

Working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers



Support materials
for ESOL providers



London Language
& Literacy Unit
CONSULTANCY & PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT



department for
education and skills

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DfES Publications

PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park

Annesley, Nottingham

NG15 0DJ

Tel: 0845 6022260

Fax: 0845 6033360

Textphone: 0845 6055560

E-mail: dfes@prolog.uk.com

Please quote ref: WRASPACK

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Introduction



‘I felt for the first time like a professional person again, not a refugee’

Refugee doctor, on a course to prepare himself for re-qualification

Context

The policy of dispersal of asylum seekers outside London and the South East, which came into effect in April 2000, represents a new challenge for providers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Organisations that previously provided no ESOL or worked only with settled linguistic minority communities now need to develop programmes to meet the needs of these dispersed asylum seekers. The immediate needs of asylum seekers may be for induction and orientation programmes that teach the everyday English language needed for gaining access to services and understanding British society better. However, as asylum seekers settle and are given refugee status, they may need to improve their English language skills for training, work, and further or higher education. In addition, they will need to receive appropriate advice and guidance, and perhaps language support on vocational and academic courses.

Education is essential to the settlement process. Learners, teachers and other staff consulted during the preparation of this pack identified lack of English as a major barrier to work and education. Early access to language provision is equally important; learners report feelings of inadequacy and loss of self-esteem, which are exacerbated by difficulties in communication and the lack of productive activity.

Background

ESOL providers working with refugees have long been asking for easily accessible information about refugees, and for support in developing appropriate provision. In a recognition of this need, *Breaking the Language Barriers – The report of the working group on English for Speakers of Other Languages*, published in August 2000 (see p. 107), recommended that the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) ‘should commission the production and distribution of an information and support materials pack for the tutors and support workers of organisations providing ESOL to refugees’.

In 2001, the DfES awarded a contract to implement these recommendations, including the delivery of the ESOL core curriculum training and the development of a refugee support pack. The materials in this publication were developed by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) as a member of the consortium of agencies, led by the London Language and Literacy Unit (LLLU), who won

the contract. Other members of the consortium were the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA), the Refugee Council and the Refugee Education and Training Advisory Service (RETAS).

These materials are the product of that working party, and the BSA gratefully acknowledges the valuable contributions made by refugee learners, teachers and support workers of organisations around the country, who have provided the BSA with case studies, information and comments on various drafts.

Skills for Life, the national strategy for improving the basic skills of adults, is developing a secure framework for staff providing ESOL to refugees and asylum seekers. This framework is underpinned by the national adult literacy standards and the new adult core curriculum for ESOL. As part of this strategy, staff providing ESOL to refugees and asylum seekers have been encouraged to participate in training on the implementation of the ESOL curriculum.

The Home Office White Paper *Secure Borders, Safe Havens* also stresses the importance of language skills and the importance of the new ESOL curriculum:

‘The curriculum is context-free and we plan to develop learning programmes in a specific citizenship context so that a simple programme can be followed by those who need to develop an understanding in both language and citizenship’

Secure Borders, Safe Havens: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain 2.17 p. 33

■ Terminology

There is a legal distinction between the terms 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' (see Section 1 for details). In this pack the term 'refugee' is used to denote both refugees and asylum seekers, except where the legal definitions are significant, because the term 'asylum seeker' has acquired negative connotations. Those seeking specialist support services on behalf of a refugee or asylum seeker must be clear about their legal status, as this will affect their entitlement.

■ Coverage

These materials are written for the English education system. Organisations that cover Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will need to be aware of the different structures and funding that operate in those countries. In general, however, programmes provided by the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions apply equally across England, Scotland and Wales.

■ Updates

The loose-leaf format of the pack and its division into sections allows for future updates. There are website addresses for all sources of information mentioned in the pack, to enable users to check for the most up-to-date information. Users will need to supplement this with information about their own area.

See: *Local Contacts Pro Forma* (pp. 42–5).

■.....Who is this publication for?

This publication is divided into five main sections, each of which contains suggestions for how the material may best be used, and who is best placed to use it. Two further sections give additional information and a detailed account of available resources. The sections are described below.

■.....Summary of sections

Section 1. Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Section 1 provides answers to the most commonly asked questions about refugees and asylum seekers. It includes information on legal definitions, statistics, the profile of refugees in the UK, sources of help on legal rights and entitlements, education, employment and training, and the dispersal system.

Section 2. The learners

Section 2 explores the differences between refugees and other ESOL learners. It includes information about the barriers learners face, their motivation and the support they require. A chart in this section gives an overview of learner progression, and authentic case studies present individual learners' experience of educational provision.

Section 3. Setting up ESOL provision for refugees

Section 3 considers the organisational issues and the system of networks and referrals that organisations setting up ESOL provision will need to be aware of.

Section 4. Delivery

Section 4 explores initial assessment processes, provides an exemplar class profile and scheme of work, and gives examples of how different organisations, partnerships and ESOL programmes have responded to the diverse needs of refugees. It is divided into three parts:

- Initial interview and assessment
- Programme design
- Models of provision.

Section 5. Training

Section 5 explores ideas for training those who have contact with refugee learners: reception staff, teachers, guidance workers and managers. In particular, it focuses on how to use the pack for training purposes, particularly with reference to the FAQs, the learner case studies and the models of provision. This section contains a set of training materials, which include a quiz to stimulate discussion.

Section 6. Resources

Section 6 suggests useful books, journals and websites for teachers and learners, including materials specifically for refugees. It contains guidance on selection, a checklist for selecting resources and a list of suppliers.

■.....Appendix: Sources of further information

The appendix contains a full list of the sources of information referred to in each section of the document, with addresses and telephone numbers. It is arranged by subject, and also includes an alphabetical list of key organisations and a glossary of useful terms.