

Refugee Council

research report



Survey of local authorities

Inclusive Secondary Schools Project

About the Refugee Council and the Inclusive Secondary Schools Project

As a human rights charity, independent of government, the Refugee Council works to ensure that refugees are given the protection they need, that they are treated with respect and understanding, and they have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as other members of our society.

The Refugee Council's Research Unit was set up to encourage and undertake research that is informed by the experiences of refugee agencies and refugee community organisations and that engages refugees as partners in research. We work in partnership with universities, voluntary and statutory bodies and refugee community organisations to investigate policy options, collect and communicate data, identify good practice and assess policy impact.

'Inclusive Secondary Schools' is a three-year research project funded by the KPMG Foundation. Its aim is to research and pilot new ways of working that link schools and local authorities with refugee parents, carers and Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs). The project seeks to identify good practice and strategies for increasing the inclusion of asylum seeking and refugee children in secondary education and improving their educational achievement and attainment.

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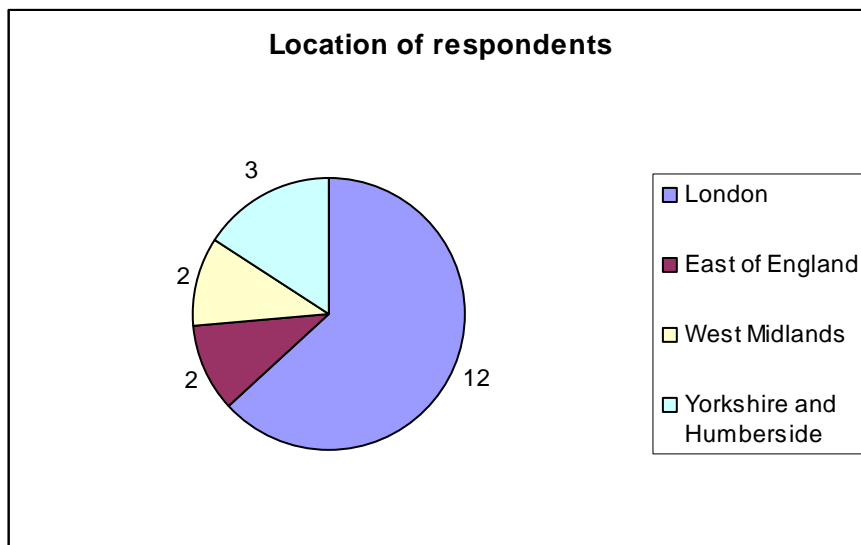
Introduction and methodology

Between December 2006 and January 2007, the Inclusive Secondary Schools project team conducted a survey of local authority education services in the four project regions (London, Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands and the East of England). The aim of the survey was to gather information about the types of support local authorities (LAs) give to secondary schools and Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) to help them work with refugee and asylum seeking parents and carers.

There were 73 local authorities who were eligible to complete this survey which comprised of 33 LAs in the Greater London Authority; 15 in Yorkshire and Humberside; 14 in the West Midlands and 11 in the East of England. The survey produced was in an online format and the link was e-mailed to named people in each of those authorities.¹ The Project Team received a total of 19 responses which is a response rate of 26 per cent.

Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents were from local authorities based in London. As there are a higher number of local authorities in this region, it was expected that London's responses would exceed those received from other regions. In addition to the fact that there are more local authorities in London, historically there have been more refugees and asylum seekers in this region so methods of supporting schools and RCOs may be more developed and therefore respondents would have more to say about their practice. The location of respondents is illustrated below.



Given the heavy London bias, it is not possible to draw fair conclusions based on the location of the responding local authorities.

A breakdown of the local authorities who participated in the study by region is outlined below.

