

REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS

An education, training and employment
guide



Produced for advice-resources by **RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit)**, London Metropolitan University, July 2006.

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About this guide

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers



Who is this guide for?

This guide is for adult refugees and asylum seekers (over 16 years) living in England. For the purpose of this guide the term refugee will be used to refer to all those with Refugee Status, Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) or Enter (ELE), Humanitarian Protection (HP) or Discretionary Leave (DL), unless indicated otherwise. The term asylum seeker will refer to those people who have an outstanding claim for asylum, including those at the appeal stage.

What does the guide cover?

The guide covers information on education, training, volunteering and employment and also some further information on the rights and entitlements of refugees and asylum seekers. Where it is not possible to provide information on a certain topic we have signposted to other organisations or websites that should be able to help.

How should I use the guide?

The guide is divided into clear sections on different topics, such as education or volunteering. You can read the whole guide in full or simply go to the section that you are interested in. If there is a word or acronym that you don't know you may find this in the glossary. Contact details of useful organisations are given at the end of the guide.

Who produced this guide?

This guide was produced by RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit) at London Metropolitan University (www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu). It is translated into 9 refugee community languages. RAGU has also produced a companion guide aimed at advisers working with refugees and asylum seekers. RAGU will update these guides regularly.

How can I give feedback?

If you have comments about this guide for refugees and asylum seekers, please send them to advice-resources@ufi.com.

Immigration status and rights and entitlements

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers



▶ How does my immigration status affect my rights and entitlements?

If you are a **refugee** you are **entitled to most** of the same **services** as a British citizen. Some entitlements depend on your leave to remain and the time you have spent in the country. If you are an **asylum seeker** you will find that your **rights and entitlements** in the UK **are restricted**, particularly with respect to employment and financial support.

If your **leave to remain** in the UK **has expired** (for example as a unaccompanied minor granted DL until your 18th birthday) and you **applied for an extension** before the expiry date, then your **leave to remain** in the UK **will continue** until a decision is made on this extension. Your rights and entitlements will also stay the same.

▶ Where can I get more advice?

If you are an asylum seeker you should contact your local **One Stop Service** for support and advice. Each One Stop Service is run by a large **refugee agency**, such as the Refugee Council. To find your local One Stop Service look at:

<http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk/english/services.htm>

The One Stop Service can help you apply for support and housing, tell you more about the asylum process and refer you to other useful organisations. If you are a refugee your One Stop Service may be able to help you apply for benefits and provide information on education, training and employment. You can find some useful information about your rights and entitlements in 20 languages at: <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

Education Action have some information about education and employment for refugees on their website: www.education-action.org/advice. If you can't find what you need you can email an adviser.

▶ What are my entitlements to education?

All asylum seeker and refugee **children** are **entitled to free education**. If you receive benefits or support from NASS you are entitled to free school meals for your child. You may also receive help with the costs of school uniform and travel. You should speak to the school to find out more about this. All children of 3 and 4 years are entitled to a free early education place in a nursery, playgroup or school.

Asylum seekers and refugees are **entitled to study any course at any level**, as long as you are able to **satisfy the entry requirements** and can **pay the course fees**. What fees you have to pay and the support you are eligible for will depend on your immigration status and how long you have been in the UK.

▶ What are my entitlements to training?

Your entitlement to vocational training will **depend on your immigration status**. **Refugees** are able to **access Government training schemes** such as Work Based Learning for Adults. If you are an **asylum seeker** you are **not eligible** for these Government schemes, even if you have permission to work. If you are an asylum seeker with permission to work you may be able to take vocational training through an employer.

▶ Am I allowed to be employed or self-employed?

Refugees are **allowed to work** in the UK and should be treated the same as any other employee. This includes being paid at least the minimum wage. The minimum wage is a legal right that covers almost all workers above compulsory school leaving age and is set by the Government. You can find out more from the National Minimum Wage Helpline on 0845 6000 678 or at: www.hmrc.gov.uk/nmw

If you are an **asylum seeker** you are **unable to take paid employment** unless you have been granted permission to work. This includes self-employment. You **can apply for permission to work** if you have been **waiting over 12 months** for an **initial decision on your asylum claim** from the Home Office. Even if you are now at the appeal stage, you can still apply for permission to work if your initial wait for a decision was 12 months or more. To apply for permission to work you must write to the Asylum Casework Directorate, Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road, Croydon, CR9 2BY. It is important to include your Home Office reference number.

If you are granted permission to work you keep this permission until a final decision has been made on your asylum claim. Your Application Registration Card (ARC) will be amended to show that you have permission to work. You **must be the main applicant** for asylum **to apply for permission to work**. For example, if the asylum claim is in the name of your partner or parent you cannot apply for permission to work.

Workers in the UK are protected by employment legislation, covering issues such as discrimination on the grounds of gender or race, flexible working and maternity or paternity rights. You can find out more about this on:

- www.dti.gov.uk/employment
- www.direct.gov.uk/Employment
- www.adviceguide.org.uk/employment

A National Insurance number (NINO) is a unique number that identifies you and is used as a reference for benefits and by employers. Most refugees will receive their NINO when they receive a letter from the Home Office confirming their status. If you do not have a NINO and require one you should telephone 0845 6000643. You will then have an interview at a Jobcentre. You will need to take proof of identity and address.

▶ Can I volunteer?

Volunteering is helping in an organisation, often a charity or voluntary organisation, without being paid. **Refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to volunteer**. Asylum seekers do not need permission to work to volunteer. If you are an asylum seeker and your Home Office documents say that you cannot take unpaid work you are still able to volunteer.

All **volunteers** should **receive money for expenses** such as travel and meals. If you are receiving asylum support or benefits the money you receive for these expenses should be the exact amount that you spend. If you are a refugee and receiving benefits you can volunteer as much as you like, but it should not stop you being available for paid employment or looking for work. You may decide to discuss your volunteering with someone in the Jobcentre so there is no confusion.

Am I entitled to benefits or asylum support?

Most asylum seekers are entitled to **support from** the National Asylum Support Service (**NASS**). This can include accommodation and subsistence, or subsistence-only if you have somewhere to live. If your asylum claim has been refused and you have exhausted all your appeal rights you may be eligible for Section 4 or 'hard cases' NASS support, if you are unable to return home. It is important that you get advice from your local One Stop Service. You can find more information about asylum support in 20 languages at: <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

Refugees are **entitled to claim benefits**. If you receive a positive decision on your asylum claim your NASS support will stop after 28 days. It is very important that you make an application for benefits as soon as possible. To claim benefits you should visit your local Jobcentre. You can find your local office at: www.jobcentrepplus.gov.uk, or by asking at your One Stop Service.

Some Jobcentres are involved in the SUNRISE initiative. This means that after receiving a positive decision on your asylum claim the Jobcentre will link you up with a caseworker. Over 28 days this caseworker will help you to put together a Personal Integration Plan that will focus on your long-term objectives. The caseworker should also help you to access advice on housing, employment, learning English, training, volunteering and other areas such as health and education. You can ask for interpretation to be provided.

From 11th June 2007, if you are granted Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection (and are 18 years or over), you will be able to apply for a **Refugee Integration Loan**. This is an interest free loan to help you pay for items that facilitate integration, particularly related to education, employment and housing. It could be used as financial help for training or requalification or as a deposit for accommodation. You should receive an application form for the refugee integration loan with your positive decision letter. You can also download an application form from this website: www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/lawandpolicy/

Am I eligible for housing?

If you are an **asylum seeker supported by NASS** you are **eligible for NASS accommodation**. You may have friends or family who can accommodate you instead. If you need NASS accommodation you will have no choice over which area of the UK you live in.

If you are a **refugee** you can **apply** to your **local authority for housing**. There are many other options such as private landlords and registered social landlords. It is **important that you get advice** before you make any decisions. For advice on housing you can contact Shelter.

Can I access free healthcare?

The healthcare system is known as the NHS (National Health Service). **Asylum seekers and refugees** are entitled to **free healthcare**. To find out more about the NHS you can read a leaflet provided in over 40 languages. You need to visit the Department of Health website at: www.dh.gov.uk. Type 'Introduction to the National Health Service' in the search box.

NHS Direct is a **24-hour telephone service** that provides confidential health advice and information for people in England and Wales. You can call NHS Direct on **0845 46 47** if you feel ill or if you want details of your local hospital or GP. If you require interpretation you need to say, in English, the language that you speak.

