



Refugee Council

A lot to learn: refugees, asylum seekers and post-16 learning

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January 2013



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Research team

This research was conducted by the Refugee Council and LSN. The research team at the time of the data collection in 2011 consisted of Lisa Doyle and James Lee from the Refugee Council, and Josephine Balfour, Naomi Haywood, Claire Herbert, Gill O'Toole and Silvia Munoz from LSN. Since the primary research was conducted, LSN went into administration and the organisation has closed.

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Contents

Executive summary	5
1 Introduction	9
2 Background to the research	10
3. Methodology and sample	15
4. Motivations to study and future plans	24
5. Admissions and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)	26
6. Eligibility to study and fees	34
7. Support	41
8 Addressing the needs of refugees and asylum seekers	48
9. Conclusions and recommendations	54
Bibliography	56
Appendix 1	58
Appendix 2	63
Appendix 3	69
Appendix 4	73

Executive summary

“The hardest part of my job is when I have to tell someone they aren’t able to study... it’s horrendous to have to say no to someone... they often cry and tell me that all they have heard since coming to UK is “no”.” Student adviser, FE college, Yorkshire and Humberside

Accessing learning is an important aspect of refugee integration. For those arriving in England in search of safety, studying English and gaining new skills and qualifications can help refugees and asylum seekers communicate, become more employable and make friends. This report discusses research that explores the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in England and publicly-funded post-16 learning providers (excluding higher education) in delivering and accessing learning.

Refugees and asylum seekers come to the UK from many different countries, having had a wide variety of educational and work experiences before arriving in the UK and their motivations to learn vary.

The rules around eligibility to study and fee remission for refugees and asylum seekers are complex and subject to frequent change. Entitlements differ between England, Scotland and Wales, with England having the most restrictive rules.

Methodology

This research was undertaken through the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data collection activities were:

- A survey of publicly funded post-16 learning providers in England
- Semi-structured interviews with 20 refugees and asylum seekers
- Semi-structured interviews with representatives of 10 learning providers

The research was carried out in England only due to the fact that there are different entitlements operating in Scotland and Wales.

A total of 70 providers responded to the survey which included further education colleges, sixth form colleges, adult and community learning providers, work-based learning providers, an art college offering both further and higher education, and a specialist service for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) placements.

Responses were received from all regions in England.

Motivations to study and future plans

The majority of the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed wanted to study in order to gain employment. Three learners had a short-term goal to go on to university, whilst only two interviewees indicated that their motivation to study was purely to learn English. As many in the sample had participated in ESOL courses in the past, although it was not necessarily their current goal, it is likely that it will have been a motivation for them at some point. Other reasons for wanting to study included making friends, fitting in to their new communities, and to gain a qualification. Many of the interviewees had a clear desire to enter higher education, although some were experiencing difficulties accessing university courses.

Admissions and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

There is a lack of formal IAG support specifically targeted at refugees and asylum seekers, and marketing materials produced by providers tend to not have information that this group would benefit from. The majority of providers either had no specific support processes in place to support refugees and asylum seekers through the application process, or were unaware of having any.

Where one-to-one support was provided to learners, this was valued highly.

Refugees and asylum seekers often obtained information about courses from a variety of sources beyond the providers themselves, including family and friends and voluntary sector organisations.

Learners need clear information and advice before enrolment to not only provide them with the right information to inform their choices but also to provide information about the system itself which they are unfamiliar with.

Almost half of the learners in the sample found the application process relatively straightforward, particularly for those with good English language skills. Those that found it difficult felt that this was due to their personal lack of understanding of the education system and learning providers' lack of understanding people's entitlements and paperwork. The process of proving their immigration status often caused real difficulties for learners with asylum seeker status. In addition, accepting prior qualifications was seen as an additional barrier to being accepted on to courses.

Eligibility to study and fees

The majority of learning providers that responded to the survey were aware there were national policies relating to eligibility to study and eligibility for fee remission. There were misconceptions surrounding eligibility to study among several of the providers interviewed, with three believing that all refugees and asylum seekers are eligible to study.

The three main sources of guidance used to explain funding rules were produced by the Skills Funding Agency, Young People's Learning Agency and their own organisations.¹

The documentation that learning providers request when enrolling students may cause refugees and asylum seekers particular difficulties. Many providers requested passports which asylum seekers are not likely to have in their possession, and providing proof of address and evidence of previous qualifications can also be difficult for this group.

The majority of the refugees and asylum seekers in the sample had not paid course fees as they were exempt, but registration and examination fees were sometimes required which some felt were high given their low incomes, resulting in some not gaining the qualification they had studied for.

Support

Some providers interviewed referred to the difficulties learners faced in meeting their basic needs such as food, housing and healthcare and how these need to be met before the educational needs are addressed.

A lack of access to appropriate and sufficient funding and financial support proved to be a significant barrier for several of the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed.

The experience of going through different stages of the asylum process results in changes in entitlement to study and financial circumstances, sometimes leaving people with no support at all which can have a detrimental impact on their ability to succeed in learning.

Some statutory funds available to support people to engage in learning are not available for asylum seekers, and entitlements can be confusing. Some providers had their own hardship funds that they allowed asylum seekers to access.

Just under half of providers surveyed had signposted refugees and asylum seekers to trusts and organisations that provide financial support for accessing learning, but there was a low level of awareness of these among refugees and asylum seekers interviewed.

Travel was a significant problem which most of the learner interviewees spoke about, not only in relation to

cost, but also in terms of distance travelled to attend courses. Support with bus fares was sought by some, but not always received.

Accessing childcare, computer facilities and stationery can cause difficulties, particularly for asylum seekers which impacts on their ability and opportunities to learn.

Addressing the needs of refugees and asylum seekers

Most of the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed described their experiences of post-16 positively and found the staff to be 'supportive', 'helpful' and 'friendly', although some added the caveat that this was only the case after they had actually got on the course but not before.

Several interviewees had experienced difficulties due to the lack of understanding and awareness of refugee issues amongst staff at some post-16 learning providers, and in some cases had been subject to negative attitudes about the abilities of asylum seekers and refugees. This was recognised by representatives of the learning providers interviewed who expressed a desire for themselves, and others within their organisations to have a better awareness and understanding of the issues.

Some learning providers felt they could benefit from information about local organisations that support refugees and asylum seekers so they can signpost people to places where they can get support on issues that they are unable to help with.

Some refugees and asylum seekers voiced frustration at being unable to join the type of courses and training they wished to study due to factors such as age and immigration status. Refugees and asylum seekers reported not having their prior educational and training experiences and qualifications valued or recognised by learning providers.

Several learning providers acknowledged that some refugees and asylum seekers may need different types of help and support when studying than other groups of learners, as they may be unfamiliar with the education system, lacking support networks and therefore isolated.

Learning providers identified some refugees and asylum seekers as particularly hard to reach, including women, specific nationality communities in their areas, and refugees who have been in the UK for some time who would benefit from improving their written English skills.

Learning providers could benefit from some clear and easy to interpret guidance on entitlements for refugees and asylum seekers.

Recommendations

Funding agencies and learning providers should produce good quality information to support and inform refugees and asylum seekers of what they are entitled to, and help them to navigate the system.

Those offering advice and guidance to refugees and asylum seekers need to understand that those with no prior knowledge of the English education system will benefit from a well informed adviser who can tailor advice to their circumstances. Staff may need specific training to understand entitlements and potential barriers.

Learning providers should ensure that all staff dealing with refugee and asylum seeker learners have an understanding appropriate to their role e.g. reception and admission staff as well as tutors.

Learning providers should provide alternatives to online application and registration processes as this can exclude people in this group, especially those still in the asylum process.

Learning providers need to be flexible about the requirements for documents to support applications from refugees and asylum seekers, as most will not have passports and may have a range of identity documents issued by government departments.

Learners should be made aware of the rules around eligibility to study once they have received a negative decision on their asylum application mid-way through a course.

Policy on funding for those in the asylum process in England should follow the example of the Scottish government to increase access to education.

Learning providers should acknowledge the gaps in financial support for asylum seekers and support applications for funds to which they are entitled.

Learning providers should ensure that there is adequate provision for learners to access computers at suitable hours or adjust assignments to accommodate learners without access to IT provision.

Learning providers should offer stationery and other appropriate in kind support to those provided support under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Learning providers should develop links with their local refugee communities and associated support organisations.

Where viable, learning providers should consider developing additional support within and around course material that will assist refugees and asylum seekers in their learning e.g. peer support, orientation and/or mentoring schemes.

1 The Young People's Learning Agency has closed since the data collection was completed.

1 Introduction

Accessing learning is an important aspect of refugee integration. For those arriving in England in search of safety, studying English and gaining new skills and qualifications can help them communicate, become more employable and make friends. This report discusses research that explores the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in England and publicly-funded post-16 learning providers (excluding higher education) in delivering and accessing learning.

The issues under investigation in this project have been identified through previous research and evidence gathered by the Refugee Council in our everyday work which highlighted some of the difficulties refugees and asylum seekers have faced when trying to access learning. Prior to conducting the research, the Refugee Council was aware of a number of refugee and asylum seekers being incorrectly charged examination and registration fees for courses where they should have benefited from exemptions. The rules regarding entitlements to study and eligibility for fee remission are complex and are subject to regular changes, which increases the possibility of misunderstandings on the part of learning providers, individuals wishing to study and organisations providing advice and support to refugees and asylum seekers. This research was designed to combine the perspectives of refugees and asylum seekers and learning providers to evidence the impact of policy and practice on those who wish to engage in learning.

The aims of the research that is discussed in this report were:

- to examine learning providers' admissions policies, support mechanisms and experiences of working with refugees and asylum seekers; and
- to explore refugees' and asylum seekers' experiences of accessing post-16 learning.

The research focuses on England only, as rules around eligibility to study differ in Scotland and Wales. The report combines data gathered from an online survey and telephone interviews with a range of learning providers in England, and face-to-face interviews with refugees and asylum seekers. The findings of this research will be used to produce information and guidance to assist learning providers and refugees and asylum seekers understand entitlements to learning, and also to highlight barriers in the education and immigration system that serve to disadvantage this group of potential learners.

The data collection for this research was conducted in early 2011, by both the Refugee Council and LSN, an organisation that specialised in research and development in the post-16 education sector. This partnership therefore brought together expertise from both the refugee and education sectors. It should be noted that there have been some changes to the funding rules since the primary data collection took place, so the context for this research was for the academic year 2010/11, with some reference to anticipated changes in the following year (2011/12).

2 Background to the research

Introduction

Accessing learning is an important aspect of refugee integration (see for example Ager and Strang, 2008; Greater London Authority, 2009; Rutter *et al.*, 2007). Post-16 education is particularly important in providing refugees with opportunities to learn English, develop or update vocational skills or take steps towards access to higher education. Many post-16 providers will be established in local communities and play an important role as local stakeholders in bringing communities together to support integration. However, many barriers exist in relation to accessing post-16 education and training for refugees and asylum seekers in England. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funding has continued to recognise refugees and asylum seekers in its eligibility guidelines. Eligibility criteria for courses and support are complex, and often depend upon an individual's age, where they are with their asylum claim, the course they wish to participate in and the type of support they receive from the government. The complexity of the system can lead to confusion among potential learners, education and training providers and those advising and supporting individuals. This confusion can lead to asylum seekers and refugees being refused entry to courses they are entitled to attend. Research by the Refugee Council has documented many of these barriers to learning for refugees and asylum seekers (see for example Doyle, 2008; Refugee Council 2010a; Refugee Council, 2010b) and other studies have also highlighted confusion around entitlements to education (see for example Stevenson and Willott, 2007).

Refugees and asylum seekers are not a homogenous group and their individual circumstances and motivations to learn will vary greatly. These include: asylum seekers who have studied in the UK wishing to progress to university; unaccompanied children whose age has been disputed by the Home Office not being able to access schools, so further education colleges are their main sources of formal education; people arriving in the UK as adults requiring English language classes; professionals wishing to attend vocational refresher courses experiencing gaps in their working careers due to forced migration; and people wishing to engage in community learning to meet new friends and start to integrate. All of the individuals described above will have different entitlements to fee remission and support to assist them while studying.

Context

Refugees and asylum seekers come to the UK from many different countries, having had a wide variety of educational and work experiences before arriving in the UK. Unlike economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers do not choose to come to the UK for the employment opportunities it may offer. Rather they leave their homes, often at very short notice, to escape a threat to themselves and gain protection from another country (Crawley, 2010).

When forced migrants are in the UK, they have to navigate the asylum process and show, with a reasonable degree of likelihood, that they have a well-founded fear of persecution in order to be granted refugee status. The time taken for an asylum claim to be fully determined varies and even when officially resolved within a few months people may have to wait longer to receive their documents. Some have to wait much longer for resolution, in many cases years. Refugees' histories of education and motivations to learn are varied, and the following sections of this chapter discuss findings from previous research on these issues.

Skills and qualifications of refugees and asylum seekers

Surveys and other research conducted with refugees and asylum seekers in the UK show the breadth of qualifications and experience that people bring with them. At the same time, they highlight the educational disadvantage that is sometimes experienced by women in their countries of origin, and that some nationalities suffer due to the breakdown of education systems that can occur in times of protracted conflict.

In 2010, the UK Border Agency (UKBA) published the findings of a large survey of new refugees (Daniel *et al.*, 2010). The baseline survey achieved a response rate of 70 percent of all newly-granted refugees between December 2005 and March 2007, with a total of 5,678 respondents. This gives a good picture of

the profile of refugees entering the UK in that two year period.² The findings showed:

“Refugees who entered the UK within this time period had a wide range of years of education before coming to the UK. The largest proportion (30 per cent) of refugees had received ten years or more education before they came to the UK...Fourteen per cent of refugees had spent no years in formal education before they came to the UK. They were more likely to be women than men. A further 13 per cent reported receiving six years or less in education, and these were more likely to have been men than women...Refugees from Somalia, Afghanistan, Turkey, ‘other’ Middle Eastern countries, Iraq and Sudan were more likely than refugees from other countries of origin to have received no education or six years or less education before coming to the UK.” (Daniel *et al.*, 2010:4)

In terms of qualifications, the survey showed that 45 per cent of refugees had a qualification on arrival in the UK, with men slightly more likely than women to hold one. Seven per cent of men and four per cent of women had a diploma, foundation degree or higher education certificate (*ibid*, p5).

There have been several other surveys conducted of the education and qualifications of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK which have shown a broad range of educational experiences (both within their own sample, and between studies). It is difficult to draw direct comparisons between some of the studies as different questions were posed, with some focusing on years in education and others concentrating on qualifications. The countries of origin featured in the samples will also have an influence on the results.

A survey of refugees living in London (Ipsos MORI, 2010) showed that 17 per cent of a sample of 1,007 refugees had qualifications sufficient for university entrance whilst 19 per cent had completed a university degree (either undergraduate or postgraduate), most of which had been achieved in their country of origin (72 per cent). Crawley and Crimes’ (2009) survey of refugees living in Wales found that more than a quarter of their sample of 123 refugees had a degree in their country of origin and just under 9 per cent had a postgraduate qualification.

Studies highlight that some forced migrants arrive in the UK with no experience of formal education. For example, Kirk (2004) found that 19 per cent of the newly-granted refugees they surveyed had received no education in their countries of origin, which is much higher than the four per cent identified by Bloch (2002). Of course, time spent in education does not necessarily result in qualifications being obtained which is illustrated by Bloch who found that 56 per cent of the same sample had qualifications before their arrival.

In terms of education and training after arrival in the UK, the findings of previous studies show that refugees and asylum seekers are participants in learning. Crawley and Crimes found two-thirds of the refugees in their sample had participated in formal English language training in the UK, and half of respondents had undertaken other training courses. Of the refugees and asylum seekers in Coventry and Warwickshire surveyed by Phillimore *et al.* (2003), 56 per cent had participated in ESOL classes in the preceding year. In a study focusing on asylum seekers from Zimbabwe, Doyle (2009) found that a third had participated in education or training in the UK, most of which was vocational.

As is illustrated by these studies, the levels of participation in education and training, both prior to flight and once in the UK, varies among refugees and asylum seekers and no generalisations can be made. For the minority who have had no education or have gained no qualifications previously, studying in the UK presents a great opportunity for them, and will help with employability and integration in the longer term.

Motivations to learn

The reasons refugees and asylum seekers wish to engage in learning are wide-ranging and mirror many of those held by the population in general. There are some factors that may be shared by other migrants, such as the need/desire to learn English or gain a qualification that is more readily recognised in the UK. For those who cannot work while they are awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, taking part in education and training can give life some structure and provide a meaningful way to spend time. Phillimore *et al.*, (2003:46) described the motivations of their survey sample:

“The main motivation for learning was to learn to speak English (57% 92), to help get a job (28% 45), to improve long-term career prospects (12% 20), for pleasure or social interaction (11% 18), and to increase self esteem (11% 18).”

Refugees can face difficulties accessing the labour market in the UK (see for example Community Links and Refugee Council, 2011; Bloch, 2004; Home Office, 2005) so participating in education or training can help to make people more employable. Morrice noted that for the refugees in her research, their motivation to learn came from a realisation that much of the education they had participated in previously counted for very little in the UK (Morrice, 2011: 121).

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

For many of those arriving in the UK, learning English is a priority. Without English language skills it is difficult to navigate daily life and find employment. As this is a key skill that people need, it is this type of post-16 education that has been the focus of much of the research in the area of post-16 education. Entitlement to ESOL and the availability of courses has changed over the years, and the current situation in terms of who can study English without paying fees is outlined below.

The UKBA's survey of new refugees found that around half of their sample felt that they understood, spoke, read or wrote English well at the time they were granted refugee status, and approximately ten per cent reported no English language ability at that stage (Daniel *et al.*, 2010:13). These language skills may have been acquired prior to arrival in the UK, or through formal and informal methods afterwards. Women were more likely to report no English language skills, suggesting that they may need more support in improving their English (*op.cit*).

Ipsos MORI's (2010) survey of refugees in London found that 66 per cent of their sample had taken part in ESOL classes, although it should be noted that 10 per cent did not complete the course.³ Over half of the respondents reported having to wait over a year to access ESOL classes (2010:3). Delays in being able to join ESOL classes and a lack of courses at pre-entry and higher levels has been noted in other research (see for example Houghton and Morris, 2008; Greater London Authority, 2012a) and recent changes to funding arrangements in England could further restrict the number and types of courses available.

During the data collection period for this research the funding arrangements for ESOL were in a state of flux. The government had announced changes in funding levels and entitlements to fee remission in late 2010 (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2010), meaning that many of the providers who participated in this research did not know what type of course they would be offering in the year 2011/12. Some of the key changes were summarised by the Greater London Authority (2012) as:

- A reduction in the National Funding Rate and 'programme weighting' factor for ESOL, equating to a 20 per cent decrease in money received per learner by learning providers.
- Full fee remission only applicable to those who receive 'active benefits' (for example, Job Seeker's Allowance and Employment Support Allowance).
- A requirement for those on 'inactive benefits' to pay 50 per cent of the course fees.
- The abolition of funding for ESOL in the workplace.⁴

After the initial announcement, there was some flexibility introduced for those who were receiving 'inactive benefits' meaning that providers could give full fee remission to people in this group, but they would not receive additional funding from the Skills Funding Agency for this, so it would come from their existing budget and could only be delivered to those who were learning English in order to find employment. For some learning providers, this announcement came too late for them to change their delivery for the new academic year and research found that people in low paid work and those with very low levels of language and literacy who receive inactive benefits have been particularly disadvantaged as a result of these changes (Greater London Authority, 2012b). Being unable to access English classes can hinder integration, so restrictions placed on some groups of potential learners can have a wider effect on their lives than merely

not being able to take a class. Asylum seekers who have waited for more than six months for a decision on their claim are eligible for co-funded ESOL, which means that they will have to pay 50 per cent of course fees. As the majority of asylum seekers are not permitted to work, this will be beyond the reach of many.

The situation above relates to those in England. By contrast, the rules around access to ESOL differ in Scotland and Wales. In Scotland the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) waives fees for any asylum seeker attending college to do a full or part-time ESOL course and ESOL classes are free for all asylum seekers in Wales.⁵

Eligibility to study and fee remission

As mentioned previously, the rules around eligibility to study and fee remission are complex and subject to frequent change. Please find below a summary of the Skills Funding Agency's rules which are accurate at the time of writing.

