

HERAN conference

Initiatives in higher education for refugees and asylum seekers, Wednesday 11th May 2005



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INTRODUCTION

The first conference of a new network, HERAN (Higher Education for Refugees and Asylum seekers Network), was held at the Graduate Centre at London Metropolitan University on 11th May 2005. The conference was organised by RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit) who were also responsible for setting up the network.

The purpose of the conference was to:

- To showcase some of the initiatives taken by universities around the UK working with refugees and asylum seekers
- To identify strategies to sustain and mainstream the short-term project-based initiatives in HEIs for refugees and asylum seekers and to improve access to HE
- To encourage future sharing of information, exchange of views and implementing agreed action plans through network membership or through using the new network website
- To encourage policy makers to look critically at some of the barriers preventing refugees and asylum seekers from accessing HE

101 delegates attended, representing 30 universities as well as colleges, refugee agencies, refugee community organisations, local government, policy makers, funding bodies and voluntary sector organisations. The conference was opened by Malcolm Barry, the Head of the College of London and chaired by Harinder Lawley, the Head of Access Development, both at London Metropolitan University. The keynote speaker was Arun Kundnani, News Editor at the Institute of Race Relations. The workshops were facilitated by HERAN members. The panel at the end of the day included representatives from LSC, Universities UK, UCAS, CARA and RAGU as well as Hamdi Barre, a refugee from Somalia currently working on a Aimhigher project who showed a film about her own experience.

During the lunch break, delegates had the opportunity to look at the new HERAN website and RAGU's 'Information for Asylum Seekers' website. There was also a stall with information about projects for refugees and asylum seekers in different universities.

Delegates were asked to give feedback both on the conference and on whether it would result in any action. Responses were very positive. Many delegates commented that they were surprised and encouraged to see that so much work was going on. They were keen to go back to their institutions to share ideas from the workshops and raise issues with senior management. Several delegates said that they would amend their Equality and Diversity statement to include refugees. Some other comments were:

- 'Very glad HERAN is there and that I can draw on its resources'
- 'Really good event for reminding us of why this work is so important'
- 'A really useful day. Didn't know about HERAN or that so many other organisations were involved in projects similar to mine. In just one day I have gained a massive support network.'

For a summary of the key points from the day (from workshops and panel discussion), please see the end of this report. Further background information is in the Appendix.



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Speaker: Arun Kundnani, Institute of Race Relations

Arun Kundnani gave an overview of the current situation for asylum seekers and refugees, focusing particularly on asylum seekers who 'if they did not already exist would have to be invented' as they are such a convenient scapegoat for society's ills. In fact, in today's Britain, he said, they are 'not the problem but the solution'.

He went on to assert that the effect of this disinformation is not only the denial of human rights of asylum seekers but a threat to the democratic process in general. He catalogued examples of abuses of human rights and racial violence that have raised little protest. This process of demonising asylum seekers has been further assisted by 'a media industry which thrives on hounding immigrants' with asylum seekers going through a series of transformations from a group claiming humanitarian protection or the right to work into 'scroungers' then 'criminals' and finally to a threat to the very fabric and cohesion of our society.

Arun Kundnani attributes this climate of fear and loathing partly to powerlessness we feel in the shift towards a globalised economy that erodes the boundaries of national sovereignty. With no control over these new global forces, a new racism is born, so that all new migrants (Muslims in particular) bear the brunt of this sense of bewilderment and disorientation in a rapidly changing world. The recent acts of Parliament have been trying to address this by defining 'us' and 'them' and by doing so, creating 'a new Britain defined by demonisation, surveillance and internment'.

An example of this is the 2002 Immigration and Asylum Act that has made it possible for immigration officers to conduct raids on schools to deport pupils, unrestricted by the usual rules that would need to be followed. It also allows for pupils to be held in detention centres for unspecified periods of time without receiving education or to have segregated education in accommodation centres. The recent 2004 Asylum Act includes the facility for the withdrawal of all benefits and subsistence from families whose asylum claims have failed, likely to leave families destitute or result in the separation of children and parents. This is another example of the 'numbers game' where the interests of children are eclipsed by the bid to meet deportation targets. A Home Office document detailing techniques to 'control and restrain' children during the deportation process is a shocking indicator of the moral low point we have reached.

Arun Kundnani went on to give vivid case studies of detention and deportation of teenage students at school and further education colleges around the UK and the campaigns launched by fellow students to stop this. Oxford University students also recently campaigned against the deportation to Afghanistan of one of their students. A national Schools Against Deportation campaign is now sending a strong message, backed by the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, that the best interests of the child should be the primary consideration when deciding whether to deport someone at school or college in the UK.

In his closing remarks, Arun Kundnani paid tribute to the growing number of teachers and lecturers who do not turn their backs on their responsibility to their asylum seeker and refugee students who need their support. Whether through assisting with paperwork or funding, advocating for individual students or thinking about how a college or university's policies can be changed to provide wider opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees, this 'pushing the boundaries' can make a real change. Looking at how to do this and sharing ideas about what HEIs have already done, he concluded, was what the HERAN conference was all about.



WORKSHOP A

Models of mentoring: enabling staff and students to support refugees

Meg Message, Leeds Metropolitan University
Juliet Millican, University of Brighton
(with a contribution from Elizabeth Cafferty, CARA)

'Mentoring Refugees into Employment'

Meg Message, Leeds Metropolitan University

This is a project led by Leeds Metropolitan University in partnership with the Refugee Council, St George's Crypt and the Refugee Education Training and Advisory Service (RETAS). Funded by the HE Active Community Fund, it uses voluntary activities to support the local community. This is one strand of the development of a sustainable strategy in the University to support refugees.

Meg Message explained that the mentors are university staff, recruited through personal approach. This has worked well and there has been no shortage of volunteers. In fact, they were astonished by the good will they tapped into. The mentees are referred to LMU by local refugee agencies. They are refugees (with full refugee status and/or Indefinite Leave to Remain) actively seeking employment and/or further qualifications, preferably with an academic/professional background. They should also be moderately competent in spoken English. Ideally the pairs should have a shared background of work or education.

Support for mentors consists of:

- Initial training sessions
- Mentor support pack (fact sheets and other information)
- Mentor support group
- Email
- Follow up meetings with mentors

Mentors commit to one hour a week initially, reducing over a period of six months. This needs to be flexible to suit the requirements of each pair. Meetings take place on University premises.