Can I get legal advice?

It is very **important** that you **get legal advice** before making some decisions or to complete forms correctly. This is especially true if you are making an application for asylum, appealing a negative decision on your asylum claim, extending your leave to remain or applying for family reunion. Speak to your One Stop Service or contact one of the organisations listed at the end of this guide for more information.

You can read about 'How to get good asylum advice' at: www.advicenow.org.uk/asylumadvice. This information is also available in several other languages at: www.multikulti.org.uk.

The Refugee Women's Resource Project at Asylum Aid has produced a leaflet for **women seeking asylum** in the UK. This is available at www.asylumaid.org.uk and is translated into several refugee community languages.

How can I find an adviser?

For many issues you will find that you need extra help and advice to get information or to make a decision. This is known as IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance). There are **many organisations** in the UK that **give IAG** and some that work particularly with refugees and asylum seekers. Your local **One Stop Service** is one of these and should be able to **refer you** to other useful agencies.

Refugees and asylum seekers can get **free careers advice and guidance** from **learndirect**. You can get advice:

- **On the internet** at: www.learndirect-advice.co.uk
- **By telephone** on 0800 100 900. There are some bilingual advisers available (for example in French, Farsi, Somali and Urdu).
- **By email:** www.learndirect-advice.co.uk/contactus

nextstep provide free information to adults 20 years and over, living in England, on learning and work. You can use the nextstep website to find your local office: www.nextstep.org.uk

Connexions is an organisation working with **13-19 year olds** in England. You can find your local Connexions office at: www.connexions.gov.uk

Learning English

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers



Why should I learn English?

It is important that you learn the local language when you are living in the UK. Learning the local language will **help you to feel part of the community** and **make friends** and is **important for employment**. Refugees who apply for British citizenship now have to show they are at ESOL Entry Level 3. Learning the language outside the classroom will help you to pick up the local accent and common expressions.

What are ESOL courses?

There are many different types of English course in the UK. Most are ESOL (**English for Speakers of Other Languages**) courses. ESOL classes are **aimed at different levels of students**. Entry level is the lowest level and divided into 3 sub-levels called Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3. If you are new to learning English you will start at Entry 1. Entry level is then followed by Level 1 and Level 2. These 5 levels of ESOL are all Skills for Life certificates. Skills for Life is a Government strategy to improve literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

Where can I learn English?

Colleges

The advantages of studying at a college are:

- Greater choice of courses
- Opportunity to meet people
- Access to computers and a library
- Advisers in Student Services

Refugee organisations

Some refugee organisations run ESOL courses. Some of these organisations may be RCOs (Refugee Community Organisations) that are working with people from one country or region and others will serve the whole refugee community. The advantages of studying here are:

- Feel more secure studying somewhere with experience of working with refugees
- Access to specialist advice is possible

Private language schools

Some private language schools provide free English courses for refugees and asylum seekers. Private language schools vary a lot from large school with excellent facilities to smaller ones which offer a few courses. Make sure you visit the language school before committing to a course to see if it is right for you.

On the Internet

There are lots of resources and free courses available on the internet for all levels of English. The advantage of studying online is that you can work in your own time and at your own pace. Some useful websites include:

- www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise
- www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish
- www.learnenglish.org.uk
- <http://a4esl.org>
- www.uefap.com

You can access the internet at your local library or at an open access ICT centre. These centres are based in the community, such as in an adult education centre or community organisation. The two main kinds of open access ICT centre are UK Online centres and learndirect centres. Some centres may be both.

UK Online Centres provide the ICT facilities you need and help and support in using computers and the internet. You can:

- Use computers
- E-mail
- Surf on the internet
- Take a short 'taster' course

To find out where your local UK Online Centre is you could ask at your local library, telephone 0800 77 1234 or look on the website www.ufi.com/ukol. Some centres provide support in other languages but you will need to speak to your local centre about this.

learndirect Centres offer access to computers and online courses including English Language courses. To find your nearest learndirect Centre, look on their website at www.learndirect.co.uk learndirect has a wide variety of courses and will assess your language to see which is the best for you. The main ESOL courses are called ELLIS and include extra help in a variety of languages. learndirect also provide a 'Welcome to English' course for people very new to the language.

How can I find an English course?

To find an English course you could:

- Speak to an adviser at your One Stop Service or other refugee agency
- Go into your local college and ask for details of their courses
- Contact learndirect on 0800 100 900 or look on their website www.learndirect.co.uk

Before you start an English course you are likely to be given a short test to find out which level you are at. If you have passed one level you will move onto the next level. If the classes at your level are full your name should be placed on a waiting list.

How do I enrol?

When you enrol or register for a course you may be asked to **show documents to prove your immigration status**. This could be a letter from the Home Office or an ARC. If you are **receiving asylum support or benefits** you will need to **show proof** of this too.

How much should a course cost?

From 2007/08 **refugees** who are **unemployed or receiving income-based benefits** will still be entitled to **free ESOL**.

However, if you are an **asylum seeker** you will only **become entitled to free ESOL** classes **six months after your claim for asylum**. You must be waiting for a decision on your claim or appeal. If you have been refused asylum and are receiving 'Section 4' support from NASS, because you are unable to return to your home country, then you can also access ESOL courses for free.

If you are an **asylum seeker** aged **16-18 years** you can **access ESOL courses for free** if you are receiving NASS support, or are an unaccompanied child seeking asylum and in the care of social services. If you become 19 years old while you are on a course you can continue studying until the end of that course. If you are on a course waiting list and become 19 years old before a place is available you can also study that course for free.

The **cost of English courses** will **vary by college** and depend on the rate of fees you have to pay. Refugees will be charged the lower home fees rate but asylum seekers could be charged the higher overseas rate (though each college has discretion over this).

How should I choose a course?

If you live in an area with a wide selection of ESOL courses you need to think carefully about the type of course you want. If possible you should discuss this with an adviser. It is important to think about what is best for you and the way you live.

- Do you want an ESOL course combined with another subject?
- Do you need to focus on one area of the language?
- Do you want a course aimed at a particular profession?
- What time of day do you want to study?

How can I learn English outside the classroom?

If you want to learn English then you need to do as much work outside the classroom as you do inside. Practising English whenever you can will mean that you improve more quickly. If your friends speak the same language as you, agree with them to speak English, even if only for an hour a day.

Watching television

You will find that watching a variety of television programmes will help you to improve your English. **Children's programmes** can be a good way to start if you are new to English as the **language is simple** and there is a lot of repetition. **News programmes** are very useful as they **are repeated** and you can find out about life in the UK. If you have 'teletext' on your television you can get subtitles for some programmes by pressing 888. If you have digital television you will need to select 'subtitles' from the set-up menu and follow the instructions. You could record television programmes on video so you can watch them again.

Listening to the radio

Listening to the radio is another great way to learn English. Keep a radio on whenever you can. At first you may not feel that you understand much but gradually you will understand more. Listening to a **local radio** station will help you to **learn the accent** spoken and mean that you find out what is happening in your area. You might find it useful to record items on the radio and listen to them again.

Reading

Reading newspapers, magazines and books is a great way to practise your English and increase your vocabulary. Many local newspapers are free. National daily newspapers come in two types; broadsheets and tabloids. Broadsheets (such as The Times and The Guardian) are written in formal, correct English and contain more news about politics and economics. Tabloids (such as The Sun and The Daily Express) are written in more everyday, conversational English and have more entertainment and sports news.

Visiting the library

A good place to read is in your local library. The library is **free to join** and you do not have to pay to borrow books or use the internet. Your library may have books in a range of **community languages** too. You may to pay to borrow other items such as videos or DVDs and to print from the computers. To join the library you will need to take in 1 or 2 forms of identification with your address on it, such as a letter from the Home Office, a tenancy agreement or a letter from your GP.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a great way to learn and practice your English. It also provides the opportunity to keep busy, learn new skills and contribute to your local community. You can read more in the 'Volunteering' section of this guide.

Mentoring

Mentoring is when you are matched with another person, your mentor, who acts as a guide to life in the UK. You can talk about different issues or your mentor might accompany you to help you with specific tasks. Ask at your One Stop Service for any local projects.

