

Work Placements in Local Authorities for refugee professionals

A report on the Diversity Works programme



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1. Background

This report describes RAGU's experience of developing work placements for refugee professionals in Local Authorities for over six years. It is written for Local Authorities who wish to engage with work placement schemes for refugee professionals and for specialist organisations delivering work placement programmes.

Partners

RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit), London Metropolitan University, specialises in developing and delivering programmes for refugee professionals. In 2001 we established the Diversity Works programme to develop structured work placements for refugee professionals at a level commensurate with their previous work experience. Since then 54 refugees from a wide range of professional backgrounds have been placed in the voluntary, public and private sector. Of these work placements 40% have been set up in five local authorities across London, including the Greater London Authority (GLA) as a centralised regional authority.

The local authorities who have been directly involved in the Diversity Works programme are:

- Camden Council
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Haringey Council
- Islington Council
- Merton Council

In 2006 under the Equal programme, PRESTO¹, we built onto the existing Diversity Works programme, to develop work placements further targeted to meet the needs of refugee professionals, with a focus on work in local government.

Aims of the Diversity Works programme

The aims of Diversity Works are three fold:

- To create structured work experience opportunities for refugees with high level skills and professional experience to enhance their re-entry into the labour market
- To promote refugees as a skilled workforce to UK employers and raise awareness of refugees contribution to the labour market

¹ PRESTO, the Partnership for Refugee Employment through Support, Training and On-line Learning, is an Equal Funded programme set up in 2005

- To raise employers awareness of Equality and Diversity issues in practice and encourage them to participate in a programme of positive action to combat social exclusion of refugees from the labour market

Diversity Works is described in more detail in RAGU's publication 'Diversity Works Placement Guide.'²

Why have work placements in the public sector?

In RAGU's experience of providing guidance to refugee professionals we found that many clients actively sought entry level employment in the voluntary or public sector, rather than the private sector. Indeed RAGU's project outcomes over 10 years also indicated that our clients achieved higher rates of employment in these two sectors.

There are two explanations for these project outcomes. Firstly refugees' perception that the public and voluntary sectors have relatively benign and welcoming cultures, as organisations with employment policies that promote the fair recruitment and selection of a diverse workforce.³ This factor is pertinent for groups who frequently experience social exclusion from a competitive labour market. Refugees face disproportionately high levels of unemployment; additionally refugee professionals face high levels of underemployment.⁴ Understandably then refugee professionals seek to target the public and voluntary sectors as potential employers.

The second reason is the business case; the widespread recognition that a diverse workforce is best placed to serve an increasingly diverse customer base in both private and public sectors. Workforce development sections in the public sector actively seek to nurture a diverse workforce, particularly in front line services, as representative of their service users. And therefore managing a diverse workforce as well as promoting equality of opportunity for employees has become key to public sector employment practice.

Choice of employer, by refugee professionals and other minority groups, based on an avoidance of discriminatory employment practice and actively choosing socially inclusive organisations, is also highlighted in the Government's green paper 'A Framework for Fairness' (June 2007).⁵ The paper, proposing a single Equality Bill to include all six strands currently legislated for separately, cites government thinking:

in terms not just of prohibiting unfair discrimination, but also of

² *Diversity Works Placement Guide: a toolkit for those setting up voluntary work placement programmes for refugee professionals*, RAGU, November 2007, www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/publications

³ Information gained from one to one guidance work with refugee professionals by RAGU advisers over a decade

⁴ *Integration Matters*, Home Office, 2005

⁵ Framework for Fairness: Proposals for a Single Equality Bill for Great Britain, www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/doc/325335.doc

promoting equality and cohesion in more positive ways, especially in how we design and deliver our public services.

The dual focus on inclusion and anti-discrimination powerfully underpins a rationale for developing work placement schemes and other employment support programmes in the public sector.

Local Authorities: policies and practice

In 2004 RAGU carried out a focus group to explore strategies for work placements in Local Authorities with managers from the five Local Authorities listed as partners. The group identified key legislation and Local Authorities policies that mitigate for work placement schemes and that could be used to support a rationale for creating work placement partnerships.

Some of the key policies that provide tools for agencies to engage with local authorities and advocate for work placements for refugees are described below.

