitably speculative, however, it was noticeable that detours in their stories were often more critical of the support systems or lack of them, or else signalled a dissonance between expectation and experience, which they felt uncomfortable criticising, in part assuming that the fault was their own. This was particularly evident in accounts of racism, where some participants took it for granted that name-calling would occur.

Although there was less structure in the stakeholder interviews a prompt sheet operated as an aide mémoire and ensured coverage of key topics. The purpose of these interviews was to identify strategies of support developed and delivered by their organisation. The practitioners’ position within their organisation inevitably influenced the official comments and more factual aspects of the interview. In a number of stakeholder interviews, personal background provided additional insights and a valuable commentary on the context in which they and their colleagues worked. This distinction between official accounts and the more personal perspectives raises some interesting challenges with respect to the analysis and final report.

As other researchers have attested, the process of analysis is a continuous one that inevitably takes longer than expected (Knight, 2002). Collective analysis of data between case studies was not possible due to differences in our timescales. However a similar process was followed, with analysis beginning immediately the interview was over and consisting of three stages:

- reflection on the data during the post-interview note taking process;
- reformulation of data as a summary of key issues for each interview;
- codification and classification of data according to anticipated and emergent key themes relevant to the overall focus of the REP project.

Each stage resulted in a different output, interview notes, interview summaries, and illustrative quotes confirming or challenging key themes, or an individual story. Data analysis at each stage involved researchers in each research team preparing or

commenting upon each output, this process was interspersed with joint discussions about the data collection, analysis, and results. In the North East and South East case studies illustrative individual stories were produced using verbatim accounts and in West Midlands quotes were used to illustrate narrative stories produced by the research team. Five of the individual stories (using both methods) are included within this report to help convey the complexity of challenges and the extent of the constraint they place on integration and for consideration as approaches by others engaged in this type of research.

Research considerations

Practicalities

Practicalities affected researchers and participants alike, and are common to most research (Knight, 2002). One of the biggest challenges was finding a suitable time for the interview. Even though we arranged times with the participants there were several late cancellations. Finding a convenient place to meet, where the interviewee would feel comfortable and relaxed was another practical challenge. Interviews normally took place in community centres or offices. However, in one case, a migrant in the North West case study suggested we conduct the interview in the interviewee's car because she felt that there would be more privacy and less interruption, although an unconventional location, it was a very successful interview. Clearly issues of safety need to be taken into account when not using public spaces.

Gaining access and adopting a collaborative approach

The use of community contacts acting as intermediaries was common to all case studies. This was not without its problems. Although we discussed and provided written criteria for our community contacts, they did not always know if an individual fulfilled the criteria, this was especially true for the migrants. The South East and West Midlands teams used funding from complementary projects to undertake activities that assisted in accessing research participants. For example, in the South East they used funding to recruit five refugees from different communities and train them in research, interviewing and life history skills and paid them for conducting peer interviews between participants.

From previous experience, and knowledge of the community, we recognised the practical and ethical dangers of parachuting in, gathering information, and leaving. In accordance with our overall collaborative approach when working with the community, and after discussion with some of our community contacts, it was decided to address the possible imbalance of power between researcher and research participants by offering several forms of practical support. For instance, in the North West case study we offered to review curriculum vitae and find out names and information about courses or areas of work in which the migrant had expressed

an interest. This approach enabled participants in the research to enrich their 'linking social capital' (Woolcock, 1998) by acquiring links to access additional sources of support. The North East team described how they '*actively engaged with others in the region to tackle social inequalities and affect change, promoting the voices of marginalised groups and highlighting examples of good practice that can be built upon to develop models of working in other localities*'. One of their stakeholders explained how

It is useful on a practical level and good to see organisations not normally involved making a contribution to this agenda. There is very little research on refugees and education and employment, and this kind of work can help either by proving and confirming what is already understood anecdotally or by revealing something new and triggering new ideas.

Confidentiality and anonymity

The pre-interview discussion and permission form addressed issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Assuring confidentiality and anonymity for all participants was an important feature of the data collection process. To respond to concerns expressed by participants when disseminating the views of practitioners and policy-makers within the regional case studies we ensured quotations did not include details that might reveal an individual's identity and grouped types of organisation together.