Eligible for SFA funding

Refugees and asylum seekers, learners aged 19 years or older and who meet one or more of the following criteria are considered as home students for fee purposes (i.e. not classed as overseas/international students):

- Asylum seekers who after six months are still waiting for a decision on their claim or appeal
- Asylum seekers who have been refused but are receiving support under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- People granted refugee status, discretionary leave to remain, humanitarian protection or exceptional leave to remain, their spouses and dependents
- Learners granted indefinite leave to remain (settled) and who have been ordinarily resident in the UK for 3 years before the start of the course
- Learners who were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain, Discretionary leave to remain, refugee status with 5 years leave to remain or Humanitarian Protection and have applied for further leave to remain in time should be considered as having continuing leave to remain.⁶

Eligible for full fee remission

Those who are considered as home students for fee purposes (as described above) can get their fees paid by the SFA if they meet one or more of the criteria they state below:

- "Individuals on Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) for skills training in order to help the individual into work or to remove a barrier to getting the individual into work. This includes units and awards as well as full qualifications. Where there is a joint claim, then both individuals are eligible for fee remission. Where an individual is a dependant of a claimant (but not part of a joint claim or claiming themselves), they are not automatically eligible for full fee remission but they may be eligible under other criteria.
- Learners aged 19–23 years of age studying their first full Level 2 qualification.
- Entry or Level 1 aims (excluding Basic Skills) where a Learner has an entitlement to a full Level 2 qualification, in that they must have a highest prior attainment of Level 1 or below, but need a step up from basic skills in order to progress to a full Level 2 and are aged 19–23 years of age.
- 19–24 year-old Learners studying their first full Level 3 qualification.
- 19–24 year-old Level 4 'jumpers' studying their first Level 4 or above without having attained a first full Level 3 qualification.
- Learners studying English and Maths learning aims set out at Annex 2 paragraph 20. New standalone English and Maths QCF qualifications as they are approved for funding in 2012/13.
- Trade Union representatives studying Trades Union Congress (TUC) learning aims.

- An individual studying their first full Level 3 qualification who has left the British Armed Forces after completing four or more years of service or has been medically discharged, due to an injury in active service, after completing basic training.
- An individual who has not reached GCSE level C or above in English and Maths undertaking GCSE English and Maths.
- Unemployed individuals who are in receipt of a state benefit (other than JSA or ESA (WRAG)), who want to enter employment and need skills training to do so are, at the discretion of the Provider, eligible for full funding for units and other learning aims that will help the individual into work or removes a barrier to getting the individual into work.
- Classroom-based ESOL provision will only be fully funded for those who are on JSA, ESA (WRAG) or unemployed and on a state benefit, where it is identified as a barrier to employment.”

The criteria above are quoted to illustrate the different factors that need to be taken into account to assess whether somebody will be exempt from fees, and to show the technical language that is used. These guidelines are aimed at learning providers, but those who will be advising refugees and asylum seekers (or others) on their learning options, may have difficulties interpreting the rules. In addition to rules changing, since the commencement of this research the funding body for 16–19 year olds, the Young People’s Learning Agency, was closed and its duties were transferred to the Education Funding Agency.

In contrast, in Scotland the SFC waives fees for asylum seekers attending college to do a full or part-time advanced or non-advanced course.

Financial support for learners

It should be noted that at the time of carrying out this research the methods of additional financial support available to learners was also in a state of flux. When the coalition government came to power, it announced the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) available to 16–19 year olds in England. It has been replaced by a bursary scheme aimed at supporting vulnerable learners. Learners who are considered vulnerable, for instance those in care or care leaver and those receiving Income Support, are eligible to apply for a bursary of £1,200 a year. Learning providers will also be able to distribute bursaries they feel need financial support to participate in learning.⁷

Discretionary Learner Support is the state funded resource that learners over the age of 19 who are in financial hardship can access to help meet the costs associated with learning. The funds are distributed by learning providers who establish their own schemes. However, eligibility criteria set by the government excludes asylum seekers from receiving these funds.⁸

Summary

This chapter has outlined the breadth of educational experience that refugees and asylum seekers bring when they come to the UK, their motivations to learn and the differential entitlements experienced by these learners. This information sets the scene for the discussion of the research findings that follows.

2 It should be noted that as the nature of conflict and persecution changes between and among countries over time, these surveys can only provide a snap shot of a particular moment in time. For instance, in 2011 the UK saw a large increase in the number of asylum seekers from North Africa as a result of the ‘Arab Spring’, and people from these countries constituted a much lower proportion in previous years.

3 It should be noted that the majority of interviews for the survey were conducted in English, which may have an impact on this finding across refugee populations in general.

4 See the Greater London Authority (2012b) report for further explanation.

5 See for example Scottish Funding Council 2010

6 http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/SFA/Funding_Rules_-_Version_3_-_30_July_2012.pdf Pages 85-86

7 See <http://www.education.gov.uk/a0064057/financial-support-for-learning>

8 See <https://www.gov.uk/discretionary-learner-support/eligibility>

3. Methodology and sample

This research was undertaken through the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data collection activities were:

- A survey of publicly funded post-16 learning providers in England
- Semi-structured interviews with 20 refugees and asylum seekers
- Semi-structured interviews with representatives of 10 learning providers

The research was carried out in England only due to the fact that there are different entitlements operating in Scotland and Wales. The research approach is outlined below, and the characteristics of the sample are discussed at the end of the chapter.

Survey of all publicly funded post-16 learning providers in England

A survey was conducted with all post-16 learning providers in England who were in receipt of public funding. The purpose of the survey was to examine the admissions policies, support mechanisms and experiences of staff working with refugees and asylum seekers in post-16 learning organisations in England.

The survey was administered as an online tool and was piloted with three learning providers before being distributed to all intended recipients, to ensure the questions were reader-friendly and that they gathered appropriate data to support the project objectives. A copy of the online survey is available at Appendix 1.

Questionnaire design and distribution

The survey was facilitated by LSN's Statistical Analysis and Survey Unit. Snap Professional survey software was used to programme the online survey and generate a URL link which was dispatched primarily to staff in senior management roles via email (i.e. Principals, Vice-Principals, CEOs and so on) in the post-16 education and training sector in England. This staff group were asked to distribute it to principal staff members that provide potential learners with information, advice and guidance (IAG) on courses and ways to access learning. This route was selected as the research team recognised that these staff members play a key role in assessing an individual's entitlement to participate in courses and are often the main point of entry into learning.

Using LSN's Client Information Management Systems (CIMS) database, the distribution list for this survey was made up of 1400 records. The survey was officially launched on 14 March 2011 and closed on 15 July 2011.

Monitoring and promotion

While the survey was live, responses were closely monitored to ensure that a sufficient response rate was achieved. Routine email reminders containing the original link to the survey were sent intermittently to obtain as large a number of responses as possible. To further increase the response rate and to achieve a more representative sample the team telephoned providers to encourage their participation.

As well as direct distribution to senior members of staff, additional channels were used to promote the importance of the survey with staff across the sector including a number of relevant provider networks such as the 157 Group, the Association of Colleges (AOC), the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), and the National Association of Managers in Student Services (NAMSS). A link to the survey was also circulated to University and College Union's ESOL network as well as another network focused on ESOL research.

Data analysis

Data checks were carried out on the responses submitted for quality assurance purposes. Duplicate cases were removed and individual responses were checked to ensure that responses were sufficiently completed. After checking the data a total of 70 valid responses were collected.

The responses were collated and analysed using SPSS and Excel. The majority of questions within the survey were single or multiple choice questions. However, there were a number of open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were grouped into themes to identify key points. Themes have been outlined and summarised throughout the report and are supported with relevant quotes.

Key issues

There were a number of key issues primarily related to the difficulties encountered in recruiting participants to complete the online survey.

Although efforts were continually made to identify and recruit participants which involved the LSN project team 'cold calling' organisations it became apparent that the project team over-estimated the depth of experience and understanding that our target audience would have in such issues. In some organisations, for example, there are clear issues about the robustness of IAG for refugees and asylum seekers, and a lack of awareness about how IAG is delivered and who delivers it to this particular group.

The specific nature of the survey, coupled with gaps in knowledge relating to the issues surrounding accessibility and the usefulness of IAG provision for refugee and asylum seekers meant that a small proportion of staff contacted had difficulty in identifying the appropriate person in their organisation to complete the survey. Previous anecdotal evidence revealed that whereas 'home' students would be referred to one individual for registration, funding and so on, learners from refugee and/or asylum seeker backgrounds are often referred to a number of individuals in a particular team.

In addition feedback received from a small number of respondents indicated that they were unable to fully complete the survey due to insufficient knowledge of all the processes involved within their organisation. This was often the case in organisations where there was not a specific member of staff with responsibility for all the processes covered in the survey.

Semi-structured interviews with learning providers

One-to-one interviews were conducted with a staff member from ten learning providers to provide more detailed information about the issues covered in the survey. The interviews gave researchers the opportunity to probe deeper and identify examples of practice that have been developed to support refugees and asylum seekers, as well as problems and issues experienced by providers.

The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they would be willing to discuss the issues further with the research team and five providers were identified to take part in the interviews in this way. The other five providers were accessed through LSN's extensive contacts database. The selection of providers was conducted to ensure a range of experiences with different provider types, geographical spread, and size. The questions were piloted with one provider prior to conducting the 10 interviews. The interview schedule is available at Appendix 2.

Each interview was conducted via telephone at a time convenient to the provider. The interviewees were assured of complete confidentiality and any responses and quotes that are used in this report have been anonymised to reflect that confidentiality. The interviews were approximately 30-45 minutes in duration and the responses were collected by note-taking. To assist the providers in preparing for the interview the topic areas were sent in advance electronically.

Semi-structured interviews with refugees and asylum seekers

To gather in-depth qualitative information about the learning experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in accessing post-16 education and training in England the research team conducted interviews with 20 refugees and asylum seekers who were over the age of 16. The interviews were face-to-face, semi-structured and focused upon: issues relating to accessing learning; courses they had studied; IAG; funding and support; motivations to learn; opinions of their providers; and ideas on how to improve the system to enable more refugees and asylum seekers to participate. The interview questions were piloted with two people to test the usefulness and relevance of the questions, and it was found that no adjustments to the

interview schedule were required. The interview schedule can be found in appendix 3.

The sample included people from a range of backgrounds and ages who had tried, both successfully and unsuccessfully, to access courses in post-16 education and training.

The participants were accessed through a variety of methods in order to vary the sample in terms of their demographics, length of time in the UK, motivations to study and experiences of education both in the UK and in their countries of origin. Participants were recruited through: RCO News, the Refugee Council's newsletter for Refugee Community Organisations; the *Refugees into Teaching Project* mailing list, the *Education, Training and Employment Working Group* (the Refugee Council chaired this group which brought together statutory and third sector organisations working with refugees); the *Refugee Integration and Employment Service* in London and the *Northern Refugee Centre* in Sheffield.

The interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the individual interviewees and a small financial contribution was provided to cover travel expenses. The interviewees were assured of complete confidentiality and any responses and quotes that are used in this report have been anonymised. The interviews were approximately 45-60 minutes in duration and the responses were collected by note-taking with back-up digital recording where permission given. To assist the interviewees in preparing for the interview the topic areas were sent in advance electronically along with a consent form which was reviewed and completed at the time of interview to ensure the interviewees were fully aware of the process.

Data analysis

The data from the survey and interviews were analysed systematically through coding the barriers and enablers to accessing post-16 education, and the experiences of providers and learners of post-16 education. This allowed the data to be grouped into themes which have been outlined and summarised throughout the report and supported with relevant quotes from participants.

Sample

Profile of survey respondents

A total of 70 providers responded to the survey which comprised the following:⁹

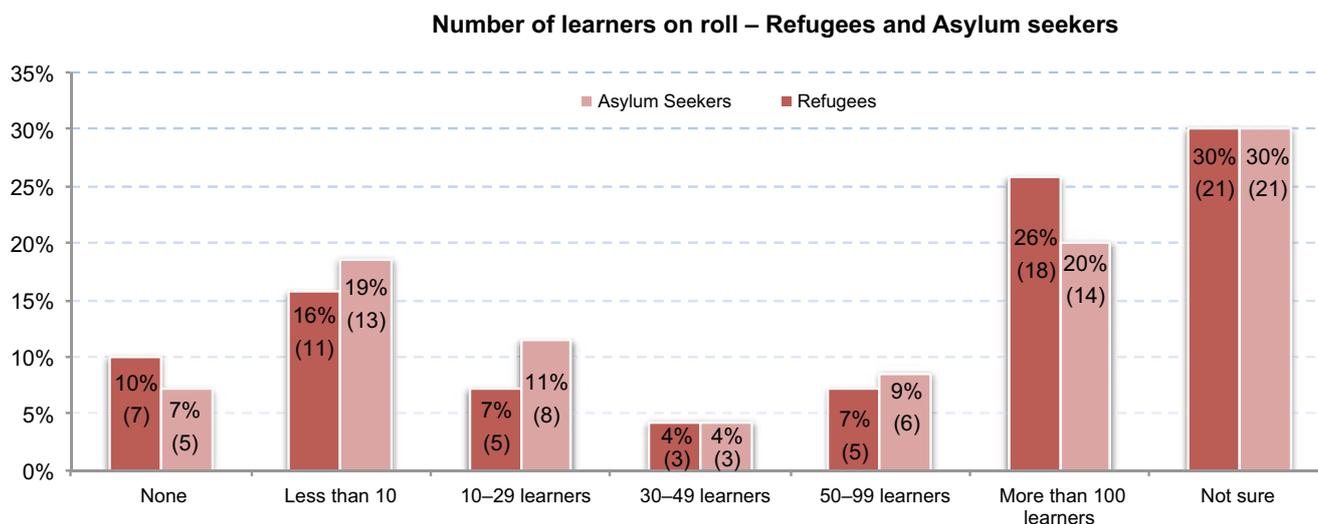
- 53 further education colleges
- 7 sixth form colleges
- 5 adult and community learning providers¹⁰
- 3 work-based learning providers
- 1 art college offering both further and higher education
- 1 specialist service for ESOL placements

Fourteen providers came from the Greater London region; thirteen from the South West, with eight providers from each of the Eastern, South East, and Yorkshire & Humber regions, seven responses from the North West and six from the West Midlands. The North East and Eastern region had the fewest responses with two and four respectively. In terms of size, the majority of organisations catered for more than 600 learners.

Just over half of those completing the survey were involved in learner support/student services; other roles included delivering ESOL services, admissions and/or customer services.¹¹

Respondents indicated the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers currently on their organisation's roll. Although there were some providers who stated there were no refugees and asylum seekers attending their learning establishment, a fifth of the providers had more than 100 learners who were asylum seekers and over a quarter had in excess of 100 refugees studying their courses.

Figure 1 – Numbers of learners on roll that are refugees and asylum seekers



Sample size = 70 respondents

Note: Response numbers are added in brackets

This pattern shows a range of experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers in this sample, indicating that the responses to the survey reflect both providers with a lot as well as little experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers. This means that the findings are likely to have captured providers that have developed specific systems and practices as they are more likely to be admitting refugees and asylum seekers, as well as those who do not. Thirty per cent of providers indicated that they were unsure of the numbers of these groups of learners suggesting there may be some confusion and a lack of understanding by some staff in post-16 provision in terms of establishing numbers of these particular groups being enrolled. The uncertainty about refugee numbers could be due to the difficulty in monitoring, as there is no reason why an individual would need to reveal this during the application process (although this does not prevent learning providers from requesting the information). Those who are asylum seekers need to prove their status and their receipt of asylum support so this information should be recorded by the provider. This uncertainty could therefore be attributed to individual misunderstandings of status on the part of the person completing the survey.

Profile of learning providers interviewed

The sample of the learning providers selected for interviews included five further education colleges, three local authority adult and community learner providers, one sixth-form college and one work-based learning provider. Interviewees varied in their job roles with senior management represented as well as those responsible for admissions, guidance and ESOL programmes. The providers were located in seven of the nine English regions, with the North East and South East being the ones that did not feature.

All of those interviewed had some experience of working with refugees and/or asylum seekers, but the extent of this varied across the sample. One FE college in the North West had around 2,000 asylum seekers participating in their ESOL classes, but was unsure how many were attending other courses within the college or how to find out that information. Other providers had cohorts of learners ranging from 70 (consisting of 50 on ESOL and 20 on 'mainstream courses', and mainly from the Afghan community) to 20 asylum seekers currently on roll. The sixth form college did not have any learners who were refugees or asylum seekers on roll at the time of the interview, but two refugees had attended previously. The work-based learning provider identified 20 learners who were refugees, asylum seekers or economic migrants but did not separate them out in their monitoring.

One provider linked with the local Gateway Team (supporting people arriving through a specific type of refugee resettlement programme) and an ACL provider reported that as the cohort of refugees and asylum

seekers was large, the service was able to fund more courses for them. One FE college had a dedicated person responsible for ‘international and asylum seeker support’ who had set up a forum to provide enrichment activities outside of the curriculum, such as pastoral support.

This information illustrates the wide range of experience respondents had of working with refugees and asylum seekers which helps to provide a context for their responses, as it highlights different approaches to supporting this group of learners and individuals’ levels of understanding of the issues and entitlements.

Understanding the terms ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘refugee’

In addition to their experiences of working with asylum seeker and refugee learners, provider interviewees were asked about their understanding of the terms ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘refugee’. Whilst most of the interviewees demonstrated a good understanding of the terms and were able to offer clear definitions, some did not fully understand the terms. Eight of the ten interviewees provided definitions of ‘asylum seeker’ that were accurate and seven out of ten offered definitions of ‘refugee’ which were accurate in most respects, with a misunderstanding being suggested that a refugee could also be an asylum seeker, but may have arrived as a result of a sudden disaster that had left them destitute.

One interviewee understood the process of applying for asylum, but did not understand how status changed when a claim was successful and another responded in relation to issues of fee remission or eligibility for support, but did not offer a definition. Another interviewee stated:

“We treat asylum seekers and refugees the same at the college, we don’t make a distinction between these two groups”. Guidance officer, FE college, North West

This approach has clear implications if they are delivering statutory-funded provision in terms of eligibility to study and fee remission and they could be breaking the rules imposed by funding agencies.

Profile of refugees and asylum seekers interviewed

Interviews were conducted with ten men and ten women. Nine of the interviewees lived in London (in at least four different boroughs including Ealing, Lambeth, Greenwich, and Southwark), four lived in Manchester, four in Hull, two in Sheffield and one in Birmingham.¹² The ages of participants ranged from 16–47 years. The sample came from 11 different countries of origin, with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe totalling three each, with two each from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Somalia, and Uganda, and one each from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cameroon and Trinidad and Tobago. Below is a summary profile of the learner interviewees.

Length of time in UK

The newest arrivals in the UK had been in the country for only three months at the time of interview, with three interviewees having been resident for more than 10 years, one of whom had been in the country for 14 years. It was important to get a sample that covered different lengths of time in the UK as people’s requirements and expectations around education are likely to change the longer they are in the UK. For example, for those with little knowledge of English, ESOL classes are likely to be their first interaction with the education system whereas those who have longer residence may be more focused on entering the labour market, a factor that is also linked to immigration status.

Table 1 – Length of time in the UK

Time in UK	Frequency
Less than 1 year	6
1 year	3
2 years	2
3 years	1
4 years	2
5 years	1
6 years	0
7 years	1
8 years	1
9 years	0
Over 10 years	3

Immigration status

As highlighted earlier in this report, the immigration status of an individual can affect their entitlements to education and support, so it was important that people with a range of statuses were included in the sample. When looking at the immigration status of the interviewees, six different categories emerged. None of the participants were asylum seekers awaiting their initial decision.

