

Refugee Council

research report



Survey of Refugee Community Organisations

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

During December 2005 and January 2006, the Inclusive Secondary Schools project team received responses to the questionnaire distributed to Refugee Community Organisation (RCOs) in the four project regions (London, Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands and Eastern region). The aim of the survey was to gather information on existing practice among RCOs relating to the education of refugee children.

The survey was sent to RCOs in the four project regions and was made available in both hard copy and for completion online, giving respondents the option of using either method. A paper copy was sent to all of the RCOs on Refugee Council databases, which amounted to approximately 600 organisations. In addition to this, several forums and networks distributed the questionnaire, to organisations that were potentially not on existing Refugee Council databases. The RCO sector is characterised by constant flux, with organisations opening and closing all the time, so there are inherent limitations to any distribution lists that exist. It was hoped that publicity generated through e-mail forums would also increase the range of organisations that were aware of its existence. The use of multiple publicity routes and the fluid nature of the RCO sector makes it impossible to provide an exact figure of the sample size.

A total of 66 responses were received from RCOs (18 online and 48 by post), one from an RCO Network and one from a Refugee Supporting Agency. This response rate is not as low as it might initially appear, as the questionnaire was specifically asking organisations to provide information about their current practice in relation to education. This means that organisations that are not doing work on this issue will not have been motivated to respond. RCOs provide a wide variety of support to their service users, and often focus upon help with immigration issues, housing and money, therefore the development of education-specific projects is not necessarily considered a priority.

Profile of respondents

Respondents were asked to complete a section at the beginning of the questionnaire which described characteristics of the organisation they were involved in. The discussion below outlines the responses received.¹

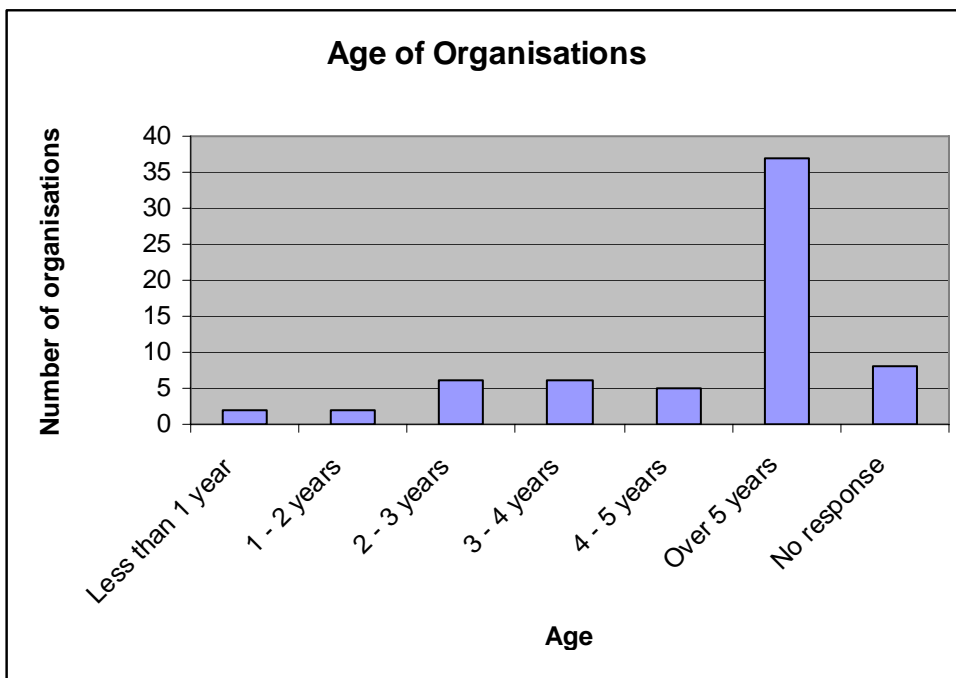
Regional spread

There was an extremely heavy London bias in the returns. Of those who answered the question on location, 52 were from London, two from Yorkshire and Humberside and two from the West Midlands. None of the RCOs stated that they were based in the East of England (although the response from the RCO Network was based in this region). Ten organisations did not state the region in which they were based. Given the fact that there is a much larger and more established RCO sector in London than in the other regions included in the survey, it was anticipated that a higher proportion of surveys would be received from the city. However, the response rate from Yorkshire and Humberside, the West Midlands and the East of England was lower than the project team would have liked so should not be interpreted as an accurate picture of the activities that exist in these regions. As 91 per cent of respondents were from London, no analysis of findings can be carried out according to region.