Dissemination

Our collective dissemination strategy addressed the EQUAL principle of innovation in that it included a regional dissemination event in each of the case study areas. Dissemination events allowed the project teams to share findings and seek feedback on the issues raised with a range of stakeholders, including policy-makers, funders, employers, education and training providers, voluntary and community organisations, and research participants. The overall aim was to raise awareness of underlying issues, provide a stimulus for organisational discussion and where appropriate to bring about a change in practice. A particular consideration when disseminating findings was to ensure anonymity of practitioner and policy-makers. We addressed this by careful selection of quotations and examples, as well as relating issues to organisational categories, rather than specific organisations as discussed previously. A national conference, conference papers to other events, a website, more informal dissemination and this publication ensured dissemination of findings in a variety of contexts and to a range of different audiences.

APPENDIX 2

Research participants summary

Country of Origin	Male	Female	Total
Afghanistan	Kontar		1
Azerbaijan	Natiq		1
Bengal		Samina	1
Brazil		Isabella, Flavia	2
China		Mingmei	1
Eastern Europe		Natasa	1
Eritrea	Agymah, Abeeku		2
Ethiopia	Bomani		1
India	Ajit, Akil, Bandhu, Chetan, Deepak	Dharini	5
Iran	Javeed, AmrAn, Mansoor Mehrak, Nouri	Asal, Avizeh, Delbar, Dorri	9
Iraq	Adil, Juhan, Yasin, Harith, Botan, Bassem	Zainab	7
Jamaica		Mary	1
Lebanon		Adiba	1
Monserrat		Marita	1
Nigeria		Aba, Halima	2

Country of Origin	Male	Female	Total
Pakistan	Ali	Catherine	2
Palestine		Aseel	1
Russia	Anton, Artur	Alina	3
Singapore		Jasmine	1
Sudan	Jafar	Abok	1
Syria	Basel	Laila	2
Ukraine		Lukina	1
Zimbabwe	Tawanda	Amadika	2
Total	27	24	51

APPENDIX 3

Area case studies and partner organisations

South East – Brighton and Hove and Portsmouth

Dr Anne Bellis was manager of the REP project and was a researcher based in Sussex University's Centre for Continuing Education and is now working at the Institute of Employment Studies, University of Sussex.

Linda Morrice is a Lecturer in Continuing Education at the University of Sussex. She conducted interviews with refugees and asylum-seekers in the South East case study. During the project an opportunity arose to bid for funding from Brighton and Sussex Knowledge Exchange (BSKE) to train and support a group of refugees in interviewing and research skills (Morrice 2007b). Through the BSKE project we were able to recruit three refugees to work on REP.

Jonas Addise came to the UK 2004. He completed the Ways into Learning and Work course at the University of Sussex which is part of the Refugee Education Mentoring And Support into Higher Education Project (REMAS HE). He is currently studying for a BSc in Business and Accounting. He also works as a community interpreter.

Fayegh Shaafi is a Kurd from Mahabad in Iran. He has just successfully completed an MSc in Civil Engineering and hopes to either find work as a civil engineer or study for a PhD.

Elena Woolridge worked as a paediatrician in the Ukraine. She has been in the UK for 5 years and has recently qualified as a holistic therapist.

The Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) is Sussex University's leading specialist in part-time university education for mature students. CCE is also a flagship for the

University's interactions with the wider region, engaging with a large and diverse range of partner organisations across Sussex and South East England. For over 15 years, CCE has worked with local communities to develop and deliver community based education and widen participation in Higher Education for a range of non-traditional learners, including the long term unemployed, black minority ethnic and refugee groups, disabled people and people living in areas of multiple deprivation. Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) at University of Sussex was the lead partner in the REP Project. Its case study of refugee experiences was based in two urban areas on the south coast of England, Brighton & Hove and Portsmouth.

At the time of the 2001 Census, the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population of Brighton & Hove was 5.1%, which was lower than the national figure (9.1%) but higher than the percentage for the South East (4.9%). There is no single large identifiable minority ethnic group; the Indian community is the largest, accounting for 0.7% of residents (Brighton & Hove and Adur Area Investment Framework, 2003). Brighton and Hove has a relatively small but diverse refugee and asylum-seeker population.

Portsmouth ranked as the 44th most deprived local authority, but also points out that '...not all residents have experienced a rise in their living standards and there are still pockets of severe deprivation' (Portsmouth City Council 2001: 7). According to the 2001 census, the BME population of Portsmouth is currently about 5.3%. Evidence of the linguistic diversity of the Portsmouth population is provided by the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) which has estimated that there are 35 different language groups in the City.