Table 2 – Immigration status of sample

Status	Frequency
Refused asylum seeker	5
Refugee (5 year leave)	7
Refugee (indefinite leave to remain)	1
British citizen (formerly refugee)	2
Exceptional leave to remain	2
Indefinite leave to enter	3

Of the people who had their asylum application refused, one was awaiting the results of an appeal and three had submitted fresh claims and were awaiting the outcome. During the interviews, those who had refugee status reflected upon their experiences of education while in the asylum process as well as their time as refugees. Prior to August 2005, people granted refugee status were given indefinite leave to remain but since then those recognised as refugees are given five years limited leave in the first instance.¹³

Means of support

Interviewees were asked how they currently supported themselves financially, and nearly half were receiving Job Seeker's Allowance. The numbers of people in employment was low, although it should be noted that those who were still in the asylum process are not usually granted permission to work in the UK. This low level of employment does not necessarily reflect a desire not to work, particularly taking into account that nine people in the sample would need to prove that they are actively seeking work as a condition of receiving Job Seeker's Allowance. It is well documented that levels of employment among refugees are much lower than employment rates for the population as a whole (see for example Daniels *et al.*, 2010 and Ipsos MORI, 2010) and several interviewees voiced their frustration about being unable to find work and recognised the importance of gaining qualifications as a route into the job market. Interviewees had held a range of jobs in their countries of origin, from skilled professional (such as accountant, pharmacist, teacher and university lecturer) to none (the latter mainly due to the age of interviewees who had not completed schooling when they left their country).

Previous educational experiences

The interviewees were asked about their educational experiences prior to arriving in the UK. Participants provided different levels of information in response to this question, so their answers paint only a partial picture. All interviewees had prior educational experiences, and in terms of their highest educational experiences five had attended school, six studied at further education level and eight held undergraduate degrees. Some respondents mentioned having started degree courses but not having completed them. Only one respondent had no prior qualifications.

There was a tendency for respondents to talk only of the highest level of education they had achieved, and there was a lack of information about whether those who had attended school had achieved any qualifications as a result of that schooling.

Overview of courses studied in the UK

The interviewees spoke of having studied a range of courses since arriving in the UK. These were delivered by different types of learning providers, including further education colleges, local authority provision, work-based learning and a private training provider. Participants had also undertaken courses delivered by voluntary sector organisations and one had studied while in an immigration detention centre. Many of the interviewees had clear ambitions to study at university and therefore the learning they had undertaken was seen as a gateway to meeting that aim.

Some had studied only one course while others had participated in many different courses at different levels: for example one interviewee had studied ESOL, a BTEC in Science and a Certificate in Journalism and another had undertaken computer training, a Diploma in Business Administration, and Access to Social Work as well as many short courses delivered by voluntary sector organisations.

The table below provides a summary of the courses that the sample had participated in. Many respondents had participated in several courses so the number of courses exceeds the number of people interviewed. It should also be noted that some had studied the same subject at different levels, for example, ESOL levels one, two and three.

Table 3 – Courses studied in the UK

Type of course	Frequency
ESOL	9
Access to higher education	5
Computer/IT training	3
Life in the UK	3
Maths	3
Advice course	2
Literacy and numeracy course	2
Accountancy and mathematics levels 1 and 2	1
BTEC in science	1
Certificate in computer maintenance	1
Certificate in Journalism	1
City and Guilds Work preparation	1
Customer service course (with employment preparation)	1
Diploma in Business Administration (incomplete)	1
Food hygiene course	1
GCSEs	1
Leadership training	1
Nail technician course NVQ level 2	1
Short course in interpreting	1
Teaching Assistant course	1

These courses are predominantly vocational, and the majority were delivered by further education colleges, with local authorities being the second most popular type of provider. Only one interviewee had not undertaken any kind of study in the UK. He ideally wanted to study a higher education course but had encountered difficulties in doing so, related to course fees. He had been trying to enter education since gaining refugee status but had not succeeded.

Some of the interviewees had taken part in education or training that they did not particularly wish to do as it was either the only thing on offer to them at the time (as their chosen courses were either full or had already commenced), or because they were a means to an end. For example, one woman was told by a college that she would have to complete a literacy and numeracy course to qualify for another course even though she had a degree in finance in her country of origin where she had studied in the English language.¹⁴

Nine of the interviewees reported having taken part in formal ESOL classes. One woman explained that she had taken part in English language courses at five different FE colleges as when she was completing one and wishing to enrol on the next, the learning providers kept closing the courses she needed to progress onto. This led to her having to take multiple buses, and travel long distances, to get on the course she wanted. Most respondents did not provide a lot of detail about their ESOL learning, either in terms of the lengths of the courses or the level studied.

Three refugees were taking part in courses that had been specifically designed by their local authority to help them learn essential things as soon as they arrived in the UK. These individuals were part of the Gateway resettlement programme and authorities receive additional funding to support resettled refugees during their first year in the UK.¹⁵ The course covered English, numeracy and basic facts about what it is like to live in the UK. The participants in this programme spoke highly of the education they were receiving and had learned enough English to allow them to be interviewed in that language despite only having studied it for a few months.

9 A full breakdown is provided in appendix 4.

10 By 'adult and community learning providers' we mean education provision catering for those over the age of 16 that is funded and delivered by local authorities (and sometimes by voluntary organisations) and is usually part-time up to Level 2. See Schofield and Matthews (2009) for a more detailed definition.

11 Given that the survey covered a range of different aspects of learning provision, it was anticipated that the person who completed the survey may have needed to consult with colleagues to obtain information to respond to some questions.

12 Interviewees living in London were not specifically asked about the borough they lived in, but this information emerged from their answers to other questions.

13 At the end of the five year period refugees have to apply for further leave and may be granted indefinite leave at this stage (Refugee Council, 2010c)

14 Without proof of qualifications, people are sometimes forced to study courses that are very basic for them.

15 The Gateway Protection Programme offers 750 people a year into the UK. Applications are made to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees prior to arrival in the UK, and once people are settled, local authorities and NGOs provide support (including the provision of accommodation and advice) for those who have arrived.

4. Motivations to study and future plans

When asked about their motivations for wanting to take up education and training, fourteen of the interviewees said it was in order to gain employment; some had specific career paths in mind, for example, four talked about going into teaching. Three learners had a short-term goal to go on to university, whilst only two interviewees indicated that their motivation to study was purely to learn English. This may be because they considered that they had moved on as they could now speak good English. However, as many in the sample had participated in ESOL courses in the past, this must have been a motivation for them at some point. Other reasons for wanting to study included making friends, fitting in to their new communities, and to gain a qualification. Some had realised that the previous learning they had undertaken counted for very little, so wanted to gain new qualifications (Morrice, 2011)

One woman was pregnant and experiencing sickness, but still made a great effort to attend classes displaying a determination to gain the skills in difficult circumstances. She spoke about her husband's experience which prompted her to learn English:

“When coming here, me and my husband go to [the local authority housing department] because we were living in one bedroom and his English was not very good and he tried to talk, but the people in front were laughing because maybe he said something he didn't know. It's upsetting me and when it was upsetting me I promised to myself the first thing in my life has to be to learn English. I had vomiting, I used a plastic bag, catch the bus and go in the class. Everybody sit, I stand up because I can't, my back and stomach in pain, but I try to stay in the class.”

She went on to describe how important it is to understand the language particularly for her children:

“I have to learn English...and then when the letter for your children come to the house I have a problem reading. When your children talk to you and you can't understand them because my children were small coming here and quickly get English...learning another language when you live in another country, if you want to live in this country for all your life and you have children you have to learn this language even if hard, you have to be...reading the letters when the post comes, that's very important.” Interviewee 13

Not only was it seen as important in terms of 'fitting in' and for their families, but some described the importance of education and learning English in terms of their own self-esteem:

“Asylum seekers and refugees really need this education because for now I am OK, I can understand, I can talk but I'm not like that good but I trust myself. When I listen to others and hear how they struggle, some of the women have lost their self-esteem. They say 'I cannot talk' I say 'you are doing fine, continue'. I would really love to see them maybe in five years time, or two years time, see these women be something. Because you know there is a problem with the refugees, they cannot get a job because they cannot speak English and that is a real worry for me because I think why? We were deprived in our own countries not to do English, why should we be deprived here while we have the opportunity. And they say they want us to integrate so how are we going to integrate if they take our education away? How?” Interviewee 16

Another interviewee explained that the motivation for participating in education in this country was partly because it enabled them to acquire qualifications which would be recognised worldwide:

“I believe that if you have education here you can go anywhere in the world, it's recognised. But if you come from different countries you have to, there is things you have to go through, like qualifications and different things, in this country. I think the education here is good if you have access to it, it is good.” Interviewee 18

Finally one learner spoke of their determination to succeed so that if he was granted refugee status and permission to stay, he would be able to continue with his education at university in the UK:

“It’s just self-determination, just being determined. Because in the end of it all, everyone, well, I’m speaking for myself, whenever you claim for asylum you always hope to be believed and that you will get status. So all along I was doing that while knowing when I get status then I can go the next chapter. When I was doing the Access course I knew that if I got status, I would have a place at university and I would be considered as a home student and start education.” Interviewee 8

Accessing post-16 education is important for the wellbeing of these learners, and for their families and futures. Their motivations for attending courses was not simply to acquire new skills or learn the language but also to be accepted into their communities, to improve their self-worth and self-esteem, to be able to communicate with their children better, to meet new friends and understand more about their new country.

Future plans

Some of the interviewees were waiting to join other courses on which they had been accepted. Five people were planning to undertake further ESOL classes, and other future courses mentioned were: BTEC Level 2 in Applied Science; A’ Levels; International Baccalaureate; computer maintenance; and BTEC in Building and Environmental Construction. Many of the interviewees had a clear desire to enter higher education, although some were experiencing difficulties accessing university courses. Although this research is specifically focused upon post-16 education excluding higher education, the problems encountered when trying to access degree courses were raised repeatedly. Some respondents had successfully completed courses at university, but unfortunately there were more examples of people having started a course and then dropping out once it became clear that they would be liable for overseas student fees, or having found out about fee levels and realising it was impossible for them to even start a course. Problems with access to higher education were a recurring theme in the interviews and has been recognised as an issue by others (see for example Refugee Support Network, 2012).

5. Admissions and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

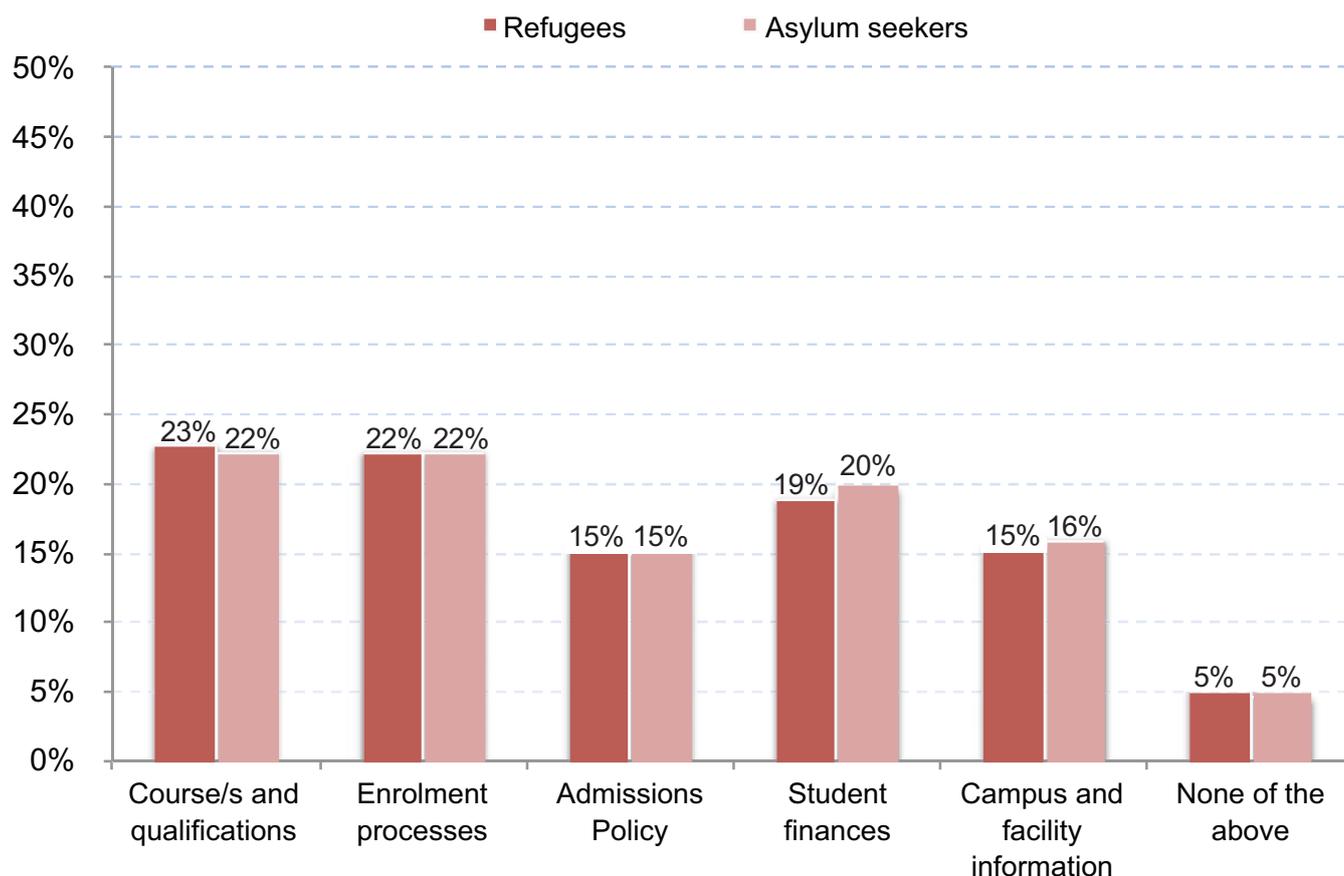
The significance and importance of the provision of IAG has been recognised in terms of enabling learners to make correct choices for their learning. People base their choices on a range of factors, and information about entry qualifications, cost, length and location of courses and their descriptions has been identified as being the most useful for informing decisions (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011). Good quality IAG is also helpful in terms of career trajectories and more likely to prevent failure through ensuring enrolment on to inappropriate courses in terms of level and ability.

This chapter discusses the research findings relating to: the provision of IAG; the admissions process; and support given to learners through the admissions process

Providers' experiences of delivering IAG to refugees and asylum seekers

In the survey, providers were asked about their experiences of working with and providing formal IAG to refugee and/or asylum seeker learners prior to and during the admissions process. The types of IAG providers gave to refugees and asylum seekers are displayed below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Experience of providing formal information, advice and guidance to individuals who are refugees and/or asylum seekers



Sample size = 207 responses for refugees and 220 for asylum seekers

Note: This question was multiple answer therefore the total sum of responses is more than the final sample size. Percentages are based on the total number of responses for the question

The survey results show low levels of experience of providing IAG to refugees and asylum seekers across these categories. There was little difference between the levels between the two different groups of learners.

However, just over half of respondents (52 per cent) had supported refugees and asylum seekers to help them to engage in learning through other types of activities not listed above. For example, one FE college ran a support group for international learners to assist them in settling into the college and the UK whilst another provided generic advice on welfare issues, housing, additional financial support, immigration issues, and help with referral to external agencies. Another FE college specifically noted its work with unaccompanied children as part of their broader work with those who are looked after by their local authority. One sixth form college worked with families to support placements in mainstream state education for children aged over 11 years.

Accessing an education system that differs from previous experiences of education and training in individuals' countries of origin can present real barriers to learning. This increases the importance of having clear information about courses but only just over a fifth of providers that were surveyed provided IAG on courses and qualifications to refugees and asylum seekers. Two provider interviewees emphasised the importance of IAG for these learners to ensure that they are able to join the most appropriate courses.

Many of the learner interviewees reported negative experiences when trying to obtain information and advice from learning providers to enable them to study and that was relevant to their own circumstances:

“Often advice is too generic and they are not listening to what you really want to do”. Interviewee 1

Learning providers were not the only ones that the learners felt could have been more helpful in guiding people to the right courses. Without accurate information, refugees and asylum seekers can face difficulties in knowing what course to apply for:

“It took me ten years to find out about how to become a teacher... would have done the course earlier... Many refugees might never find out about some courses.” Interviewee 4

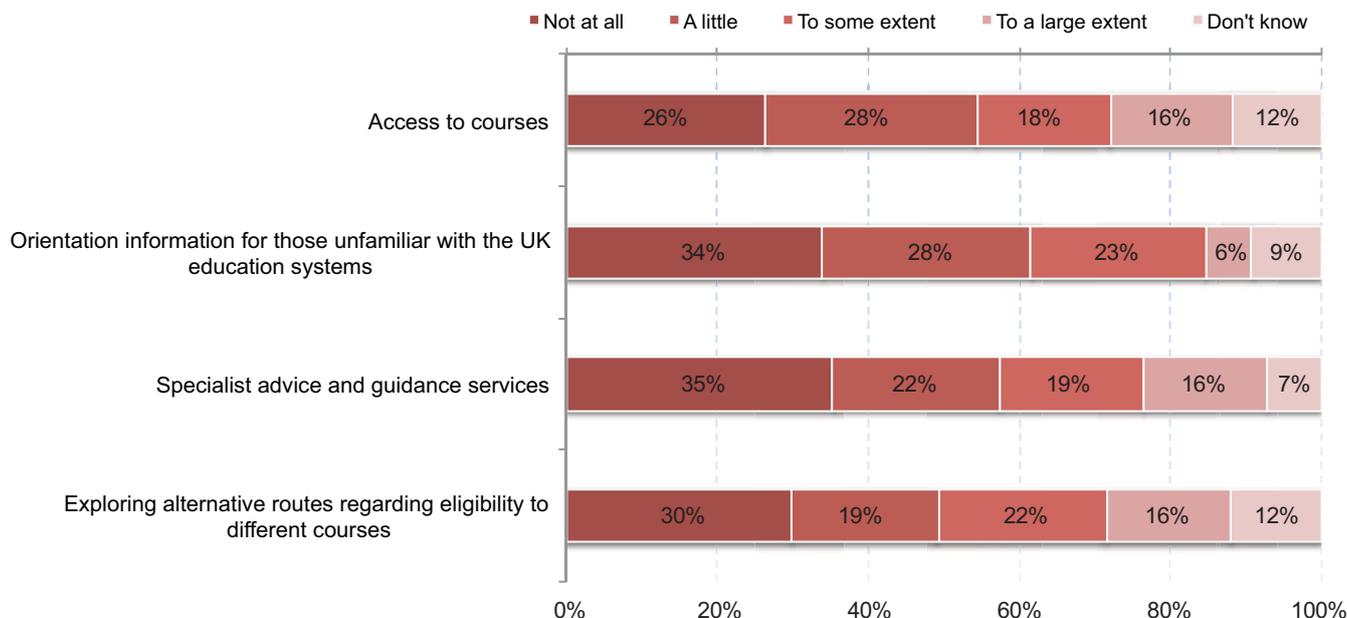
“It’s difficult to know what the different types of courses are and what different qualifications mean... It would be useful if someone at the Job Centre would have talked me through all this when I first went there.” Interviewee 3

Many of the interviewees gained this support from sources other than learning providers in order to select the most appropriate courses for them to apply for, which will be discussed later.

Providers' marketing materials

Given that there are different rules regarding eligibility to study and that refugees and asylum seekers may not be familiar with the education system in England, these potential learners can benefit from having clear information that relates to their circumstances. The survey found that the inclusion of specific information for refugees and asylum seekers in marketing material was not something that could be relied upon.

Figure 3 – Inclusion of information for refugees and asylum seekers in providers’ marketing material



With the exception of the final category (which referred to signposting to alternative provision), the ‘not at all’ and ‘a little’ categories constitute the majority of responses. It should be noted that this does not necessarily mean the information is not covered in marketing materials as between 7 per cent and 12 per cent of those completing the survey did not know if their organisation had this material for refugees and/or asylum seekers. This would mean that if refugees and asylum seekers were looking for guidance on what is available for them from the publicity material produced by providers, they cannot rely on the information being available in general marketing material.

Nearly 70 per cent of providers in the survey did not do any additional promotion/publicity work on top of its usual marketing, specifically targeted to refugee and asylum seekers. Examples of additional promotion and publicity work from some of those that did included:

“We promote the fact that we have a Guidance Officer who works specifically with these groups of people.” ACL provider, North West

“Promotion in local asylum/refugee centres.” Sixth form college, London

“Awareness-raising within specific forums, e.g. the MAF – Multi-Agency Forum. Occasional outreach with specific groups.” Specialist educational guidance service, East Midlands

“Through the refugee centre – leaflets and information.” ACL provider, West Midlands

In the interviews only one provider spoke of pro-actively targeting refugees and asylum seekers:

“We work with community groups and fund them to deliver provision – we do a lot of ‘myth-busting’.” ACL provider, East Midlands

Five providers stated that they simply did not have the resources to provide targeted publicity with some explaining that this was the case for any potential group of learners, not just refugees and asylum seekers. An ESOL Programme Manager said that they did not advertise their courses as they were already at capacity and did not wish to create demand that they could not meet. Four providers referred to some general outreach work that may reach refugees and asylum seekers, such as initiatives with local secondary schools, occasional focus groups with members of the local community and advertisements for ESOL classes in community centres and at community events.