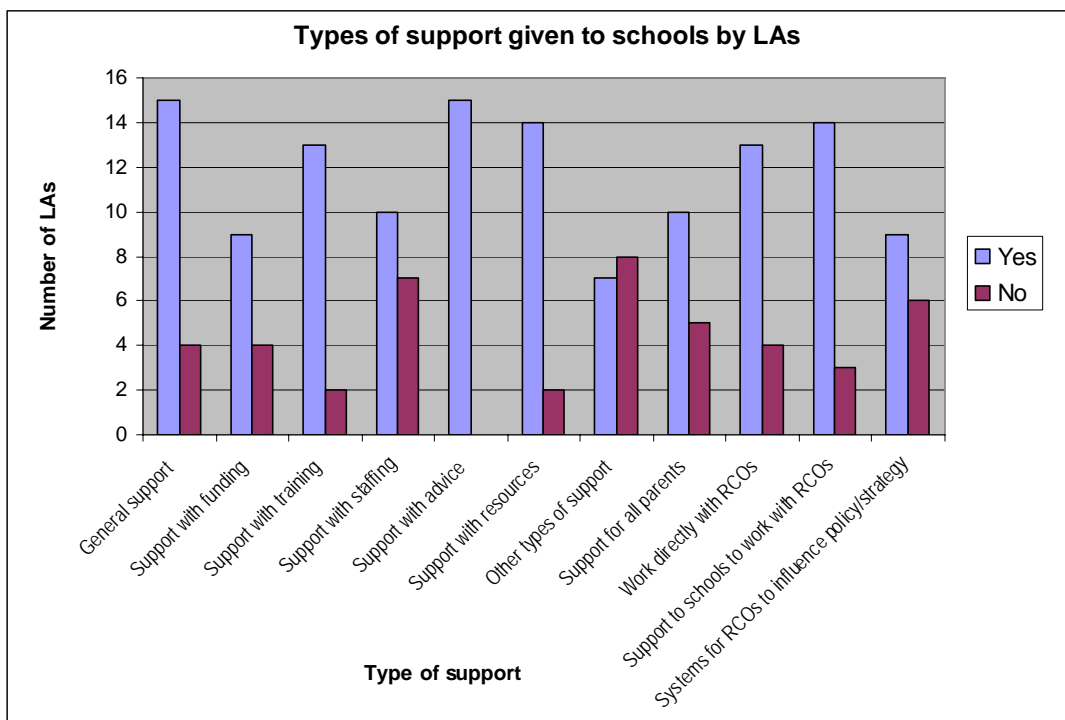
¹ The Project Team identified people in each local authority with a remit for inclusion and sent the survey directly to them. It was hoped that this would help to increase the response rate.

London	Yorkshire/Humberside
Bexley	Calderdale
Brent	Kingston upon Hull
Hackney	Sheffield
Haringey	
Hounslow	East of England
Islington	Essex
Kensington and Chelsea	Suffolk
Lambeth	
Newham	West Midlands
Richmond	Dudley
Sutton	Wolverhampton
Tower Hamlets	

Many local authorities have a dedicated Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) or Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) staff. The majority of respondents in this survey held a position in the EMAS or EMTAS teams. While Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) funding is commonly used to raise achievement levels of ethnic minority pupils in general, schools and local authorities that receive funding through this scheme also use it for targeted support to refugees and asylum seekers.

Types of support

Local authorities have the potential to provide a wide variety of support to schools which can better enable them to better target the needs of refugee and asylum seeking pupils, engage parents and carers, and influence local and school policy. The range of services that LAs responding to this survey offered schools included general support, training for general and specialist staff and the provision of material resources. LAs in our sample also stated that they work directly with RCOs and support links between RCOs and schools. The graph below illustrates the most common types of support in further detail.



All of the local authorities that participated in the study cited 'general support' and 'support with advice' as the most common types of services provided. The latter comprised of advice to secondary schools on how to work effectively with refugee and asylum seeking parents and carers. The next most common responses were 'support with resources' and 'support to schools to work with RCOs'. Other frequent responses included formal links with RCOs and support to both schools and RCOs with training.