¹ It should be noted that there were unanswered questions in a large proportion of the questionnaires received. This means that most figures will not add up to 66 (the figure for total respondents).

Age of organisation

The majority of RCOs who responded to the survey had been established for more than five years (37 responses which represents nearly 65 per cent of RCOs). Only two RCOs were in their first year of existence. This is an unsurprising finding as RCOs are often initially set up to provide newly arrived communities with support (both practically and emotionally) and are usually very small operations at the outset (staffed by a few volunteers). For many RCOs, establishing educational support programmes is likely to be something that is embarked upon once an organisation has become more well-established and can more easily access funding and larger networks of service users. However, it should be noted that some RCOs are specifically established to deliver education programmes where a need is identified.



Target group/remit of organisation

The survey asked respondents to describe the target group(s) who benefit from their work. Most respondents answered by stating their users' country or region of origin, although some also described other aspects such as gender.² The table below illustrates respondents' answers in terms of countries/communities. It should be noted that these were self-descriptions and some organisations stated more than one target group.

² The question was phrased 'what is the target group of your organisation?'

Africa	No.	Asia/Middle East	No.	Europe	No.
Somalia	10	Afghanistan	3	Bosnia-Herzegovina	1
Congo	2	Middle Eastern	2	Ethnic Albania	1
Eritrea	2	Vietnam and China	1		
Francophone Africa	2	Vietnam	1	South America	
Africa	1	China	1		
Angola	1	Iran	1	Columbia	1
Burundi	1	Iraq	1	Latin America	1
Cabinda	1	Russia	1		
Central Africa	1	Pakistan	1		
East Tanzania	1	India	1		
Horn of Africa	1	Sri Lanka	1		
Rwanda	1	Turkish/Kurdish	1		
Sudan	1				
Tigraya	1				
Uganda	1				
Yemen	1				

The majority of these organisations had a target group of people from various parts of Africa. The country of origin mentioned most frequently was Somalia. This level of response from the Somali community is not surprising as there has been a widely acknowledged concern about educational achievement and exclusion among Somali pupils and therefore communities have responded by establishing support programmes for their young people. In addition, Somalis were among the first groups of people to come to the UK in large numbers so support initiatives may be more developed as they are a longer established community than many of the others who responded to the survey.

In addition to descriptions of target groups that were based around countries, other responses are shown below.

Target Group	Frequency
Refugees/Asylum seekers	18
Children/Young People	16
Women	4
Parents	3
People with mental health issues	4
Older people	3
Unemployed people	2
Black and Minority Ethnic Groups	4

Given that the survey targeted Refugee Community Organisations, it might be expected that there would be a higher proportion of respondents naming refugees and asylum seekers as their target group. However, as this survey was sent out by the Refugee Council and the aims stated that the questionnaire was exploring issues relating to the education of refugee and asylum seeking children, then it seems likely that respondents might not have thought it necessary to explicitly state this. Indeed, responses from RCOs whom the project team know work with refugees and asylum seekers did not state this in their response to the target group question. It is perhaps unsurprising that those that have a specific remit of working with children and young people would include some kind of educational activities. As mentioned previously, these categories were not mutually exclusive so, for example, an RCO could be working with Somali women and children.

Staffing

Organisations were asked about their staffing levels and whether these staff were paid or volunteers.³ However, some of those who completed the questionnaire did not specify the proportion of paid or unpaid staff and merely wrote in the total number of staff. Their responses are illustrated below.

Number of staff	Frequency
0	2
1-5	18
6-10	17
11-15	4
16-20	3
21-25	3
26-30	3
31-35	1
50+	2

The majority of RCOs questioned were small organisations, 37 having ten or less members of staff. It is interesting that two respondents stated that there were no members of staff at all and indicates that some people do not consider volunteer positions as 'staff' (if there were no staff at all, it raises the question of who was completing the questionnaire). At the other end of the spectrum, two organisations were large, one with 58 staff (11 paid, 47 volunteers), and another with one part time paid worker and approximately 430 volunteers.⁴ These two examples are unusual and do not reflect the RCO sector as a whole.

