

What works in promoting the employability and entrepreneurship of prior skilled and experienced Refugees

GOOD PRACTICE: its essential features identified in working with RAS* clients

* 'RAS' = Refugees & Asylum Seekers

1. INFORMATION, ADVICE & GUIDANCE

Why is IAG considered to be Good Practice?

RAS have less knowledge of, and little accurate peer learning opportunities for

1. Routes to employment in the different skills sectors (such as where those skills jobs are advertised, how to engage in recruitment processes)
2. The North East labour market
3. Roles and remits of different agencies
4. Support packages offered by the whole range of agencies
5. Rights and responsibilities as an employee
6. UK work place culture
7. How to establish equivalence of skills, qualifications and experience gained outside the UK

Essential Features of Good Practice

Case Work is the most effective form of support.

But it needs to

1. Be Career (skills) focused, rather than 'into work' focused, if prior skills are to be utilised again
2. Based on individual tailoring rather than generalised
3. Dependent on the sensitivity of initial needs assessment and diagnostic tools, to be effective in identify skills and aspirations.
4. Job Seeker Agreement needs to include route for transfer or prior skills
5. Consider the pyramid of needs, with case workers knowledgeable about map of relevant support in locality/region to signpost and refer to other appropriate opportunities.
6. Include referral to ESOL: Identify organisations that can deliver ESOL (English language training) as part of their provision. Map available services and understand eligibility
7. Create an individual action plan, arising from the assessment, with regular review to open up new options /flexibility
8. Consistent in quality across the service and across the region

9. Delivered by competent staff (e.g.: appropriate awareness, knowledge, confidence, and attitude)
10. Its only as good as the resources available – staff, tools, capacity (time available to work with client)
11. Right career advice as soon as possible. Route map for how to get back on track with career and realistic understanding of time it could take (e.g:how long transferability training or further education would take) rather than making u-turns or taking dead ends
12. Next Step accessible pre-status decision. On line skills and CV tools. RAS could take with them into JCP when status granted?.
13. More integrated practice and joined up working, such as cross-referral. If there can be no dedicated case worker throughout an individual's journey, then share information within an agency and also between agencies - or enable case files to travel with them. RAS may go through a series of specialist support programmes then into the mainstream as their status changes but their case files don't travel with them
14. Both supportive and also realistic: Map career aspirations to local labour market information, consider feasibility when goal setting: how long the journey might take to 'top up' or transfer skills and qualifications; skills route mapping which includes an 'adaptability pathway' too
15. Include training on UK recruitment processes and work place culture
16. Give more information on the place of / value of post-graduate degrees in the labour market. In other countries these may be guarantees of a job, but not here. RAS could waste time and money on wrong assumptions

Access to IAG support

1. Pro-active steps to engagement such as outreach work: increase the knowledge of RAS communities about the range of services available and broker relations with them, so that they maximise opportunities and uptake. Help RAS understand that Job Centres are not the only source of employment support/job seeking
2. Understand how to communicate effectively with clients for whom English is a second language, by phone and face to face
3. Confident and positive attitude towards RAS, across reception staff and case workers and awareness of specific and additional needs and eligibilities
4. Active signposting and referral by one agency to other (more) appropriate and relevant services. Don't 'hoard' RAS to meet service delivery contracts on diversity or 'hard to reach'
5. Better funding arrangement across organisations so that they are not 'in competition' over their client group
6. At the right time in the person's journey through asylum process to status. Or as soon as eligible

'Grace' Period at point of transition from asylum status to refugee status, when permission to work begins and UKBA support ends. To enable R to deal with rapid changes in this transition

period (such as finding new accommodation), and continue skills transfer activity, while maintaining eligibility for Job Seeker Allowance

1. Be flexible &/or use discretionary powers to enable client to complete relevant training or re/qualification if their status decision is made before completion, without withdrawal of benefits
2. Appreciate language or skills top up as part of actively seeking work
3. But also consider immediate access to employment and enterprise support programmes normally only accessed after 6 months on benefits. As the vast majority of RAS have already waited years for a status decision, with no permission to work during that period

Other

1. NARIC on line access for case workers: and awareness of it by services as the tool to measure equivalence of prior qualifications
2. Dedicated support programmes for specific skills (in addition to Health professionals, Teachers).
3. Employment adaptation training for more professions
4. 'Top-up' scheme: an opportunity to fill gap between NARIC & UK qualification without having to start from the very beginning
5. Extend NARIC to include Skills testing: to establish professional skills equivalent
6. Work Clubs and Enterprise Clubs that respond to the specific and additional needs of refugees, and provide for skills sector focus. Or sector specific support groups. Invite skills sector HR / recruitment agencies. Professionals from sector. HMRC training.
7. Job fairs / meeting opportunities for RAS and employers
8. Information on local RAS skills to local businesses and vice versa