Specific responses captured in the category 'support to schools to work with RCOs' revealed varied means of support. Four LAs said they were involved in signposting schools to refugee organisations for specific materials such as literature on the National Curriculum and British education system. Others gave advice to schools on training courses and funding schemes to support the achievement of refugees and asylum seekers. One LA signposted its schools to the Centre for Equality and Diversity to help staff cope with issues of racism and bullying, and another stated that RCOs in their area were represented in their English as an Additional Language (EAL) sub-group for 14-19 year olds which helped to develop the EAL curriculum and other initiatives. The sub-group also helped to develop the authority's language policy indicating that partnerships can work to influence local policy as well as improve educational attainment for those with language needs. One LA described links with a local Refugee Forum which enhanced the schools' support to refugees and asylum seekers. An example of their work was the provision of a mobile exhibition to raise awareness about refugee issues within education.

Some examples of the types of activities that were included under 'general' forms of support were working closely with the authority's Social Care Team to help the placement of unaccompanied children in schools, and assisting partnerships to provide health education and legal advice to parents and carers of refugees and asylum seekers in schools.

There were four responses by LAs in this study that outlined why they did not offer support. Three out of four respondents said RCOs had never been formed in their area, or had previously existed but no longer had adequate funding to continue their activities. One respondent said the Children's Service and Traveller team manage issues relating to vulnerable groups in education.

Provision of advice

Almost half of the LAs in this study provided advice to schools on how to engage effectively with refugee communities. The table below shows the responses in more detail.

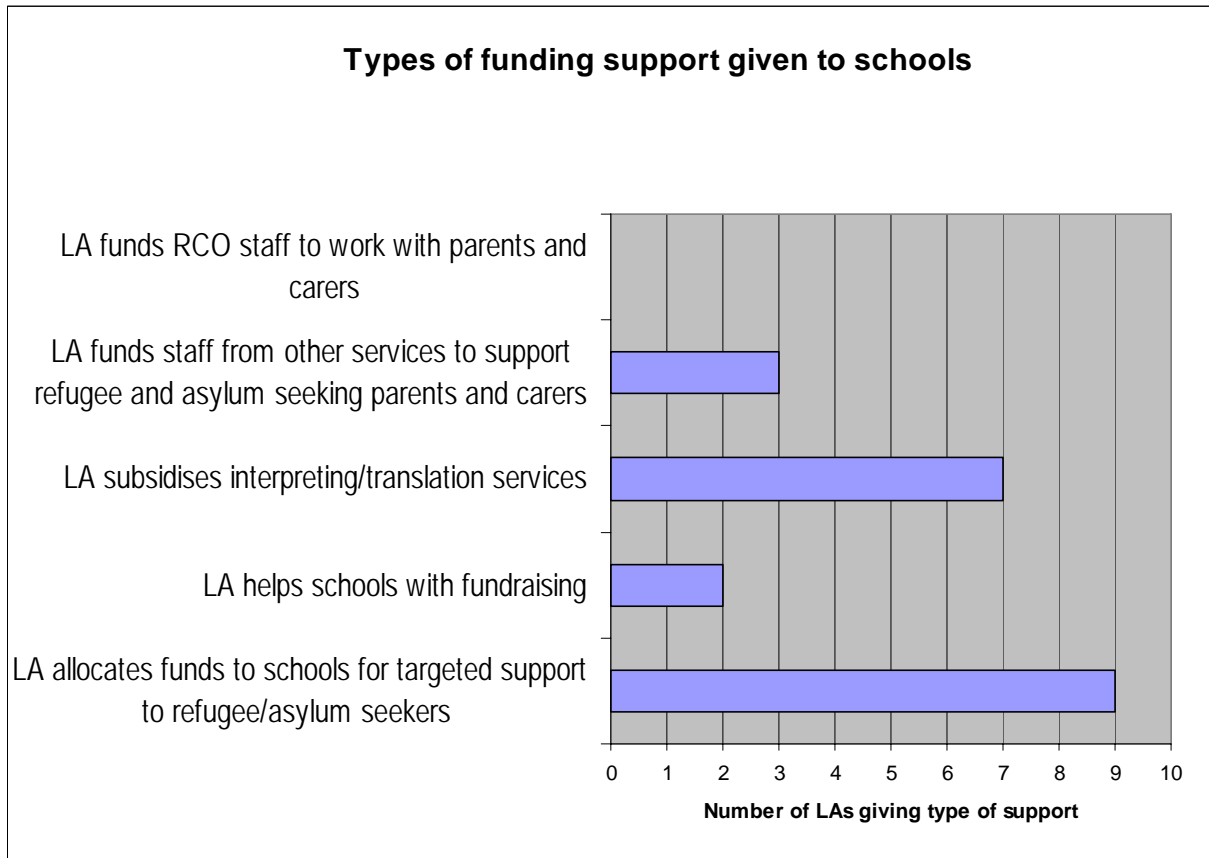
Types of advice	Number of LAs
Advice on how to work effectively with refugee and asylum seeking parents and carers	13
Signposting secondary schools to Refugee Community Organisations in the area	10
Advice on how to work effectively with Refugee Community Organisations	7