Of the 53 respondents to this question, 39 specified whether these were paid or unpaid.

Number of paid staff	Frequency
0	10
1-5	24
6-10	2
11-15	3

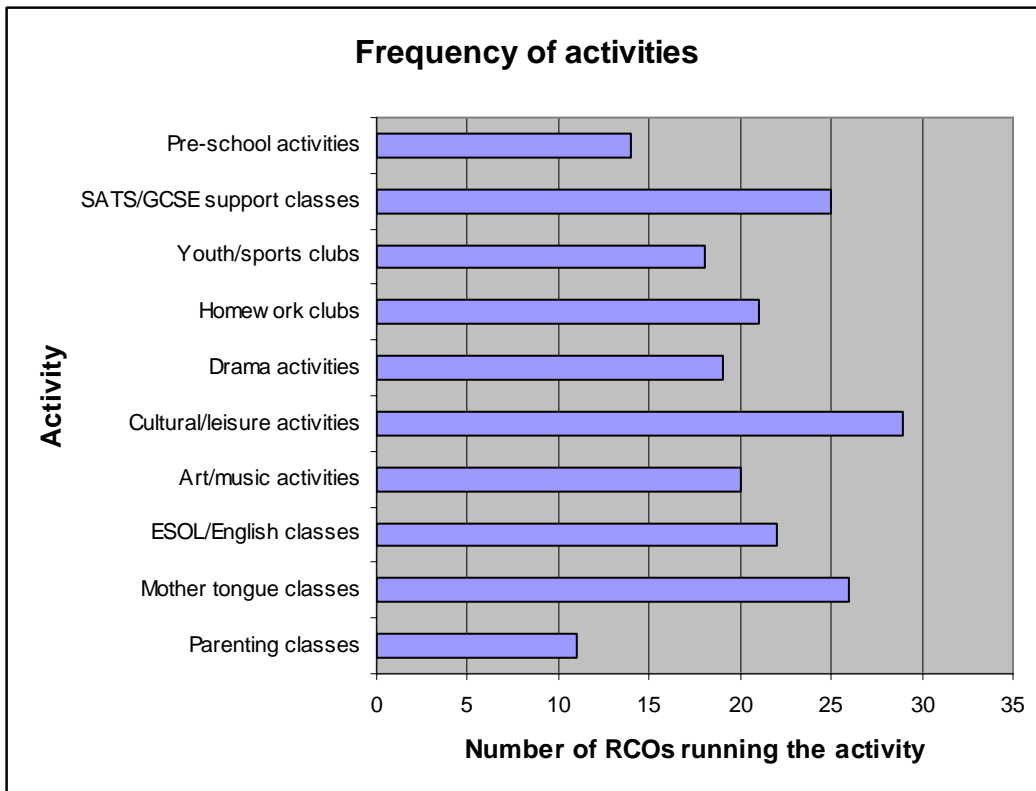
No RCO specified more than 15 paid staff, despite there being 12 RCOs with over 15 staff in total. In those organisations where it was clear that there were both paid and unpaid staff, the latter tended to outnumber the former illustrating that RCOs can rely on the work of volunteers.