Up to May 2005, 24 university staff have been involved and 18 refugees. The mentees have had backgrounds in engineering, law, teaching, nursing, computing, journalism, music, university lecturing, accountancy, construction and acting.

Some practical outcomes of the project:

- Four mentees have been given support with applications and have enrolled on degree courses.
- Two mentees have been successfully interviewed for jobs as care workers and another has taken up a teaching assistant post.
- One mentee has been offered guest lecturing slots at the university.
- Work shadowing has taken place at a local law firm and at the West Yorkshire Playhouse.
- University funded a free place on an intensive English language course.
- One mentee has been provided with a PC and workbooks.
- Guest membership of the University library has been taken up by most mentees.

The main challenges have been:

- Expectations of the mentees
- Keeping the referral agencies in touch with the project.
- Getting the mentors together for training, feedback etc
- Maintaining flow of mentees.
- Monitoring progress
- Evaluation – measuring success
- Future funding – they hope to get financial support from the University
- Sharing experiences across the sector and rolling out a model to other universities.

The mentees have given very positive feedback. Comments include:

“Words cannot express my gratitude for the support you are giving me”

“I feel I’ve come home”

“Agencies can help with housing and benefits and things like that but there is nowhere to get academic advice”

REMASHE, a mentoring project with refugees run by the Universities of Brighton and Sussex

Juliet Millican, University of Brighton

In 2003 the Community University Partnership programme funded the University of Brighton to do a small research project into issues of access into HE provision by refugees and asylum seekers in 2003. The research indicated a high proportion of qualified people from these communities in the City of Brighton who are either out of work or in work for which they are over-qualified.

The key issues the research identified were:

- Difficulties in getting qualifications gained in home countries recognised by UK universities
- Unfamiliarity with the UK academic context
- Problems within institutions of properly recognising the needs and potential of people with a different academic history
- Difficulty in accessing certificates from former programmes fully or partially completed

The response to research was:

- To set up a steering group of university personnel and community members
- To work with organisations already involved with this client group
- To facilitate entry into education by supporting applicants, while at the same time working with admissions staff.

The research was followed by a pilot project that provided mentoring to young people from a refugee background and with full refugee status, hoping to go on to HE in the UK and provided additional training to University Aim Higher mentors in issues particularly affecting this student group.

The mentors worked with an ESOL group (five female students with young children aimed at a range of different HE courses) and a local V11th form college (four male students taking their A levels). The mentoring covered topics such as careers advice, entry to HE processes, course choices and university culture.

The outcomes were:

Mentors felt:

- That much of the additional training was not necessary – that these groups had the same needs and questions as many local teenagers
- That some members of their groups could go on to become effective mentors themselves
- That these students were already getting some support through their institutions and could be accessing more.

Participants felt:

- Pleased and privileged that the university was making contact with them, and this encouraged them greatly to 'want to attend a university course'
- There were other people within the city who were more in need of this support

In the second phase of the project, the University of Brighton has linked with activities at the University of Sussex to form a broader 'Refugees into Higher Education' project. They have decided to focus on three areas, Brighton, Hastings and Crawley. They have appointed an outreach worker to make contact with people who were still outside of current educational provision and planned a range of different responses, including taster courses, mentoring and advice and guidance sessions.

For the mentoring activities, they have decided to offer two levels of support:

- Academic advisors from a relevant discipline area who might, through a one off meeting, be able to offer realistic course related information
- Ongoing mentoring with a university student to explore the broader issues related to attending HE study.

In addition to this they will do ongoing work on conversion of non-UK qualifications and APEL. Advisors and mentors are recruited via the Universities' intranets and are then given training in partnership with Migrant Helpline. Taster courses and visits to the university campus will be organised towards the end of the summer term.

The stages of the mentoring process are:

- Outreach worker makes contact with potential students
- Student profile completed together
- Academic advisors and mentors complete a similar profile
- Mentoring service matches student with appropriate help
- Outreach worker accompanies student to first meeting and follows up on progress

This is still in the early stages but the initial impressions are very positive. There is strong enthusiasm from certain areas (especially Hastings). University staff and students are keen to be involved. There is some sense, however, that some students have found them 'too late' and are already demoralised by rejection.

A final contribution to the workshop was from Elizabeth Cafferty from **CARA (Council for Assisting Refugee Academics)**. She talked about the problems CARA grantees (all are refugee academics with experience of working in HE) have in finding work as academics in the UK even after gaining postgraduate qualifications or re-qualifying in the UK. Recently CARA, London Metropolitan University and RAGU ran a pilot workshop to try to give refugee academics some practical tips and links to get their first job. Kate Cooper from London Metropolitan University and Jane Hoy from Birkbeck gave short talks with lots of practical suggestions for how to get part-time appointments and how to gain teaching qualifications. This is being followed by individuals contacting RAGU for further support and the opportunity to link up with an academic initially to observe a class and have a discussion with them. Feedback from lecturers was that they would like to offer more so this could grow into a

mentoring role depending on the pair. This will be done on an individual basis according to demand.



Discussion

Delegates suggested that a comparative evaluation of the Brighton and Sussex project with the Leeds Met one would be very interesting.

What are the practicalities of using students as mentors? They are paid £7.20 per hour. This is an opportunity to get credits although it is not always possible for them to drop other modules.

Comment on how you can help with the overseas fees problem. Meg explained that since the project is for refugees, they are treated as 'home' students so it is not a problem. However, she is aware that it is a huge problem for asylum seekers. Leeds Met has a small fund that has been used to cover asylum seekers' fees.

The HERAN network has asked universities to report on what they do and it is a haphazard system across the UK with lots of inconsistencies. It is confusing for the asylum seekers and those who work with them. Juliet said that they were also working with those who had status so the question did not arise. Often admissions staff don't know that those with refugee status should be treated as 'home' students and are eligible for student support. This is a real problem as refugees can be treated as international students.

How do you meet the language and cross-cultural communication needs of refugees? Meg explained that that work closely with RCOs and refugee agencies and take advice from them. This was especially important at the beginning when they would not have had the confidence to deal with the cross-cultural issues. Mentees need to have a certain level of English to be part of the project. Juliet added that the same is true with their project. The participants need to have the right level of language to apply to university. They can offer other support as well.