The majority of local authorities in the sample provided an important link between secondary schools and local RCOs. A lack of awareness of the existence of LA resources for refugee families has been cited as a common barrier to refugee and asylum seeker student achievement.² These figures indicate that some secondary schools turn to non-statutory sources such as RCOs for support in engaging parents and carers in their children's education.

² McKenna (2004) *Daring to Dream: Raising achievements of 14 to 16 year old asylum-seeking and refugee children* (London, Refugee Council)

Support with funding

Previous Refugee Council research has shown that few government funding streams directly support refugees and asylum seekers in education.³ Many grants and schemes, such as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, support the achievement of ethnic minority pupils more generally, rather than being refugee-specific. Some local authorities use their resources to fund schools' work with refugees, as illustrated below.

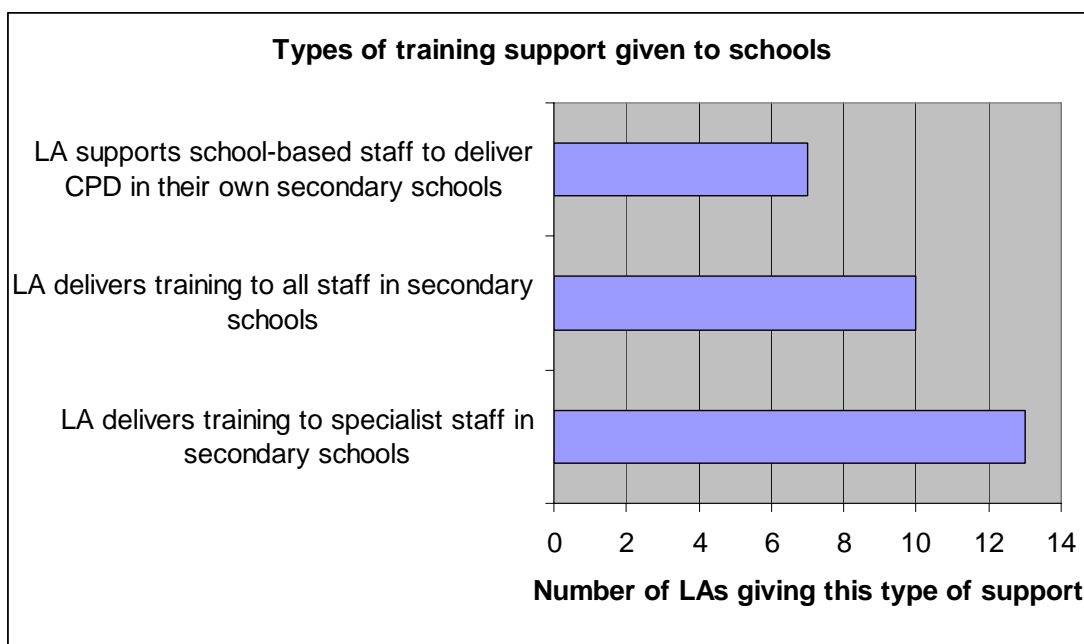


The above graph illustrates the main types of funding support provided by the nine local authorities who gave a positive response. The most common type of funding to schools was support to refugee and asylum seekers in their achievement and overall well-being at school. Eleven of the 19 (58 per cent) respondents said that their local authority funded secondary school activities involving parents and carers of refugees and asylum seekers which included interpreting and translating services. These LA services supplemented the work of schools whose core budget did not always cover these costs. They also promoted community outreach by familiarising parents and carers with the school's ethos and procedures and fostered closer links with the refugee and asylum seeking community.

