

SKILLED PROJECT: BIG CONVERSATION 2

MAY 19TH 2011 at STOCKTON ARC

Findings & Recommendations from Session 1

What is transferable and generalisable from specialist practice?

What can be achieved at level of practice?

What needs to be addressed in the wider arena?

Table 1: INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

General Summary

Two specialist support programmes exist for prior skills judged to be of particular value in meeting UK labour market / skills needs: those who are medically trained and those with teaching experience. These programmes provide holistic support. That is they are designed to meet a pyramid of specific and additional needs, provided through an intensive programme. Support elements specific to the needs of refugees include:

- a. 'UK familiarisation': Intensive courses run via universities to prepare refugee doctors for the UK medical context.
- b. Peer group sessions: where refugees and non-refugee doctors can share experiences, illustrating that refugees are not 'alone' in some of their concerns. A space for people to meet, with additional support available if needed.
- c. One-to-one mentoring
- d. Work placements

Holistic approaches should include:

- a. Linguistic adaptation;
- b. Professional adaptation;
- c. Practical support e.g. basic issues such as transport;
- d. Social/spiritual support.

Refugee doctors frequently undersell themselves and underplay their refugee background to the extent that they undersell their related desirable qualities, e.g. language skills, cross-cultural competencies etc. It is therefore important for projects to focus on confidence building and both a personal and professional level.

Such programmes cannot succeed without Co-ordination at both group and individual level, including

- a. Internal and external communication a priority.
- b. Consistent promotion of services and awareness-raising.
- c. Organisations must not be insular; building and re-building relationships consistently as the context changes.

The Refugee Health Professionals Project supports doctors and other health professionals e.g. nurses, dentists. Both refugees and asylum seekers are eligible to access the project. Approximately 20-25 refugee doctors are participating in the programme on Tyneside.

The Refugees into Teaching Programme in the North East currently has 18 refugee teachers on teaching placements in schools.

JCP should link into special support services and shift focus to a long-term approach. Needs to view the whole refugee process, not only getting them into employment, i.e. ESOL, literacy, numeracy, academic qualifications, job etc. Recommend a JCP policy shift from away from work focus towards identification of skills. Can JCP be more flexible, identify skills gaps and broker provision to fill them?. For the JCP staff its about striking a balance; new approaches shouldn't fight against the system, but should seek to incorporate both sides.

Training courses organized on a local rather than national level, and need to be accredited.

Could such support be structured along a business model? Could be delivered as a social enterprise, consortia, partnerships, or through commercialising training. Need to have a business model with an effective code of ethics, and need to be outcome driven rather than outputs/targets driven.

Actions / solutions recommended at practice level

1. Refugees intoTeaching participants might benefit from increased awareness of the Next Step National Telephone Service.
2. All organizations should be ready to support RAS clients more once the Home Office RIES project ends in September 2011.
3. RRF could contact the new contractors for the JCP Work Programme to offer assistance in identifying and accessing RAS communities.

Outside of front line control / External levers

1. Lack of consistent and strategic communications models/highways: Although there is a lot of information and services available for refugees, there is over-reliance on informal networking and communication. Everything is rather ad hoc, and there is no mechanism to ensure that information can trickle through consistently. Can IT route be an answer? e.g. a refugee services search engine along the lines of Google.
2. What exactly are the parameters of the new flexibility and discretion elements within the new Get Britain Working programme at JCP? How can this be translated into operational flexibility at front line to allow a skills transfer focused approach?

Table 2: ENTERPRISE

General summary:

The support structure for business start up is there but the refugee community is poorly connected to it.

Some thought both refugees and non-migrants shared similar barriers. For example, bank lending is limited for all businesses, not just for refugee enterprise. But still refugees have less credit history / UK references, no familiarity with UK business culture, structures and bureaucracy, plus have years of attrition of self-confidence through the asylum system.