Respondents' involvement in education-related activities

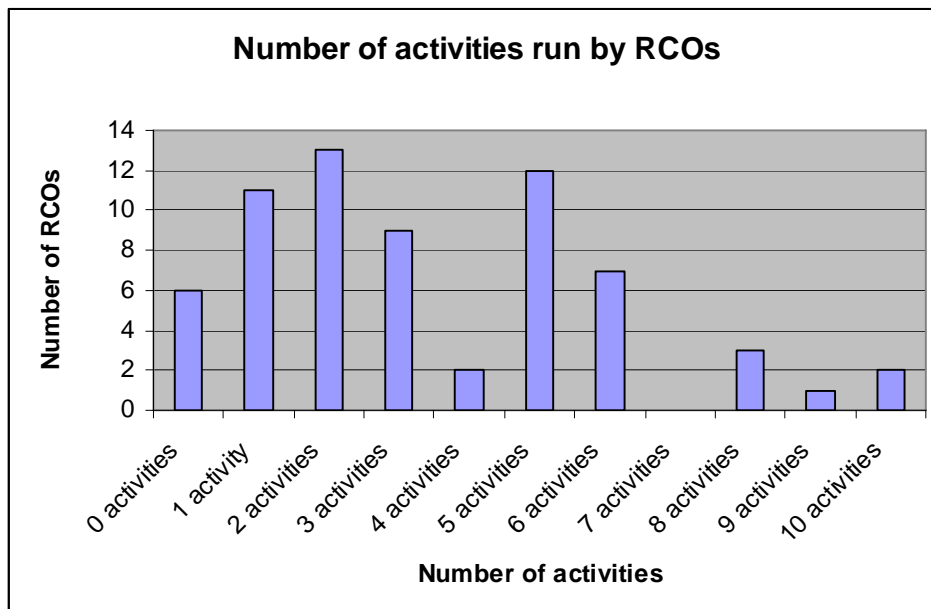
Respondents were asked to indicate the types of activities they were involved with, and then asked to provide further details of the ways in which they worked (in terms of partnerships, funding, staffing, target groups and locations). The graph below highlights the frequency of involvement in the pre-determined survey categories.

³ The question was phrased 'how many staff does your organisation have? (Please indicate whether paid or unpaid.)'.

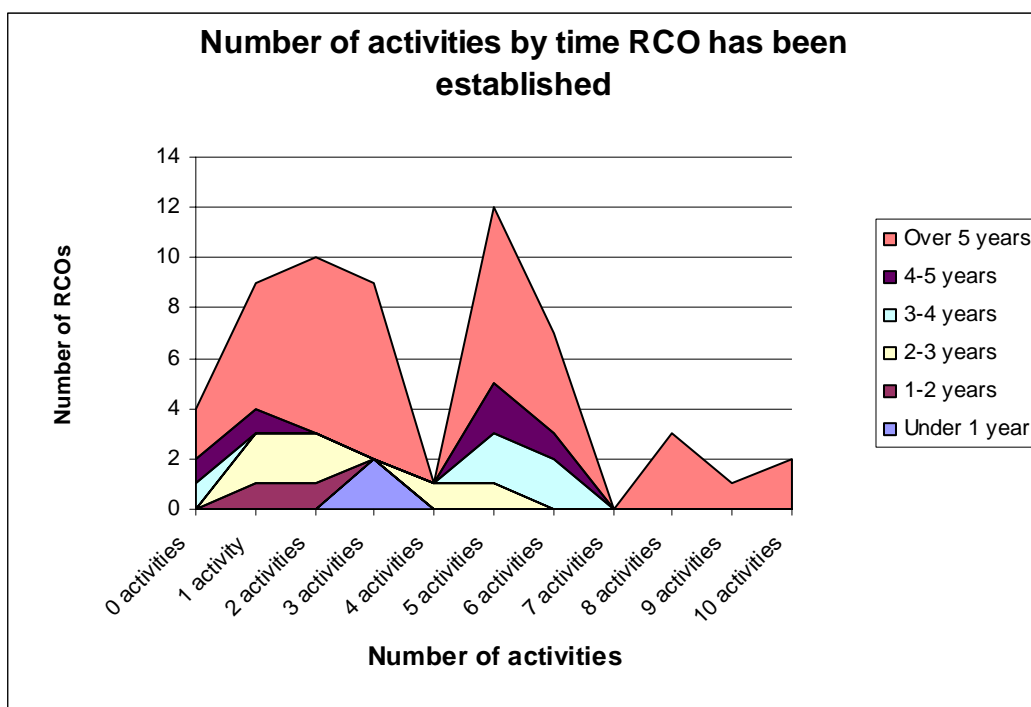
⁴ This figure refers to an organisation with a national remit that has a well-developed network of volunteers.



Cultural/leisure activities (such as traditional dance and cultural story telling), mother tongue classes and SATS/GCSE support classes were the most frequently run activities. In addition to these activities, under the 'other' category, organisations stated that they ran general literacy and numeracy classes, sexual health education, cultural awareness programmes and food hygiene courses. It should be noted that many RCOs ran more than one activity.



Only 17 of the respondents stated they ran one or less activity, indicating a commitment among the majority of respondents to provide a range of educational opportunities for their service users. It was expected that the longer an organisation has been running, the more activities it would run. However, these figures show that this is not always the case.