Support with training

Nearly 90 per cent of respondents (13 out of the 15 replies) said they offered support by way of training for secondary school staff. Training of specialist staff such as EMAG staff or EAL teachers was cited as the most common type of training. The following graph shows a breakdown of training services provided by the local authorities that responded to the survey.

³ McKenna (2004)



The graph above shows that training of mainstream staff in secondary schools was less frequent than that offered to specialists (77 per cent of those who provide training), however it is arguably as important to educate mainstream staff about the needs of refugees and asylum seekers as it is to conduct specialist teacher training. Refugees and asylum seekers are often taught by a mixture of mainstream and specialist staff, therefore joined-up thinking in terms of training could enhance education provision for these students.

Schools can opt into training services provided by LAs, but it was reported that some do not choose to take advantage of what was on offer. Seven of the 13 LAs (nearly 54 per cent) in the sample also stated they provided Continued Professional Development (CPD) training to secondary school mainstream staff.

Support with staffing

Two thirds of respondents in the sample stated they provided secondary schools with staff to support their work with refugee communities. Respondents emphasised several main areas of support. Specialist staff from LAs worked in secondary schools to:

- Deliver family learning classes to refugees and asylum seeking parents and carers through the school
- Deliver English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes
- Provide induction sessions to orientate refugee parents and carers to the new school community
- Provide interpreters so that parents and carers can better engage with the school and their children's education.

The table displays the findings in more detail.

Types of staffing	Number of LAs
Local authority provides interpreters	4
Local authority provides inductions for refugee and asylum seeking parents and carers	5
LA staff deliver ESOL to refugee and asylum seeking parents and carers through secondary schools	5
LA staff deliver family learning to refugees and asylum seeking parents and carers through school	7

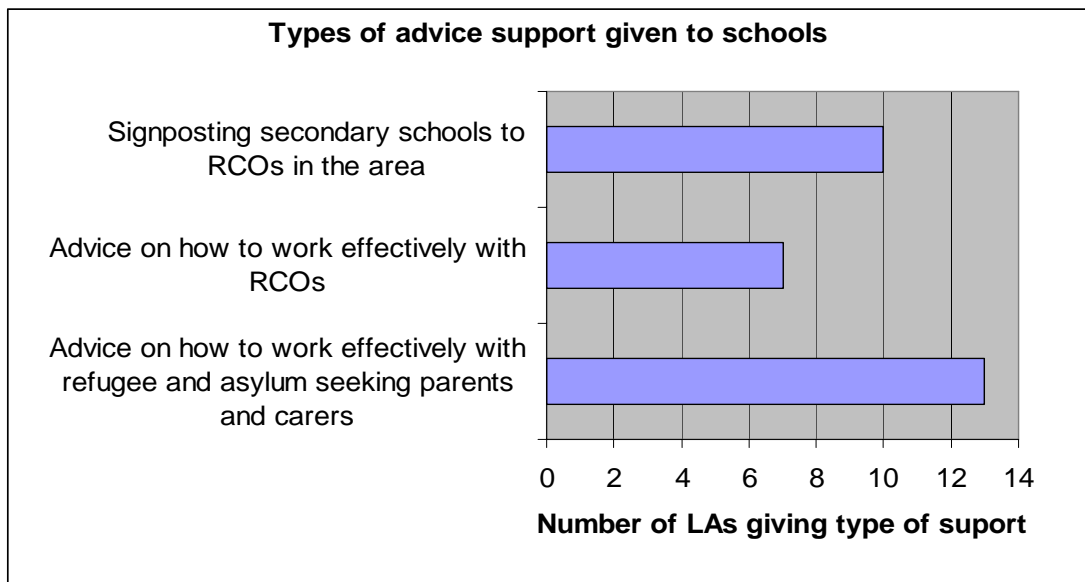
Seven of the local authorities in this survey offered family learning classes to parents and carers whose first language was not English. In addition, some LAs had specialist staff who spoke many of the community languages and who were available to act as translators or interpreters for activities such as school inductions. Saturday schools were also available for new parent and student arrivals. 'Bilingual Community Officers' were also cited as valuable staff support whose main functions included support for parents when they first arrive at school by helping them to understand the British education system, school policies and procedures. They also supported pupil development through the use of their mother tongue language.