The Time Together scheme is a national refugee mentoring scheme run by the charity Timebank. As a participant in the scheme you will be paired with a trained volunteer mentor for 1 year. There are Time Together projects around the UK. Visit www.timetogether.org.uk for more information.



Education

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers

▶ What is the education system in England like?

The education system in England may be very different to the one in your country of origin. Education for adults takes place mainly in colleges and universities. You can study for a variety of qualifications. Where you study will depend on the type of course that is best for you. Higher education at university is often seen as the most prestigious but many higher level courses now take place in colleges in England. You need to think about the type of course, the level of qualification, the possible costs involved, the support available and how it fits into your future plans.

Some useful information about the education system, including an explanation of different qualifications can be found on:

- www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning
- www.qca.org.uk

You are entitled to study any course at any level, as long as you can satisfy the entry requirements and pay the course fees.

▶ What is further education?

Further education is the education available past 16 years, but **below degree level**. The aim of further education is to **train people for work or future studies**. The courses available are flexible and varied. Some higher education courses also take place in further education colleges.

▶ How much do further education courses cost?

Many further education **courses are free** to refugees who are **receiving benefits**. You will need to show evidence that you receive benefits when you enrol. For others, often the higher level courses, you may have to pay fees. Refugees are entitled to the lower home fees rate.

From 2007/08, asylum seekers (aged 19+) will not be eligible for publicly funded further education, until they have been in England for six months after their claim for asylum (and are still waiting for a decision on their claim or appeal). This means that before the six months they will be charged the higher overseas rate for courses in further education. Some colleges may decide to charge the lower home fees rate to asylum seekers as they have discretion over this.

For more information about the costs of courses for asylum seekers look at the 'Learning English' section of this guide, under 'How much should a course cost?'

What financial help is available for further education?

Learner support funds are available in colleges to help with the costs of studying, such as transport or books. Asylum seekers receiving NASS support and between 16-18 years old are entitled to these funds. Asylum seekers 19 years and over are not entitled.

If you have refugee status and are 16 years or over you are also entitled to Learner support funds. If you were not granted refugee status but given leave to remain in the UK, then you will need to be in the country for 3 years before you are entitled to learner support funds. This does not apply to 16-18 year olds with this status, who do not need to meet this 3 year residency requirement.

You may also be entitled to an **Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)**. EMA is a government scheme which entitles students between 16-19 years to receive payments of between £10 and £30 a week for attendance at college or school. Eligibility is dependant on your household income. This is only available to people with refugee status, humanitarian protection, or ILR. If you have ILR you must have been 'ordinarily resident' in the UK for 3 years.

What are the entry requirements for further education?

Many courses have no specific entry requirements. The **college prospectus will tell you** if there are any. Always speak to the course tutor if you feel you are able to do a course but you do not meet the formal entry requirements, as they may be able to set you a short test.

Your **English** will need to be **good enough** for you **to follow the classes**. If your English needs improving there are lots of ESOL courses available. Courses combined with ESOL are often available, or your college could provide additional help with English.

How do I find a further education course?

- Visit your local college - pick up a prospectus and speak to Student Services
- Go to your local library– it should have college prospectuses
- Look on the college's website
- Use other websites, for example: www.hotcourses.com or www.learn-direct-advice.co.uk/findacourse/

How do I choose a further education course?

Choosing the right course for you is important, especially if there are costs involved, so **speak to an adviser**. Courses may seem to have the same value, but if one is accredited it would be worth more to you afterwards.

Depending on the area that you are interested in, you may be able to choose between, or do a combination of:

- **Vocational course** - better if you are happier learning practical skills and doing hands-on things.
- **Academic course** - better if you are more interested in analyzing and researching arguments and theories.

Your choice of academic or vocational course will also **depend on what you hope to do after your studies**. Unfortunately courses that are intended to lead to employment may not be available to asylum seekers without work permission. If this includes you, then speak to the college. Courses that appear vocational but are combined with ESOL may still be available.

You may feel that neither a vocational or academic course is right for you. You could choose a course that develops a specific skill, such as ICT, or oral presentation abilities. Another option is to take a course in preparation for higher education. They include specialised preparation courses, Access courses and academic English courses.

▶ **How do I apply for a course in further education?**

You will need to apply **to the college directly**. The main period for applications is January to September, but some courses may repeat every term so you can apply at any time. When you go to the college to enrol you should take:

- ARC or other Home Office document
- Letter showing receipt of benefits or NASS support

▶ **What support will the college provide?**

When you get to college, if you are finding life difficult, speak to your course tutor or **Student Services**. The college may be able to offer extra classes for English, study skills or ICT. If your difficulty is more personal, the college might have a **Student Welfare Officer** you can talk through your problems with.

▶ **What is higher education?**

Higher education consists of **advanced level courses** carried out in universities and also in colleges of higher education, art and agriculture and further education colleges. Courses take between 1 and 6 years to complete, depending on the subject and qualification and can be at **undergraduate or postgraduate** level.

Higher education courses lead to **three main types of qualifications**:

- Diplomas
- Degrees
- Professional qualifications

▶ **How much does higher education cost?**

The costs of higher education can appear confusing. There are **two rates of fees** for university: 'home fees' and 'overseas fees'. If you are a **refugee** (or their spouse or child) you are entitled to **pay 'home fees'** for full and part-time courses in higher education.

If you are an **asylum seeker** you are **likely** to be **charged** the '**overseas fees**' rate for both full and part-time courses in higher education. This is **at the discretion of the university** though. Some may charge 'home fees' to all asylum seekers and others may decide on an individual basis. If you are committed to a particular course speak to the university to see what can be agreed.

From September 2007, universities and colleges in England can charge 'home fees' of up to £3,070 a year for new full-time students. 'Overseas fees' can be more than double this.

What financial help is available for higher education?

If you have **refugee status** you are **eligible for student support** for first degrees, postgraduate initial teacher training and other specific 'designated courses' (such as HNC, HND and Foundation Degree). If you have **ILR (without refugee status), ELR, ELE, HP or DL** you are also **eligible** for student support but you must have been '**ordinarily resident**' in the UK for **three years** or more. This includes those waiting for a decision on an application for further leave to remain. **Asylum seekers** are **not eligible** for any statutory financial support for these fees or any other costs, however long they have been in the UK.

The amount of student support that you receive will depend mainly on your (and your family's) income. You can find out more information on:

- www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk
- www.scholarship-search.org.uk
- www.hero.ac.uk

If you are an asylum seeker or refugee not eligible for student support you will find it very difficult to get funding for higher education. Educational trusts and charities have some limited funds. The Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) has a very useful handbook, 'Higher Education Pathways' which includes lots of information on funding. This is free for refugees and asylum seekers. Telephone CARA on 020 7021 0880 or look at: www.academic-refugees.org.

What happens if my immigration status changes in the middle of a course?

If you are an asylum seeker and receive a positive decision on your asylum claim while on a course you should **tell the university immediately**. You can be **reassessed for 'home fees' and for student support**. For any positive decision, you will be eligible to pay 'home fees' when the fees are next charged. Your eligibility for student support will depend on the decision you receive from the Home Office.

If you receive **Refugee status (with or without ILR)** you will be eligible for assistance with paying fees for the subsequent years of the course. You will also be eligible for assistance with paying your fees for the current year, if your status was given within 3 months of the first day of the start of the course. You will be eligible for support with living costs from the first quarter following your change in immigration status.

If you receive **ELR, ELE, HP, DL or ILR (without refugee status)** you must have lived in the UK for 3 years before you are eligible for student support.

What are the entry requirements for higher education?

Entry requirements **vary widely** between courses and institutions. You can find the entry requirements for each course in a **college or university prospectus** or on the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (**UCAS**) **website**.

The entry requirements may be listed as:

- Grades in particular qualifications (for example A-levels)

- Grades in particular subjects (for example Physics) or subject areas (for example Performance Arts)

If you have **qualifications from outside the UK** that are not listed, they should be **considered on an individual basis**. Contact the university or college and ask to speak to the Admission Tutor for the course you are interested in. There is more flexibility in most universities in considering applications from mature students (aged 21 or over).

Your **English must be at a high level** to study but there are no official levels of English needed. The IELTS score is one guideline that some universities use. A common score requested is 6.0 and above. Always contact the individual institution to see what they ask for.

▶ How do I find a course in higher education?