Five of the learner interviewees spoke of the need for clear straightforward information in a variety of formats including on the providers' websites. They also wanted information and guidance about the types of courses which would provide them with the best opportunities of securing future employment.

These comments illustrate that clear information and advice is needed before enrolment to not only provide learners with the right information to inform their choices but also to provide information about the system itself which they are unfamiliar with.

Providing support during the admissions process

Over half of the survey sample (53 per cent) indicated that their organisation did not have specific processes in place for supporting refugees and/or asylum seekers during the admissions phase. Just under a third (30 per cent) did have specific processes and 17 per cent were unsure if these procedures existed. Examples of these specific processes included:

"Full team of ESOL teachers to support these students throughout the process starting with outreach programmes to publicise ESOL courses at our college." Sixth form college, London

"A multi lingual guidance officer, who is himself a refugee, is Level 4 qualified and provides IAG and support to refugees and asylum seekers." ACL provider, North West

"Separate enrolment process, including a student advisor with specialist knowledge." FE college, London

Other providers mentioned having specific assessment processes, providing one-to-one guidance and help with completing forms. Internal processes to support staff were also mentioned, such as having relevant training to enable them to be informed to support the learners. For example, an FE college in the West Midlands stated:

"Staff attend training in assessing eligibility for home fees and are able to refer to a senior welfare officer who has more experience in advising students from this background." FE college, West Midlands

Eight of the ten providers interviewed stated that they had no specific policy or process in place to support refugees and asylum seekers during the admissions process.

One provider interviewee explained that they had no specific support in place because they had so few learners in this group. Another pointed out that, as the provider itself was so small, the resources were not available to establish different processes.

"We are a small provider and don't have resources [to have specific processes/policies for refugees and asylum seekers]. We treat all learners on an individual basis and will support refugees and asylum seekers with whatever we can. For example, if their English is not good enough to understand sometimes we will try and get another trusted student to speak their language or we ask for someone from the community – we have good contacts in the community." Programme Manager, WBL, North West

Of the two provider interviewees who had specific processes, one FE college referred to this being in place for ESOL enrolment but not for other courses. The other organised activities in ways that they believe make them more accessible, particularly for women:

"We hold specific days to support and welcome them to come with women and children. Sometimes women in the past were put off from coming because they had nowhere to put her children so now we specifically invite them all in and it has worked well." English Language Centre Manager, FE college, South West

It was not clear whether this referred to ESOL enrolment only or all of the college's courses. An ACL provider highlighted that refugees who have entered the UK through the Gateway Programme have access to specific programmes such as summer schools, so they are supported to join these.

Most of the provider interviewees reported that one-to-one support is available to individuals who need it during the admissions process, but all applications were dealt with in the same way through a generic process. The English Language Centre Manager, ESOL Programme Manager and Registry Manager who were interviewed indicated that they were often approached by colleagues to provide support with the admissions of refugees and asylum seekers. This suggests that knowledge is not mainstreamed throughout providers and a few people are relied upon to support colleagues. In two of these examples, the staff were people working on English language provision who were assumed have the relevant knowledge. One local authority received support and expertise from a specialist:

“We have an IAG coordinator who has a specialist advisory role. All enrolment staff know the basics on courses and funding for refugees and asylum seekers, but the IAG coordinator is the expert and can offer expert advice in complicated cases.” Senior Manager, ACL provider, East Midlands

One interviewee referred to the assistance they provided in terms of assessing the ‘value’ of previous qualifications in order to try to get people onto the courses they wish to study. One interviewee stressed the importance of making sure that people are able to complete the course when they are going through the admissions process.

“The courses we offer are academic and often not suited to refugees/asylum seekers. We need to ensure that everyone who is admitted has the ability to do well and complete the course; refugees/asylum seekers may not be able to due to their difficult background.” Senior staff member, Sixth form college, West Midlands

The latter quote suggests some assumptions that are being made on the part of the provider about the abilities of refugees and asylum seekers. In the interviews, some learners spoke of automatically being put onto courses that the providers thought were appropriate, rather than ones they felt were most suitable. One woman described how she was told she had to attend a basic course in literacy as she was unable to produce her certificates from her home country, but she felt that she was merely repeating something she had already done:

“It was like I was in year 7. It felt like a child’s course to me – I don’t think it was really worth doing it.”
Interviewee 10

As indicated previously, these practices reflect the needs of several of the learner interviewees who spoke of the value in being able to speak to someone on an individual basis, with the relevant knowledge and expertise to understand their circumstances and to be able to provide the right kinds of advice and guidance. This will lead to providers understanding skills and prior attainment, and prevent learners from finding themselves on inappropriate courses. For some, frustrations were expressed about the learning providers not providing enough information and assistance at this point, although they were then satisfied with their experiences afterwards.

“Once you’re on the course [learning providers] are very helpful, but before you’re on the course they just tell you to apply... but you don’t know how to and they don’t help you.” Interviewee 4

Working with external organisations

Given the complexity surrounding entitlements, it was anticipated that learning providers would seek support from other organisations about the admission of learners who are refugees and asylum seekers. Just under half of the sample in the survey (47 per cent) had done so, and the main organisations and reasons for contact were:

- Young People’s Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency – for clarification of funding and entitlement.
- Refugee Education Training Advice Service (RETAS) – provided help and support to students and keep staff updated with current legislation.

- Local Refugee Community Organisations and support groups – sometimes potential learners were accompanied by their local refugee support group when applying for places and financial support.
- UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) – regarding eligibility to study
- Refugee Council and Refugee Action – to provide advice on qualifications and financial support, especially for asylum seekers.

The responses from the providers interviewed reflect those from the survey. The majority of providers mentioned contacting voluntary and community sector organisations such as the Refugee Council, Refugee Action and RETAS. Other sources of support referred to were local authority staff including the asylum team and housing department, the UK National Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC), black and minority ethnic organisations, church groups, health services, and a multi-agency forum.

Sources of information and support for learners in selecting and applying for courses

The refugees and asylum seekers in this sample did not seem to rely upon providers' published materials to find out what courses were available. The most frequent method of discovering what courses were on offer was by visiting or telephoning learning providers (eight interviewees). Support workers, such as people from refugee agencies, some of whom were dedicated education and training advisors, were the second most popular sources of information.

Friends and family provided information and inspiration, with interviewees reporting having heard that others had studied courses and then following in their footsteps. One man stated.

“Once you know someone who has done the course then it gives you courage that you can do the same. Another refugee doing a course shows you that you can do it too.” Interviewee 4

Tutors in both voluntary sector drop-in centres as well as those who taught on formal courses also provided information, sometimes helping them with their progression from one course to another. Given the fact that nine of the twenty interviewees were receiving Job Seekers' Allowance, it is disappointing that Job Centre Plus staff were only mentioned once in a positive sense. Two interviewees who had received specialist advice specifically mentioned the usefulness and importance of that type of support.

“Someone who listens to what you want and what experience and qualifications you have is important... they should care about what you can do and not just find anything for you.” Interviewee 4

“Especially the Gateway Programme. They help us to find schools and they give us advice about what you can do after this ESOL. [The support workers] are the ones to find the courses and tell us, and they always advise us about the courses we are doing. Very helpful.” Interviewee 9

When it came to applying for courses they had identified, only two interviewees reported not having had any assistance at all. Others had help from support workers, advisers at the Refugee Council, college staff (both in admissions departments and tutors) and a teacher at school.

Application process

The process of getting onto courses varied greatly both between courses and between providers. Some participants described difficulties they encountered, including the impact of their immigration status.

Only two of the interviewees said that they had applied for courses online. Those in the asylum process are less likely to have access to the internet at home than the general population and this process may be less familiar to many than filling out paper forms or face-to-face enrolment given the way systems may have worked in their countries of origin. Six people mentioned filling in an application form and there were nine instances of undertaking an assessment before being accepted onto a course. In some cases the assessments were for the learning providers to gauge the level of English language skills (and Maths on one occasion), and others were to ascertain which course and level were most suited to the applicant. Two interviewees had formal interviews in colleges before being offered a place on a course.

Nine interviewees felt that joining courses had been easy for them. One interviewee felt that the reason he found it easy to apply to a college was due to his English language skills.

“I think for me it has been easy to apply for a course because I can express myself in English but for some others it seems to be difficult because they are still [not good with English]...but I can express myself in English so it has been easy to apply for it.” Interviewee 10

Those who identified the process as being difficult felt that this was due to their personal lack of understanding of the education system and learning providers not understanding people’s entitlements and paperwork. One woman described applying for her course as *“like climbing Mount Kilimanjaro!”* (Interviewee 5), and another noted that although it had been easy for her, she had witnessed others experiencing difficulties.

“But that was quite difficult for someone who was new in the country because some people were struggling. And I was watching even for some who had got their papers, refugees, it was difficult for them because there were some papers they required from them that they don’t even have which was very difficult. It was not straightforward at all.” Interviewee 16

One woman attributed her success in accessing a course at an FE college to having found out what she was entitled to and asserting her rights forcefully to the learning provider.

Several in the sample talked a great deal about the difficulties they faced in proving the information learning providers needed because of their immigration status. For example, one woman had problems at a college as they were not familiar with the *Standard Acknowledgment Letter* she had been issued by the Home Office and the response from staff made her feel like she had no right to be in the UK, and they therefore would not accept it as identification:¹⁶

“I was made to feel worthless because I did not have the information, ID and papers and evidence of address that they (learning providers) wanted.” Interviewee 6

Other learners talked about the difficulties and the lengths asylum seekers have to go to in order to prove their immigration status before being accepted on to a course:

“I have seen some asylum seekers in my position as a volunteer running around looking for letters to confirm that they are asylum seekers whereby they give them the ARC card and the colleges are saying it is not enough, can you get letters? So they go running around into charities like the Red Cross and the Refugee Council and others getting letters supporting their ARC card in order to be admitted in colleges.” Interviewee 7

Another learner describes his experience when proving his status and how when trying to meet the terms the providers asked for he was finally told that he had no entitlement to enrol on the course due to his status:

“Normally if I said I was interested in this course they would say yes, quickly you would get a positive response, and then they would ask you, to do this they would tell you about the course and show you how it is and then they would say, for payment we need a letter for example from the JobCentre about your benefits. We need your National Insurance Numbers and whenever I would say I don’t have a National Insurance Number they would say ‘OK, so how are you supporting yourself’. ‘I’m an asylum seeker’. ‘Oh, I’m sorry. You are not allowed.’ And that’s it.” Interviewee 8

As highlighted previously, asylum seekers are allowed to study under particular circumstances, and in the interview this man reported the response being negative from many providers as soon as he mentioned his status, rather than them seeing if he was eligible. He implied that this was discrimination, and reported how people’s attitudes would change from being helpful and friendly as soon as he mentioned that he was an asylum seeker:

“It was coming towards Christmas and courses had started. Then I went around, really looking around. I went to [two universities and one college], I went to loads of places. Everywhere I would go asking, asking if there were opportunities. One thing they used to ask me was qualifications from home, do I have any evidence. But the next thing, when I used to say I was an asylum seeker, there was ‘oh’. Whenever they used to say they need to know my status, then that used to be like a brick [wall coming down]. Whenever the first point of contact you come to which is the receptionist, you see them turning their face because they are speaking to an asylum seeker then you straight away lose hope.” Interviewee 8

In a similar vein, one woman (Interviewee 6) described how she felt that the admissions staff were standing in her way. She was told that she would have to attend a pre-assessment course and could not start the course she wanted until she had completed it, delaying her entrance for a term. She had to persuade the admissions officer to allow her to sit an admissions test which she passed. Throughout this process, she felt that the reason she was being asked to study a pre-assessment course, rather than take a test, was because she was a refugee and the member of staff assumed she was uneducated.

This raises the issue of inconsistent practice among providers and it can then be a matter of luck whether a person gets accepted onto a course depending on which learning provider, and who within that provider, they approach. One woman referred to the confusion that can arise between different learning providers, some of which have different requirements which she found confusing. She talked about, for example, some providers being willing to accept qualifications which are equivalent to GCSE whilst some will not:

“It’s confusing as you need to make sure you apply to the ones that accept your previous qualifications.”
Interviewee 1

Often refugees and asylum seekers arrive into the UK with considerable prior learning and employment experience, prior qualifications with some highly qualified and recognised in their professions in their country of origin. However, in England, these can be of little or no value, as some interviewees commented, employers and education providers ask for UK experience. For them, it would have been useful if their home country experience was accepted. Interviewee 2

Summary

The findings from this research have identified a lack of formal IAG support specifically targeted at refugees and asylum seekers, and marketing materials produced by providers tend to not have information that this group would benefit from. The majority of providers either had no specific processes in place to support refugees and asylum seekers through the application process, or were unaware of having any. Where one-to-one support was provided to learners, this was valued highly. Refugees and asylum seekers often obtained information about courses from a variety of sources beyond the providers themselves, including family and friends and voluntary sector organisations. Learners needed clear information and advice before enrolment to not only provide them with the right information to inform their choices but also to provide information about the system itself which they are unfamiliar with. Almost half of the learners in the sample found the application process relatively straightforward, particularly for those with good English language skills. Those that found it difficult felt that this was due to their personal lack of understanding of the education system and learning providers’ lack of understanding people’s entitlements and paperwork. The process of proving their immigration status often caused real difficulties for learners with asylum seeker status. In addition, accepting prior qualifications was seen as an additional barrier to being accepted onto courses.

16 A *Standard Acknowledgement Letter* is issued to acknowledge that an asylum claim has been made but an Application Registration Card (ARC) cannot be issued within three days.

6. Eligibility to study and fees

The availability of adequate funding for courses is fundamental to enabling access to post-16 education for learners. This chapter focuses on how courses are funded, for example through the Skills Funding Agency or by individuals, rather than financial resources needed by individuals to support themselves while studying.

As highlighted in chapter 2, the rules around eligibility to study state funded courses and the possibility of receiving fee remission is determined by a number of factors, including an individual's immigration status, age, and length of time in the UK. This chapter explores the complexities of the funding system from the perspectives of both the learning providers and refugees and asylum seekers.

This chapter discusses the research findings relating to:

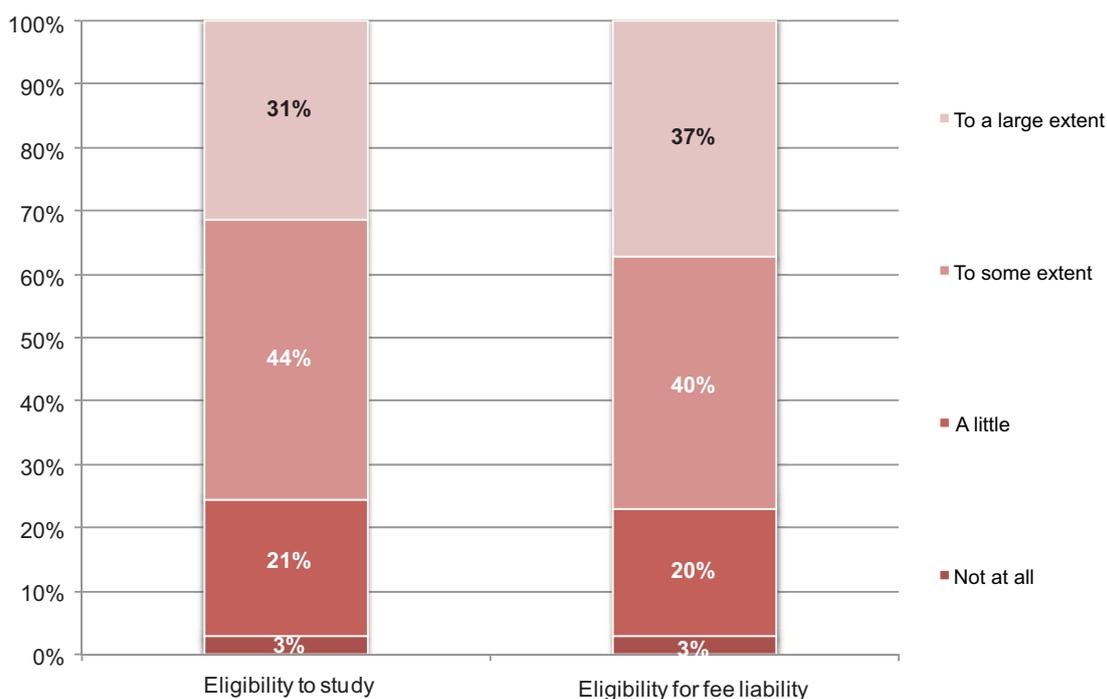
- The awareness of the policies regarding eligibility to study and fee liability
- Types of guidance providers use to assist them in interpreting policies
- Factors providers use to assess eligibility including documentation requested
- Fees paid for courses

Awareness of eligibility to study and fee liability

In the survey, providers were asked how aware they were of national policies related to eligibility to study (course criteria) and eligibility for fee remission in relation to the position of refugee and asylum seekers.

As Figure 4 shows, the majority of respondents indicated that they were aware to some extent or to a large extent of the national policies with only two respondents stating they had no knowledge or understanding at all:

Figure 4. – Providers' awareness of national policies related to eligibility to study (course criteria) and eligibility for fee liability, for refugees and/or asylum seekers seeking to access learning – percentages



Sample size = 70 respondents

The proportions vary slightly between the two areas, but there was a radical difference. As the survey was completed by people in a variety of roles, then it is possible that they rely on others in their organisations to inform them of the rules. This was the case with some of the provider interviewees who said that this type of knowledge was not necessary in their roles as there were other staff within their organisation who understood the rules. One ACL provider commented on the complexity of eligibility:

“It depends on what course they’re interested in doing and their own personal circumstances. The eligibility and funding regulations are so confusing it’s difficult to say – it’s on a case by case basis.” Senior manager, ACL provider, Eastern region

There were misconceptions surrounding eligibility to study among several of the providers interviewed. Three stated that all refugees and asylum seekers are eligible to study, with one emphasising the need to meet the academic requirements for the course, another saying that all are eligible and the issue lies in whether they have funding or are able to pay. Another felt that it is the personal financial circumstances of the individuals that causes the problems rather than meeting eligibility criteria:

“All are eligible – we don’t impose any restrictions. Often the barriers are financial and these are not imposed by us – it’s lack of government support for refugees and asylum seekers and complexity of the benefits system that doesn’t allow them to claim benefits and study on some courses.” Guidance officer, FE college, North West

These views are incorrect and may highlight the difficulty some providers have in interpreting the policies; asylum seekers are required to have been in the UK for six months before being permitted to participate in SFA funded courses.

Three of the provider interviewees were able to demonstrate an accurate understanding of the policies, two of whom also noted that those under 18 have entitlement because they are children. One FE college interviewee mentioned that in exceptional circumstances, some people have been permitted to study if they just fall short of the six months’ residence requirement or are age disputed.¹⁷ An ACL interviewee also highlighted the flexible approach they sometimes take as they have been known to allow people who are not eligible to ‘unofficially’ join a class if that course had reached the minimum number of learners to be sustainable “so that they can get the learning.”