What are the benefits for mentors? Meg said that this is difficult to quantify but the mentors definitely felt that they had gained a lot and that it had been a mutually beneficial experience. One of the mentors decided to change career and become a social worker partly as a result of this experience. Juliet added that another benefit is that mentors are aware that this will increase the diversity of the student population.



WORKSHOP B

Staff development, refugees and awareness raising

Jane Hoy, Birkbeck, University of London
 (with a contribution from Alma Riggs, University of Glamorgan)

The objectives of this workshop were to:

- Share ideas about what we want to raise awareness about
- Think about strategies for awareness raising
- Look at 2 examples of developing a framework for staff development which enables us to develop a more inclusive environment in the classroom and in the college

Sharing ideas

What do you want to achieve in staff development in your workplace and why?

Participants' responses

Raising awareness with Admission Tutors	To understand issues for refugees in application and interviewing process, selection interviews, cultural issues, etc. To clarify the recruitment process and what is required at university
Raising awareness with front line staff (not just administrators)	To challenge assumptions made at first contact, which might become a barrier for refugees accessing HE
Opening up barriers created by providers themselves	Staff need to understand mission and own responsibilities within an organisation
Using existing Student Support to target refugee students	To ensure widening participation supports refugees through language, financial support, personal tutoring and counselling services
Raising profile of refugees in Equality and Diversity agendas	Refugee issues are marginal and invisible, often subsumed in ethnic minorities issues
Having specialist refugee advice	Specialist knowledge needed to advocate on behalf of refugees and delivering organisation training on refugee issues
Individuals finding support and information about existing campaigning and backup resources	To raise awareness and support the cause of refugees in their own workplaces

Presentation of Initiatives

1) Birkbeck, University of London

Create a framework for staff development based on market research of staff views and values towards refugees:

- Current perspectives and values of staff and students towards refugees?
- Issues facing refugees and asylum seekers in your college and community? Set up a working group to find out local refugee issues (they are different), involving refugees

in the college, leaders and individuals, community and voluntary organisations from the local community.

Listen to refugee(s) voice(s) and experience(s):

- Raise awareness of diversity and differences of refugee issues within refugee community themselves by having refugees to present their own experiences, i.e. refugee women or refugee gay speakers.
- Issues such as sexism and homophobia are present in both host and refugee communities and support and information need to be available.

Organise cultural contributions: these combine academic perspectives, links with national events and celebratory activities and can be fun. The approach is to involve academics in the issues re legislation and policy and to ensure that refugee academics and communities are included. Some examples from Birkbeck:

- Refugee Week: included satirical theatre on immigrations experiences and events from different local refugee groups
- International Women's Day: focus on refugee women and asylum with speakers from academic journal Feminist Review and refugee women
- Summer School on the Politics of Asylum and Immigration for anyone included: well known national speakers; workshops led by ex refugees; Home Office speaker and group and experiential work to enable connections to be made between participants from host and refugee communities (accredited on the Development Studies programme)
- Development Studies Certificate: core modules delivered for refugees which included work placements with NGOs.
- National mental health awareness day: seminar on mental health and refugees linked to College project on supporting students with mental health histories.

Involve Student Unions: they may have student organisations you can work with and will be concerned about rights issues.

Make links with academic curriculum and labour market:

- Present refugee issues as linked to the curriculum to attract academic support, make them part of the programme and to involve teaching networks, e.g. development studies, social policy, arts management, counselling for professionals working with refugees, courses for women, journalism, human rights, law etc.
- Provide volunteering opportunities to familiarise refugees with workplace

Critically engage with government policies and practices towards refugees, involving committed academics.

What should be done by schools, colleges and universities to ensure integration of refugees?

Improvements to:

- Provision of English language teaching (quality/level/hours)
- Provision of information and guidance
- Access to level of financial support offered

Review:

- Existing procedures for recognition of previous learning
- Provision of courses – need to be wider range and more affordable

- Adapt mainstream courses with additional support – helps keep refugee programmes integrated

What approaches work?

This needs to take account of staff and public perceptions and how they can identify with refugee issues. Research featuring discussion groups with floating voters (Rainey Kelly Cambell Roalfe, 1998) revealed that:

- There was a low awareness of refugees' experience – perceived as a 'twilight world'
- Refugees are a minor issue, not a major cause
- There is no awareness of who champions or campaigns for refugees
- Attitudes vary from sympathy to impotence, no identification, national pride and suspicion
- Sympathetic attitude may be qualified. People find it difficult to identify with refugees or imagine how they could help.

Three routes that might have some impact on perspectives:

- Raising the profile of refugees as a cause. The British are good at charities and taking up causes. Issue is that many do not know where to go for campaigning support.
- Common enemy: 'don't play into the hands of dictators'
- Ordinary people: 'imagine how you would feel as a refugee' Encouraging empathy from people by involving people's feelings and reactions to identify with refugees (more effective than facts, which can be interpreted in many ways). This may move the perception from 'superficial' to 'empowered' sympathy and from a 'small issue' to an 'important cause'.

2) Glamorgan University, Refugee Week, June 20, 2005

Alma Riggs talked about the awareness raising activities they are involved in at the University of Glamorgan. She explained that refugees are a non-issue in South Wales, because of the relative low ethnic minority population in the area. This is an opportunity to trail blaze an initiative on refugees and widening participation.

They are running an event during Refugee Week this year (*details of the event from bbjones@glam.ac.uk*) aimed at university staff, local government representatives, voluntary and private sector organisations and local schools staff. Following keynote speeches and discussion, the workshops will look at:

- Reality and myth
- Refugees, asylum seekers and HE
- Legislation and implementation

This awareness- raising initiative also involves a discussion forum with the local council of refugee academics (Cardiff) in schools. It will provide youth training, using a video produced by young asylum seekers and support in applying for funding.



Discussion

Refugee Week is a very valuable vehicle to promote the cause of refugees. There was some discussion about whether it would be a good idea for Refugee Council to change the

date as it effectively excludes Higher Education. It was recognised, however, that the date is suitable for schools.

Were refugee issues embedded at Birkbeck as a result of the programme? No, it did not continue due to end of HEFCE Widening Participation funding. HEFCE also changed direction of policy to Aim Higher and schools work. The focus shifted from adults though universities could do more to work with young refugees (similar to recent interest in care leavers). The College has applied for funding from the Challenge Fund (Home Office) to support refugees wishing to teach in further and higher education and is awaiting a response.