The survey found that LA staff also supported secondary schools by building links with RCOs. 'Refugee Home-School Support Workers' were employed to bridge the gap between families and schools, combat marginalisation and help those families engage more effectively with schools.

Support with advice

All of the respondents said they advised secondary schools on how to work effectively with refugee and asylum seeker parents and carers. Research has shown that a lack of English and/or awareness of local authority services can act as a barrier to accessing services.⁴ Local authorities can be important sources of information and awareness-raising to ensure that the refugee and asylum seeking community can access their services which in turn, it is hoped, will combat social exclusion.

The table below illustrates the types of advice given to schools by the local authorities that replied to this survey. Nearly all of the local authorities gave advice on how schools could engage with parents and carers of refugees and asylum seekers. This included activities such as producing specific handbooks for refugees which contained useful information about secondary schools (for example, school procedures in different languages). One of the LAs in the survey put this information on their EMAS website. However it should be recognised that online services may not be easily accessible to all refugees and asylum seekers.



The range of support services to refugees and asylums seekers is also contingent upon funding. One LA stated:

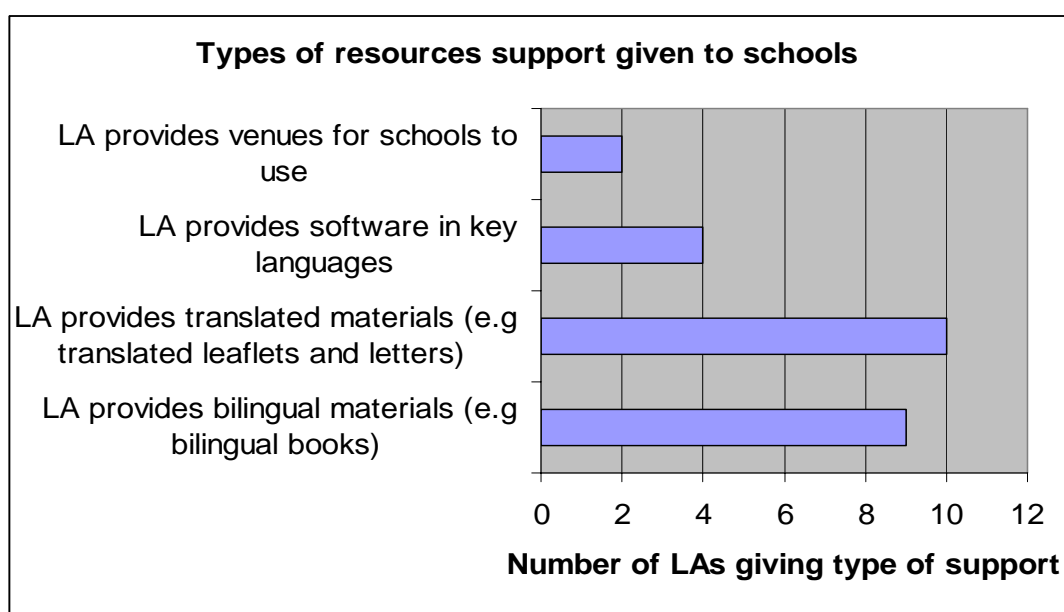
⁴ See for example, Jones, C. and Rutter, J. (1998) *Refugee Education: Mapping the Field* (Trentham)

“We helped the refugees and asylum seekers to form the 'New Arrival Association' but there is lack of funding for them to help themselves”.