1. Statutory Equality Duties:

Employment law is rich with equality legislation: on race, gender, disability and more recently on sexual orientation, religion and belief, and age under the Employment Equality Regulations (2003 and 2006 respectively). Local authorities, as with all employers, have a duty to meet these requirements in relation to the public's access to their services and in terms of their employment practice.

2. Equality Schemes:

In respect of gender, race and disability, public authorities also have a general and specific duty to proactively promote equality throughout all their activities. They must demonstrate how they intend to achieve this through an equality scheme that they are legally obliged to produce. Many local authorities undertake to do this through the Equality Standard.

3. The Equality Standard and Best Value Performance Indicators

In 2000 the *Best Value (BV) regime* was introduced by central government aimed at improving the quality of local government services. Covering a wide range of services (for example Community Safety, Health and Education), it enables local government to assess their own performance and for central government, via the Audit Commission, to monitor their performance applying Best Value Performance Indicators, (BVIP)

As part of the Best Value programme the *Equality Standard* for local government was launched in 2001 and is now adopted by most local authorities.⁶ Unlike most BVIPs, the Equality Standard is a voluntary

⁶ Improvement and Development Agency for Local government, <http://www.idea.gov.uk>

addition to the required compliance with Statutory Equality Duties by all local authorities. The Equality Standard is a tool to enable local authorities to combat institutional discrimination in the culture, organisation and governance of their organisation following the MacPherson report, 1999. The Standard consists of a systematic framework consisting of set targets relating to policy, service delivery and employment at five levels of achievement. By now a majority of the UK local authorities aim to meet the Equality Standard as a minimum standard. Specific examples of the application by Local Authorities of the BV Equality Standards include:

- Measuring the percentage of employees from ethnic minority communities compared with the economically active minority ethnic community population in the authority area
- Targeted recruitment to strengthen under-represented groups through campaigns, advertising and analysis of recruitment process and policy⁷

The Equality Standard provides a clear rationale for local authorities to engage with programmes for refugees and other socially disadvantaged groups within their communities. The agency for Improvement and Development in Local Government cites that the Standard can be used as:

'... a basis for working with partners in the public private and voluntary sectors; for supporting the work of community forums and promoting citizenship engagement'.⁸

The Equality Standard is a cornerstone for agencies to advocate with managers in local government for the engagement with organisations delivering work placement programmes.

4. Neighbourhood Renewal Schemes (NRS)

The national strategy for neighbourhood renewal was launched in 2001 and set a series of targets across national and local government to improve employment, crime, health, education and the physical environment in the poorest neighbourhoods. These schemes include specific initiatives such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) to bring together local agencies to ensure a co-ordinated approach to regeneration. The LSPs include the local government and a range of partners in the public, private and third sectors, such as Job Centre Plus, and the Learning and Skills Council. A good example of an LSP is the Renewal Partnership bringing together six west London boroughs to deliver services to refugees including employment support programmes.

Since their formation LSPs have an increasing remit to deliver objectives set out in Local Area Agreements.

⁷ Islington Council, *Dignity for All, Equality and Diversity policy*

⁸ The Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government, *The Equality Standard for Local Government*, March 2007, www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5145192

5. Local Area Agreements (LAA)

Introduced as a pilot in 2003, LAAs are a three-year agreement between a local area and central government. The LAA describes how local priorities will be met by delivering local solutions. LAAs delivered by the LSPs aim to:

- Increase opportunities for neighbourhood engagement
- Create sustainable community strategies

Sustainable community strategies are defined as

*'places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents ... contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive ... and offer equality of opportunity and good for all.'*⁹

Increasing a local communities' economic activity is seen as one of the key objectives of LAAs. It is therefore further leverage to ensure that boroughs with sizeable refugee populations take into account the needs of this group and actively create opportunities to promote their sustainable inclusion in to the local labour market.

The London Situation

Forced migrants (refugees) and economic migrants to the UK have historically settled in London and this is likely to continue, though estimates of the proportion of refugees in the net migration are not possible to predict.