Three provider interviewees specifically mentioned strictly following the government or SFA rules. Here are the views of two managers:

“We follow SFA to the letter, we don’t use anything else. We’re a small organisation so we can’t run any risks therefore we follow SFA to the letter.” ESOL programme manager, ACL, West Midlands

“We do what the government guidelines say, we have little influence on education for refugees and asylum seekers and what we can provide for them.” Registry manager, FE college, London

One senior manager in an FE college said that sometimes their college had refugees and asylum seekers trying to access courses that were too high a level for them because they would need to have good English language or other skills prior to entry:

“There is sometimes an issue with refugees and asylum seekers thinking they are able to get onto high level courses, when actually they need time to learn English and acquire skills and knowledge. We try to ensure that nobody goes on a course that is too high level.” English language centre manager, FE college

Overall, the data shows a range of levels of awareness by providers, however, this may partly be due to the job role of the participating staff in the survey and interviews. The consequences of confusion among providers was illustrated by one woman who, when 17 years old, had tried to access education courses at

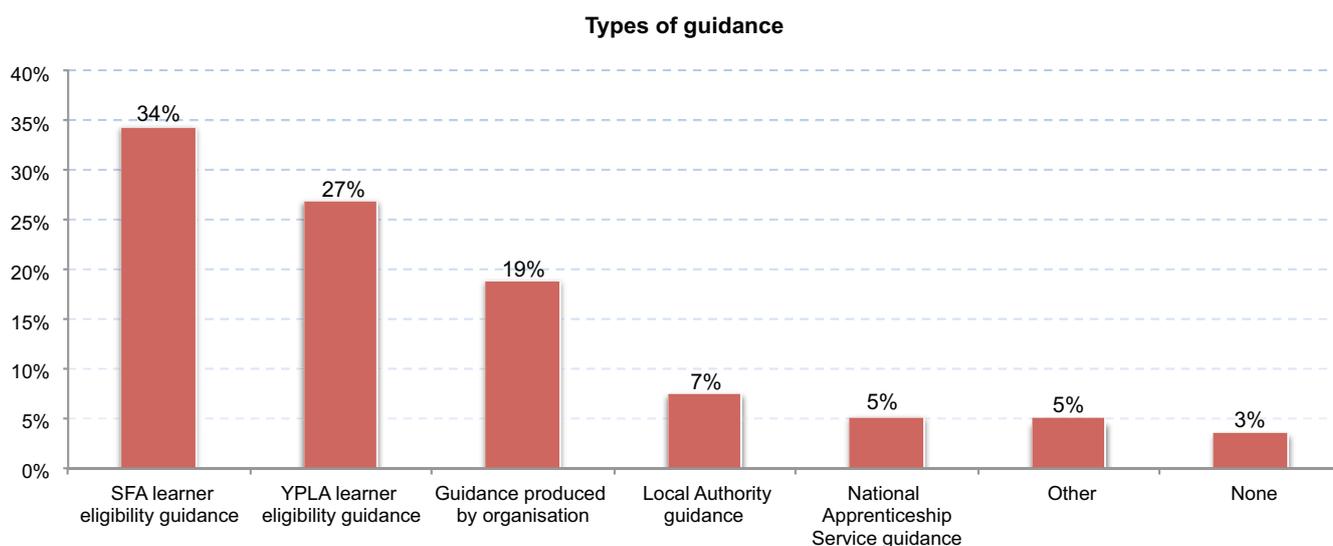
a college and had been told that due to her age and status she did not qualify. However, when she eventually accessed a work-based learning course her course tutor told her that the college had been:

“Very wrong, they are not supposed to be telling you – at your age it’s free everything’. Not everybody’s the same – not everybody follows the rules for refugees and asylum seekers”. Interviewee 20

Guidance used by learning providers

Many providers rely upon a range of guidance documents to understand and interpret policies. From a list of options, respondents to the survey were asked to select the different guidance materials they used to assess whether refugees and/or asylum seekers are eligible to study or for fee remission. In most cases, respondents used a combination of materials

Figure 5. Types of guidance providers use when assessing eligibility to study and fee remission – percentages



Sample size = 176 responses

Note: This question was multiple answer therefore the total sum of responses is more than the final sample size. Percentages are based on the total number of responses for the question

The three main sources of guidance used were produced by the SFA, YPLA and their own organisations. It is not surprising that the SFA and YPLA were most frequently used given that these were the funding bodies. The ‘other’ category included that produced by the UK Council for International Student Affairs and one provider cited using Home Office national guidance. A small number of providers stated they did not use any guidance, which, while only applying to six providers, is potentially worrying as not doing so can result in people being denied access to courses or incorrectly admitted.

The majority of the provider interviewees also referred to the SFA guidance, and/or other government documents including those from the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions. Unlike the survey, some also referred to information produced by voluntary sector organisations and charities as additional sources being used.

One FE college provider spoke of the difficulties in trying to keep on top of the rules referring to it as a “constantly changing field”. This interviewee spoke of the burden of other pressures which impacted on their day-to-day working role which often meant that there was:

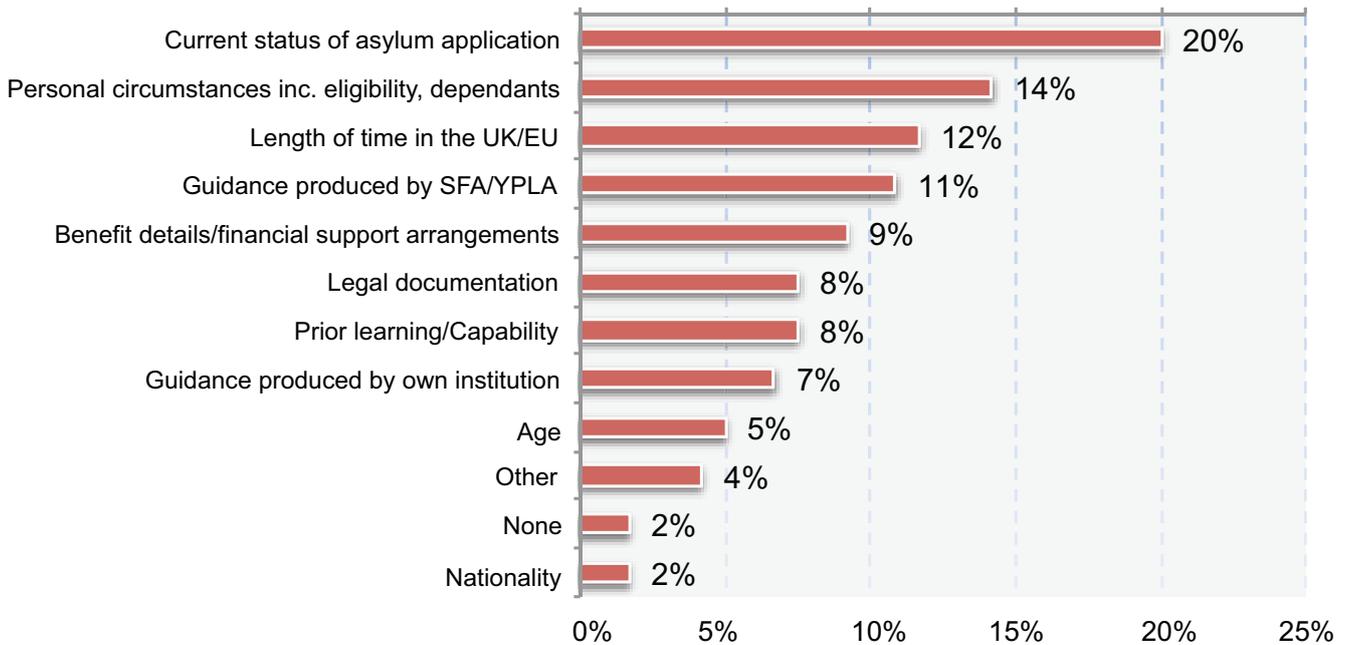
“No time to read all; I focus on key findings and sections that are relevant to my work.” Senior manager, FE college, South West

Factors used to assess eligibility and documents requested

In order to assess eligibility to study and fee remission, learning providers request certain documents from applicants. Survey respondents were asked to indicate the factors that they take into consideration when assessing refugees' and/or asylum seekers' eligibility to access statutory funded provision; a list was provided as set out in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Factors providers take into consideration when assessing refugees' and/or asylum seekers' eligibility to access statutory funded provision – percentages

Factors taken into consideration when assessing eligibility to access SFA/YPLA funded provision



Sample size = 120 responses

Note: Respondents could list more than one factor and so the total sum of responses (i.e. factors) is more than the final sample size. Percentages are based on the total number of responses for the question.

As Figure 6 shows the most common factors were current status of asylum application; personal circumstances including eligibility and dependants; and length of time in the UK/EU. These are all factors that can have an influence on whether people can study. It is interesting to note that some providers produced their own guidance to assist staff in assessing eligibility which presumably simplifies the rules to make it easier for them to understand.

Providers were also asked to indicate the types of documents that they ask refugees and/or asylum seekers to show when assessing their eligibility to study. At the time of the data collection, learning providers will have been using the SFA's guidance, *2011/12 Learner Eligibility and Contribution Rules Version 2.1* which outlined the types of information and documentation that providers are required to gain from learners who have asylum seeker status to establish entitlement to study. These were:

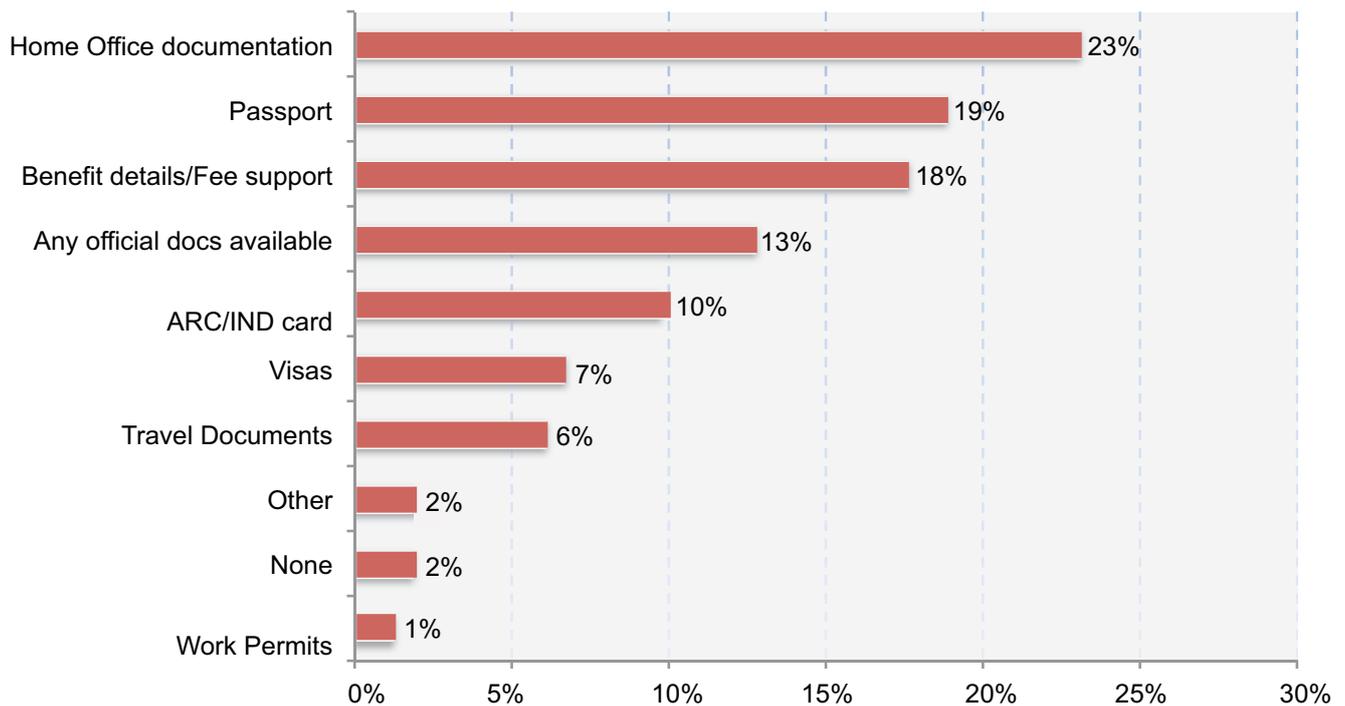
- The Application Registration Card (ARC) which records the date of application.
and
- Proof of receipt of Asylum Support through a letter less than one month old or a post office receipt confirming they have received support. The receipt will need to be dated at least six months after the date of issue of the ARC and should be issued during the same month as enrolment (if Section 95).
or

- Confirmation from the Home Office of the receipt of Section 4 support within three months of the date of issue. Individuals may no longer have an ARC.¹⁸

A total of 165 documents were listed by respondents; the full range is shown in Figure 7 below. The most common were:

- Home Office documentation
- Passport
- Benefit details/fee support details

Figure 7 – Documents providers request refugees and/or asylum seekers to show when assessing their eligibility to study – percentages



Sample size = 165 responses

Note: This question was multiple-choice and respondents could list more than one document and so the total sum of responses (i.e. documents) is more than the final sample size. Percentages are based on the total number of responses for the question.

‘Other’ documentation included producing their NI number, proof of educational qualifications, and assessment of course suitability.

The responses given by the provider interviewees reflect those found in the survey, where they indicated referring to passports, ARC, Immigration Status Document, travel documents, Home Office documents such as those outlining immigration status or confirmation of receipt of Section 95 or Section 4 support, proof of address and letters from solicitors.

As has been demonstrated above, providers can request a significant number and type of documentation. However, refugees and asylum seekers can face particular difficulties producing some of the standard documentation that learning providers request.¹⁹ For instance, asylum seekers are not likely to be in possession of their passport as the Home Office retains it while processing their claim, and/or they may not have travelled to the UK using their own documents as people fleeing a regime will often not be able to source official documents because they are in fear of the authorities. If an asylum seeker is living in accommodation provided by the UK Border Agency they will not have utility bills in their own name to show proof of address. In addition, people who leave their countries due to persecution often have to do this very

suddenly, within a few weeks or even days of realising they are in imminent danger (Crawley, 2010) and with few personal possessions. Carrying certificates to prove their qualifications is not necessarily going to be at the top of the list of things to bring. Once in the UK, it is often difficult, or undesirable (due to fear of being traced and perceived risk to any family members who remain) to contact institutions in their countries of origin to obtain proof of qualifications.

Several of the providers interviewed recognised that refugees and asylum seekers may experience problems producing some of the documents usually required, so have adopted more flexible approaches, for example, accepting a letter from an 'authoritative' source (such as the Refugee Council) to explain a person's circumstances and entitlements. One interviewee from an FE college who stated that "*legally we can't admit them without the relevant documents*" also suggested that they could accept evidence from an embassy, which may be appropriate for other types of migrants, but not for those who have fled their countries as a result of persecution that is very often perpetrated by the state.

One provider noted that the requirements of the SFA had been the basis upon which they designed their electronic enrolment system to ensure that they are doing everything correctly. This has sometimes led to people not being able to join their courses as they stated:

"We have to enter into our electronic system which documents have been seen so we are sure to follow the SFA guidelines and we know exactly what evidence has been seen and when. If they don't have the relevant documents then we can't admit them – we liaise with local providers to try to get them support through other means." ACL provider, West Midlands

Some providers stated that if there were people that they could not admit onto courses due to the eligibility criteria, they would signpost them to provision that existed within the local community. It is likely that this community sector provision will only exist in areas with higher levels of refugees and asylum seekers, and therefore those who are in less diverse locations could be at a disadvantage.

A student adviser in an FE college spoke of the "*very restrictive*" national guidelines stating that "*sometimes we get by, by not asking refugees and asylum seekers too many questions.*" (Student advisor, FE college)

The refugees and asylum seekers interviewed described the documents requested by learning providers to prove their entitlement to study state-funded provision. Of the twenty people interviewed, the Immigration Status Document was the most commonly mentioned form of identification with six people having shown this when applying for courses. Five showed their ARC, and four were asked to produce a passport, although some highlighted that they could not. One participant took along a passport from Azerbaijan and this was accepted, and one woman had to show a college a copy of a letter from the High Court to show her claim was still live, even though it had been refused initially. Most interviewees who produced identification linked to their immigration status stated that the learning providers understood what it was, with the exception of the woman with the Standard Acknowledgement Letter discussed earlier, and another had doubts about whether they knew what her Immigration Status Document was:

"I don't think they really understood but I gave them. Most of them they don't seem to understand anything about it but I just told them that I am a refugee." Interviewee 12

Three interviewees were asked to show evidence of being in receipt of Asylum Support, two of whom had to provide three months' post office receipts to prove they were still getting that support, despite SFA guidance only requiring evidence for the month when enrolment takes place. Proof of address was also mentioned by three interviewees which can sometimes be difficult for asylum seekers to produce when they live in accommodation provided by UKBA.

"Of course, my address there was nothing else I could give them. Remember I was an asylum seeker, I didn't have a utility bill, any letter that was coming to me was about my migration status which I wasn't giving in, so my address was nothing other than saying this is my address and my ARC card, that's all I

had...I know I used to have a tenancy agreement on NASS which was like 13, 15 pages which I never understood other than that. I didn't have a bank account; I didn't have nothing so it was just like through someone's discretion that I could register.”²⁰ Interviewee 8

The documentation requirements set out for asylum seekers by the SFA do not include documents that this type of learner can obtain. Despite this, learning providers appear to be operating a standard list of proof documentation they require from all learners, which puts asylum seekers at a disadvantage and can cause discomfort and embarrassment for the individuals who have to explain why they do not have what is being requested.

Course fees paid by learners

Fourteen of the twenty refugees and asylum seekers interviewed reported not being charged fees for their courses. Four explained that this was because they were on JSA and three because they were receiving Asylum Support.²¹ However, this does not mean that they were not required to pay something towards their learning as four interviewees had paid between £30 and £50 for application or registration fees which was described as “*a lot of money if you don't have much money*” (Interviewee 3). Another interviewee had spent £15 on an ESOL course, and two others reported that voluntary organisations and churches they were involved with had paid for them to attend some vocationally-focused courses.

Given the fact that Refugee Council advisers often report having to intervene when refugees and asylum seekers are incorrectly charged fees for courses where they are entitled to exemption, it is perhaps surprising that only one person in the sample reported confusion about the level of fees that should be charged to join a course. The woman had been told by a college that she had to pay for her learning as she was not on mainstream benefits. She then found a course where she was offered a concessionary rate of £20 which, at the time, she was unable to pay so she had to tell them she could not join, an experience she described as “*humiliating*”. When asked if she had received any assistance in getting funding to help pay for courses she reported having received unclear and contradictory information:

“There was a lot of confusion with different people telling me different things, nobody seemed to know or have a clear answer.” Interviewee 6

Examination fees were also additional costs which dictated whether some refugee and asylum seeker learners joined some courses. Two learners talked about taking up courses but being unable to complete them as they could not afford the examination fees. This situation will apply to many on low incomes, but restrictions around permission to work mean that asylum seekers and newly granted refugees may be more vulnerable to this situation as they will not have been able to save any money to meet the payment.

Summary

This chapter discussed learning providers' understanding of national policies related to eligibility to study and eligibility for fee remission, highlighting inconsistent levels of knowledge. Awareness of the types of documentation that this group possess can make the admissions process run more smoothly and make refugees and asylum seekers feel more welcome. The majority of the refugees and asylum seekers in the sample had not paid course fees as they were exempt, but registration and examination fees were sometimes required which some felt were high given their low incomes, resulting in some not gaining the qualification they had studied for.

17 Age disputed children are those whose stated age on their asylum application is disputed by the Home Office or a local authority – in some circumstances this can lead to being treated as an adult, and in any case will cast doubt upon their claim to be a child.

18 http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/LearnerEligibilityandContributionRules_2011_12_12Aug2011__June_revision_V2.1.pdf pages13-14. This was valid at the time of the data collection, but has now been replaced by other guidance issued by the SFA.

19 Please see Refugee Council and Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010) for an explanation of the types of documents refugees are likely to hold.

20 Asylum Support is commonly referred to as 'NASS' which stands for National Asylum Support Service which was formerly the section in the UK Border Agency that distributed support to asylum seekers.

21 The other seven did not explain why they did not pay fees.

7. Support

Following on the previous chapter which looked at the role of funding in enabling refugees and asylum seekers to join an education or training course, this chapter now considers other forms of support that are important to securing access and successful participation.

The term ‘support’ can mean many things, ranging from practical methods of support including financial support to pay for living expenses and travel expenses to the more emotional and social kinds of support. As stated in chapter 2, the data collection for this research was undertaken at a time when the types of statutory support available to help people while learning was changing. Learning providers were not sure what support funding streams would look like in the following academic year, so these are not discussed in the findings here, although it is acknowledged that they can be key sources for learners.

Financial support

Many of the problems associated with supporting people to study are shared among those on low incomes, irrespective of whether they were born in the UK or not. It may be the case that refugees and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to being on low incomes. Research has indicated that refugees may be at a greater risk of poverty than the population at large due to issues such as barriers to employment and difficulties in accessing bank accounts (Scottish Poverty Information Unit, 2010).

In addition to considerations about direct costs relating to courses, the other financial issues that learners have to take into account relate to how they are going to financially support themselves while studying. Some provider interviewees referred to the difficulties learners faced in meeting their basic needs such as food, housing and healthcare and how these need to be met before the educational needs are addressed.