SOME QUESTIONS OF FURTHER INTEREST

- A. What makes delivering support to a RAS client different to working with non-refugee clients? Is there a 'skills' gap or is there an additional burden / overload on the resources/capacity of service providers? Or both?
- B. If so, how can a generalist agency respond? What are the practicalities (opportunities & challenges) for creating specialism with a staff team, or upskilling all the workforce?
- C. What flexibility or discretion exists within benefits entitlement rules to enable Rs to complete skills transfer employability training whilst still qualifying for JSA?
- D. What role can RAS themselves, supported by the Regional Refugee Forum, play in maximising uptake of existing support in the region? Or in supporting IAG services' work with RAS?

2. WORK BASED OPPORTUNITIES

Work Placements, Apprenticeships, Volunteering, Mentoring and Shadowing

Why are work based opportunities considered to be Good Practice?

1. They help validate, test and evaluate skills and experience gained outside the UK
2. Upgrade/top-up existing skills and support further skills development
3. Support professional career development
4. Provide focused useful knowledge
5. Prepare people for working in the UK's specific work place culture
6. Acquire a UK work reference
7. Restore / give people confidence
8. Harness Peer Learning
9. Develop employability skills
10. Promote skills specific english language, and general language development
11. Reduce the employability gap. Close the gap between getting status and actually being work ready
12. Minimise risks of workplace conflict
13. Enable greater retention
14. Increased productivity
15. Professional qualifications not wasted
16. Reduce isolation
17. Promote interaction and integration beyond the RAS community

Essential Features of Good Practice

1. Places brokered purposefully, matched to prior skills to promote transferability
2. Active engagement with employers across skills sectors, not just voluntary & community sector
3. Understanding mutual benefit for effective matchmaking: able to communicate potential benefits to employers
4. Mentoring / buddying scheme - local professional mentor with same sector skills and experience
5. Boundaries set around mentoring, so that mentor able to focus on skills support rather than pyramid of needs
6. Adequate workplace preparation, for example how things work in the UK workplace, CRB checking. Include simple things like tea making, talking about yourself
7. In work support to RAS and to employer & staff including dialogue to explore consequences of misunderstanding. For positive experience on both sides
8. Effective management of the placements process. Make it easy for employers, because their willingness to offer an opportunity can collapse if not supported by practical advice and external support.

9. Produce a good practice pack for employers
10. Effective marketing of opportunities to the RAS community to promote access and uptake
11. Promoting employer awareness and knowledge of eligibility and legality to overcome uncertainty
12. Promoting RAS awareness of the value of volunteering and work based opportunities for skills transfer and career progression
13. Capturing employers' positive experience of RAS in workplace
14. Information to RAS about workers' right and responsibilities, and places to go for advice such as TUC, including reps in work place
15. Information on routes and processes of progression and promotion, including in work training
16. Contact employers with a strong sense of corporate social responsibility to discuss work based opportunities as a route for implementing this aim
17. Engage employers with stated workforce equality & diversity targets and offer them additional routes to connect with RAS skills for recruitment (such as via HR departments or the recruitment agencies used by large employers)

SOME QUESTIONS OF FURTHER INTEREST

These schemes are dependent on engaging the interest / buy in of wider range of employers, particularly from private sector, to provide more work based opportunities. So:

- A. Are there any specific limitations on / issues for private sector companies in offering volunteering or other (unpaid) work based opportunities?
- B. What type of funding is available for supporting the delivery of these schemes?
- C. How do or can these schemes link to the newly emerging policy context?
- D. What role can RAS themselves, supported by the Regional Refugee Forum, play in maximising uptake of existing support in the region? Or in supporting these schemes' work with RAS?