Local authorities bear much of the responsibility of meeting housing, welfare, education provision and other services, for migrants, (though in 1994 support arrangements for a majority of asylum seekers moved from Local Authorities to NASS).¹⁰

The distribution of refugees and local authority provision in respect of education, training and employment is well documented in the LORECA Mapping exercise.¹¹ London councils have responded variously to refugee populations within their boroughs. Those with higher proportions of refugees and with well established refugee community organisations are increasingly developing borough specific approaches to support greater refugee integration including developing employment strategies.

⁹ As defined by Communities and Local Government, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/sustainablecommunities/whatis/>

¹⁰ NASS is the Nationality Asylum Support Service provides accommodation and subsistence to asylum seekers on a case by case basis

¹¹ Stephanie Schreiber, *LORECA Mapping Exercise*, LORECA October 2006, www.loreca.org.uk/activities/mapping.asp

Greater London Authority: In 2006 the Mayor of London's office formally took on the responsibility of refugee integration in London. The formation of the Board of Refugee Integration (BRIL) to lead and co-ordinate this task has led to the publication of The Mayor of London's draft strategy, 'London Enriched'¹², published July 2007. The draft strategy has been presented for wide consultation with major stakeholders.

In particular the strategy proposes increased engagement with employers across statutory, private and third sectors to join a structured work placement programmes. It is hoped that once funding is drawn down in 2008 this will provide the means for agencies to work with Local Authorities proactively to develop work placement programmes for refugees.

Conclusions

The establishment of the new Government Equalities Office and the Equality and Human Rights Commission in October 2007 signals a statutory and public commitment to ensuring that all members of Britain's diverse communities have the freedom to reach their full potential, socially and economically. From the descriptions in this chapter I, it appears that there is more than enough legislation and policy in the making and already in place to support refugee professionals work opportunities into local government. How this is translated into practice is the challenge facing specialist refugee agencies and is described in the next chapter.

¹² *London Enriched*, The Mayor's Draft Strategy for Refugee Integration in London, July 2007 chapter 6

2. Delivering Work Placements

This chapter describes RAGU's experience of delivering work placements in Local Authorities over five years and specifically under the Equal funded programme, PRESTO, from 2005 to 2007.

Diversity Works: preparing the client

The process for placing refugee professionals is described in detail in the report ' Diversity Works: Guidelines to Work Placements. '¹³

With a few exceptions all our work placement clients who were assessed and selected for the Diversity Works programme, received training in a group and one to one guidance to identify their individual needs. Following this RAGU approached individual Local Authorities to explore opportunities for work placements for each client.

The majority of clients placed in Local Authorities had specifically asked for work placements to be located in the public sector. In several cases a relationship had already been well established with a particular Local Authority department who had previous experience of hosting a work placement. In these cases the setting up of the placement was relatively straightforward and without delay.

However prior to the initial contact the client had with the Local Authority RAGU asked clients to undertake their own labour market research in order to prepare them for their interview. It is important that the client has some prior knowledge of the services of the specific council department, their key policies, and the likely skills set expected within the role potentially offered.

Further client preparation included guidance on reflective learning, supervision processes, cross-cultural communication, team-working and the contractual agreement with the employer who are hosting the work placement.

Establishing Diversity Works in Local Authorities

In general we found it best to be as informed as possible about:

- Council organisational structures
- Council initiatives to support refugees
- Council initiatives on work placements/employability

Getting hold of this information can be surprisingly challenging to obtain. We carried out extensive networking within each council having secured an initial contact. However it was often the case that even within the councils there was

¹³ *Diversity Works: Guidelines for Work Placements*, RAGU, November 2007, www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/publications

a lack of awareness about who to approach or what relevant schemes were available.

RAGU used four types of approaches in order to work with Local Authorities. These were:

1. Contacting the Human Resource (HR) based departments:

- Social Inclusion Teams
- Equality and Diversity managers
- Workforce development teams
- Business and Relationship managers

Councils HR departments can either be centralised as part of the Chief Executives office or are located in autonomous Local Authority divisions e.g. Social Services, Environment and the Housing Management services or ALMOs¹⁴, depending on each Local Authority.