This research explored whether learning providers had sources of financial support available to refugees and asylum seekers who were learning with them. This is of particular importance to asylum seekers, the majority of whom, unlike other learners, are not permitted to work in the UK. This means they are left with no way to supplement their income, so transport costs, books and so on can only be purchased from the limited income they receive from the UK Border Agency.

A lack of access to appropriate and sufficient funding and financial support proved to be a significant barrier for several of the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed. One woman, who was in the process of appealing a negative asylum decision, described her experience of trying to access education as an adult in this country, the attitudes she faced and her determination to succeed:

“I need a lot of support to stay in education. The funding is a big thing. Right now I would have loved to go further but I cannot because there’s no money. We as asylum seekers are not eligible after our claim is exhausted – they will tell you ‘you don’t belong here so you cannot study’, which I think that’s a problem because...to come back as a returner after twenty something years, back to education, it was a great achievement.” Interviewee 16

Different sources of support

The interviewees spoke of meeting their everyday needs through a variety of sources including benefits such as JSA and housing benefit; asylum support; and help from family and friends. Some of the interviewees referred to more than one source of support, and two explicitly referred to sharing childcare responsibilities with their spouses which would otherwise have incurred a cost. Three refugees were due to commence college courses in the coming months and did not know at the time of the interview how they would support themselves. One man receiving Section 4 support faced specific difficulties due to the nature of the assistance he received, which is not provided in cash, but loaded onto the Azure payment card that can only be used in certain retail outlets, and described this as “a struggle”. As he had no access to cash, getting to college, feeding himself (on approximately £5 a day) and buying materials to use in college was very difficult.

Another learner, who was a mother, highlighted the difficulties of trying to attend college with limited support while trying to look after her daughter. She drew upon a range of sources for help, including some savings, as illustrated below.

“I had a bit of savings. I went through all that and sometimes my family helped, but because there were now 2 of us, me and my daughter, it was a bit difficult. I applied for Child Benefit and that took a long time because I had to send forms back and forth saying you haven’t sent this, you haven’t sent that, so that took a bit of time. And it’s not much when it does come through. Family support and whatever I had left I was scrimping and scraping to get by.” Interviewee 12

Unfortunately this help was not sufficient to provide enough for her to continue in her course as she was not informed about the implications of studying to her income. When she started studying these benefits ceased and she was left with insufficient money to live on. She sought part-time work but was unable to secure any. She stated that she would not have started the course if she had known this in advance:

“I thought that if you were a refugee you would get help...I was on Job Seeker’s [Allowance] when I started the course, they said you don’t pay [fees] if you are receiving any benefits, you don’t have to pay, but if you’re working you have to pay...but then the twist is that when you are on Job Seeker’s Allowance you are actively seeking work so when you tell them you are going on a full time course they stop all that. They stop your JSA, they stop your housing benefits, they stop everything. I didn’t know that stopped the Housing Benefit and everything...so that’s when I fell behind with my rent and I just couldn’t cope so I had to stop the course and go back on JSA”. Interviewee 12

As a result of these events, this woman was in rent and council tax arrears. She felt she had not been given clear information about the financial implications of her studying, although she felt that maybe she had not asked the right questions. It should not be the case that somebody is left in arrears because the full implications of their decision to study were not explained.

Two learners described the situations they found themselves in at lunchtimes as they did not have any money to be able to eat in the canteen with others, or have hot food. One learner who had an Azure card could not use that to buy food at college, and when he took pre-cooked food there to heat up it was problematic to do so. Another chose to avoid other students as he felt uncomfortable about fellow students buying him lunch:

“Halfway the [asylum support] stopped so I started walking to college. Lunchtime I used to be in and of course there were students who knew what I was going through and started buying me lunches and I felt, again, like it was embarrassing so every lunchtime I used to go out really, just walk around and come back.” Interviewee 8

For the learner with the Azure card, an easy solution would have been for the college to provide facilities to re-heat pre-prepared food so he could eat hot food at lunchtime.

The impact of the asylum process

The experience of going through different stages of the asylum process results in changes in entitlement to study and financial circumstances. One woman became destitute and failed her Access course and she was unable to repeat it because when the course had finished in the summer her asylum support had already ended. When she received a letter to tell her she had not passed she was very unhappy and disappointed:

“At the time that I was doing the Access course, when I became destitute, I couldn’t study because I didn’t have a place to live. And then I lived with one woman from the church who helped me, who locks me out so I stand by the door and then by two or three in the morning she watched movies so I sleep on the couch in the living room so for me I...couldn’t study. I couldn’t sit still and that was the problem. It is very, very difficult if you study and all of a sudden the Home Office don’t consider you are in college which they did know

because I sent a letter. The college wrote a letter for me and I sent it but that was not even recognised.”

[Interviewer: Did you tell the college what had happened?]

“No, because I still continued on the course when my [asylum support] support stopped, the college didn’t know. I was too afraid as I thought if I tell them maybe they will kick me out or just stop, so I wanted to just finish my course.” Interviewee 16

This woman’s story illustrates the vulnerability of those who have insecure immigration status. The funding rules would have allowed her to continue her studying as long as she had not been told by the Home Office she would be removed from the country during this period. The college may have been able to reassure and perhaps give her increased support had they known her circumstances, but the fear of negative consequences prevented disclosure.

Hardship Funds

Some learning providers have their own hardships funds that they allocate to learners in need. These are established and administered by individual providers according to their own criteria. Responses to the survey showed that 40 per cent (28 respondents) of learning providers had hardship funds which refugees and/or asylum seekers could access, and 36 per cent (25 respondents) did not.²²

Providers had varied eligibility criteria for these funds. Several respondents used the funds to support learners who were not eligible for statutory funding, as was the case for asylum seekers:

“Asylum seekers are not eligible for Discretionary Learner Support and therefore they can apply to the hardship fund if showing progression and on low income.” Welfare and support manager, FE college, South West

A number of providers talked of making funds available where there is ‘evidence of real financial hardship’ or where learners were homeless. One FE college in the South West commented:

“The college has made use of the ESOL hardship fund to provide fee remission to some ESOL learners this year. We will continue to use our own funds to do so for the next 2–3 years for unwaged applicants, not on JSA.” Admissions staff, FE college, South West

Six out of the ten providers interviewed said that they had their own hardship funds that were available for learners to allocate to people in particular need to support them in their learning. Assessment of who could receive these funds tended to be carried out on a case by case basis, and the money was provided to cover costs such as travel (although one provider specifically said that their funds excluded this use), books, childcare and one provider even helped pay for glasses that a learner required.

“We have learner support funds for people receiving NASS support. For example, we have paid for spectacles or supported with some travel costs. We do this on an individual basis, we can’t support all, we are often restricted by strange rules, e.g. refugees and asylum seekers must live within a certain distance from the college.” Guidance officer, FE college, North West

However, one interviewee reported that the hardship fund within their FE college had recently been abolished which was not a popular decision among some staff.

“We don’t have a hardship fund or similar any more. We used to have it and had a chunk of money that we distributed to whoever we felt needed it most (often refugees and asylum seekers). The college merged two years ago and since then there is no hardship fund anymore. Several staff at college have campaigned to get it back, but have not been successful.” Student adviser, FE college, Yorkshire and Humberside

The loss of such funds is unfortunate, as many of the learning providers in this research indicated that they

felt able to use these funds using their discretion, rather than being constrained by criteria imposed by the government. In some cases, it appears to be the case that providers are making a particular effort to plug the gap left by eligibility gaps for statutory funds.

However, not all learners that were interviewed had a positive experience of receiving support in this way. None of the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed reported having received hardship funds (although perhaps they did not know them by that name) and one of the sample had asked if he could receive support from his college's hardship fund but was told that he was not entitled to any as he was an asylum seeker (Interviewee 7).

Other types of support

Some learning providers offered other types of support/services to refugees and/or asylum seekers, beyond financial support offered through statutory or organisational funds. Nearly half (44 per cent) of survey respondents identified other types of support they offered to refugees and asylum seekers. These included: one-to-one guidance and support throughout their course of study; signposting to other organisations and course providers, including those providing ESOL, if unable to help; providing welfare and/or mentor support; and signposting to other sources of financial support.

Some of the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed had received support from providers, be that financial or in other ways that helped to meet practical needs. Despite hardship funds being available, there was a low take up among the sample. There appeared to be a lack of awareness about what was available to them, but also two interviewees explicitly described a reluctance on their part to approach people for help, in case that would draw attention to themselves leading to them being thrown off their courses. When asked if he had applied to a hardship fund, one asylum seeker responded:

“Absolutely not...whenever they say if you're on benefits or on this, you don't need to pay but I used to know that anything I tried to get involved in, my name is going to turn up and I may end up losing the course.” Interviewee 8

This quote highlights the impact of having insecure immigration status on everyday life. Even though this man had entitlement to study, he did not want to do anything that would result in people knowing he was an asylum seeker in case they subsequently barred him from studying.

One woman was told by somebody at her college that there were different types of support she could apply for. Her explanation displays confusion about what they were and illustrates the need to have good quality advice and guidance in determining which type of funding is most suited to each individual:

“The college did two forms of funding. One is an adult learning grant...and I applied for the other one...so I thought it would be more than the £40 a week but it's actually less because I think first they gave me a payment of £63 and then after another month or so, or two months, they gave me £50 so it's much less than the adult learning grant...but it wasn't any help for like bus fare, food and everything, it was a bit tight...once you apply for one you can't go back and apply for the other one.” Interviewee 12

Funding from charities and voluntary organisations

Just under half (46 per cent, 32 respondents) of providers surveyed said that they had signposted refugees and asylum seekers to trusts and organisations that provide financial support for accessing learning. Below is a list of trusts and organisations providers referred to:

- Educational Grants Advisory Service (EGAS).
- Local and national trust funds and charitable organisations, including those specifically for refugees and asylum seekers i.e. Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Barnardo's, Asylum Support/NASS.
- Local Authorities and Local IAG services such as Citizens Advice/Connexions, Social services, Job Centre Plus.

Many of those in the list above may not be able necessarily to provide additional funding to learners, although they may be able to signpost individuals to other sources of funding. This illustrates some confusion on the part of providers that could result in time being wasted pursuing organisations that cannot give funds, and missed opportunities from those who do. It would be beneficial for learning providers to have an accurate list of potential sources of financial support so the refugees and asylum seekers do not have to approach multiple organisations before finding ones that may be of assistance.

Eight of the providers interviewed also mentioned referring learners to various organisations including local voluntary organisations which provided free education classes, and trusts and charities. Two providers also assisted with tasks such as writing letters to support applications and providing help to fill in application forms whilst another provider had directed a learner to another statutory learning provider who was in a position to support learners with costs.

As there are sometimes exclusions for asylum seekers being able to apply for some funds, and refugees can face difficulties paying for education costs due to a lack of access to money when they were in the asylum process, some charities have established funds to support refugees and asylum seekers with their learning by providing small grants. Almost all of the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed were not aware of the existence of these funds and so were not using the opportunity to gain some financial support for their learning. Only one interviewee mentioned that he had tried to get money to pay for fees from a charity, but his application to do so had been unsuccessful.

Help with travel costs

Travel was a significant problem which most of the learner interviewees spoke about. Getting to classes was problematic not only in financial terms but also in terms of distance and often it was linked to the relocation of asylum seekers by UKBA. One provider describes below the great efforts some learners go to in order to reach their place of study.

“A really massive barrier is if they are moved at short notice. Travel is difficult if the distances are long, and may be impossible if they are housed too far away from the college. Also they often don’t get any support with travel expenses; many walk for really long distances, over an hour each way in many cases. We have several refugees and asylum seekers who really want to study here but have to drop out because they are re-housed too far away from the college, it’s distressing to them and us... we can’t do anything to help.”
(Guidance officer, FE college, NW)

Some of the refugees and asylum seekers interviewed reported having to take several buses which could take over an hour each way. This did not appear to deter them from studying, even though it was sometimes expensive and time consuming. One woman was offered a place at a college that was a considerable distance from her home and spoke about the difficulties involved in trying to get there:

“Travel costs, because [location of college] is quite far – and that course they offered me was in the evening between 6–9pm. Of which there is no bus coming that way and I don’t drive.” Interviewee 5

Given that travel costs could be significant for this group, some of the interviewees had sought support from their learning providers to help cover them. One interviewee was not entitled to any money for fares as she did not have her status although she was receiving asylum support. Some British citizens on the course did get given a bus ticket but she was told as she did not have status she was not eligible (Interviewee 16). One woman requested help with travel and was told if she attended full time she would have got help with bus fares but as she was going for two days a week they could not. Sometimes she used to walk over two miles to get to the college (Interviewee 18). Another woman (Interviewee 13) asked her college if she could have support to buy a bus pass, but they refused. It transpired that the reason for the refusal was because of the qualification level she had achieved in her country of origin. She explained:

“And then because I am writing down that I have certificate from my country and then he sent me a letter

'we are not accepting for helping for travel pass...we can't help you for anything because you have certificate from your country'. It made me upset and angry and I ring them and talk to him and say 'listen I know I have certificate from my country but I can't use it. I have nothing, I can't use it, same as in the bin, and the travel is difficult so it is better to stay at home than pay expensive bus and then catch two buses there and two buses back...He says 'up to you, you can stay at home. You don't have to come to college, we just pay if you have no certificate in your country.' Interviewee 13

One learner spoke of having had a bus pass in the past from colleges, but this ceased causing him difficulties getting to his place of study:

"It has been a struggle. In certain areas I have been using my legs to walk to and from colleges and at times you find it really very, very difficult in terms of catching time, in terms of when it is raining or terrible winter, you find it hard...The situation is worsening...You could struggle but it's times when you talk to the tutor or head of section and tell them, look, I'm always late and there is a reason. I sleep in this area and this is the distance, and they are like 'ok, we shall give you a bus pass this week', 'tomorrow we shall help you'...At this moment in time it is quite difficult because most of the colleges don't give bus passes".

[Interviewer: But you've had a bus pass in the past from your colleges?]

"Yes, some colleges, yes. And some may still be 50:50. So for example recently I almost dropped out of my course. I spent one month without going because they had taken me to a different place and it was very far and I couldn't manage with Azure card...so it was hard for me...I have managed to get a bus pass from one of the organisations who said OK, have 3 days as a volunteer, be active and we will give you a bus pass. And that is how managing the course at the moment." Interviewee 7

This interviewee found creative ways to support his learning, such as volunteering for organisations who would then cover his travel costs which enabled him to more easily reach college. As the Azure card can only be used in specific retail outlets, people are unable to purchase bus tickets or passes.

Some of the learners, however, did have positive experiences. One learner described receiving what she thought was government-funded learner support fund, which amounted to £50 to cover her travel for three months. Another (Interviewee 17) mentioned that the person running the course would give her the bus fare and sometimes money for lunch. It was unclear from this story whether this was from the tutor's own pocket, rather than from the learning provider itself, but the learner did make clear that she would have not been able to study had she not received this assistance.

Childcare

Several providers noted that childcare was something that learners need extra support with, and they had thought of ways that they could provide help in this area. It was reported that one local authority education service could not sustain the childcare they provided due to a lack of funding.

"We used to have a crèche, but we have had to close it because there isn't sufficient funding and we don't have anything to replace it. It's very difficult for learners with children if they don't have anyone to help them." ESOL manager, ACL, West Midlands

Another provider noted that arrangements had been made with nearby childcare providers to lower the cost for learners.

"We have links to local nurseries and they have offered places on reduced fees for children of learners. Childcare is a big barrier so reduced nursery fees is great. We have supported some learners with childcare costs in the past." Programme manager, WBL, North West

Being unable to meet childcare needs is likely to disadvantage women more than men, resulting in an inability to engage in learning.

Access to learning resources

As asylum seekers usually leave their homes with few belongings and live on little support while in the UK, accessing equipment to help with their studying can be difficult. Having access to computer resources was a further practical barrier that the interviewees referred to both for searching for courses and employment opportunities but also as computer use is often required as part of undertaking specific courses. One learner spoke of how difficult it was to find access to a computer. He spoke of having to use several public libraries to access the internet as he said he was only able to have access in each library for one hour maximum (Interviewee 2).

Another woman explained how she was enjoying the course that she was enrolled on but the assignments were a difficulty without having regular access to a computer. She felt that there were too many assignments as every day she had to go and look things up on the computer and she did not have any computer or internet at home so she had to go to the library where there were limited hours (Interviewee 17).

One learner noted some practical support given by a tutor that enabled her to complete her homework:

“I had no cassette at home and the teacher said you came in early and I’ll give you a cassette, CD and the book, go to separate room and sit there and listening and reading. She really helped us.” Interviewee 13

In addition to more expensive equipment such as computers and cassette players, for the learner in this sample who was receiving Section 4 support, even buying basic things like pads of paper proved very difficult.

“I have considered buying these materials [stationery] using Azure card in the shops I go to, but whenever you are buying them it is a tug of war, negotiation, appealing and requesting and kneeling down, so the movement hasn’t been much because colleges don’t give any materials, starting from pen or anything. So, you go to [a major supermarket] with paper, and you go to the desk and they say ‘this is not food, are you going to eat paper?’. And you say please, this is money, ‘it’s for food’. You see, first of all there is a lack of information on Azure card...so some workers think that it is primarily for food and when you are talking about food they are looking at bread, looking at spaghetti, looking at beans, peas, tomatoes, but when you bring this on, the paper, they say ‘are you going to eat paper, this is not food’.” Interviewee 7

Such seemingly low cost items not only make a significant dent in a weekly budget of just over £35, but the purchase of a notepad was prohibited by a retailer. The provision of stationery to learners in these circumstances could be something that learning providers could do at relatively little cost.

Summary

This chapter discussed the types of support, financial and otherwise, that refugees and asylum seekers may need to allow them to engage in learning. Being unable to access, or unaware of, funding streams available for other groups of low income learners leaves asylum seekers at a disadvantage, and a lack of awareness of organisations that can provide support means that they are missing out. Resources to help with travel costs, child care, computer facilities and stationery would be of great benefit to asylum seekers in particular, and could mean the difference between learning and not doing so.

22 Just under a quarter (24 per cent, 17 respondents) did not know whether their organisation had a hardship fund available to refugees and/or asylum seekers.

8 Addressing the needs of refugees and asylum seekers

“The hardest part of my job is when I have to tell someone they aren’t able to study... it’s horrendous to have to say no to someone... they often cry and tell me that all they have heard since coming to UK is no.”
Student advisor, FE college, Yorkshire and Humberside

This chapter discusses some of the issues not focused upon previously, and suggestions of what is needed to better enable refugees and asylum seekers to participate in learning. It will initially focus on what refugees and asylum seekers and learning providers felt about their interactions with each other, and will then highlight issues that need to be addressed to improve opportunities to learn.

The material discussed in this chapter mainly comes from the qualitative data collection, and many of the suggestions about what learning providers felt they needed to help them work better with refugees and asylum seekers. This information was given in response to a question about the types of guidance they would like to help them understand and entitlements, funding and support, but many broader needs were identified.

The refugees and asylum seekers interviewed were asked their views of learning providers they had contact with, and expressed a range of perceptions. Twelve of the interviewees described their experiences as positive and found the staff to be ‘supportive’, ‘helpful’ and ‘friendly’, some with the caveat of this applying only after they had actually got on the course but not before. Others commented that they had not experienced any problems and had found everyone very helpful:

“I think the learning environment has been so conducive that it has helped me to do whatever I am doing there and be successful in all of the courses. I have not had any problem with any college, so I have no regrets.” Interviewee 7

“I didn’t see any discrimination actually. I think it’s alright, of course I didn’t see all the colleges and universities, but from my experience I didn’t see any discrimination, any differentiation. That’s good. All my education here, all my training experience here is, all people were helpful always. It was good, it was very good.” Interviewee 19

Nearly half of the providers surveyed thought there were no specific or major problems in working with learners who were refugees or asylum seekers. The difficulties that were identified included lack of childcare, levels of English language and insecure housing status. Issues related to the education system that were raised included the complicated nature of completing paperwork, which put pressure on staff in organisations, the necessity to have clear explanations and guidance for the different education systems and the narrow entitlements for learners. Some of these will be elaborated upon below.