3. ESOL : ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Why is ESOL considered to be Good Practice?

1. English language is an essential communication need for effective access to and uptake of support services
2. Essential skill in engaging effectively in job seeking and recruitment processes
3. Essential skill in operating successfully in the work place and for progression
4. For example, generalist advisers find it a struggle to work with clients who need more ESOL as ESOL is a key preparatory factor before starting to seek work
5. Generalist IAG case workers typically have a set amount of time to dedicate to each customer in order to meet contract/service delivery targets. But a RAS with low English language skills requires more time to get to the same point as others. One result is that identifying prior skills can get lost in the rush to get through in the set time allowed for each client and is not reflected on the Job Seeker Agreement
6. Without it prior skilled refugees will end up in low skilled jobs where they are unlikely to re-establish their career pathway

Essential Features of Good Practice

1. Access to ESOL learning available from arrival in UK
2. No-fee access, as asylum seekers receive no cash support and only enough to meet basic needs
3. Access before permission to work granted as part of employability skills preparation
4. Provided in a variety of settings (community based, college) to suit confidence and ability of learner
5. Language conversation groups or opportunities to practice conversational / spoken English to gain confidence and proficiency with both the language and UK culture
6. Skills related / vocational ESOL curriculum for sector skills specific vocabulary
7. ESOL tutors with relevant sector skills language knowledge
8. Access to professional bodies specializing in training and equipping refugees in specialist language
9. Linking employment training to ESOL, such as 'ESOL for Jobs': includes Understanding how to market yourself to employers, Information on Recruitment practices, Assistance with constructing CV and applications, Interview skilling and training
10. Intensive / immersion courses for faster progression
11. Flexibility of provision to enable continued progression: such as evening classes for those in work
12. Childcare provision to enable single parents to access and progress
13. Map available provision and be aware of eligibility requirements
14. Be available as part of work place training, as literacy and numeracy are

15. Seen as an essential part of the requirement to be actively seeking work once registered for Job Seeker Allowance. Allow R to complete ESOL related courses rather than be interrupted once status is granted.

SOME QUESTIONS OF FURTHER INTEREST

- A. What will be the impact of the ending of full fee remission for further education/adult learning (including ESOL) for all those not on Job Seekers Allowance from September 2011?
- B. What opportunities exist to mitigate this impact? What other models of delivery could be developed?
- C. What role can RAS themselves, supported by the Regional Refugee Forum, play in maximising uptake of existing support in the region? Or in supporting ESOL providers' work with RAS?

4. SELF-EMPLOYMENT & ENTERPRISE

Why is Enterprise support considered to be Good Practice?

1. RAS with previous business experience and motivation to be self-supporting, with long term visions, can respond to and create new business opportunities
2. New regional market demand from the new community for diverse services and supplies (for example to suit culturally diverse diets, music etc)
3. Keen to develop these business opportunities before longer term settled entrepreneurs/ already established businesses outside the region capitalise on the emerging market demand
4. Demand met from non-displacement imports
5. Interest in renewable energy technology for implementation in countries of origin
6. Interest in 'development' focused markets in countries of origin: such as meeting IT needs
7. International links: RAS have understanding how to 'do business' in many countries, language skills, contact networks, and contacts with resources for import and markets for export

Essential features of Good Practice in supporting RAS enterprise

NB: there has been less research and discussion of this so far, so this is what is known 'so far'

1. Understanding how to do business the UK way, such as legislation
2. English business vocabulary
3. Business planning the UK way
4. Roles, remits and enterprise support available across the region, including self-help sources such as on-line
5. Delivering information and training in a way that is digestible to RAS
6. How to access support, and maximising support available, including sources of finance (grants/loans) for feasibility/market research and at start up
7. Peer learning
8. Different models of business in the UK: such as social enterprise
9. Comparing UK models of business to RAS own cultural experiences of and attitudes to enterprise structures, such as suspicion of cooperatives being linked to political control
10. Access to social networks, business networks, trading partners
11. Access to start up or investment capital, as loans need to be based on credit history or collateral in the UK which RAS don't have
12. Mitigating risk – as RAS have no cushion of financial risk
13. Identifying and understanding purchasing processes for tendering
14. Support for over 25's: there has been much more emphasis on young entrepreneurs, support schemes aimed at under-25 years. This excludes many Refugees
15. As much support for actual practicalities of operations and delivery as for training around confidence and skills, after which much support ceases

16. Supporting access to Bank support for entrepreneurs: some banks have low expectations about the capabilities of refugees or their prior experience
17. Need for access to incubator space = resource centre for people to plan etc
18. Need for help in identifying business premises, such as council lists of premises and rent/rates costs, and any free lease periods at start up
19. Consideration (flexibility/discretion) about Refugee immediate access to enterprise support programme from e.g: Job Centre Plus, rather than wait 6 months. Refugees have already waited several years for their status decision, outside of the mainstream benefits system.
20. Protection of unemployment benefits during start up period to trading income
21. Enterprise Clubs: how can they be designed to fit/include the specific needs of refugee entrepreneurs

In 2006 Ippr North produced a report called *Destination North East: Harnessing the regional potential of migration*, which the RRF participated in. Extracts:

Studies carried out at national level indicate that more could be done to tap into the latent entrepreneurial potential of migrant communities. For example, non-white ethnic groups have been found to be more entrepreneurial than their white counterparts across the UK regions (Harding et al 2005) and there is evidence to show that migrants, and asylum-seekers and refugees in particular, show strong levels of self-sufficiency (Bloch 2002). At a regional level, one study in the North West found that if the number of 'assimilated entrepreneur' businesses were to be increased by 10 per cent, this could generate over £235 million additional profit in the region (Sustainability North West 2005).