Issues around special funding and refugee programmes:

- Important to encourage teaching staff to be aware of what is going on in the classroom within their remit, with refugees or students who are friendly towards refugees.
- Middle managers in organisations need diversity training to take responsibility for and to take forward agendas (Diversity agenda) coming from the top. Birkbeck's programme was developed from the bottom up.
- Funds for refugees could be used: part to support the refugees themselves and part for programmes, such as Work Based programmes such as Foundation degrees (which are receiving more funding at present)
- Encourage refugee students themselves to provide training for staff and to highlight differences and expectations not met by the education system.
- Hear what refugees have to say rather than their voices mediated by someone else.

Working groups needs to be systematic about:

- Ensuring that we understand the ways in which racism and anti-refugee feeling and legislation is connected.
 - avoid deficit models and labelling
 - consider strengths and contributions of individuals and groups from refugee communities
 - employ refugee academics, teachers and researchers
 - work with refugee communities
 - encourage staff and students to put themselves in the refugees' shoes and engage with being a refugee, e.g. have you worked overseas?
 - common ground between refugees and ethnic minorities.

The Scottish approach: Stewart Simpson from the University of Strathclyde explained that the RiTeS (Refugees into Teaching in Scotland) project is engaging councils and Scottish government by presenting positive images of refugees and their talents in the context of the problem with migration and understanding the local Labour Market. There are 15,000 refugees in Glasgow alone, many of them highly qualified who could make a valuable contribution to Scotland.



WORKSHOP C

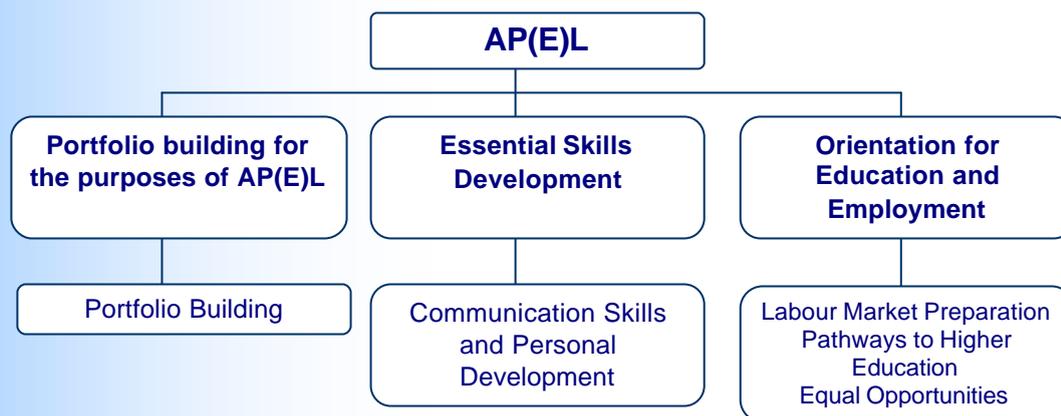
APEL programmes for refugees

How can AP(E)L be used to support refugees into relevant HE and employment?

Andrew Clarke, RAGU, London Metropolitan University

Andrew Clarke introduced the workshop by defining the difference between APL (Accreditation or Assessment of Prior Learning) and APEL (Accreditation or Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning). APL involves assessing and accrediting formal learning that is supported by certificates. APEL involves assessing and accrediting informal learning and learning that is not supported by formal certificates or other documents. APL may simply be a credit transfer process that involves the HEI looking at the certificates provided and deciding (with the guidance of NARIC and their own university system) on what they consider to be the value of this certified learning for their institution and what (if any) credit they will award. APEL, on the other hand, involves providing extensive documentation of where and how the learning occurred and written proof that certain learning outcomes were achieved. The process of gathering together this evidence inevitably means that the APEL process becomes a tool for personal development. This aspect of the process and also the fact that many refugees do not have the certificates required for APL make this the most relevant for these learners. Even those who do have the certificates they need find the APEL process valuable.

The RAGU programme AP(E)L for Refugees is delivered in three modules plus advice and guidance:



The portfolio contents are:

- Introduction – statement of purpose
- CV
- Education and Training + Outcomes
- Employment History + Outcomes
- Life Experience + Outcomes (choice)

- Conclusion – Short / Long Term Aims
- Evidence

A portfolio can be used:

- To gain exemption from university programmes
- For personal development
- When applying for jobs
- To help in identifying training or educational needs

What do students gain?

- Specific communication skills – the ability to describe their skills and knowledge for education and employment purposes
- Understanding of UK systems and practices
- A UK HE qualification
- Experience of study in a UK university
- Ability to make informed choices about their future career progression
- Increased confidence and self-esteem

Professional backgrounds of students 2003 – 2005

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • Teachers / Lecturers | 25% |
| • Associated Health Professionals | 12% |
| • Engineers | 12% |
| • Doctors / Vets | 8% |
| • Admin / Clerical | 5% |
| • Community Development | 5% |
| • Others inc. law, business, IT, research | |

Issues to consider

- Providing additional support – Advice and Guidance / Tutorials / Pastoral care
- Developing staff knowledge and expertise
- Working with existing university structures
- Funding specialist courses
- Developing new models of delivery
- Establishing links with refugee communities



Discussion

There was some discussion about the EU's APEL framework that came out of the Barcelona agreement 12 years ago. There is a need for the consistency and clarity that this could offer but it seems there has not been enough progress made.

If funding for such courses as the RAGU AP(E)L programme is tied to unemployed people through LSC and JobCentre funding, it excludes others who may benefit (such as the under-employed). It would be a good idea to run it as an evening course for employed people and women who have childcare responsibilities and cannot attend.

Andrew explained that the RAGU programme allows for funding of childcare for this reason. Travel expenses are also reimbursed.

It would be a good idea to have a link to work-based learning (as in Foundation Degrees).

There needs to be a clear indication of the difference this and other similar courses make. Funding for tracking would be a good idea to show successes and to have evidence to gain funding for future initiatives.