Awareness and understanding of refugee issues

Although many in the sample did have positive experiences in accessing post-16 provision as illustrated above there were several whose experiences had been less positive. Some of the negative comments made by refugees and asylum seekers about learning providers arose from what the learners regarded as a lack of general knowledge and awareness about refugees:

“I identified the need for stopping this myth [about who refugees and asylum seekers are] I found there was a lack of knowledge about refugees and asylum seekers.” Interviewee 8

“Very importantly not to assume that refugees/asylum seekers are uneducated. There are a lot of false perceptions in the media and in schools that filter through to admissions people and they often just don’t want refugees/asylum seekers to join.” Interviewee 6

Several interviewees had experienced difficulties due to the lack of understanding and awareness amongst staff at some organisations and in some cases the negative attitudes about the abilities of asylum seekers and refugees. They spoke of the need for “*more research on the experience of newcomers*”; and of not “*assuming refugees and asylum seekers are uneducated*”.

“I would appreciate if the system would consider that asylum seekers are people – you just can’t play with our emotions. I think the system takes asylum seekers as just walkovers you know – ‘they can’t be educated’ whether you teach them or you train them you cannot accomplish that out of them’.” Interviewee 5

Another interviewee, who works for an organisation that supports refugees and asylum seekers described his experience and the need for an acknowledgement from voluntary sector organisations of the difficulties that these learners face:

“I don’t want to use the word ignorance because it is a hard word, but I found actually even today, even within the [refugee supporting organisation I work for] there is a perception of thinking that things are OK. Like at the frontline when we are talking to clients, including myself, we are like ‘go to college. You apply for this course and you do it’, but actually we don’t go to these colleges to find out what is happening here.” Interviewee 8

This was recognised by representatives of the learning providers interviewed who expressed a desire for themselves, and others within their organisations to have a better awareness and understanding of refugee issues. This request started at a very rudimentary level for one provider, who recognised the limitations of staff knowledge about forced migration and so suggested some “*basic awareness training...something simple and quick to use on the different terms e.g. refugee, asylum seeker, economic migrant – some people don’t know the difference.*” Programme manager, WBL provider, North West

There were requests for knowledge about refugee issues to be shared among all staff, including information on the processes asylum seekers have to go through, the forms they have to complete and the support they can receive, as illustrated below:

“Guidance on the forms that asylum seekers and refugees have to complete would be useful (like forms from Home Office, not college documents). They often ask us for help and we don’t know about this, we can’t help them. Guidance and awareness raising on the difficulties that they face with basic needs. I know about this but I think many across the college don’t and it would be good to raise awareness [so people understand] they don’t drop out because they don’t want or value education. Guidance on what support from government they are entitled to. Often it seems that they are supposed to have access to caseworker within a short time but then they come to me and have been in UK for many months and have not heard of a caseworker and have no support. I don’t know what to do in these instances. Information on how they can get into the system, like getting an NI number, when can I expect them to know about these things and treat them as UK students? Even if they are classed as home students they need lots of support.”
Guidance officer, FE college, North West

Working with relevant organisations

The provider above illustrates the fact that learners turn to their staff for help with things that are broader than just those relating to the courses they are taking and academic needs. Forty per cent of the providers surveyed had links with local Refugee Community Organisations. A range of organisations were referred to, the majority of which were nationality-specific groups covering countries such as Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Somalia. National agencies, such as the Refugee Council and Refugee Action were also mentioned. These links can help providers to support learners, but the majority of survey respondents did not have these connections.

Requests for information about local organisations that support refugees and asylum seekers were made by several providers, so they can signpost people to places where they can get support on issues that

providers' staff are unable to help with. There was an emphasis placed on the desire for information that was relevant to where they were located, rather than at a national level.

"Flyers should be local and explain who the refugees and asylum seekers are in our local area, like where they come from, how long they will stay." Assistant principal, 6th form college, West Midlands

"Information to give to refugees and asylum seekers if we can't help them. Information on local organisation who can, often I'm not sure if the contacts we give them to local organisation are useful." Registry Manager, FE college, London

"It has to be relevant to our specific locality, anything related to the situation nationally generally isn't very relevant. Each specific provider and the local area is different and this needs to be taken into account when producing guidance." ESOL manager, ACL provider, North West

Some learning providers had made links with organisations in their areas, and knew of the types of provision and support on offer that refugees and asylum seekers could benefit from. One provider gave two examples:

"There is a local voluntary sector that we work with, we are not strong on courses for women- we are trying to improve this- we refer women to local voluntary organisation who offer ESOL and other courses specifically for women. They often provide childcare on site, which is an issue for us – we can't do that as we don't have the funding.

There is a home tutor network and this is also a local resource that we refer refugees and asylum seekers to if we can't provide for them, again often because of childcare issues. These are volunteer teachers, often refugees or asylum seekers themselves and they can also provide additional support, which is useful for exam time." English language centre manager, FE college, South West

Having knowledge of what is available beyond their own organisations can help to broaden opportunities for those who cannot access formal provision for reasons of entitlement or other barriers to learning.

Limitations of courses on offer and developing specific provision

Some refugees and asylum seekers voiced frustration at being unable to join the type of courses and training they wished to study. One interviewee had contacted lots of colleges about enrolling to do A' Levels and in doing so, tried to sell himself by telling them about his previous experience and qualifications. However, he was told that as an adult student he was not entitled to study A' levels as they are not financially supported by the government. This issue is something that is shared by all adults over 24 years old in England who do not qualify for full fee remission at Level 3, but there are also restrictions placed upon asylum seekers, because of their immigration status, which restricts access to particular courses.

"I'm not allowed to do nursing because I'm an asylum seeker. It's very limited – only a few things I can do and nine-tenths of them are all boring – hair and beauty, flower arrangement – useless courses. Do you want to do something that you don't use – but you can say you have a degree in this?! I can't have a degree in flower arrangement... "It's heartbreaking – it's sad – I'm labelled, I feel that I'm just put in this bottle and told 'just stay here you can't move'." Interviewee 5

Some SFA funded vocational training requires people to have permission to work, so asylum seekers will have limited access to these courses. Asylum seekers tend to be restricted to vocational training that is delivered by colleges (i.e. not work-based learning) and unpaid work placements can sometimes be permitted (Refugee Council, 2011). This can cause a sense of frustration and unfairness, as illustrated by the quotation. Restrictions around what people are allowed to study led to one provider specifically calling for "a whole change in government policy" (Diversity manager, FE college, East Midlands).

One provider highlighted a particular issue that young people can face when they have arrived in the UK late in their secondary education. It is documented elsewhere that those who arrive in the UK in the last few

years of compulsory schooling can face significant difficulties in accessing school places (Walker, 2011; Doyle and McCorrison, 2008). Those who do secure education placements may not be able to achieve GCSEs due to a disrupted educational career, and because they may have arrived in the UK without knowledge of the English language. Refugee Council staff working with young people report difficulties in finding appropriate GCSE courses at colleges and the vast majority of these are designed for people who wish to retake their exams and are therefore familiar with the curriculum. Those who need to start from scratch often cannot find the correct type of course to suit their requirements and are forced down different qualification routes. Having encountered this issue with a group of learners, this FE college described a creative solution they developed to address this type of problem in order to assist a group of refugees from Afghanistan to access the courses that would help them in their chosen career direction.

“We had a significant problem two years ago when we had a cluster of five Afghan boys who came here after secondary school; they had only been in secondary school for around 6–9 months and had no GCSEs and were unable to access any of the courses that we offer because they just didn’t have the prior knowledge. We decided to put on a bridge year, during which they received ESOL provision, Maths, IT. We then created a low level motor mechanics course (motor mechanics was their chosen area of study) – after one year on this bridge course they were able to progress to a regular motor mechanics course.” Student adviser, FE College Yorkshire and Humber

The development of specific provision for this group enabled them to engage with learning at the college in a subject that they were interested in, while also giving them broader skills such as English, Maths and IT. It should be acknowledged that this type of response will not always be possible due to current funding constraints, and one provider specifically stated *“there is no point telling schools and colleges to take on refugees when they don’t have any funding and we can’t provide for them”*. Assistant principal, Sixth Form college, West Midlands

The funding levels for ESOL, which has a high take up by refugees and asylum seekers, was being reduced soon after the data collection took place. While there were some concessions in terms of opening up access more broadly than was originally proposed (as discussed in chapter 2), learning providers were having to make plans at that time for their offer in the forthcoming year. Learning providers surveyed were asked if they were going to change their ESOL delivery in the following academic year. Of those who did deliver ESOL, half highlighted that they were going to be making changes to their ESOL offer for 2011/12 and just under a quarter of the whole sample were unsure as to whether they would make any changes to their ESOL offer. As some of the rules changed between the data collection their commencement, it is unclear to what extent the learning providers changed their ESOL delivery, but respondents suggested the scale of provision will be downsized; be it through staff cut backs, or student numbers, with possible changes in funding arrangements where those who do not qualify for fee remission being subject to increased fees. The worst case scenario for some organisations would be to cease ESOL provision entirely.

Accepting prior experience from country of origin

When trying to access education in this country one of the difficulties that interviewees faced was that of not having their prior educational and training experiences and qualifications valued, an issue that has been identified elsewhere (see for example Ragu, 2007) One interviewee suggested that being able to take free short courses to allow for conversion of qualifications could be something that would help. Another commented:

“Education and training that refugees already have needs to be accepted and there should be tests rather than relying on documents, which refugees often don’t have. Refugees should not be expected to have to start education all over again.” Interviewee 6

It is important that people are given the opportunity to study at the level that is most appropriate to them, so that time and other resources are not spent repeating what has gone before rather than providing the opportunity to progress.

Support for individuals when in education

Several providers acknowledged that some refugees and asylum seekers may need different types of help and support when studying than other groups of learners. This was an acknowledgement of being unfamiliar with the education system, as well as lacking the support networks that others will usually have. One provider noted that refugees can feel stigmatised and isolated, and putting peer support mechanisms in place can help to reduce this and increase inclusion:

“We need to acknowledge that refugees and asylum seekers have needs and they need to be addressed, but doing it in subtle ways. For example, refugees and asylum seekers may not know what a mentor is, so won’t take up the offer of one, but they didn’t take up the offer because they didn’t know what it was. It’s about identifying people early but not stigmatising them – often they don’t want their tutors to know about their refugee status on the mainstream courses. They can feel it’s a stigma and it’s embarrassing. One refugee learner was involved in an art exhibition as part of their course and families were invited and the learner pretended to be sick because they didn’t want to admit they didn’t have any family in this country as it’s embarrassing, so kept it quiet. Peer support works really well. Those on mainstream courses may be the only refugee or asylum seeker on their course which is very isolating – they need to feel included and supported.” Diversity manager, FE college, East Midlands

This provider also felt that to be able to develop support mechanisms that respond to the needs of this group of learners, there needs to be support for this effort from the senior managers in the college, and a positive message communicated by staff.

“They need support from the top. They put together a refugee strategy and took it to senior management and they heard the experiences of one individual which made a huge difference – hearing the personal account and the individual case makes a huge difference and having commitment from the top. A senior manager arranged that during the whole week of Refugee Week everyone in the college had a line added to their email auto-signature saying “[Name of] College welcomes asylum seekers and refugees”. Diversity manager, FE college, East Midlands

Engaging hard to reach groups

During the provider interviews, participants were asked if there are any groups of refugees and asylum seekers they found particularly hard to reach with their current provision. Three providers thought that there were no groups that were particularly hard to reach, one of whom noted that they were approached by many proactive and confident refugees and asylum seekers who were likely to succeed in education. Another stressed that demand exceeded supply so they could not cater for all those who wished for places on courses. Two providers were unsure as they were not really aware of particular communities that need to be reached, but one referred to their links with a local network that works with refugees so they hope to have identified needs through them.

One sixth form college felt that there were people who had the ability to study at the level they provided, but sometimes lacked the confidence to be able to cope with the system and therefore miss out on opportunities available to them. Three providers below identified that women in particular can face additional barriers sometimes linked to childcare needs but also in terms of different cultural norms:

“Women with young children, they are not hard to reach, but it is hard to satisfy and accommodate. It is difficult to find childcare.” FE college, South West

“The spouses of some of the communities can be hard to reach as their eligibility can be complicated.” ACL provider, East Midlands

“The Congolese community – it was more difficult to reach women than men – the same applies with the Bengali population. There are gender issues.” ACL provider, Eastern region

Two providers also identified particular sections of refugee communities that they felt were not being reached; the Congolese community mentioned above and the recently-arrived Afghan population:

“Afghan communities have been more difficult to reach because there are a newly arrived community and so no community organisations have yet been established, and they simply haven’t been here as long as other communities so the infrastructure has not yet been established.” Senior manager, ACL provider, East Midlands

Another provider talks about the difficulties that some refugees face in terms of improving their language and written skills and their solution to supporting these learners:

“Refugees who have been here for a number of years (8–10 years) and who want to improve their written English skills. They are often embarrassed and therefore don’t want to do a course with English people in it. We have provided writing courses specifically for refugees who fall in this category, but often attendance dwindles due to frustration about how long it takes to write well. It is slow progress and often they just don’t realise this initially.” English Language centre manager, FE College, South West

The first response by the ACL provider highlights the importance of local community organisations in helping refugees and asylum seekers to access educational services within their local areas. Without these organisations, the Afghan community were not making their way to the college. The second example displayed a willingness to adapt provision to make it more suitable for the refugee population, but unfortunately the new offer did not succeed as anticipated.

Easy read guide to entitlements

As discussed in previous chapters, the situation surrounding eligibility and funding for refugees and asylum seekers is complex, and something that both learning providers and individuals identified as confusing. At the outset of this research, there was a recognition that people could benefit from some clear and easy to interpret guidance on this issue, as the rules relating to it are often contained in weighty documents that rely upon the ability to understand funding structures. There was agreement that this would be beneficial from providers:

“We look at guidance from SFA but it is often very complicated, it would be good to have a simple, easy-read guide of what they government says we should do.” Guidance officer, FE college, North West

“A resource that’s kept up-to-date and contains everything providers needs in one place. The SFA should put it on their website and house it – it could contain home office information as well.” Senior manager, ACL provider, East Midlands

In the absence of clear information, there is a danger that people will be denied access to courses to which they are entitled.

Summary

This chapter has highlighted some of the barriers that refugees and asylum seekers face when trying to access post-16 learning, and the difficulties learning providers can face when trying to meet the needs of this group. While most of the refugees and asylum seekers in this sample had overall positive experiences of the places where they had learnt, both individuals and learning providers expressed the need for staff to develop a greater understanding of refugee issues in order to be able to open up access and support learners in appropriate ways.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

This research has discussed refugees' and asylum seekers' experiences of post-16 learning from the perspective of refugees and asylum seekers themselves, and a range of learning providers in England. The findings echo those of other research carried out on this issue, illustrating that many of the concerns raised about access to learning over many years are yet to be addressed.

The context of this research was a confusing range of entitlements to access courses and support for this group of learners, and the fact that some of rules and systems changed during the life time of the project serves to illustrate the difficulties potential learners, advisers and staff in learning providers face when determining who can do what. Taking this with a general lack of awareness of refugee issues, there is much scope for incorrect advice to be given resulting in people being denied opportunities to learn.

Even though this research was not about higher education, many of the refugees and asylum seekers we interviewed had been trying to access that sector, and were facing significant problems. It was beyond the scope of this study to fully investigate this, but there are still some fundamental structural barriers that exist which prevent those who have successfully navigated post-16 education from continuing their studies.

Recommendations

Funding agencies and learning providers should produce good quality information to support and inform refugees and asylum seekers of what they are entitled to, and help them to navigate the system.

Those offering advice and guidance to refugees and asylum seekers need to understand that those with no prior knowledge of the English education system will benefit from a well informed adviser who can tailor advice to their circumstances. Staff may need specific training to understand entitlements and potential barriers.

Learning providers should ensure that all staff dealing with refugee and asylum seeker learners have an understanding appropriate to their role e.g. reception and admission staff as well as tutors.

Learning providers should provide alternatives to online application and registration processes as this can exclude people in this group, especially those still in the asylum process.

Learning providers need to be flexible about the requirements for documents to support applications from refugees and asylum seekers, as most will not have passports and may have a range of identity documents issued by government departments.

Learners should be made aware of the rules around eligibility to study once they have received a negative decision on their asylum application mid-way through a course.

Policy on funding for those in the asylum process in England should follow the example of the Scottish government to increase access to education.

Learning providers should acknowledge the gaps in financial support for asylum seekers and support applications for funds to which they are entitled.

Learning providers should ensure that there is adequate provision for learners to access computers at suitable hours or adjust assignments to accommodate learners without access to IT provision.

Learning providers should offer stationery and other appropriate in kind support to those provided support under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Learning providers should develop links with their local refugee communities and associated support organisations.

Where viable, learning providers should consider developing additional support within and around course material that will assist refugees and asylum seekers in their learning e.g. peer support, orientation and/or mentoring schemes.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire for learning providers

Research has identified that refugees and asylum seekers can face a range of barriers to education and training in England. Accessing learning is an important aspect of refugee integration, but the complexity of the system can lead to confusion among potential learners, education and training providers and those advising and supporting individuals.

This survey is being carried out by LSN and the Refugee Council as part of a research project funded by the Nuffield Foundation. The purpose of this survey is to explore the impact of policy and practice relating to educational entitlements, admissions policies and support for refugees and asylum seekers by considering the experiences of admissions staff across post-16 education sector in England.

As principal staff members that **advise and support potential learners**, your insight is very important. The questionnaire should take no longer than **10 minutes** to complete. Your answers will be treated in strict confidence by the research team and will not be attributed to you in any way. If you are experiencing any technical difficulties regarding the online survey, or require a paper-based version of the questionnaire, please contact the LSN Survey Team at surveysresearch@lsnlearning.org.uk or 0207 492 5168.

The closing date for this survey is **21st March 2011**.

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution.

Section 1: About you and your organisation

1. In your current role, are you involved in providing formal information, advice and guidance to learners and/or potential learners on any of the following? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Course/s and qualifications Enrolment processes Admissions policy Student finances
 Campus and facility information None of the above

2. Please indicate the type of organisation you work in: *(Please select one option only)*

- Further education college Sixth form college Work-based learning provider Local Authority
 Adult and community learning provider Other

If 'Other', please specify in the space provided below:

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Name of your organisation (optional): *(This information is being collected in order to monitor responses and will not be used to identify individuals)*

.....

4. Job Title: *(Please state your full job title in the space provide below)*

.....

5. Please indicate the region that your organisation is based in: *(Please select one option only)*

- East of England
- East Midlands
- Greater London
- North East
- North West
- South East
- South West
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire and the Humber
- Other

If 'Other', please specify in the space provided below:

Please indicate the Local Authority that your organisation is based in:

6. Please indicate the approximate size of your organisation in terms of learner numbers: *(Please select one option only)*

- Less than 50 learners
- 51–100 learners
- 101–250 learners
- 251–400 learners
- 401–600 learners
- More than 600 learners

Section 2: Admissions

Definitions:

An **asylum seeker** is a person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been determined.

In the UK, a person is officially a **refugee** when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government or by the Judicial system thereafter.

7. Approximately how many learners on your organisation's roll are refugees? *(Please select one option only)*

- Less than 10
- 10–29 learners
- 30–49 learners
- 50–99 learners
- More than 100 learners
- Not sure

8. Approximately how many learners on your organisation's roll are asylum seekers? *(Please select one option only)*

- Less than 10
- 10–29 learners
- 30–49 learners
- 50–99 learners
- More than 100 learners
- Not sure

9. Do you have experience of providing formal information, advice and guidance to individuals who are refugees and/or asylum seekers on any of the following: *(Please select all that apply)*

	Refugees	Asylum seekers
Course/s and qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enrolment processes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Admissions Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student finances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Campus and facility information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Do you have any other experience of working with individuals who are refugees and/or asylum seekers seeking to engage in learning?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If 'Yes', please describe instances where you have worked with refugees and/or asylum seekers, in relation to your current role. *(Please specify in the space provided below)*

.....

.....

.....

Section 2: Admissions

11. Does your organisation's marketing material include information, advice and guidance (IAG) sources for refugees and/or asylum seekers on any of the following: *(Please select one option per row only)*

	Not at all	A little	To some extent	To a large extent	Don't know
• Access to courses	<input type="checkbox"/>				
• Orientation information for those unfamiliar with the UK education systems	<input type="checkbox"/>				
• Specialist advice and guidance services	<input type="checkbox"/>				
• Exploring alternatives routes regarding eligibility to different courses (i.e. bridging courses or programmes to move refugees into mainstream education)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

12. Does your organisation have specific processes in place for supporting refugees and/or asylum seekers during the admissions phase?