North East – Leeds

Olivia Garvey is a Widening Provision Project Officer in the Lifelong Learning Centre (Learning and Teaching)

Heather Wilson Lifelong Learning Centre (Learning and Teaching)

The School of Continuing Education (now the Lifelong Learning Centre) at the University of Leeds has over 50 years' experience of providing courses designed especially for adults. It is particularly committed to widening participation in HE to under represented groups, and through collaboration with local Muslim communities, has developed a successful and popular programme of Islamic Studies. The School has been one of the leading CE research centres of excellence in the country and its involvement in the REP Project formed part of its mission to engage in developmental research work, including community-based research. The North east case study drew on its established community networks to explore the experiences of refugees in the Leeds area.

Leeds is a large, cosmopolitan city, an economic and cultural focal point within West Yorkshire with a diverse population and economy. Although the city is economically thriving, it includes nine of the most deprived wards in the country according to the UK government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (LSC, 2006). Yorkshire and Humberside has the highest regional population of National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodated asylum-seekers (Home Office, 2004b) and has been a major reception area for the Home Office's dispersal scheme since 2000. At approximately 10,000, this figure represents 20 per cent of all asylum-seekers in the UK, although it does not include 'failed asylum-seekers' or unaccompanied minors. One quarter of all those in the region are living in Leeds with 1,809 housed in April 2006 (Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Asylum-seekers and Refugees).

North West – Preston

Dr Ann-Marie Houghton is Director of REAP: Researching Equity, Access and Participation a research group based in the Department of Educational Research.

Joti Sethi was a Research and Development Officer in REAP and on the management committee of Nguzo Saba an umbrella organisation for members of the African Caribbean community.

REAP: Researching Equity, Access and Participation (formerly the Community Access Programme) is a research and development group within Lancaster University's Department of Educational Research. The Department has a reputation for nationally acknowledged excellence in research and has developed a particular strength in the field of post-compulsory education over the last decade. REAP specialises in the fields of education equality, widening participation and issues of inclusion. It has a positive and well-established relationship with local black and minority ethnic communities and voluntary organisations, for example through its African Caribbean and Asian Curriculum Project. REAP's case study focused on the education and employment experiences of newly settled members of minority ethnic communities in Preston, Lancashire.

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) identifies Preston as one of the 88 most deprived local authority areas in the country (Preston City Council, 2002). Overall Preston consists of nineteen wards, six fall in the bottom 10% nationally for multiple deprivation indices based on the ONS indices of deprivation (2000), 6 for income, 6 employment, 9 health, 5 education, 7 housing, and 9 child poverty. Preston's 2001 census figures show that out of its 18,786 minority ethnic population, 8,002 of these were born outside of the UK (Preston City Council, 2001). Currently, Preston is not a designated refugee settlement. Preston has 7.2% of the population born outside the EU compared with 6.6% for

the average English and Welsh population for example, 43.52 % of the Asian communities have origins outside of the UK (Preston City Council, 2001). The greatest proportion of Hindus and Sikhs within the North West region, live in Preston.

West Midlands – Stoke on Trent

Jan Bourne-Day is a Senior Lecturer in Crime Studies at MMU Cheshire and is currently working towards the completion of her Doctoral thesis at Loughborough University.

Jill Ward is Principal of Wedgwood Memorial College in Barlaston. Her engagement in this project is a result of her ongoing interest in adult learning and the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

The Wedgwood Memorial College at Stoke-on-Trent is an adult education college offering residential learning opportunities to adults and young people from all kinds of educational and social backgrounds. The College opened in 1945 and has a long and well-established history of delivering adult education programmes within a residential setting. It is committed to promoting equality and diversity, and lifelong learning opportunities to communities throughout Staffordshire. The focus of the Staffordshire case study was on the fast growing refugee and asylum-seeker community in the Stoke-on Trent area.

Stoke on Trent ranks 16th in the country in terms of multiple deprivations. At the time of the 2001 Census, the majority of Stoke on Trent's residents were white (94.8%); 2.6% Pakistani; 0.9% mixed; other categories being 0.5% or less. Since January 2001 larger numbers of asylum-seekers began to be dispersed to Stoke on Trent by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). By March 2002 it was clear that there would be substantial new refugee communities wishing to become established in North Staffordshire, mostly living in Stoke on Trent. They are of different national and ethnic origins from the existing black and minority ethnic communities in Stoke on Trent (CAB, 2003).

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