WORKSHOP D

Identifying strategies for sustainability of projects and funding streams to support initiatives for refugees and asylum seekers in HEIs

Azar Sheibani, RAGU, London Metropolitan University
(with a contribution from Anne Bellis, University of Sussex)

Current trends for refugee and asylum seeker projects in HEIs:

- a. Projects based at universities with the HEI having the sole responsibility for the project
- b. Projects based on partnership between universities
- c. Projects based on broader partnerships between an HEI and partners from other sectors
- d. Projects based on partnerships between an HEI and refugee community organisations and refugee agencies
- e. Multiple projects with funding from various sources

Types of projects:

- a. Projects to target refugees and asylum seekers as students i.e. working on requalification issues, delivery of English language and/or other courses, AP(E)L activities, delivery of other initiatives such as IAG, employment support, mentoring projects and so on
- b. Projects to target refugee community organisations as part of widening participation, continuing education or regeneration programmes in regions
- c. Projects to target both refugees and refugee community organisations i.e. to access refugees via RCOs
- d. Projects to target refugee children and their parents as part of Aimhigher, Connexions or other initiatives
- e. Research projects on refugees and asylum seekers
- f. Projects to focus on policy and strategic work for refugees and asylum seekers

Some initial tips for developing sustainable projects for refugees and asylum seekers in HEIs:

- Identify all key staff in the university who can support refugee initiatives and secure their support from day one: senior management, Widening Participation departments, Continuing Education departments, European Funding departments, research centres, Student Services, Student Unions and so on.

- Consult refugees (your potential students) and refugee community organisations (RCOs) before you embark on a new initiative to ensure that the project is needed and supported by the main stakeholders.
- Identify potential partners in the region specially other HEIs, regional development agencies, refugee community organisations and regional consortia on refugees and asylum seekers
- Develop initiatives which will complement the activities of FE colleges and the voluntary sector organisations. This will enable you to create strong and long-lasting partnerships with the other players in regions. Never go for the programmes which could be developed and delivered by other sectors.
- Present examples of good practice in other HEIs to your university and the academic departments.
- Secure core funding from the university (even if it is small) so that it could give you the breathing space you need when there are funding gaps.
- Think about sustainability from day one and add this to the project plan



Discussion

All participants agreed that funding sustainability is a key issue. It is essential to make use of existing networks and partnerships to influence policy. Refugee projects need to be creative and innovative about accessing funding. Could they tap into funding available for overseas students? It will help if there are refugees employed within the university. Refugee students should be encouraged to become 'student ambassadors'. Universities can be wary of refugees because of the high level of support needed.

Delegates wanted to explore what could be done to include asylum seekers in the 'integration agenda'. Should we be putting pressure on HEIs to include refugees within the widening participation targets?



WORKSHOP E

Orientation and Introduction to HE for Refugees

Cherie Woolmer, University of Brighton
Nicky Conlan, Sussex University

Cherie Woolmer and Nicky Conlan presented their joint project, REMAS HE (Refugee Education, Mentoring and Support into Higher Education) as an interesting example of two HEIs working together on a range of activities for refugees.

Following pilot activities at the University of Sussex (Higher Education Learning Project, Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) funded by the European Social Fund) and University of Brighton (Refugees into Higher Education, Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) in 2003-2004, the two universities started to work towards collaboration. The development process involved:

- A series of pilot activities carried out as result of research, supported by University/Community Steering Group at Brighton.
- Development and piloting of Ways into Learning and Work at Sussex– included mentoring.
- A dissemination event with community partners hosted by Brighton – highlighting need for joint service – both institutions working with similar groups
- Project evaluation and discussion
- Aimhigher funding opportunity identified and secured

The resulting collaborative project, REMAS HE, involves a range of activities including Mentoring, an Academic Advisor Network, Ways into Learning and Work course and the development of “taster” sessions. The geographic scope has been widened to include Brighton and Hove, Hastings and Crawley. A Refugee Outreach Worker has been appointed and a steering group (now larger) oversees the whole project with the active involvement of community partners. The two universities produce joint publicity.

Refugees into Higher Education Partnership

James Lee also gave an overview of the Refugees into Higher Education Partnership based at Leeds Metropolitan University and funded by Aimhigher. The project is raising awareness, providing useful information and training to IAG networks, FE colleges, universities and other related organisations throughout West Yorkshire. The focus is on the needs, aspirations and educational rights and entitlements of refugees. It is also working in partnership with a group of refugees from across the sub-region who are wanting to access HE. The aim is to develop a support package specific to refugees that can be used as a model in other regions.



Discussion

The discussion focused on the advantages and disadvantages of this model of working and on lessons learned in the first stages of the REMASHE project. Cherie and Nicky explained that this model of two universities working in partnership is unusual but was influenced by HERAN models of practice.

The main issues that emerged from the first round of project activities were:

- Numbers completing course were fewer than expected (variety of reasons – see below)
- Lack of support services such as childcare and travel expenses were a barrier
- Refugees with professional qualifications need personal as well as professional mentoring



WORKSHOP F

Specialist Programmes in HE for refugee professionals

Richard Payne, RAGU, London Metropolitan University

RAGU has 10 years experience of delivering specialist courses for refugee professionals. This provides models for other HEIs to consider and learn from when developing their own courses.

The approach with course provision for refugees is either to place them on mainstream courses with extra support geared to their needs or to develop courses tailored to the needs of refugees with built-in support. RAGU has opted for the latter. Each current course is a distinct model, sharing common characteristics. The three current courses described below are typical of the types of courses RAGU runs, even though the subject or professional focus may vary:

1) APEL Course (Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning)

- General orientation course for refugees/asylum seekers (with permission to work)
- Supporting students into employment or education
- Validated at 1st year undergraduate level

Why the course was set up:

- In recognition that skilled and qualified refugees were not realising their full potential.
- To provide a study opportunity devoted to addressing personal needs through research & investigation of new social environment.
- To provide practical support (e.g. assistance re: equivalence of qualifications, education & careers advice and guidance).
- To equip student with the personal and communication skills for self-advocacy.

Aim: To provide refugee students with a solid departure point for the achievement of personal goals.

Focus:

- To enable the students to reflect on and assess their knowledge, skills, abilities.
- Identify their strengths/ weaknesses,
- Identify transferable skills/skill gaps in pursuit of personal goals.

Content:

- Portfolio Building
- Essential Skills Development
- Orientation for Education and Employment

Funding: JCP (Job Centre Plus) and LSC (Learning & Skills Council)

2) Routes into Employment in Schools for Refugees.