You need to get the **prospectus of universities**. These are available directly from the University or from libraries. You might find it useful to **search on the internet**. You can order a prospectus from any higher education institution or further education college in the UK through: www.aimhigher.ac.uk/courses/order_prospectus.cfm

The internet has a variety of other websites that you can use to search for higher education courses. These include:

- www.learndirect-advice.co.uk
- www.hero.ac.uk
- www.hotcourses.com
- www.prospects.ac.uk
- www.ucas.com

▶ How do I choose a higher education course?

A wide range of courses is available at higher education level. You need to take many different factors into consideration so it is important to **get support and guidance from an adviser**.

Once you have decided on a few courses you could telephone the university or college for more information. Ask to **speak to someone from the department** as you can explain your situation and expectations to them.

If possible, you should go to the college or university to have a look around to see how it feels. Most universities and colleges have **Open Days** when you can speak to people from different departments about the course you want to study and also speak to Student Services.

Apart from this, there are many resources you can use to help make your decision. These include:

- University websites
- Professional bodies' websites or Advice Lines
- Newspapers and professional journals
- Quality assessment tables for different courses (for example <http://education.guardian.co.uk/universityguide>)

▶ **How do I apply for a course in higher education?**

How you apply for higher education depends on the type of course you want to apply for.

If you want to apply for an **Undergraduate degree, Foundation degree, HND/HNC or Diploma** then you will need to **apply through UCAS**, using the online application system. You can find lots more information on: www.ucas.com.

For a **part-time undergraduate or postgraduate course** you should get information about applying for a particular course from the university or college prospectus. Always check this for application deadlines. You will need to **apply to each institution directly**.

▶ **What support is available in higher education?**

Support is available to students, either **through the institution** itself, or through the **Student Union**. The Student Union is a body established by students to represent them and give them support and advice during their time in Higher Education. It is independent of the college or university.

Training

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers



Can I access Government training schemes?

If you are a refugee and receiving benefits you can access Government funded training schemes. Asylum seekers (with or without permission to work) are not eligible for these Government training schemes. The main schemes are Work Based Learning for Adults and Apprenticeships. Other training courses are supported by Jobcentre Plus. You should ask your local Jobcentre about these.

What is the New Deal?

If you are a refugee and receiving Jobseekers Allowance the Jobcentre Plus may recommend that you join the 'New Deal'. New Deal is a **Government programme** that aims to **support people into work**. You would have a New Deal personal adviser to work with you to develop a plan to find you suitable employment. This **may include a training scheme**. There are several New Deal schemes aimed at different groups, such as lone parents, young people and people over 25 years.

What is Work Based Learning for Adults?

Work Based Learning for Adults (**WBLA**) is another programme from Jobcentre Plus aimed at getting **people into employment**. The programme aims to do this **through training and work experience**. WBLA is targeted mainly at people over 25 years old who have been unemployed for 6 months, but refugees may be invited to join the programme earlier. You will put together a training plan with the help of the Jobcentre which may include work experience, working towards a qualification such as an NVQ, training for a specific job or a combination of these.

What are Apprenticeships?

An apprenticeship is a type of **work-based training** for young people and adults interested in learning new skills and gaining qualifications as they work. You **work and train** with an employer **and study** at the same time with a learning provider, such as your local college. Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships are aimed at 16-24 year olds and normally take between 1 and 3 years to complete. Entry requirements are flexible.

If you want to work in a specific industry or business area then an apprenticeship might be a good option. You will gain experience, knowledge and skills in your chosen area, an NVQ at level 2 or 3, a Key Skills qualification and a technical certificate such as a National Diploma. You need to make sure that you are making the right choice when committing to an apprenticeship as it can be a lot of work. Make sure that you speak to an adviser before making a decision. You can find out more at: www.apprenticeships.org.uk.

Can I access training from my employer?

If you are in employment your employer **may provide or fund training** that could lead to an academic or vocational qualification. This could include basic skills training or training specific to your role at work. Many employers are committed to employee development. The 'Investors in People' standard is given to employers who show a continued commitment to staff training and development.

What financial support is available for training?

You may be able to take out a **Career Development Loan** to help pay for training. This is only **available** to people with **ILR**. This loan can be for £300 to £8000 to cover costs such as course fees, course materials and living expenses. It can be used for full-time or part-time courses.

A Career Development Loan can help to pay for up to two years of vocational (work-related) learning, or up to three years if the course includes one year's relevant practical work experience. Your study should be job-related and you should not be supported financially by any other organisation or be receiving a mandatory grant. A Career Development Loan may affect the benefits you receive so it is important that you get advice before taking the loan out. Remember that the Career Development Loan is an agreement between you and the bank and you must feel able to repay the full amount.

You can get an information booklet about Career Development Loans by telephoning 0800 585 505, seven days a week. You could also ask at your local Jobcentre, college or training centre. You can find more information at: www.direct.gov.uk/cdl.

Can I do a course with a work placement if I do not have permission to work?

The **current policy** from **NASS** is that asylum seekers receiving support are able to do a **vocational course** that includes an **unpaid 'work placement'**. This placement must be part of the course and not paid employment. It is recommended that you contact NASS to tell them about your course so that there is no confusion over your entitlements. If your course includes a training allowance you may need to have the conditions to your temporary admission adjusted. You should also tell NASS about any training allowance you are receiving as it may affect the support you receive from them. NASS should not take into account any help with travel expenses or meals.



Volunteering

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers

What is volunteering?

Volunteering is **helping** in an organisation, often a charity or voluntary organisation, **without being paid**. Volunteering is **very common in the UK** in people of all ages and backgrounds. It is very respected by employers who will value the experience you gain as a volunteer. Many refugees and asylum seekers volunteer for their local refugee agency, refugee community organisation (RCO) or other local voluntary organisation.

What are the benefits of volunteering?

As well as being enjoyable, volunteering has many benefits if you are a refugee or asylum seeker. Volunteering can:

- Improve your English and communication skills
- Help you to meet new people and make friends
- Teach you new skills and develop those you already have
- Increase your self-confidence

Volunteering can also **increase your employability** as you can:

- Learn about work culture in the UK and get experience in a UK workplace
- Gain useful references for future employment
- Show initiative and commitment, which employers value highly
- Gain experience in a new area
- Do something that is valued by employers in all sectors; private, public and voluntary

If you are an asylum seeker and do not have permission to work volunteering can be especially useful. It can help **fill the gap** left on **your CV** by not being able to take paid employment. Volunteering can also give you something positive to focus on in your daily life and help you to feel part of your local community.

How can I find somewhere to volunteer?

You may already know somewhere that you would like to volunteer, such as in a community centre, a local charity or a refugee community organisation. Go in and ask to speak to the manager or someone who can help.

If you need help finding somewhere to volunteer you could **speak to** your One Stop Service or visit your local **Volunteer Centre**. Most towns and cities have a Volunteer Centre, which is an organisation that finds volunteering opportunities for people. They will ask you what you are interested in doing and match you with a local organisation. You can search for your local volunteer centre on the website www.do-it.org.uk. You can also use this website to search for volunteering opportunities yourself.

You could also try local newspapers, or noticeboards at your local library or community centre. Organisations looking for volunteers will often advertise there.

What can volunteers do?

Volunteers can be involved in a **range of activities**. It is up to you what you would like to do as a volunteer so choose something that you enjoy doing and find interesting. Some examples of activities include:

- Interpreting
- Advice work
- Community development work
- Administration / office work
- Helping at a club for the elderly / children
- Befriending patients in a hospital

It is possible to find something that fits with your skills and interests. If you want to try something new, volunteering is a great way to develop additional skills. You may decide to volunteer in an area that you would like to work in the future. Some activities will need you to speak English well, but for others it is not so important. Remember that volunteering is a great way to practise your English.

How do I apply to be a volunteer?

Many organisations working with volunteers have a very **informal application process**. You may meet with the manager or volunteer supervisor for a short talk and agree what your role will be. You could then start very quickly.

In other cases a more **formal application system** will be in place. The organisation may advertise for a specific volunteer role. They may ask interested people to send a **CV or application form** and ask applicants to give references. The organisation will then look at the applications and decide who to interview for the volunteer position. Do not be intimidated by this formal procedure. It is always good practice for future employment in the UK. You can read more about this formal application process in the section of this guide on 'Employment and self-employment'.

What should I expect as a volunteer?

Volunteering is usually very flexible so you should expect to fit it in around your other commitments, such as college or family. You should discuss this with the organisation that you are volunteering with.