But the refugee community itself has significant issues with its own attitudes and practice that presents barriers to their entrepreneurship. Success will depend on motivation, dedication, self-reliance and seizing every opportunity such as volunteering and networking,

Actions – solutions recommended:

1. Close the 2 way knowledge gap: support agencies need to proactively seek connection to refugees. Refugees need to proactively inform themselves about and access/take up/maximise the support that does exist. Require practical actions such as:
 - a. Promote use of RCO webpages and websites as interface with the community
 - b. Promote RCO's own internal dissemination mechanisms for driving *accurate* information into their community
 - c. Promote more outreach work, community based work by support agencies. Face to face is always most effective route
 - d. Have a dedicated point of contact for RCO within support agency
 - e. Training offered locally to communities
 - f. Drive knowledge of support/agencies available into the refugee community e.g: via RRF / UCOMEDIA websites
 - g. Work directly with Five Lamps and HMRC training to pilot mechanisms
2. Address the attitudes/myths that have become prevalent in refugee community (“I/we can’t achieve”) and seek to reestablish self-confidence and self-reliance. By:
 - a. Documenting success stories from RAS businesses (film/written) and disseminating into RCOs/RAS community
 - b. Challenge attitudes to volunteering or networking as having no benefit. Promote understanding of longer term pay off versus short termism in RAS approach/thinking
 - c. RAS entrepreneurs as Mentors (positive role models such as Norbert)
 - d. Seek coverage of success stories in local media
3. Provide more information to refugee community on the availability/access to Business software (such as Barclays)
4. Encourage use of PO Box numbers rather than home addresses for RAS business. E.g: Stockton Business Centre offers this facility

Table 3: VOLUNTEERING

General summary

Volunteering is too restricted to charitable sector opportunities. Limits the range of skills that can be practiced (such as engineering).

Need for clarity / to differentiate between volunteering and a work placement – and the different outcomes from each for refugees. And that they each involve different barriers, and therefore different approaches to solutions, such as brokering with host agencies and different preparation and support. Clarity will help avoid overlap many agencies approaching the same host agencies. (Volunteering: longer time commitment/role in host organisation. Work Placement: shorter time, time limited role, involves private sector too.

There is negativity from some companies towards refugees, based on lack of knowledge about the client group

NERS Volunteering project will continue through to 2013

There are some specifics both for volunteering bureaux and for hosting agency: such as preparing the refugee, re-paying asylum seeker volunteers expenses immediately, rather than by cheque at end of month

There are also generics: such as educating staff to work with volunteers (to value them, respect them as colleagues, to include them in training etc), whether refugee or not

Actions / solutions recommended at practice level :

1. Circulate the '*Good Practice guide to Volunteering*' that is specific to working with refugees and asylum seekers to complement good practice guides that exist on generic work. Via the Regional Volunteering Forum?
2. Raise appreciation amongst refugees and asylum seekers of the value of volunteering even if it doesn't relate to their prior skills. Useful to link volunteering opps to securing NVQs , and promote understanding among the community of the value of gaining a qualification (delayed reward/return)

Outside of front line control / External levers

1. Need more volunteering opportunities outside of VCS, in wider range of organisations / businesses. Is it a question of contacts/brokering, or attitudes to refugees, or other practicalities?

Table 4: WORK PLACEMENTS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

General Summary

The RISE ILM project which provided refugees with paid full time 6 month work placements within organisations relating to their prior skills had very high success rate (70% of Refugee participants in employment at 12 months). But it was very expensive, relying on substantial funding, to support the comprehensive preparation and sustained support work with participants, and the in work salaries.

Shorter term placements have value:

- a. If 1-2 days a week then a Refugee can still meet the criteria of Job Seeker Allowance.
- b. If 1-2 days a week then a Refugee is still eligible for vocationally based training and can gain an accredited qualification
- c. Enables quick skills assessment/validation for the Refugee: a quick way of testing their comparative skills level at a practical level (as it is very difficult to accurately know where prior skills sit relative to the UK context. Refugees may have skills and experience from home, but at a practical level and UK context those may not apply/transfer well or directly match)

The JCP arranges work trials of up to a week. JCP welcomes clients self-marketing to employers. But in order to come under their work placement scheme, the employer has to be signed up to a SLA (such as health & safety)

Identifying and brokering a work placement takes a lot of time and hard 'selling'

Employers consider they gain more from a work placement than a volunteering placement. For example, the person needs to fulfil the responsibilities of any employee (i.e: turn up each day and on time)

A Refugee has more to benefit from a placement with business sector employer than in the VCS.