Organisations existing for less than one year ran 2 - 4 activities and many of those organisations operating for over five years ran four activities or less. However, almost all of the organisations running four or more activities have been established for three years or more, and all of those running eight, nine or ten activities are in the highest category of time established.

Funding of activities

The questionnaire asked respondents to state how they funded the activities they ran. It was anticipated that organisations would draw upon a wide variety of sources in order to be able to deliver education-related activities. Some activities were funded from more than one source and the table below shows the range of funders and how many times they were mentioned.

Funding Source	No.	Funding Source	No.	Funding Source	No.
Local authority	14	Community Chests	6	Prim. Care Trust	2
Fees, Donations	13	Sure Start	6	2nd tier org	2
Charitable trust	9	Self-funded	4	College/Adult education	1
Comic Relief	8	Children's Fund	3	Fast Forward Grant	1
Assoc. of London Govt	7	Local network	3	Football Foundation	1
Awards for All	7	New Deal for Communities	3	Housing Assoc.	1
Trust for London	7	Connexions	2	Local Church	1
Another vol. org.	6	Local Education Arts Project	2	Sport England	1
Children in Need	6				

The funding sources mentioned most often were Local Authorities (including their education services) and fees and donations paid by participants. Fees and donations were used to fund seven different activities, with more mention of their use in SATS/GCSE support classes and mother tongue classes. These two activities were also the most common use of council funding. Two perhaps surprising findings are that a Primary Care Trust funded a homework club and a housing association funds drama activities.

The responses to the funding questions illustrate clearly that RCOs rely on a great number of sources to finance their activities. There was no real trend of one particular funder being used for specific purposes. Five sources were identified as the funders of seven different types of activities (Trust for London, Fees/Donations, Comic Relief, local authority, Association of London Government).⁵ This shows that RCOs are often approaching funders with large remits for financial support with educational activities. When looking at the patterns within each educational activity, the findings show that there were at least five different funding sources used in each category, with two activities relying on 12 different types of funding sources. This indicates that RCOs pursue many funding avenues to get their work supported. Unreliable funding trends tend to force RCOs to seek funding from multiple sources in the hope that at least one or two will be successful. This can perhaps be taken as an indication of the commitment these organisations have to providing their communities with support services.

Partnership working

Respondents were asked if they worked in partnership with other organisations in order to deliver their education-related activities. Partnership work can sometimes mean that organisations are able to provide a better service as they have more access to resources such as facilities and staffing. It also enables organisations to tap into the different skills and expertise across the voluntary/community and statutory sectors. Funding requirements are also an influence as some funders give priority to partnerships. In this case, the partnership arrangements are very formalised. It should be noted that respondents to this survey may have indicated that they work in partnership with others or with schools when actually the relationships were very fluid and informal.

The findings of the survey show that there was a lot of partnership working among the organisations who completed the questionnaire.

Partner	No.	Partner	No.
Schools	31	Sure Start	3
Other voluntary org.	11	Community Hall	2
Local authority	8	Individual persons/tutors	2
Adult Learning Centre/college	7	Advocacy Across London	1
New Deal for Communities	6	Assoc. of London Government	1
Charitable Trust	4	Black and Minority Ethnic org.	1
Youth/Sports Club	4	Parents	1

It is encouraging to see the level of working with schools being so high, although it must be noted that the question did not explore the level of partnership working that exists, which could range from the loan of a classroom to the school providing staff.⁶ However, the level of engagement with the statutory schooling sector indicates a willingness to work together on both sides.

⁵ This Funder is now called London Councils

⁶ It should also be noted that there may have been some misinterpretation of this question. For instance, the Association of London Government is a funder rather than an organisation that would jointly deliver a programme of activities.

	Pre-school activities	SATS/GCSE support classes	Youth/sports clubs	Homework clubs	Drama activities	Cultural/leisure activities	Art/music activities	ESOL/English classes	Mother tongue classes	Parenting classes	IT classes	Other educational activities	Total
Schools	5	15	1	4			3		1	1	1		31
Other voluntary org					1	2	4	1		1	1	1	11
Local authority	1	1			1	1		2	2				8
Adult learning centre/ college								5			2		7
New Deal for Communities	1	2	1			1				1			6
Charitable trust			2	1					1				4
Youth/sports club			3			1							4
Sure Start	1							1		1			3
Community Hall		1						1					2
Individual person/ tutors							1	1					2
Advocacy Across London						1							1
Assoc. of London Government			1										1
Black and Minority Ethnic org.					1								1
Parents	1												1

In some ways, this is a predictable pattern of partnership working when you look at who is engaged in particular activities. For example, the partnerships formed between RCOs and adult education were to deliver ESOL and IT classes and Sure Start worked on pre-school and parenting classes.