Yes No Not sure

If 'Yes', briefly outline what this includes (i.e. key stages of this process) *(Please specify in the space provided below)*

.....

.....

13. Does your organisation seek support from other organisations when working with refugees and/or asylum seekers during the admissions process?

Yes No Not sure

If 'Yes', please specify which organisations and what help they provide? *(Please list in the space below)*

.....

.....

Section 3: Funding

14. To what extent are you aware of national policies related to eligibility to study (course criteria) for refugees and/or asylum seekers seeking to access learning? *(Please select one option only)*

Not at all A little To some extent To a large extent

15. To what extent are you aware of national policies related to eligibility for fee liability (course fees) for refugees and/or asylum seekers seeking to access learning? *(Please select one option only)*

Not at all A little To some extent To a large extent

16. What guidance do you use when assessing whether somebody is eligible to study and qualifies for fee remission? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Skills Funding Agency (SFA) learner eligibility guidance
- Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) learner eligibility guidance
- Local Authority guidance
- Guidance produced by your own organisation
- National Apprenticeship Service guidance
- Other
- None

If 'Other', please specify in the space provided below:

.....
.....

17. What factors do you take into consideration when assessing a refugees' and/or asylum seekers' eligibility to access statutory funded provision? *(Please specify in the space below)*

.....
.....

18. What documents do you ask refugees and/or asylum seekers to show when assessing their eligibility to study? *(Please specify in the space below)*

.....
.....

19. If your organisation delivers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, have the funding changes had an impact on your offer of ESOL provision for the next academic year (2011/12)? *(Please select one option only)*

- We do not deliver ESOL courses
- We do deliver ESOL courses, and are making no changes to our provision
- We do deliver ESOL courses, and we are making changes to our provision
- Not sure

How are you changing it? *(Please comment specifically with regards to your offer to refugees and asylum seekers)*

.....
.....

Section 4: Support mechanisms

20. This academic year have you allocated Discretionary Learner Support (DLS) Funds to refugees and/or asylum seekers enrolled at your organisation?

- Yes No Not sure

21. Given recent Government changes, will you be changing the way you distribute DLS Funds?

- Yes No Not sure

How are you planning to change it? *(Please specify in the space below)*

.....
.....

22. Does your organisation have its own 'Hardship' fund that can be accessed by refugees and/or asylum seekers?

- Yes No Not sure

If 'Yes', briefly outline your organisation's eligibility criteria for support in the space below:

.....
.....

23. Do you offer refugees and/or asylum seekers any other types of support/services that will help them to access learning?

Yes No Not sure

If 'Yes', please specify in the space provided below:

.....
.....

24. Do you signpost refugees and/or asylum seekers to trusts and/or organisations that may be able to provide financial support to help them in accessing learning at your organisation?

Yes No Not sure

If 'Yes', please specify in the space provided below:

.....
.....

Section 5: Working with refugee communities

25. Does your organisation do any additional promotion/publicity work on top of its usual marketing, which is specifically targeted to refugee and/or asylum seekers?

Yes No Not sure

If 'Yes', please specify in the space provided below:

.....
.....

26. Does your organisation have links with local Refugee Community Organisations?

Yes No Not sure

If 'Yes', please specify in the space provided below:

.....
.....

Section 6: Additional comments

Would you be willing to participate in any follow-up interviews to discuss your responses in more detail?

Yes No

Please provide your name and contact details below:

Name: Phone number:

Email address:

Any other comments? Please use the space below to comment on any other issues picked up in this survey.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

Appendix 2

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Learning providers

Research has identified that refugees and asylum seekers can face a range of barriers to education and training in England. Accessing learning is an important aspect of refugee integration, but the complexity of the system can lead to confusion among potential learners, education and training providers and those advising and supporting individuals.

This interview is being carried out by LSN and the Refugee Council as part of a research project funded by the Nuffield Foundation. The purpose is to explore the impact of policy and practice relating to educational entitlements, admissions policies and support for refugees and asylum seekers by considering the experiences of admissions staff across post-16 education sector in England.

As a principal staff member who advises and supports potential learners, your insight is very important. Your answers will be treated in strict confidence by the research team and will not be attributed to you in any way.

Background information

1. What type of organisation do you work for? (*E.g. FE college, Sixth form college, specialist college, WBL provided, LEA, ACL*)
.....
2. What types of courses do you provide? (*Explore what the provider does*)
.....
3. What region and local authority is your organisation based in?
.....
4. Approximately how many employees work in your organisation?
.....
5. Does your organisation work with learners/potential learners who are asylum seekers or refugees?
.....
If yes,
 - Approximately how many learners are asylum seekers?
 - Approximately how many learners are refugees?
6. What is your current job title?
.....
7. Could you briefly outline what your role involves? (*Explore role related to provision of formal information, advice and guidance to students and/or potential students*)
.....
.....

8. Would you describe yourself as having personal experience of working with learners/potential learners who are asylum seekers or refugees?

.....
.....

If yes, in what capacity have you worked with learners/potential learners with refugee status?

.....
.....

9. What do you understand to be an 'asylum seeker'?

.....
.....

10. ... and what do you understand to be a 'refugee'?

.....
.....

An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been determined.

In the UK, a person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government or by the judicial system thereafter.

A) Admissions

11. Does your organisation have a specific policy/process for asylum seekers and refugees during the admissions process?

.....

12. Does your organisation offer specific services to support asylum seekers and refugees during the admissions process?

.....

If yes,

• How do these learners/potential learners access your services during the admissions process?
(E.g. referrals, walk-in, word of mouth)

.....

• When can learners/potential learners use the services during the admissions process?
(Consider opening hours, drop in or by appointment)

.....

13. Can you explain which asylum seekers and refugees are eligible to study at your organisation and why?

.....
.....

14. What documents do you ask for from refugees and asylum seekers to assess eligibility to study?
(E.g. ID, proof of immigration status, proof of address, proof of previous qualifications/experience, CRB checks for some courses)

.....
.....

15. Are there asylum seekers or refugees who you do not admit that you do not work with?

.....
If yes, who are the people you do not work with and why do you not work with them?

.....
(Please await explanation and **do not** prompt. Possible explanations may include the following).

- Funding
- Immigration regulations/procedures/laws
- Fear of fines for incorrectly admitting migrants
- Age not known/disputed
- Asylum seekers/refugees not having appropriate ID/passports
- Asylum seekers /refugees not having permanent residency/proof of address
- Asylum seekers/refugees not being CRB checked/not having documentation to allow for CRB checking

16. Are there any courses that you do not admit asylum seekers and/or refugees on? (Probe particularly about vocational training that include a work-based element)

.....
If yes, which ones and why?

17. Does your organisation seek support from other organisations when working with refugees and asylum seekers during the admissions process?

.....
If yes, which other organisations?

18. Does your organisation do any additional promotion/publicity work in addition to its usual marketing, which is specifically targeted at asylum seekers or refugees? (Prompt: ensure both asylum seekers and refugees are covered)

.....
If yes, what kind?

.....
If no, are there any specific reasons for this? (E.g. funding)

19. "Refugee Community Organisations are run by and for refugees. They provide advice and support, often informally, and act as bridges to mainstream services and other local groups". Does your organisation have links with local Refugee Community Organisations?

.....
If yes, how did you establish these links and what do these links involve?

.....
If no, are there any specific reasons for this?

B) Funding

20. Can you explain which asylum seekers and refugees are eligible for funding to study at your organisation and why?

.....

21. How do you find out about funding sources available to asylum seekers and refugees?

.....

22. What guidance do you use to find out about funding available to asylum seekers and refugees?
(E.g. Skills Funding Agency (SFA) learner eligibility guidance, Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA) learner eligibility guidance, Local Authority guidance, Guidance produced by your own organisation, National Apprenticeship Service guidance)

.....

23. What kind of funding is available to asylum seekers and refugees?
(E.g. fee remission, partial fee remission, fee waiver, hardship fund, Discretionary Learner Support fund, Charitable Trusts, support with loans for fees)

.....

24. This academic year have you allocated Discretionary Learner Support (DLS) Funds to asylum seekers or refugees enrolled at your organisation?

.....

Why/why not?

.....

25. Given recent Government changes, will you be changing the way you distribute DLS Funds?

.....

If yes:

- How are you planning to change it?
- How do you think this will impact on learners/potential learners who are refugees/asylum seekers?

.....

26. Does your organisation have its own ‘Hardship’ fund that can be accessed by asylum seekers or refugees? (Prompt: ensure that answers are given for both asylum seekers and refugees)

.....

If yes, what is the eligibility criteria?

.....

If no, are there any specific reasons for this?

.....

27. Does your organisation offer asylum seekers and/or refugees any other types of financial support that will help them to access learning?

.....

28. Are there any particular issues/problems in your organisation gaining funding to support asylum seekers and refugees?

.....

(Probe:

- *lack of information/difficulty of process/competition with other similar groups/lack of transparency of the process).*
- *lack of funding for specific courses)*

If yes, is there any one thing that would improve this situation?

.....

If your organisation delivers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, have the funding changes had an impact on your offer of ESOL provision for the next academic year (2011/12)?

.....

If yes, how?

.....

.....

29. Does your organisation signpost asylum seekers and refugees to trusts and/or organisations that may be able to provide financial support to help them in accessing learning at your organisation?

.....

If yes, who do you signpost to and how does this occur?

.....

If no, are there any specific reasons for this?

.....

30. What barriers other than funding are there to asylum seekers and refugees being admitted to courses at your organisation?

.....

E.g.

- Asylum seekers/refugees not having the necessary qualifications/experience
- Insufficient level of English
- Asylum seekers/refugees not having the necessary entry requirements, such as IT skills, being able to type etc.

C) Provision

31. Have you encountered any significant problems in delivering your provision to asylum seekers and refugees?

.....

If yes, why?

.....

32. Are there any groups of asylum seeker and refugees that you consider particularly hard to reach with your current provision?

.....

If yes, why? How could services be made more accessible to these groups?

.....

Concluding questions

33. As a result of this research we will be producing guidance to guide further education providers in supporting asylum seekers and refugees. What kind of guidance would you welcome/ what would be useful for your organisation?

.....
.....
.....
.....

34. Is there anything else that you would like to add that may be useful for this project?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you!

Appendix 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Refugees & asylum seekers

The Refugee Council and LSN are carrying out research investigating refugees' and asylum seekers' experiences of accessing post-16 education (excluding higher education).

Research has identified that refugees and asylum seekers can face a range of barriers to education and training in England. Accessing learning is an important aspect of refugee integration, but the complexity of the system can lead to confusion among potential learners, education and training providers and those advising and supporting individuals.

In this interview you will be asked about your experiences of studying and training in the UK. Your answers will be confidential and you will remain anonymous. Please answer with as much detail as possible, but feel free to not answer questions if you are not happy to do so.

Background information

1. How long have you been in the UK?
.....
2. What is your immigration status?
.....
3. How do you currently support yourself financially? **Prompt:** government support/benefits/work/family, etc.
.....
4. Did you have any educational or vocational qualifications prior to coming to the UK? If so, what?
.....
5. Were you employed before coming to the UK? If so, what work were you doing?
.....

Accessing education in the UK

6. Have you undertaken any training or education courses in the UK?
If no, go to question 26.
If yes:
7. What education and training have you done? **Prompt:** subject, level, length of course.
.....
8. Where did you study? **Prompt:** Name of provider, type of provider (e.g. FE college, work-based learning etc.)
.....

9. Did you receive any information, advice or guidance about education and training opportunities available to you?

.....

If yes: Who gave you the information, advice and guidance?

.....

What did they tell you?

.....

10. How did you find out about the courses? **Prompt:** friends, advisor, internet, library.

.....

11. When you found the courses you wanted to study, what did you have to do to apply to join the courses? **Prompt:** online application, registration in person.

.....

12. Were you asked for any identification documents?

.....

If yes: Which forms of identification were you asked to show?

.....

13. Did anybody help you with the application process? **Prompt:** friends, family, advisor, staff at the learning provider.

.....

14. How easy did you find it to get onto your courses?

.....

If no: What difficulties did you experience?

.....

15. Was there anything you found particularly useful when accessing your course? **Prompts:** guidance documents, websites, particular members of staff, community organisations

.....

Funding and support

16. Do you have to pay any fees for your courses?

If yes: How much were the fees?

Do you know why you had to pay fees?

If no: Do you know why you do not have to pay fees?

.....

17. How did you pay for your course? **Prompt:** savings, bursaries, trusts, friends, family.

.....

18. Did you receive any assistance in getting funding to help you pay for your courses?

If yes: Who helped you to get funding?

.....

19. How have you supported yourself while studying? **Prompt:** savings, employment, friends/family, EMA, hardship funds.

.....

20. What support do you need to stay in education? **Prompt:** Financial support, child care, travel costs, access to study materials (e.g. books, stationary, internet)

.....

21. Are there things that would prevent you from continuing your course or doing further study?
Prompt: Financial support, child care, changes in methods of support e.g. EMA, distance to education provider.

.....

22. Can you explain how you feel about the course[s] you have participated in?

Was it what you expected?

Did you enjoy studying?

Did it give you what you wanted and needed for your life/work goals?

.....

23. What do you think of the learning providers who you have studied with? **Prompt:** how helpful? Supportive?

.....

24. Why do/did you want to study the courses?

.....

25. How do you think you may use the knowledge and experience you gained? Prompts: employment, support children in school, taking part in social activities, further study, making new friends.

.....

If no:

.....

26. Have you tried to participate in education or training in the UK and have been unable to?

If no: go to question 27

27. Have you faced any difficulties in accessing education or training? **Prompt:** funding, eligibility, previous qualifications, other support needs.

General views on education and training

28. Would you like to do any education or training in the future?

If yes: What would like to study?

.....

Why?

.....

29. Do you think education and training opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers could be improved?

If yes: How do you think it could be improved?

.....

If no: Why do you not think it could be improved?

.....

30. Is there anything else you wish to say about your experiences of education or training more generally?

.....

About you

Age

.....

Gender

.....

Country of origin

.....

City/Town/Region (in UK)

.....

Thank you!

Appendix 4

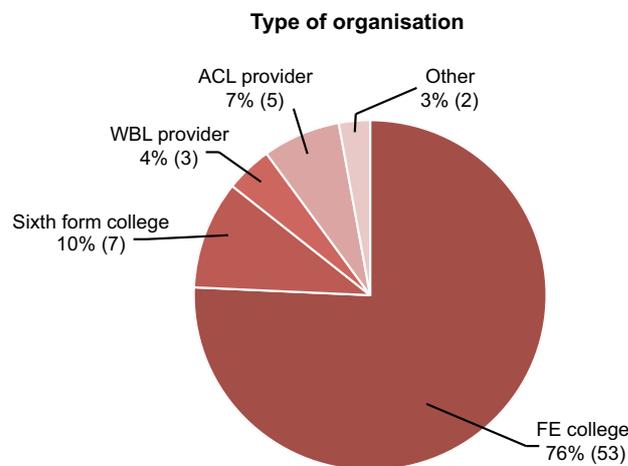
Profile of survey sample

A total of 70 providers responded to the survey (including the pilot responses). A profile of the survey sample is provided below.

Organisation type

Over three-quarters of responses came from further education colleges (76 per cent, 53 responses). A further seven responses (10 per cent) came from sixth form colleges, five were from adult and community learning providers (7 per cent) while three came from work-based learning (WBL) providers (4 per cent). The 'other' responses included an art college providing both further and higher education courses and a specialist service managing the central English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) placement service in a city.

Figure 8. Type of organisation in survey sample – number and percentages

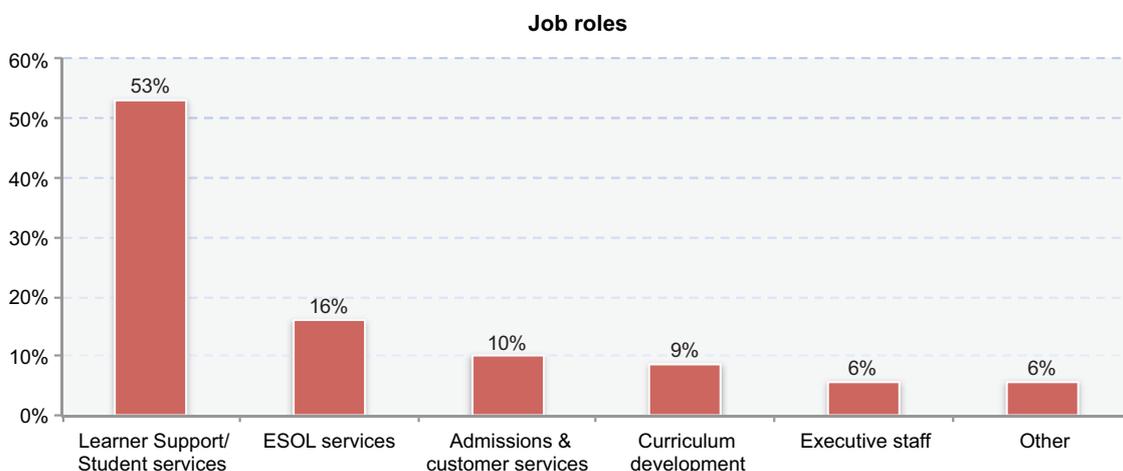


Sample size = 70 respondents

Job roles

53% of those who completed the survey were involved in learner support/student services with 16% delivering ESOL services and 7% in admissions and/or customer services.²³ In terms of the 'other' category this included an administrator role, coordinator of community education and development, business manager, lecturer and service manager.

Figure 9. Job role and/or services individuals were involved in – number and percentages

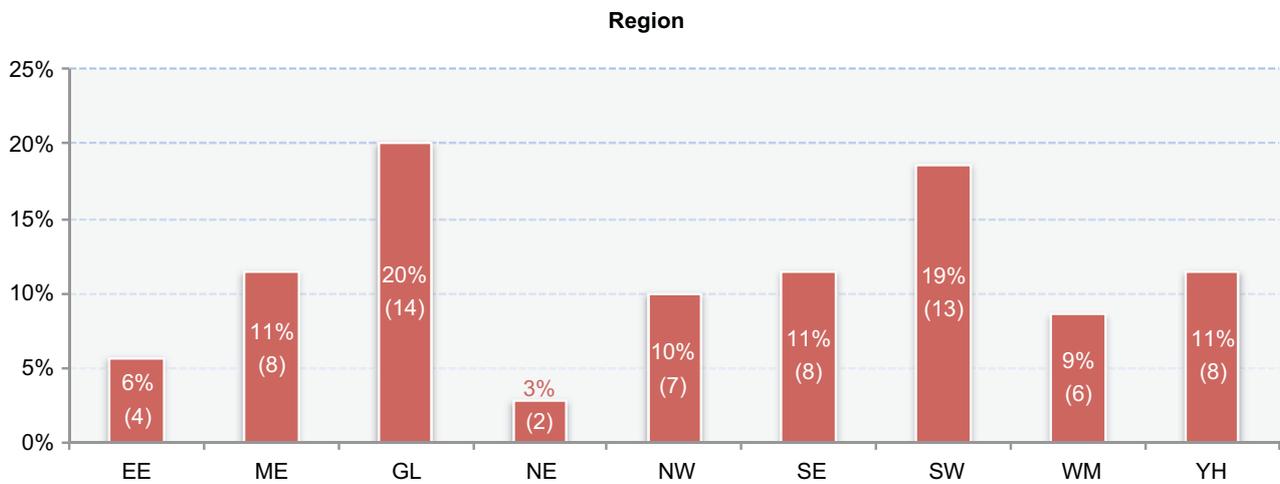


Sample size = 68 respondents

Region

20 per cent of survey respondents came from the Greater London region with 19 per cent from the South West and 11 per cent from each of the East Midlands, South East and Yorkshire and Humberside. The North East and Eastern region had the fewest responses.

Figure 10. Breakdown by region – number and percentages



Sample size = 70 respondents

Organisational Size

In the sample the majority of organisations, 90 per cent, catered for more than 600 learners.

23 Given that the survey covered a range of different aspects of learning provision, it was anticipated that the person who completed the survey may have needed to consult with colleagues to obtain information to respond to some questions.

The Refugee Council is the leading charity in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. As a human rights charity, independent of government, we work to ensure that refugees are given the protection they need, that they are treated with respect and understanding, and that they have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as other members of our society.

This report can be downloaded at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk



www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

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