As a volunteer you should receive:

- A clear idea what you are expected to do
- Support from a nominated member of staff
- Induction to the organisation
- Money for your expenses, such as travel or meals

Some organisations may be able to cover the costs of childcare. If you need this help it is important that you discuss it before you commit to being a volunteer, as it is quite rare.

Volunteering is supposed to be fun so talk to your volunteer supervisor if there are problems. You do not have to stay anywhere as a volunteer if you do not want to, but try to give the organisation as much notice as possible if you intend to leave.

What will the organisation expect from me?

If it is important to **treat your volunteering as seriously** as any paid employment. You will need to stick to any policies that the organisation has, be **reliable and professional** and tell the organisation in advance if you intend to leave or cannot attend at your regular time. The organisation may rely on you for an activity to go ahead, or for a deadline to be met, so it is very important that you keep them informed. A reference from your volunteer supervisor may help you find future employment.

What is a CRB check and do I need one?

If you want to **volunteer with vulnerable people**, such as children or the elderly, your organisation will ask you to fill in a disclosure form. This is also known as a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check. This check is used **to see if you have a criminal record** that would make you unsuitable for working with vulnerable people. It is not something to worry about. The organisation should give you the form and help you to complete it. This service is free for volunteers. You can find out more at www.crb.gov.uk or telephone the Criminal Records Bureau on 0870 90 90 811.

It can be difficult for refugees and asylum seekers to send off the supporting documents needed. If you do not have a passport then you are required to provide 5 identity documents (such as a marriage or birth certificate, bank statement, utility bill, or NHS card) from a long list. If you cannot provide these documents explain this to the organisation. They may be able to involve you in activities in another way.

Can volunteering affect my benefits?

If you are a refugee and receiving Jobseekers Allowance you are able to volunteer but you must be careful it does not affect your benefits. You **must remain available for work**, which means you should be able to attend a job interview with 48 hours notice and be available to start work with a weeks notice. You should also be **actively seeking work**. This includes registering with an employment agency, applying for jobs or sending employers your CV. You should **tell the Jobcentre that you are volunteering** to avoid any problems. Your volunteer supervisor could write a letter to the Jobcentre to tell them what expenses you receive, that they know that you may have to stop volunteering to start a job and list the skills that you are developing as a volunteer.

Employment and self-employment

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers



Am I allowed to work?

Refugees and asylum seekers with permission to work are able to take employment in the UK. There is more information on this in the section of this guide on Immigration status and rights and entitlements. If you are an asylum seeker without permission to work you can prepare yourself for employment. Volunteering is one way of gaining valuable experience as well as UK references. You may also decide to research the labour market in the UK, research your profession, or build up a network of contacts.

What is job search?

It is important to find out about the job search process in the UK if you want to find employment. It may be very different to the system that you are familiar with. The system in the UK involves **finding a position**, applying for that position and if you are selected, having an interview. The job search system **can vary by profession** so it is important that you speak to an adviser or find out more if you want to work in a specific area.

The job search process in the UK can take a long time. It is important to remember that you can use the skills, experience and knowledge from abroad in the UK. If you have qualifications or work experience from overseas the section of this guide, 'Using qualifications and experience from overseas', will also be useful for you.

How do I research the labour market?

A valuable use of your time may be to research your profession, if you have one, or to research the UK labour market in general. You need to find out who to talk to, where they are and how the system works.

If you know more about the labour market in the UK it will help you to understand how the system works here. If you have a profession or occupation and are hoping to continue with this, you need to check if it involves the same work and if there is a demand for it in the UK. Some **websites that can help you** to research the UK labour market are:

- <http://jobseekers.direct.gov.uk>
- www.prospects.ac.uk/links/SectorBs

If you have a **particular profession** you may want to ask yourself:

- What would the job involve in the UK?
- Do the qualifications I have meet the requirements in the UK?
- Is it worth requalifying or would a related profession be better for me?
- Would I prefer to change my career?

To help you to think about these you could:

- Contact the professional body or look at their website (use this website to get a list of professional bodies in the UK: www.hero.ac.uk).
- Look at job adverts to see what employers are asking for
- Apply for job application packs to look at job descriptions and person specifications
- Read journals for your profession
- Speak to someone working in your profession

► What are the key skills that employers look for?

As well as skills specific to a particular job, employers will look for employees with key skills. Key skills are **abilities** that **employers want** all their employees to have. They **are transferable** in employment, learning and life. If you change career you can use your key skills in your new area of work. Key skills include:

- Communication skills
- IT
- Numeracy
- Working with others
- Problem solving
- Improving your own learning and performance

► What is networking?

Networking is **meeting people** that can offer you **advice and information** about your area of work and **introduce you to others** in the area. These people are known as 'contacts'. Many people find their first opportunity through networking. Once you have identified an employer, you can make a speculative approach for a voluntary or paid position.

You may not be able to rely on the traditional networks so it is important that you are active in creating your own network in the UK. A careers adviser could help you to develop your list of contacts which could include:

- Friends and family
- College tutors
- Other people in your area of work
- Key employers in your area of work
- Professional bodies

► How do I find job vacancies?

Newspapers and magazines

You can look for vacancies in your area in **local newspapers**, or vacancies across the UK in **national newspapers**, especially broadsheets. Newspapers' websites are often an easy way to search the job vacancies advertised. You could also look for **specialist magazines** in your local library or in a newsagent.

Jobcentres

You do not have to be receiving benefit to use the resources available at the Jobcentre.

- **Jobpoints** - A Jobpoint is a touch-screen computer available in Jobcentres which has thousands of job vacancies. Just choose the sort of job you are looking for and a list of vacancies will come up.

- **Internet** - You can also search for Jobcentre vacancies on their website www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk.
- **Telephone** Jobseeker Direct on **0845 6060 234** - To talk about any vacancies with a Jobcentre Adviser. They can tell you about vacancies in your area, send you application forms and sometimes arrange interviews.

Recruitment Agencies

Many people find employment with the help of a recruitment or employment agency. These are agencies that **help companies find employees** for temporary or permanent job vacancies. You can find the addresses of agencies in your local telephone directory or 'Yellow Pages'. To register with a recruitment agency you will normally need to make an appointment. They will want to see a copy of your CV, references and proof of permission to work.

Shop windows and notice boards

You can also find job adverts in shops such as newsagents, general stores and supermarkets. Community organisations and centres may also have job vacancies displayed. Most of the jobs advertised in this way will be for low-skilled employment and may not be very well paid.

Internet

The internet is being used more and more by people looking for work. Remember that if you do not have access to the internet at college or home that your local library should have free access. Some websites are very general and others are aimed at specific professions or skills level. Some examples include:

General job websites:

- www.monster.co.uk
- <http://jobseekers.direct.gov.uk>
- <http://www.fish4.co.uk/iad/jobs>
- <http://jobs.guardian.co.uk>
- www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

Public and voluntary sector jobs:

- www.lgjobs.com
- www.charitypeople.co.uk
- www.jobsgopublic.com
- www.opportunities.co.uk

Graduate/professional jobs:

- www.get.hobsons.co.uk
- www.prospects.ac.uk
- www.thebigchoice.com
- www.doctorjob.com

Speculative applications

To make a 'speculative approach' means to contact an employer because you think that there might be a job. You could do this by sending a CV and covering letter, telephoning the organisation or visiting them. If you decide to visit the organisation you should always telephone first to check that it is okay. You will need to research the organisation before contacting them.

▶ How do I apply for a job vacancy?

Both formal and informal job application systems exist in the UK. An **informal system** is less common and exists mainly for low-paid or casual work. You may meet with the manager for a quick talk and make arrangements quickly.

A **formal job application process** is much more common. The job advert is likely to ask you to send a **CV and covering letter** or to telephone or write to the organisation for an **application pack**. The application pack will tell you the deadline for the application and normally include:

- Job description
- Person specification
- Application form or request for CV
- Equal opportunities monitoring form
- Request for references

▶ What is a job description?

The job description will lay out the **duties and responsibilities** of the position. It will tell you **what is expected of the person** in the organisation. It should tell you the job title, who is responsible for or manages the position, the purpose of the job and list all the duties and responsibilities. It is important that you read this carefully so that you are applying for the right job for you.

▶ What is a person specification?