- Vocational course for refugees / asylum seekers
- Supporting students into employment
- Validated at 1st year undergraduate level

Why the course was set up:

- Need to facilitate entry of refugees with teaching backgrounds into employment in schools.
- In recognition of shortage of trained refugees employed as bilingual support workers and teachers.
- Local schools with large numbers of refugee children on the rolls.
- Schools' statutory obligations to be inclusive learning environments.

Aim: To prepare refugees who wish to work as co-educators / bilingual support workers for employment in schools.

Focus:

- Provide students with a theoretical and practical understanding of the English school system (academic input & work placement).
- Develop students' awareness of the strengths/needs of refugee children
- Develop the school's role in supporting refugee children/working with refugee communities

Funding: JCP (Job Centre Plus) and LSC (Learning & Skills Council)

3) Organisation, Community & Development for Refugee Community Organisations (MSc): part-time evening, modular 2 year programme

- Supporting students in employment
- Validated at postgraduate level

Why the course was set up:

- To provide RCO staff with professional development that is fully accredited.
- To build the capacity of RCOs
- To be flexible. Modules can be studied independently, linked to the particular or other MSc programmes

Aim/Focus: To increase the understanding and effectiveness of individuals working to develop refugee communities.

Content:

- Management
- Organisational development
- Social policy
- Community development
- Managing equality

Funding: London Development Agency (LDA)

Distinct courses with shared characteristics

Whatever the course, they have certain features and approaches in common:

- Product of specialist recruitment & support (RAGU) and specialist input (Departments of Education and Applied Social Sciences at London Metropolitan University).
- Free and, if aimed at unemployed refugees and asylum seekers, they cover travel and childcare costs
- High level of tutorial support
- Access to careers and education advice & guidance
- EAP/ ESOL / Communication Skills
- IT support
- Student input into course co-ordination

Richard concluded his presentation by looking at why RAGU has chosen to provide these specialist courses rather than providing support on mainstream courses. This is basically because RAGU believes that tailored courses for refugees can be more effective because:

- Discreet/specialist courses for refugees can address particular needs: individual, social and educational.
- Study in a 'safe,' non-judgemental setting. This gives students an opportunity to discuss anything they find strange or confusing about the course, UK culture or the 'system' with the staff. They can also try out a (possibly) different educational culture with different teaching and learning styles so that they are comfortable with these when they re-enter HE or go on to further training.
- Students can provide each other with support and solidarity. They have the shared experience of handling change, being in transition
- Students are in continual contact with specialist staff (trainers, tutors and advisers) and this allows for effective cross-referral in response to changing needs. It also gives non-specialist staff continual support if they want it and allows for speedy resolution of any problems that occur which might be left or ignored in a mainstream course, resulting in non-completion. Once the course is completed, students can use RAGU staff as referees and can get support into employment from advisers.

At the end of all courses, there is a shared sense of achievement and a perceptible increase in self-confidence amongst the students. The courses can provide a good bridge to mainstream university courses or to employment.



Discussion

Lucy Williams from the European Centre for Migration and Development at the University of Kent explained that they run a certificate course (partly funded by Social Services), Certificate in Social Care Practice for Asylum Seekers and Refugees. This is a part-time course taught over 15 months aimed at those who work in services for young refugees. Participants come from refugee and non-refugee backgrounds. As with the RAGU courses, there is a very supportive atmosphere and a good understanding of the issues faced by refugees. However, there is no funding for travel or childcare. Furthermore, they have been battling every year to allow asylum seekers to be considered 'home' students by the university but have not been successful. The course could not have continued if it had not been for funds from Social Services. This is precarious, however, and it may be that this will be the last year they can run the course.



PANEL PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

There were 6 panel members. Susan Davenport (RAGU) gave a brief presentation on HERAN and the new HERAN website and Elizabeth Cafferty (CARA) explained the role of CARA in providing funding for refugee academics and also mentioned the new handbook they have produced on Higher Education for Refugees. Hamdi Barre (Aimhigher SOLEN) showed a short film made by Middlesex University about her experience as a refugee in HE and her subsequent employment. The presentations of the three remaining panel members are summarised below:

Catherine Marston from Universities UK explained that she has been focusing on international issues over the last year and has been very involved in immigration issues. They have not focused on refugee/asylum issues but are keen to find out if there is anything that Universities UK could do in this area of work. Universities UK has undertaken considerable work on widening participation issues although with no specific refugee/asylum dimension but this should be considered for future work. She said that she was keen to learn and gather information and ideas to try to develop Universities UK's work in this area.

Simon Kaufman from UCAS made the following points:

1) UCAS and Widening Participation

a) Engagement with Aimhigher:

- Membership of National Compact Scheme Steering Group
- Involvement with various AH strand groups primarily although not exclusively in the South West
- Provision of staff development/consultancy services to AH groups

b) Relationship with HEFCE:

- Membership at Chief Executive level of the HEFCE WP Strategy Committee
- Close working relationship being developed with the HEFCE WP Directorate
- Partnership with the funding council to develop an electronic application service for summer school admissions (this is likely now to be deferred to 2006/7)

c) Future development of the UCAS service:

By the end of 2007 they will have a specification, as far as practicable, to reflect incorporation of the five high level principles of 'fair admissions' and more detailed recommendations of the Admissions to HE Review Steering Group (September 2004) chaired by Professor Schwartz (Vice Chancellor, Brunel University).

2) UCAS Equal Opportunities Task Group

UCAS established a cross-company Equal Opportunities Task Group in 2004 with the support of the Equality Challenge Unit to act as a champion of equal opportunities and diversity issues within the organisation and with a particular remit to bring forward recommendations for enhancements to UCAS products and services to make the organisation better able to meet the needs of diverse applicants.

UCAS is now a member of the Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network

(HEEON) and of the CRE HE Good Practice Network enabling it to be better positioned to understand good practice emerging from the sector in the promotion of equal opportunities.

UCAS has adopted an Equality Policy which addresses directly the requirement as far as is practicable in the delivery of its products and services for UCAS to assist its 325 member institutions to fulfil their 'public body' duties under equal opportunities legislation. UCAS itself is not a 'public body' within the terms of equal opportunities (and other) legislation.