The work that already exists in the North East confirms that refugees in that region are no exception when it comes to possessing strong levels of self-sufficiency, but that there are barriers to business start-ups, including difficulty of navigation within a new business culture, lack of access to advice and support, shortage of money and discrimination (RRF/Angier et al 2004). This was confirmed by Ippr's qualitative work with refugees, all of whom identified barriers to support, advice and appropriate funds in discussions around entrepreneurial opportunities for refugees.

Such barriers have detrimental effects for the North East, which lags behind the UK average in terms of the number of businesses relative to the population size. It is estimated that the region would have to have between 18,500 and 22,500 more VAT-registered businesses to achieve its target of 90 per cent of national average GVA per head (One NorthEast RES 2006). To move towards this target, the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) intends to tap into the latent potential of migrant groups by targeting migrants and refugees in the promotion of business start-up. It plans to do this, both within and outside of the North East, through a Regional Image Campaign and an Attracting Entrepreneurs programme (One NorthEast RES 2006).

From the findings of this research project, it is evident that the current emphasis on promoting business start-ups among migrant groups needs to include an explicit focus on the barriers that migrants face if it is to be successful. The challenge, therefore, will be for policy in this area to deliver results for migrant communities, who face specific barriers that are not necessarily shared by other groups, such as language difficulties and the lack of recognition of skills and qualifications gained overseas.

SOME QUESTIONS OF FURTHER INTEREST

- A. What are the new and emerging remits, roles and map of enterprise support across the region after decommissioning of regional structures?
- B. What can be made of the potential international market links and experience offered by the new members of the regional community?
- C. What role can RAS themselves, supported by the Regional Refugee Forum, play in maximising uptake of existing support in the region? Or in supporting work with RAS? Or in connecting RAS to potential business partners?

5. HOW REFUGEE & ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE VIEWED IN THE REGION

Why are attitudes important for Good Practice?

1. RAS want to participate in and contribute to the regional economy. They hate to be a seen as a burden on it, but realise that is how they are often presented and viewed. They come from countries where self-reliance and supporting one's family and community is the norm and is the basis of dignity. But integration is a 2 way process between new members of the community and the 'host' community. RAS cannot achieve this on their own
2. Economic inclusion and social inclusion are mutually dependent
3. RAS need their children to have role models to aspire to
4. Public awareness, knowledge, perceptions and attitudes are fundamentally significant factors in determining the receptivity and support of front line service providers, employers and work colleagues
5. Awareness of international links and experience could promote realisation of the potential this has for the region's economy and an interest in exploring practical ways of harnessing this
6. Commitment to Equality, in practice, can open up opportunities
7. Recognition of the business case for Diversity can open up opportunities

Essential features

1. Awareness of who RAS are as people/individuals, rather than as an undifferentiated category. That many have prior skills, qualifications and experience in careers and enterprise
2. Understanding that RAS are 'legal', and clarity on permission to work
3. Understanding that they are not economic migrants
4. Understanding that while there is some overlap with BME issues, RAS have specific and additional barriers and needs
5. More opportunity to meet RAS, to get to know them
6. Implementing Equality in employment practice
7. Implementing Equality in service delivery
8. Implementing Equality in planning processes
9. Leadership (in framing the way in which RAS are talked about locally/regionally)

SOME QUESTIONS OF FURTHER INTEREST

- A. Who will now lead / take action on implementing the recommendations of the OECD report (2006) and Regional Economic Strategy (ONE) that identified the potential of Diversity to contribute to the region's economic growth?

- B. Who is playing what role on Equality and where does the issue of economic inclusion of RAS fit with this?
- C. What challenges and opportunities do Big Society and Localism present for this inclusion work?
- D. What challenges and opportunities do the spending cuts present for planning, commissioning, procurement and contracting of services that will support economic inclusion of RAS?
- E. What political leadership could there be for promoting action to 'harness' the potential of RAS skills and international links, and creating asset focused (rather than cost) approach?
- F. What role can RAS themselves, supported by the Regional Refugee Forum, play in the above? For example: What evidence can they contribute? What links can they promote? What understanding can they promote?

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