Links with schools

In addition to asking respondents about the way they work with schools on particular activities, the questionnaire also requested information about any direct links they have with schools⁷. Thirty organisations stated they had direct links with schools and the types of links they described are outlined below.

⁷ This differs from the previous section as that question asked about partnerships in general (some of which may have been with schools) whereas this questioned respondent on links with schools that may be less formal.

RCO staff members of school bodies (e.g. governors, community cohesion team) Hire classrooms Consultation with schools on vulnerable groups and refugees Mother tongue classes Support schools in interpreting and translation Conduct workshops in schools Run after school classes/clubs Supplementary classes Provide music teachers for workshops/classes Partnership activities involving parents and children Support schools in involving parents Referral of students to RCO by Home School Liaison workers Involvement in community festival Training for teachers and parents School visits to church Newsletter sent to schools Provide home-school liaison service Give school information about our client group
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This illustrates a range of both formal and informal links. It clearly shows that RCOs and schools work together on learning activities (as identified in other sections of the survey), but it also shows the supportive role organisations play with schools on broader issues such as working with parents and raising cultural awareness. The descriptions above generally seem to refer to planned activities, however one RCO stated that "*at times we are called upon to render support at crisis points*" highlighting the ad hoc nature of some of the links that are formed. The most common links that were identified between responding organisations were concerning the provision of classrooms and the running of mother tongue, after-school and supplementary classes. The involvement of RCO staff on school bodies was also mentioned several times.

Links with local authority

Respondents were asked about their links with local authorities. This question was phrased broadly in the hope that organisations would give information about any links, not just those relating to education-related activities.

A total of 29 respondents identified direct links they have with local authorities. The responses below show that RCOs do participate in forums/meetings/steering groups at a local authority level. Respondents did not give a lot of detail about these groups, but it is plausible that these include forums which local authorities both manage and participate in.⁸ It is encouraging to see that almost half of the respondents to this survey participated in local decision-making and community forums, as this would suggest that the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers are being brought into discussions and perhaps impacting on education policy at the local level. It is also encouraging to see that some local authorities directly funded the activities of RCOs, although it should be noted that this was only the case for six respondents.

⁸ That said, some respondents did specify the groups and these include forums such as voluntary councils and refugee forums.

Type of link	No.
Community forum/Partnership working networks	6
Funding	6
Meetings/steering groups	4
Work in partnership on specific projects	3
Contract to provide services	3
Referrals (both ways)	2
Reports/Evaluation forms	1
Local authority provides training	1
Provide consultants	1
Leisure activities	1
No direct links but used space to mention lack of support	4

The responses showed that some organisations had some well-developed links with their local authorities and other programmes. For example, one response stated:

"[w]e work with EIC Action Zone, London Challenge Transition Project, Ethnic Minority Achievement Support Service, [Borough] Children's Fund Programme and project leaders".

By way of comparison, several RCOs took the opportunity to express the lack of cooperation or support they received from their local authorities. Two examples follow:

"We would like to have contact with local authorities but it seems they don't listen organisation like ours"

"We are in [particular London Borough]. [The Borough] is not supportive of supplementary schools"

The tone of these responses is one of frustration, as the respondents clearly believe that they have something to contribute, or could benefit from their support. It is clear that there is not a consistent approach across local authorities in terms of how they work with RCOs. Differing levels of support can cause much frustration to those who believe they have something to offer the local community.

Involvement in supplementary or community schools

Some RCOs are involved in the organisation and running of supplementary or community schools. These programmes are often established to work with specific cultural groups in order to improve their learning. These schools sometimes teach mother tongue classes and it is thought that this type of activity will encourage young people to remain invested in the culture of their countries of origin as well as extending their learning opportunities and therefore increasing their achievement in mainstream education.