2. Contacting job specific managers in departments related to the refugee professional's area of expertise. For example:

- Housing departments for an Architect
- Street Lighting section for an Electronic Engineer
- Human resources for a HR Administrative assistant,
- Finance teams for Accountants

3. Contacting council departments perceived by RAGU as having a likely willingness to engage in Diversity Works programme for example:

- Ethnic Minority Assessment Grants teams
- Asylum Support teams (when they existed)
- Regeneration teams supporting community initiatives such as New Deal work placements (as in Hammersmith and Fulham).

4. Refugee specific programmes in councils. Of the five Local Authorities we worked with two had refugee specific programmes. The programmes were set up as a response to the relatively large and well-established refugee populations within the borough. These are described in more detail and include:

- ***Camden Council: RAISE (Refugee Access into Sustainable Employment)***

RAISE is an Equal funded partnership led by Camden Council, to support refugees into sustainable employment in the borough. The programme included proactively developing work placements for refugees with employers in the borough, including placements in

¹⁴ Arms Length Housing Management Organisations were set up to manage Local Authorities housing stock

Camden Council. Camden Council, identified the local refugee population as a specific target group to prioritise and refugee integration became one of the key objectives within their Equality strategy. RAISE was tasked with delivering these targets.

RAISE was developed alongside the borough's pre-existent Community Employment programme, aimed largely at young adults in the borough and from which there was already experience of providing work placements in the council.

- ***Islington Council: The Islington Refugee Integration Strategy***

This was developed for 2005-2008 and arose from a series of focus groups run by the council and in which RAGU took part. Within IRIS there is a specific strategy for Employment including priority action to ensure refugees and employers are provided with a structured support programme during work placements as follows:

'Ensure that refugees and employers are provided with a structured support programme during work placements'.

'develop a strategic approach that encourages employers to offer employment related training to refugees'.¹⁵

Islington Council set up a refugee Strategic Planning Board (RSPB) and the Islington Refugee Strategic Service (IRIS) to implement the strategic action plan and meet their specific targets.

Contact with staff specifically engaged with these two council programmes took place from 2005. However previous links with both councils had already been established in setting up work placement in the borough.

Outcomes from work placements in Local Authorities

There are numerous outcomes for projects such as Diversity Works, perhaps the most obvious being employment. Outcomes also include 'softer' targets, a measure of the distance travelled not only by the client in the work placement but also by Local Authority staff engaged in the project.

Employment Outcomes

Of the 22 work placements in Local Authorities, 62% of clients entered employment, 48% of these jobs were employed in a Local Authority. Although there is no guarantee of a job at the end of the work placement evidence shows that for many the work placement makes their chances of entering work in local government significantly greater than before the work placement.

¹⁵ Islington Refugee Integration Strategy 2005-2008, available from iris@islington.gov.uk

Below is a summary of employment outcomes in the partner Local Authorities RAGU worked with:

- **Camden:** Of seven work placements five led to employment, one in permanent work in the council, two in temporary work with the council, one in another Local Authority, one in the private sector and one client currently on placement.
- **Greater London Authority:** of three work placements one led to temporary employment at the GLA
- **Hammersmith and Fulham:** no work placements were established, although one was due to start
- **Haringey:** one work placement led to employment in the council, another to employment in the voluntary sector
- **Islington:** Of a total of five work placement, three placements led to two refugees finding employment within the council, one on a permanent contract, the other secured a temporary contract via an agency recommended to them by the placement manager. Another client took up work via an agency. A fourth client was offered work in a research role, but was unable to take it for health reasons. The fifth client was short-listed for work in the section where he was placed but not selected for the post.
- **Merton:** of three work placements. one has led to employment in the council, another to employment in a bank.

Other outcomes

Over five years clients have cited a wide range of professional and personal development gains as a result of their work placements in Local Authorities.

Here are how three clients described their experience in 2007:

Housing Co-ordinator place in Islington Council

'the project has given me the confidence that I needed to work in an office, dealing with vulnerable people, learning about colleagues moods and team working. RAGU has been very supportive in this time. I am now applying for jobs and already ha a few interviews. Now I have the experience which the employers were looking for before, the only support I now need is interview practice'

Finance Assistant placed in Camden Council

'When I started the work placement I saw the difference between theory and practice. It is a large organisation and I have to deal with many different people. At the beginning it was difficult for me, I had to learn a

lot for example how to respond to queries and how to go to a meeting with head of finance. When I started I thought I knew Excel but realised I needed to learn a lot more. I was lucky they put me on training. The most important thing was to finish the work. On my CV I can now put down my recent experience and talk specifically about what I have been doing in Finance. The work placement enhanced my skills, it gave me opportunities for jobs in the future and I have so much more confidence now'.