The person specification is linked to the job description. It sets out the **criteria** for the person that the **organisation is looking for**. The person specification may look at skills, experience, qualifications, abilities and personal qualities.

The person specification will tell you what you must have and at what level. Some criteria are described as essential, in other words you must have them to be able to do the job. Other criteria are described as desirable. This means that these are not vital to the job but it will help your application if you can meet some or all of the desirable criteria.

When the organisation is deciding who to interview, or 'short listing', they will look at your application and see how you have demonstrated that you meet the person specification.

▶ How do I complete an application form?

The application form will be divided in several sections. These will include your personal information (such as name and address), your qualifications and your work history. Remember that if you have voluntary experience this is valued by employers and it is important to include it in your application.

Your application is likely to be photocopied so **type or word process** it, or use **clear handwriting**. If you run out of space on the form attach another piece of paper but make sure it is clearly labelled.

▶ **What is a personal statement?**

Your personal statement is the **most important part** on the application form. This is your opportunity to **demonstrate** that you meet the person specification and that you are the **best person for the job**.

Some useful tips are:

- Draft your personal statement before writing on the application form
- Spend time on the personal statement to make it a quality application
- Make sure you address each point on the person specification
- Give evidence of meeting the criteria and use brief examples
- Write a new personal statement for each job you apply for
- Make your personal statement interesting and distinctive
- Ask an adviser to look at it before you send it
- Keep a copy of your personal statement as it may be used at an interview

▶ **How do I write a CV and covering letter?**

A CV, or Curriculum Vitae, is a document that **summarises your qualifications, skills, experience and interests**. A covering letter is one that you send along with your CV to make the person reading it interested in you and explains why you would be ideal for the job. It is important that you do not repeat what is on your CV but expand on your skills, experience and qualities. For advice on how to structure your covering letter visit:

www.get.hobsons.co.uk/advice/applications_covering

It is **important that you seek advice** when producing a CV. You can find some help on writing your CV at: www.learn-direct-advice.co.uk/helpwithyourcareer/writecv/

You should **tailor your CV for every job** that you apply for. You can start with a basic CV that shows all your skills, qualifications and interests. You can then adapt your CV to show your strengths and qualities relevant to the opportunity.

A CV can be written in many different ways. The most commonly used are:

- **Functional CV** – these emphasise your relevant skills and strengths, rather than your work and education history. They are often very good for asylum seekers and refugees, especially if you have been out of work, are changing career or have had several short-term jobs. An example of a functional CV of a refugee can be found on the Prospects website: www.prospects.ac.uk/downloads/sis/bgissues/CV3.pdf
- **Chronological CV** – these puts your information in date order. It can show how you have advanced in your career and how you have gained skills and qualifications. It may not be the best type of CV to use if you have changed jobs a lot or have gaps in your career history.
- **Targeted CV** – these are specifically written to meet the requirements of a particular employer. It should show that you understand the needs of the organisation you are applying to.

It is an advantage to speak many languages. You should mention the languages you speak on your application form or CV. It is best not to include English in a 'languages spoken' section as the person reading your application will assume that you speak this.

▶ **What is a reference or referee?**

A referee is someone who **knows you well** and can **support your application** for paid employment or volunteering. They may be asked to say if you can do the job or volunteering well or not. The organisation you are applying to may contact them by telephone or in writing. You will normally be asked to give 2 referees.

For paid employment you usually have to provide references from people you have worked with, your teacher or adviser. You should **choose people who know you well** enough to comment on your skills, abilities, experience and character. If you are applying for a voluntary job, you may be asked to provide 'character' references. These are people who can explain that you are reliable and trustworthy. They could be someone from your local drop-in centre, or your community or faith group. Volunteering is a good way to get a UK reference for later paid work.

▶ **How do I explain my qualifications from overseas?**

You need to explain overseas qualifications so that the **organisation understands them**. Remember that the employer is interested in what you know and what you can do.

Your application should give an **English translation** of your qualification. If you think it will help you could include the **NARIC equivalent**. You could also include some of the relevant skills you learned when doing the qualification.

▶ **How do I explain gaps in my career history?**

If you leave gaps on a CV or application form an employer may think you are hiding something. If there is only a few months missing from your career history you may be able to date work or education in whole years, rather than months.

For example you could write:

- Secretary, 1998-2001
- PA to Director, 2002-2004

Instead of:

- Secretary, September 1998 – October 2001
- PA to Director, March 2002 – November 2004

If the gap is longer than a few months then try to explain it in a positive way. You may have been involved in volunteering or raising children. Make sure you include any experience you have had or skills you have developed, such as learning English.

▶ **How do I explain time in prison or detention?**

You should **speak to an adviser** if possible to discuss this. Organisations working with refugees should be sympathetic to this issue. Other employers may not understand the situation in other countries where detention is used more frequently.

If you were imprisoned for only a few months you may decide not to mention it in your application. If you were in prison for a long time it is difficult to leave a gap. You could give the dates that you were in prison and explain the reasons why, for example, "I was imprisoned for my political beliefs."

▶ **How do I explain my involvement in political activities?**

Everyone's situation is different so it is difficult to give general advice about this. You are the best person to decide how to refer to your political activities and the level of detail to give. Your involvement can be an opportunity to demonstrate relevant skills, experience and knowledge. You may decide to present your political activities openly. You may also decide to present them in a non-specific way, for example:

- Volunteering for a human rights organisation, trade union, women's organisation, minorities rights organisation etc.
- Campaigning against child labour, female circumcision etc.
- Community work

If you are in doubt whether to refer to your political activity openly or how to highlight your acquired skills and knowledge, please consult an adviser.

You can demonstrate the wide range of skills and competencies that you have developed as a result of your political activity. Some examples include:

- Organising events
- Managing people
- Financial management
- Managing projects with very limited resources
- Providing support for marginalised groups
- Rapid response to change
- Negotiation
- Conflict resolution

You can also refer to the knowledge and understanding that you have developed as a result of your political activity, such as:

- Human rights issues
- Broader political contexts, or economic, social, cultural and civic issues
- Global and national environmental issues
- Equality and diversity issues

▶ **What should I do if I am over-qualified for the position I am applying for?**

Focus on the job description and person specification. **Show** the employer that you **can do the job well** and that you are **interested in working for them** in particular. You need to demonstrate that you are motivated to do the job you are applying for.

▶ **What do I need to know about interviews?**

An interview is your opportunity to show the organisation what you can offer them and to find out more about them. You will meet one or several staff from the organisation and be asked

some questions. These will be related to the job description, person specification and your application.

If you are applying for a paid job the interview will be formal. For a volunteer position it is likely to be a more relaxed, informal interview. Remember to:

- Prepare yourself practically and mentally
- Give examples of your skills and experience
- Ask for a question to be repeated or rephrased if you have not understood

Can I ask for feedback after an interview?

It is **normal to** ask for 'feedback' about an interview. This involves a member of the interview panel telling you what you did well and how you can improve. This might be done over the telephone or in writing. If you do not do well at interview you may need to prepare more. You may also need to practice your 'interview technique'. To do this you could ask a careers adviser to give you a 'mock' interview.

What should I do if I am not offered an interview?

- Look at your application again. Does it show that you have the skills the organisation is asking for?
- Remember that many positions are very competitive. Make sure that you research the job, the company and the industry before applying.
- Focus your applications on the positions that you really want.

Where can I find out more about self-employment?

You may decide that you would prefer to work for yourself rather than another employer. Some refugee agencies run special courses on business start-up, such as RETAS. Ask at your **One Stop Service** for details of any courses running in your area. Mainstream providers can provide advice and assistance but you may find that they do not understand your particular circumstances.

It is very important that you plan self-employment very carefully and get help with this. Finance to start a business can be very difficult to find. It is a good idea to contact your **Local Enterprise Agency**. You can find the details of your Local Enterprise Agency at: www.nfea.com. You can read about starting your own business on the website www.refugeesintobusiness.org.uk. The resources are aimed specifically at refugees so look at the issues you may face when starting your own business. There is also a toolkit for refugee organisations.

You will need to do a lot of reading of information about self-employment. You might find the information you need on:

- www.businesslink.gov.uk
- www.smallbusinessadvice.org.uk

The **Prince's Trust** also provide help with business start-up for 18-30 year olds. This can include advice as well as financial support. Guidance is available on their website at www.princes-trust.org.uk or you can telephone 0800 842 842.