This survey found that 27 of the respondents were involved in supplementary or community schooling of some kind. This represents 40 per cent of organisations. The scale of some of the activities is very impressive. Some of the activities are described by the respondents below:

"76 children 7-16 are on roll of Saturday supplementary classes of numeracy and literacy classes, homework revision, sport activities, drama, learning mother tongue, ESOL for parents, educational visits, excursions and day trips."

"We provide Swahili language class. Through the Swahili language we teach Geography, Biology and Cultural. We also have Maths volunteer teacher. The teacher helps the student with their maths homework."

"We are a supplementary school, teaching Arabic and citizenship values to 300 girls (and some boys), to GCSE and A' Level."

"We run GCSE maths in our mother tongue school to support children who need more support"

These examples illustrate quite sophisticated programmes of activities. The last two examples show how organisations sometimes deliver accredited courses in mother tongue classes. Using this method means that young people are able to gain qualification in the same circumstances as host communities as there is no need for the provision of English language support. Acquiring qualifications can then show a person's ability to learn and also act as a confidence-booster.

Among the other types of activities that were described there was a large proportion of mother tongue provision designed for a range of different communities (e.g. Bosnian, Afghan, Somali, Arabic and Russian language). Other organisations supplemented children's learning by providing them with support in core GCSE subjects (such as Maths and English) and running homework clubs. These classes can provide additional time and support that schools may not be able to, which can help refugee and asylum seeking children when they attend their mainstream schools and engage in the National Curriculum.⁹

Supporting parents/carers with education issues

In addition to the types of organised education-related activities described elsewhere in the survey, RCOs provide support to parents and carers with a range of issues concerning their children's education.

Subject of support	No.
Advice/Information/Referrals	14
Understanding of school system	12
Accessing education/Applying for school place	11
Bullying	6
Advocacy	5
Applying for financial support for meals/uniform	4
Career guidance	3
Help filling in forms	3
Translation/interpreting	3
Primary/Secondary transition	2
School uniform	2
Awareness of learning disabilities	2
Advice on truancy/ behaviour problems	1
Dealing with racism	1
Liaison/ support workers	1
Signposting for specialist support	1

⁹ Some of these activities were described elsewhere in the questionnaire but this question aimed to find out about programmes organisations deem to be 'supplementary or community schools'. It is not clear whether respondents made this distinction here but the question was asked near the end of the questionnaire and the responses were written free-hand.

The most numerous response was described vaguely by many respondents so it is not possible to outline what specific issues come under this heading. It is possible that the category could also include the work that RCOs do that is not related to education.

When looking at the more specific answers, issues relating to understanding the school system and applying for school places are numerous. The UK education system can be confusing for those who have been through it themselves so it is likely to be even more so if you have been educated in a different country and in a different language (and these difficulties may be even more pronounced if parents have not attended school themselves). It appears that parents/carers turn to RCOs to help them understand the systems and processes.

It is disappointing that bullying and racism feature on this list and shows that refugee and asylum seeking children can face these particular difficulties in English schools. Translation/interpretation and help with filling in forms also features in the list illustrating the one-to-one support RCOs give parents/carers when interacting with schools (for example, interpreting at parents' evenings).