The task group will maintain a relationship with HERAN and similar networks focussing on other emerging WP cohorts with which it can usefully work to develop an understanding of any barriers to access to higher education its delivery of products and services may either directly or indirectly unintentionally contribute to and propose recommendations which enable its service in future to be as inclusive of all learner needs as possible in promoting access to higher education.

Contact details for attendees or other members of the network wish to raise any particular points: S.Kaufman@ucas.ac.uk

Carole Prance from LSC London East focused on the role of the LSC in HE and the initiatives they have to encourage equality and diversity.

The LSC supports the Government commitment to increase participation in HE. They place equal emphasis on FE and vocational training. 37% of full-time HE entrants are from FE. 50% of HE courses are vocational. 10% of HE is delivered by FE colleges.

The LSC is fully committed to tackling social exclusion and is an exemplary equality and diversity employer. A committee was set up in September 2004 to develop a national strategy for 2004-2007.

They have a range of initiatives across the London region supporting refugees and asylum seekers including:

- Induction programmes into employment
- Mentoring and coaching
- Skills for Life and ESOL
- Level 2 courses/conversion courses
- Community leadership/champions
- Women into employment
- Family learning



Discussion

There was a lengthy discussion about the withdrawal of funded IELTS courses for refugees and the implications of this on admissions requirements. Skills for Life Level 2, which has 'replaced' IELTS, will not be accepted by HEIs as an equivalent. IELTS will continue to be the requirement for overseas students so this will put refugees at a huge disadvantage. Delegates urged that the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) put IELTS back on the National Qualifications Framework and that LSC fund it again.

The question of ELR (Exceptional Leave to Remain) and HP (Humanitarian Protection) and the 3-year residency rule to qualify for Learner Support funds was also raised. Delegates felt that this should be abolished and that support funds should be available from the time the asylum seeker is granted HP (or formerly ELR) when they automatically become 'home' students for fee assessment. Otherwise, even after receiving a decision on their status, they may have to wait for a long period before it is possible to access HE. This means that people are becoming de-skilled and de-motivated in the meantime and we are losing the valuable skills and experience that refugees bring with them.

There was also some discussion about HEIs recording the numbers of refugees or asylum seekers. Few application forms ask for this information and if they do (London Metropolitan does, for example), it is not transferred to the database so the numbers cannot be easily retrieved. This would be very useful information.

A final point made was to stress the importance of involving refugees in HEI projects for refugees. It is essential to involve the local refugee community organisations and it is good practice to employ refugees on the projects when this is possible.

KEY POINTS FROM THE DAY

(from workshops and panel discussion)

- As well as advocating for individual students, we need to think of ways a college or university's policies can be changed to provide wider opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees. We need to work to raise the profile of refugees in the Equality and Diversity and the Integration agendas. If there is a widening participation strategy document, it should explicitly mention refugees within the targets. Widening participation should target refugees through language, financial support, personal tutoring and counselling services.
- For mentoring schemes in HEIs, recruiting mentors through personal approach works well. The experience of HERAN network members is that they are very keen to be involved. Involvement of refugee community organisations is also key, not only for recruitment of mentees but also for advice and information throughout the schemes, especially on cross-cultural issues.
- A general point was made throughout the conference about the importance of involving refugees in HEI projects for refugees. It is essential to involve the local refugee community organisations and it is good practice to employ refugees on the projects when this is possible.
- A key problem for asylum seekers is that at most universities in the UK, they have to pay 'overseas' fees and do not get any support. This makes study at HE virtually impossible. Although those with ELR or HP or ILR (without full refugee status) pay 'home' fees, they do not have access to student support until 3 years from the date of their application for asylum. The regulations are not always clear and there are some inconsistencies in practice. It is confusing for the asylum seekers and those who work with them and this confusion and misinterpretation of the guidelines can result in lost time for the refugee or asylum seeker. An example given was where someone with full refugee status was treated as an international student. This emphasises the need for clear information and training for all staff (particularly admissions staff).
- The conference delegates agreed that those with ELR or HP or ILR (but not full refugee status) should be eligible for student support at the time this decision is made.
- If schools, colleges and universities are serious about integrating refugees, they need to improve the provision of English language teaching (quality, level, hours), provide information, advice and guidance (accurate and up-to-date) and a higher level of support than currently available at most institutions. The existing procedures for the recognition of previous learning need to be reviewed and there needs to be a wider range of appropriate and affordable courses (including both courses aimed at refugees in specific professional areas to help them move into appropriate employment or into higher education with advanced standing and mainstream courses with adequate support)

We agreed to take up these issues at future HERAN meetings. Panel members have also kindly said that we can ask any further questions back to them.

ABOUT HERAN

The Higher Education for Refugees and Asylum seekers Network (HERAN) was established in 2003 as part of the Equal project, ASSET UK. It was set up by the Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU), a specialist unit with 10 years' experience of working with highly qualified refugees within a university. Once dispersal started in 1999, RAGU received many enquiries from colleges and universities throughout the UK about issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers who wanted to access higher education. Typically, enquiries were about:

- eligibility, access and funding for asylum seekers
- ways of obtaining recognition and accreditation of overseas qualifications and experience
- school leavers who are accepted to universities but then find that, as asylum seekers, they are considered to be overseas students
- lack of consistency or contradictions in policies or practices in different institutions
- examples of models of good practice in providing courses and services for refugees and asylum seekers with higher level education or professional qualifications
- RAGU's APEL (Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning) programme for refugees and asylum seekers

In response to this, RAGU decided to establish a network. We wanted to create a representative UK-wide group to influence and inform policy development and to develop a more coordinated approach in different HEIs. We also wanted to disseminate information in this rapidly changing field and to share experience and examples of good practice.

The network currently has members from 26 universities around the UK. We meet twice a year at London Metropolitan University. The meetings have been fruitful and have already resulted in new initiatives through shared ideas. Because not everyone is able to attend meetings, we are also developing a website to disseminate information and to allow members to contact each other.