Your **Jobcentre Plus** office may be able to help you. Speak to your adviser about this. If you are eligible and join certain Jobcentre Plus programmes, such as New Deal, you may get extra help.



Using qualifications and experience from overseas

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers

Can my overseas qualifications be recognised in the UK?

The experience and qualifications that you bring from overseas can be recognised in the UK by colleges, universities and employers. It is important that if you hold qualifications that were gained outside the UK you find out how they compare with UK qualifications. Even if you do not have any documents to prove your qualifications, you may be able to get recognition for your experience. Getting recognition is not easy though and can be very frustrating. If you do not manage to gain formal recognition you can still get an acknowledgment, understanding and appreciation of what you have achieved.

Why should I compare my overseas qualifications with those in the UK?

Comparing your qualifications can help you to **plan for the future** and **help others understand your education or training background**, especially advisers, educational institutions and employers.

How do I compare my overseas qualifications?

You will **need documents** proving your qualifications to go through the official comparison process. **NARIC** advise on how to compare your international qualifications with those in the UK. There are advisers in many organisations that have access to NARIC's information and can advise you of the equivalence of your qualifications for free. You could also visit:

- www.naric.org.uk (academic or professional qualifications)
- www.uknarp.org.uk (vocational qualifications)

NARIC give **free comparability advice** to refugees over the telephone on **0870 990 4088**. You need to give them the following information:

- Qualification title
- Awarding institution
- Length of the course
- Date of award

NARIC can also provide a written statement showing how your qualification compares to those in the UK. A Statement of Comparability (which costs £47.00 or £39.95 if you apply online) is a letter that explains which UK qualification(s) NARIC consider your qualification is equal to.

What should I do if I feel my qualification has been undervalued?

Assessments from NARIC are only intended as approximate guidelines and not as perfect conversions. Even so, people are sometimes disappointed if the assessment they receive is below the level they were expecting. If you feel that their assessment has seriously

underestimated the value of your qualification you should **contact NARIC** on 0870 990 4088 to **discuss it**. Remember that **other factors** concerning your qualification are **also important**, such as the level of competition to get on the course, the duration and content of the course, or the reputation of the university in your country. You may need to explain this when discussing your qualification with an employer, college or university.

How do I compare my professional qualifications?

If you have a professional qualification (for example as a doctor, lawyer, engineer or teacher) from your country, you should **contact the professional body**. They will tell you how your qualification compares with those in the UK. A professional body is an organisation that regulates the practice of a profession.

Professional bodies have their own systems of recognising qualifications from overseas. This may include getting an assessment of your qualifications from NARIC or another method.

Why should I get recognition for my qualifications?

If you have obtained a comparison of your overseas qualifications, you may want to find out if you can get any recognition for them. This may be **to meet the entry requirements for a course**, or to **prove to an employer** that you can do the job.

Getting recognition for your qualifications in employment

For some professions it is a legal requirement to have a qualification approved by their society, association or council if you want to do that work in the UK. Teaching, Architecture and most Health Professions are in this category. This means you have to meet all the requirements for registration set by the professional body.

For other professions it is not a legal requirement but it may be important to have the recognition and membership of a professional body (civil engineers and electricians, for example). If there is no legal requirement to have recognition, it is up to the employer whether or not they recognise your overseas qualifications. They may look at a NARIC assessment or focus on your work experience and interview.

Getting recognition for your qualifications in education

If you want to apply for a course in higher education (and for some further education courses) you will have to show the level of your qualifications. If NARIC consider your qualifications equivalent to the course entry requirements, it is likely that this will be accepted. If not, speak to the university or college as they may be flexible, especially for mature students (over 21 years).

How can I get recognition for my experience?

For your qualifications to be formally recognised you need to have certificates or transcripts. There are several ways that you can get recognition for the experience that you have if you don't have your documents with you.

Portfolios

A portfolio is an **organised folder of documents and other evidence** that shows what you have done in the past. It shows **evidence** of a range of **skills and experiences**. You should keep your portfolio updated and adapt the contents for use. The advantages of building a portfolio are:

- You recognise your skills and abilities
- You present yourself in the best possible way
- It is easier to show important information to other people

You may need to show your portfolio to careers advisers, college and universities, employers or your One Stop Service. You could use a portfolio to apply to college or university, when you are looking for voluntary or paid work, or for self-development.

Your portfolio should include copies of any useful documents that show what educational and employment experience you have. As well as any certificates, you could include:

- CV
- References from employers (paid or voluntary)
- Transcripts of units / modules covered at college or university
- Short summaries (called abstracts) of theses, dissertations or research projects you have done
- Photographs of creative work (for artists, designers, architects)
- Action plans you have made with an adviser
- Newspaper or magazine articles by you or about you
- Any other evidence of academic or work achievement

Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

APEL involves **looking at learning that comes from experience**. This could be paid or voluntary work experience, hobbies, life experience or training that you attended but do not have certificates for. With APEL you can get recognition for achievement, knowledge, skills and understanding. It is used in further and higher education. It does not matter where the learning took place, which language it was in, or the circumstances surrounding the learning.

To get an assessment of your previous experience you will need to produce a portfolio, as described above. Your portfolio will be assessed using four main criteria:

- Is it valid and reliable?
- Have you provided enough evidence to support your claims?
- Is the evidence clearly your own achievement?
- Is the knowledge recent or out-of-date?

Volunteering

To volunteer is another great way to have your experience recognised. As a volunteer you can use your skills and abilities and get a UK reference to prove what you can do. It can be difficult to volunteer at the same level of your qualifications and experience but any awareness in a sector could prove useful in the future. For example if you are a health professional then volunteering in a hospital would give you a greater awareness of how the UK health system works.

Getting recognition for trade experience

You may have experience in a specific trade, such as plumbing or bricklaying, but no qualifications or references to prove it. It may be possible to get this trade experience recognised and get a qualification at the same time. If you have a job in your trade area you may be able to get a qualification through OSAT (On-Site Assessment and Training). This has

to be arranged through your employer. An assessor will visit your workplace to identify the skills that you have and any gaps in these skills. If you are successful you will be given an NVQ. For more information about this scheme you can visit: www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk.



Requalification

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers

What is requalification?

If you are a qualified professional, you may want to find out if you can practice in the UK, or if you need to requalify first. Requalification is a **process** that you **need to follow for regulated professions** so that you are **allowed to work** in the UK in **that professional area** (for example pass a number of exams or do some courses). For unregulated professions you can legally practice in the UK but requalification may make it easier to find employment. Even if you do not have permission to work, you can use your time well if you research your profession and start preparing for the stages of requalification. **Advice and guidance** from an adviser or a professional body is **very important**.

What do I need to think about?

It is important to remember that:

- Requalification can take a very long time
- Requalification can be an expensive process and there is very little funding available
- A high level of English is needed
- Even if you requalify, you may still find it difficult to find employment
- You also need to learn about the system and working life in the UK
- You need a realistic plan to help you decide if you can requalify successfully and how long it might take you

What are regulated and unregulated professions?

In the UK many professions are **regulated**, such as Medicine, Teaching or Architecture. This means that it is **against the law to practice without being registered**. If your profession is regulated, you need to meet the standards of the professional body to be registered. The standards will be different for each profession.

Some professions are **unregulated**, such as Engineering or Finance. If your profession is unregulated, **you can practice in the UK**. But in some cases, there are common exams that many employers or customers expect you to have. Passing those exams might enable you to be on the register of the professional body that have set those exams.

What is a professional body?

A professional body can **advise you on the requalification process**, which in some cases could be very complicated and in others simpler. Professional bodies vary in their services and activities. They are **often regulatory and set standards for the profession**. Others are simply supportive and offer a membership service. The best place to find the details of your professional body is on the internet.

Is requalification worth it?

Requalifying can be **very difficult and frustrating**. You need to think about the issues carefully. It is important that you have a detailed action plan and an adviser can help you with this. You should **discuss with an adviser** whether requalification is the best route for you.

You may want to take into account your age and your financial circumstances when thinking about requalifying. Consider what else you could do. Many people decide that it would be better for them to choose an alternative, such as working in a related profession or changing career.

You should ask yourself:

- How much will it cost?
- How long will it take me?
- What is the demand for my profession in the UK?
- Are my skills transferable to the UK?
- What is the level of competition for jobs?