Attitudes of employers: some agencies have experienced that employers see Refugees as hard working and professional. Employers prefer workers born outside of UK. So its not always difficult to find placements for Refugees.

There are genuine barriers for employers considering offering a work placement = paperwork, mentoring time in work place, H&S certificate. No different really to a non-migrant. But English language proficiency is also an issue as need to be able to communicate effectively with work colleagues

There are many support agencies chasing the same employers for work based opportunities. Those employers can get tired!

Competing concerns about dangers of job substitution and exploitation (TUC) versus demand from Refugees themselves

Equality in service provision: if all clients are to be treated equally, undifferentiated, then advisers do not need specialist knowledge? Difference of opinion about whether 'equality' means all clients being treated exactly the same. They do not have equal needs. And whether a policy of equal treatment 'on paper' actually translates into equal treatment face to face. Refugees' experience is that face to face different attitudes/reactions arise from their identity as refugee or as black.

Actions / solutions recommended at practice level

1. Ensure advisers have appropriate training and knowledge of the map of support relevant to RAS locally
2. Raise awareness amongst Refugees of the chance work based opportunities (including volunteering) presents versus fear of exploitation
3. Create skills specific guides/route maps – clear description of the step by step process/ map to get back to employment using the skills of refugees. For both refugees and front line advisers
4. Case stories of placements that gave mutual benefit for Refugee and for employer, as tools for engaging more employers in offering opportunities
5. Check or Challenge the eligibility criteria for Apprenticeships (requirement of 3 years residence after status?): those who come to UK with trade skills don't have the specific qualifications needed by that UK trade. But apprenticeship support agencies cannot deliver training to them, to gain that qualification, because they are not eligible for those programmes?.

Outside of front line control / External levers

1. Need a 'Grace' period in Government policy – people need more time to be job ready, including language (ESOL). A special clause for Refugees to ensure that they have more time to adapt and prepare for work before being pushed to any work
2. Everyone needs ESOL to be work ready. Access to ESOL from day 1 of arrival in the UK. ESOL funding for IELTS
3. Funding to support capacity needed to set up placement
4. High skills support trigger
5. Awareness: correct information about refugees and what refugee status means. To employers. Training should not be formal – staff should get more briefings
6. How Equality & Diversity is actually being implemented or even understood by organisations, both service providers and employers. Need to raise awareness that E&D are not the same thing. Challenge perceptions and attitudes, including within service providers. Most providers fail to practice equality and diversity
7. More joined up thinking and working practice between agencies – for example, not enough referrals to Tees Achieve, for academic or vocational trainee
8. JCP needs to know where specialist support is
9. 'Give them a chance' appeal to employers

SESSION 2

What opportunities exist within the broader system (outside the control of front line providers) to make the refugee journey more effective?

Table 1: COMMISSIONING, PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTING

Given that much of JCP work is dictated by government policy, there needs to be a policy shift towards focusing upon identification of skills, rather than short-term goals to get people into employment regardless of/despite their skills.

The fact that there are so many untapped and wasted skills in the region is not new, but we need to quantify it, and present refugee skills as an asset. We must continue to push it onto the agenda, and to overcome rejection.

Priority groups? Special needs groups? Do these still exist? Although targeting under-represented groups is an aim, many Councils are tied by output-based considerations.

Short-term funding is a problem, i.e. governments change, contracts change, leaving no scope for long-term engagement

'Cherry-picking' within minority/hard to reach groups, i.e. targeting those deemed most 'job-ready'. Time and resources need to be allocated to allow for more flexibility around individual needs and engagement with individuals who require the most support.

Competencies: Some issues cut deeper than basic knowledge; the overall depth of understanding of refugee and cultural issues needs overhauling, e.g. advisors still ask for a client's 'Christian' name.

Table 2: EMERGING STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS OF STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

Discussion included within [Chapter 3: Windows of Opportunity](#)