This highlights the difficulties that many local community organisations face in terms of access to funding which can lead to the closure of important sources of support for refugees.

Support with resources

As the graph below indicates, nearly all respondents (93 per cent) said they provided resources to secondary schools. The range of resources was variable across the local authorities in the study, however nearly all local authorities provided parents and carers with useful resources to engage them in their children's secondary education. Translated and bilingual materials such as parent and teacher handbooks, leaflets and letters were provided by most of the participants. LAs also provided physical venues for focus groups, community meetings and information sessions for refugee and asylum seeking parents.



Other types of resources cited were:

- Guidance booklets for schools and parents in key languages.
- Access to free interpreting for schools however they pay subsidised rates for translations.
- Parenting classes.
- Connexions Personal Advisor to support refugee and asylum seekers aged 13-19 across schools.
- Home visits to parents and carers of refugees and asylum seekers (from EMAG team)
- Advice on employment opportunities.
- Advice on Education Opportunities Family Learning Appeals to help children enter schools with support from additional resources and staff time.
- Parents' meetings that target specific community groups.

The above points reflect the wide range of resources provided by local authorities which are often too costly for schools themselves to produce. LAs also offer broader support than schools. This extends to employment advice and supporting additional staff time.

Direct work with RCOs

The majority of respondents (68 per cent) stated that they work directly with RCOs. Only three LAs in the survey do not foster links between schools and RCOs because of 'a lack of RCOs or refugees and asylum seekers in the area'. This is unsurprising given the regional differences of LAs in this survey and the pattern of RCO development across the country.

LAs who gave positive responses indicated the following types of direct work with RCOs:

- Signposting/ referral to RCOs
- Training
- Advice/information
- Outreach
- Support to supplementary and community schools
- Consultation
- Joint projects
- Parents' meetings
- RCO volunteers promote links with schools
- Advertise RCO services
- Funding
- Support RCOs in providing services

LAs in the sample were clearly engaging with RCOs to help meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. The LAs direct work with RCOs in areas such as consultations, awareness-raising, outreach and partnerships also suggests that a two-way process can benefit targeted services to the refugee community.

Formal arrangements between RCOs and LAs included funding and take up of services. Only LAs without a significant number of RCOs in their area did not engage in this kind of activity. Some LAs stated a general concern about the lack of sufficient funding to carry out services for refugees and asylum seekers. For example one LA stated that money from the Vulnerable Children's Grant no longer existed for them to carry out services to support these individuals. RCOs in some local authorities even had to shut down completely due to funding cuts.

Nearly half (48 per cent) of the local authorities that responded to the survey had taken positive strides to engage refugees and member of Black and Minority Ethnic Groups in policy decision-making. Respondents indicated forums that helped them to achieve this included:

- Members of an Equalities Steering Group
- Corporate race equality partnership
- Refugee Forum/Refugee Asylum Seeker Advisory Group
- Gateway Protection Programme Stakeholders Group
- Asylum Media Group
- Multiagency forum
- Black and Minority Ethnic equalities forum.

This is encouraging, as direct engagement with refugee communities can help LAs identify their needs and develop strategies to address them.

Conclusion

The local authorities that responded to the questionnaire mainly represented the London region. However, the findings have wider implications for the work of education services in other regions of the country. The findings suggest that many LAs actively engage with parents and carers of refugees and asylum seekers and RCOs in their area, and provide a critical link between

secondary schools and RCOs to improve services to this community.

The survey shows that funding is critical to support and sustain LA services for refugee communities and LAs were willing to using their resources to help schools benefit from translation and interpreting services, material resources, specialist staffing and training. These types of activities result in better support for refugee communities and can contribute to better engagement with the parents/carers of refugee and asylum seeking young people.