If you would like to join the network, please e-mail Susan Davenport at s.davenport@londonmet.ac.uk

Questions for us to ask ourselves and others in our HEIs/organisations*

1. What ideas do you have for allocating mainstream funding to supporting refugees?
2. What steps have you taken to increase numbers of refugees in employment in your own organisation?
3. What steps do you think universities should take to employ/ support refugees into employment?
4. How could you encourage your own staff to become mentors in refugee schemes?
5. What awareness raising have you done/could you do with staff?
6. What could your academic colleagues offer in relation to courses and programmes which offer a better understanding of government policy and practice towards refugees?
7. What activities and events does your university offer as part of Refugee Week?
8. What do you consider your role/responsibilities to be in relation to supporting refugees and asylum seekers?
9. What training have you given your advice and guidance staff in the needs of refugees and the barriers they face?
10. Have you ever met/spoke to/worked with a refugee or asylum seeker?
11. Black and ethnic minority staff are underrepresented in universities and colleges. What steps is your University taking to employ more black and ethnic minority staff under its equal opportunities policy/race relations legislation?

* suggested by HERAN members

Organisations represented at the conference included:

RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit) at London Metropolitan University	University of Central England, Birmingham
University of Brighton	Middlesex University
University of Sussex	London Metropolitan University
Leeds Metropolitan University	Universities UK
Birkbeck College, University of London	UCAS
Brunel University	LSC London East
University of Glamorgan	HEFCE
University of Leeds	Uxbridge College
University of Hull	Tower Hamlets College
University of Wales, Swansea	Institute of Race Relations
London South Bank University	Refugee Council
MANCAT	RETAS
Thames Valley University	Refugees into Jobs
Kingston University	Refugee Action
University of Kent	Midland Refugee Council
University of Birmingham	Prisoners of Conscience
Bath Spa University College	Camden LEA
Coventry University	Aimhigher Camden
University of Cambridge	Aimhigher SOLEN
University of East Anglia Bournemouth University	Aimhigher South East
Cardiff University	Camden Children's Fund
University of East London	London Borough of Newham Community Education
University of Teesside	Somali Teachers' Association
University of Strathclyde	Hackney Learning Trust
Sheffield Hallam	Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service
CARA (Council for Assisting Refugee Academics) at London South Bank University	Children's Asylum Seekers and Refugees Team, Hertfordshire
University of Bristol	Global Graduates

Summary of practical actions delegates were planning as a result of the conference and general comments (taken from evaluation forms)

Examples of practical action people are planning as a result of attending the conference:

- Report to Senior Management Team
- Look at website, keep in touch with network more effectively, work on internal network for Swansea and lobby
- Lots of good ideas – need to discuss with the high and mighty before taking action
- I will be using information gained for a research project at Middlesex University
- Research local Refugee/asylum seeker groups, draft and propose focused institutional projects and activities
- Try to marry up existing HE funded community activities with this client group
- Use the establishment of our new lifelong learning centre to kick-start a more concrete strategy for refugees
- Will be feeding back that we should be doing more
- Explore funding streams and raise issues with undergraduate and postgraduate students
- Investigate the possibility of a local initiative
- Dissemination of findings from conference, especially models of good practice. Work with colleagues to improve our provision for refugees (especially introduction of APEL)
- Useful tips (thank you Workshop D). Develop networks and follow up contacts made here. Be part of HERAN network. Talk to managers and students
- Keep up contact with those met here from other organisations
- Link with other institutions to discuss further work and good practice
- Pass information on to my volunteer organisations and establish contact with other agencies
- Lots of ideas – need to think about how I can consolidate them for practical work
- Attend HERAN meetings more often
- Taking forward staff development and linking more strategically with equality and diversity team in my own institution
- Change Equality and Diversity statement to include refugees, engage more with HERAN
- Following up leads, contacts from the day
- Still planning...
- Raise awareness of asylum seekers and HE to Herts County Council and schools (e.g. INSETS for schools and dialogue with HCC)
- Campaign more on behalf of refugees whose entitlements are not always known by universities and advocate for asylum seekers for home fees
- Network with colleagues I have met to share ideas on WP with specific regards to refugees and asylum seekers
- Set up meeting with admissions staff
- Enhance mentoring on our project
- Continue to promote the work we do and try to get management more involved
- Information to be added to my report on HE provision and the Eastern Region
- Set up session aimed at community leaders to educate in regard to student finances and refugees
- Make a point of using RAGU for referral and developing better contacts with specialist advisers
- Speak to network members or do a short survey on widening participation strategies that target refugees or asylum seekers
- Talk to local HE institutions about tailored courses, highlighting examples from today
- Will follow up contacts made to find out more about courses and projects that can benefit our refugee clients

- Contact RAGU and other HEIs about new courses for the community members we support (I work for a LEA)
- Report back to my organisation and join the network
- Contact colleagues for legal support regarding equal opportunity issue for a client
- Recommend good practice projects to Aimhigher SE partners
- Lots of contacts to follow up, will send stuff to HERAN website, will feedback to the university with the aim of celebrating that we are at the forefront of things but also pointing out that there is much more to be done!

General comments:

- Encouraged by meeting other delegates and learning about the range of initiatives going on
- Very glad HERAN is there and that I can draw on its resources
- Really good event for reminding us of why this work is so important
- Lots of opportunity for networking – good event!
- A really useful day. Didn't know about HERAN or that so many other organisations were involved in projects similar to mine. In just one day I have gained a massive support network.
- The acceptability of qualifications in the UK is one of the main issues to be addressed
- A great day! Lots to think about and lots to do. Look forward to our next meeting. Good to make contact with other people working in the same area.
- A very enjoyable event - thank you.
- It is important to share experiences. However, very important issues were excluded or just superficially mentioned despite public interest.
- This conference should have a follow up. It has been an excellent opportunity for me from the voluntary sector to be able to listen to what HEs are doing in terms of supporting refugees and to be able to voice issues that I battle with everyday.
- Good to know that there are initiatives happening all over the country, getting asylum seekers from FE to HE, raising aspirations and then job opportunities
- Really enjoyable and useful day!
- An excellent conference overall – already looking forward to the next!
- A helpful and well-organised conference.
- The film featuring Hamdi was very good!
- A very helpful day. Thank you for organising it. I like the idea that this network might influence policy and would have liked to attend all workshops. Any chance of catching up with the materials?
- Very good conference – congratulations to all those involved in organising it. Demonstrates the value of this network.
- Informative, useful, stimulating, interesting.
- An excellent, well-run, thought provoking conference. Hope to be part of the network in future.
- The more sectors that are involved the better. Education is a means to the end (employment) so more attention needs to go on this problematic area too.
- Very good conference overall.
- Great day – really useful and inspiring!
- Thank you. A privilege to be involved!
- Useful for further contacts and links with networks in this area.