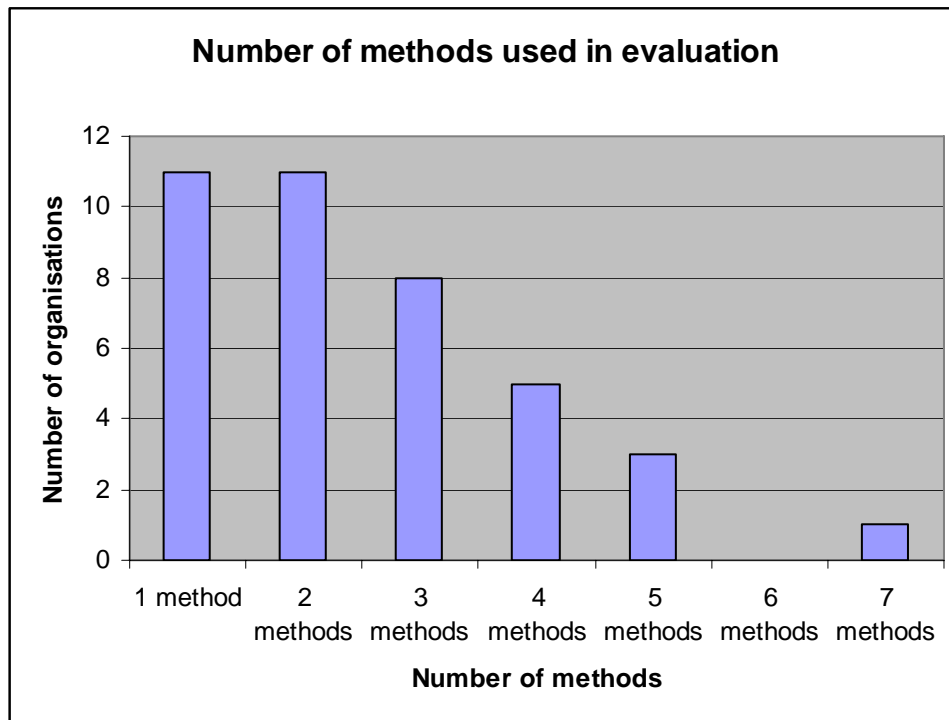
Monitoring and evaluation of education activities

The project team was interested in knowing if RCOs evaluated the activities they delivered to their service users. Undertaking this type of monitoring can be used to improve what is offered. It is also recognised that particular types of evaluation are required by funders and evidence of this activity can also be used in funding applications to help demonstrate the success of previous initiatives and as an indication of need.

Type of monitoring/evaluation	No.	Type of monitoring/evaluation	No.
Evaluation/feedback forms	17	Report to management council/funders	3
Attendance records	10	Setting targets/objectives	2
Monitor client details (age, ethnicity etc)	9	Feedback from children	2
Self evaluation/produce reports	8	Telephone feedback	2
General feedback	8	Exam results	2
Feedback from/review by parents	6	External evaluator/auditor	2
Review/staff meetings	5	By matrix standard	1
One-to-One meetings	5	Monitor student behaviour	1
Records of services provided	5	Student test	1
Progress reports on students	5	Suggestion/comment box	1
Feedback from volunteers	4		

The table shows that a range of methods are used, from formal external evaluation to various types of feedback from users. Some respondents were not detailed about these methods and such as *"we have all policies and procedures to do that"*. Answers like this were classed as self-evaluation. The feedback categories were split depending on how specific respondents were, but as some just stated 'feedback' and not from whom it came, this was classified as 'general feedback'.

Despite this inconsistency of answers, it is interesting to look at the total number of methods used by each organisation.



The majority of organisations only used one or two methods and the issue of resource constraints and conflicting priorities within RCOs could be an influence here. It may also be the case that one evaluation method is considered effective. However, as shown in the graph above, some did have a multi-method approach which is illustrated by the answer below.

“Yes, we do monitor and evaluate our activities. We usually keep records and frequency of attendance, mentor and support volunteers, keep records of all pupil activity, interview the users, questionnaires, collecting feedback, setting out targets at the beginning of project.”

Some funders impose particular types of evaluation methods on grant recipients and if RCOs are in receipt of money from various sources (as highlighted previously), this can force them to adopt different strategies to meet these needs. That said, the quote above suggests more than an obligation to a funder and displays a commitment to assessing and improving the services provided to users.

Conclusion

The findings of this survey provide an interesting insight into the types of education-related work that RCOs engage in. The data shows that RCOs deliver a wide range activities and many were involved in several different programmes simultaneously. These findings suggest that RCOs who have been established for several years are more likely to be delivering education activities¹⁰. In terms of funding, the respondents in this survey relied on numerous sources to fund their education activities which is symptomatic of the situation across the refugee sector in general. There was evidence of much partnership working in RCOs’ responses, which can be influenced by funders’ priorities as well as voluntary/community and statutory sector organisations pooling resources and expertise. Half of the respondents had links with local secondary school, both formally and informally, with the provision of mother tongue, after-school and supplementary classes being the most dominant activities. RCOs highlighted the range of informal support given to refugee and

¹⁰ This finding may be skewed by the sample tending to be dominated by those longer-established RCOs.

asylum seeking parents relating to schooling, which illustrates the need for RCOs to be engaged in education issues in order to effectively support them.