What are the practical steps I can take towards requalification?

If you have researched the process and decide that you do want to requalify in your profession there are some actions that you can take, even if you do not have permission to work. Developing skills in your profession will be useful for you in the future, wherever you are.

You could focus on the following areas:

- Improve your English language and communication skills
- Get work experience
- Attend a study group for your profession
- Join a database for your profession (currently for doctors, dentists, nurses and engineers)
- Attend a 'bridging' course
- Build a portfolio
- Network
- Assess your skills
- Look at job descriptions in your profession

What are the alternatives to requalification?

There are alternatives to requalification, such as **working in a related area** or **changing career direction**. These are not easy options either, and it is important that you speak to a careers adviser before you make a decision. They can help you to identify the skills and knowledge that you have. A lot of the skills that you have will be transferable.

If you would like to stay in the same area of work, you may be able to work at Technician level. These jobs require specific skills and knowledge but do not have the same level of responsibility. Many of the skills you will be able to transfer from your previous experience. However you may need to update yourself on other skills or systems used in the UK.

If you decide to change career direction, you could do something that you had started or thought about in the past. You could do a course at college in a new subject or volunteer in a new area. Look in newspapers or on the internet to find out which skills are needed for different

jobs. When you compare these with your own you will have a clearer idea of which other careers may be realistic for you to consider aiming for.

Where can I find more information?

You will need to do some research if you are interested in requalification. The following websites are especially useful:

General websites:

- www.prospects.ac.uk
- www.get.hobsons.co.uk

For Health Professionals:

- www.rose.nhs.uk
- www.bma.org.uk
- www.rcn.org.uk/news/refugeenurses.php

For Teachers:

- www.gtce.org.uk
- www.refugeesintoteaching.org.uk

For Engineers:

- www.refugee-engineers.org.uk

For Social Workers:

- www.gscw.org.uk

For Veterinary Surgeons:

- www.rcvs.org.uk

For Law Professionals:

- <http://lawsociety.org.uk>

For Architects

- www.arb.org.uk/registration/index.shtml

Useful contacts

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers



Refugee agencies

Refugee Council

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

240-250 Ferndale Road
London SW9 8DB
020 7346 6700
Advice Line: 020 7346 6777

Welsh Refugee Council

www.welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk

Phoenix House
389 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 1TP
029 2048 9800

Refugee Action

www.refugee-action.org.uk

The Old Fire Station
150 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8SB
020 7654 7700

RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit)

www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu

London Metropolitan University
The Learning Centre
236-250 Holloway Road
London N7 6PP
020 7133 2110

Refugee Women's Association (RWA)

www.refugeewomen.org.uk

Print House
18 Ashwin Street
London E8 3DL
020 7923 2412

Education Action

www.education-action.org

1-3 Dufferin Street
London EC1Y 8NA
020 7426 5801

Migrant Helpline

www.migranthelpline.org.uk

The Rendezvous Building
Freight Service Approach Road, Eastern Docks
Dover CT16 1JA
01304 203977

North of England Refugee Service (NERS)

www.refugee.org.uk

2 Jesmond Road West
Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4PQ
0191 245 7311

Employability Forum

www.employabilityforum.co.uk

2 Downstream
1 London Bridge
London SE1 9BG
020 7785 6270

Refugees Into Jobs

www.brent.gov.uk

Policy & Regeneration Unit
3-7 Lincoln Parade
Preston Road
Wembley
Middx HA9 8UA
020 8937 1234

Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA)

www.academic-refugees.org
London South Bank University
Technopark
90 London Road
London SE1 6LN
020 7021 0880

Advice websites

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

www.advice-guide.org.uk

Directgov

www.direct.gov.uk

Multikulti

www.multikulti.org.uk

RETAS

www.education-action.org/advice

learndirect

www.learndirect-advice.co.uk

Refugee Access

www.refugeeaccess.info

Refugee Council

<http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

Learning English

BBC

www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise
www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish

English club

www.englishclub.com

English space

www.englishspace.ort.org

Many Things

www.manythings.org

British Council

www.learnenglish.org.uk

English Page

www.englishpage.com

IELTS

www.ielts.org

Using English for Academic Purposes

www.uefap.com

Employment

Job Centre Plus

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk
Jobseeker Direct: 0845 6060 234

Directgov

<http://jobseekers.direct.gov.uk>

learndirect

www.learndirect-advice.co.uk
0800 100 900

Prospects

www.prospects.ac.uk

Hobsons

www.get.hobsons.co.uk

Monster

<http://content.monster.co.uk/>

Business Link

www.businesslink.gov.uk

Guardian Jobs

<http://jobs.guardian.co.uk>

Education

Parents Centre
www.parentscentre.gov.uk

Learning and Skills Council
www.lsc.gov.uk

Hotcourses
www.hotcourses.com

Education Advice Centre
www.ace-ed.org.uk
0808 800 5793 (advice line)

NARIC
www.naric.org.uk
Oriol House
Oriol Road
Cheltenham GL50 1XP
0870 990 4088

Aim Higher
www.aimhigher.ac.uk

Higher Education and Research Opportunities
www.hero.ac.uk

UCAS
www.ucas.com
0870 1122211

Educational Grants Advisory Service (EGAS)
www.egas-online.org.uk

Department for Education and Skills
www.dfes.gov.uk

Health

National Health Service
www.nhs.uk

NHS Direct
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
0845 4647

Health for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Portal (HARP)
www.harpweb.org.uk

Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture
www.torturecare.org.uk
111 Isledon Road
London N7 7JW
0207 697 7777

Housing

Shelter
0808 800 4444 (8am to midnight)
<http://england.shelter.org.uk>

Refugee Support
www.refugeesupport.org.uk
MHT House
Crescent Lane
London SW4 9RS
0207 501 2200

Volunteering

Volunteering England

www.volunteering.org.uk

Regents Wharf
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL
0845 305 6979

Time Bank

www.timebank.org.uk

0845 456 1668

Jobs in Charities

www.jobsincharities.co.uk

Charity Job

www.charityjob.co.uk

Do-it

www.do-it.org.uk

Criminal Records Bureau

www.crb.gov.uk

0870 90 90 811 (general enquiries)

Immigration

NASS (National Asylum Support Service)

www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/applying/asylumsupport/

0845 602 1739

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)

www.jcwi.org.uk

0207 251 8706 (Advice Line)

Home Office IND

www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

0870 606 7766

Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID)

www.biduk.org

0207 247 3590

Refugee Legal Centre

www.refugee-legal-centre.org.uk

153-157 Commercial Road
London E1 2DA
0207 780 3220

Law Centres

www.lawcentres.org.uk

0207 387 8570

Asylum Aid

www.asylumaid.org.uk

28 Commercial Street
London E1 6LS
0207 377 5123

NCADC

www.ncadc.org.uk

0121 554 6947

Immigration Advisory Service

www.iasuk.org

0207 967 1200 (Advice Line)

British Red Cross

www.redcross.org.uk

Tel: 0870 170 7000



Glossary

Guide for refugees and asylum seekers

APEL – Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning

ARC – Application Registration Card (given to asylum seekers)

Asylum seeker – a person with an outstanding claim for asylum

CRB – Criminal Records Bureau

CV – Curriculum Vitae

DL – Discretionary Leave to Remain

ELE – Exceptional Leave to Enter

ELR – Exceptional Leave to Remain

EMA – Education Maintenance Allowance

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages

FE – Further Education

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

HE – Higher Education

HND/HNC – Higher National Diploma/ Higher National Certificate

HP – Humanitarian Protection

IAG – Information Advice and Guidance

IELTS – International English Language Testing System

ILR – Indefinite Leave to Remain

IT / ICT – Information Technology / Information and Communication Technology

LEA – Local Education Authority

NARIC – National Recognition Information Centre

NASS – National Asylum Support Service

NHS – National Health Service

NINO – National Insurance number

NRP – National Reference Point

NVQ – National Vocational Qualification

Portfolio – An organised folder of documents and other evidence that shows what you have done in the past

Prospectus – A catalogue listing college or university courses

RAGU – Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit

RAP – Refugee Arrivals Project

Refugee status – An immigration status given to those the Government recognises as a refugee

RETAS – Refugee Education Training Advisory Service

RCO – Refugee Community Organisation

UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

WBLA – Work Based Learning for Adults

www.advice-resources.co.uk



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