Community Development Worker placed in Islington Council

My achievements have been to improve my IT skills and learning how to apply this. I have gained a lot of confidence speaking with people setting up meetings and demonstrating the resource and learning about different agencies work. I really feel I am contributing to the community in my work placement'.

It is not only clients who benefit from the work placements. Managers, supervisor and teams hosting work placement gain in many ways. Three managers give their views of work placements.

Manager from Islington Single Homeless team

'It's been an excellent development opportunity, it's been fun having him and diversity works. I was very impressed with him setting up meetings with providers, scheduling them, developing the referral system. He has used his initiative and we have trained him. It has allowed us to develop a part of the service which would have taken much longer to do with our staffing resources and is really useful. It's been brilliant'.

Finance Manager from Camden Council

Work placements help to achieve diversity in the public service, to show a real person how to do a real job. It's what Diversity Works is all about, giving opportunities to those least able to have these opportunities. We have had three placementees, they have been fantastic, successful, bright individuals. If they had applied for jobs at the start it would not have happened but the work placement allows you to look further, helps you to match the person's skills with the needs of the organisation. It's been brilliant, exciting and a satisfying result'.

Senior Partnership Development Manager, Islington Council

Although as a refugee specific service I hope we have good knowledge in this area, I think taking on a placement really did give first hand experience of how difficult it is to break into the world of work for refugees and which can be overcome through a work placement. It was great to have someone from a refugee background to promote the Refugee Services Directory and in my opinion she was exactly the right person to go out and promote this'.

Key Opportunities and Obstacles

1. Strategic institutional barriers

Establishing internal strategic organisational commitment to the placement of refugee professionals in a Local Authority through the Diversity Works programme has proved very challenging. This is the case even within the two boroughs, Camden and Islington with funded, corporate refugee specific programmes in place.

From our experience of working in the NHS during 2004, we found that while it was possible to identify individuals interested in the Diversity Works programme, even when they were located at strategic level, the internal structural mechanisms to influence managers to take up work placements was not in place. There was and remains a reliance on interested individuals to participate.

The Senior Partnership Development Manager to IRIS, Olivia Cavanagh, has been proactive in promoting the Diversity Works programme in Islington Council, in addition to having supervised a community development work placement. She identified several obstacles which prevented managers from taking up work placements within Islington. Many of these barriers have occurred in other boroughs we contacted and are described below:

- **Restructuring:** this is one of the most frequent reasons given by individual managers tasked with taking work placement initiatives forward leave post, or their teams are the process of change and unable to take on a work placement. (Also raised in Camden, Merton and Haringey)
- **Lack of time:** Another key reason given by managers is the lack of time available to support a work placement. The increased move towards 'SMART' working does not include targets for the additional workload that supervision of work placements brings and is therefore not seen as cost effective, even with the possibility to build diversity awareness into the team. (Also raised in all four other councils).
- **Increased hot-desking** limits physical space within which to accommodate a work placement. (Also raised in Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham).
- **Lack of awareness within the council,** from top down, even when there is a refugee specific service, about the needs of refugees
- **Pace of change in local government** is much slower than the voluntary sector, which affects the speed at which new ideas are incorporated into work plans. (Also raised in Hammersmith and Fulham)

- **Work placement schemes are focussed on school leavers.**
(Also raised in Hammersmith and Fulham, Camden)
- **Timing:** establishing finance work placements arranged at the end of the financial year may be problematic as is establishing placements during summer vacation

In order to overcome some of these barriers RAGU proposes:

- **Mechanisms at a corporate strategic level** are required.

A good example of this is Islington Council who are establishing a new Talent Management Scheme in 2008. The scheme, part of their Corporate Strategy, aims to enhance the overall capacity of the talent available for both recruitment and retention of staff at all levels over the next decade. The scheme identifies specific priorities and drivers to achieve this and this includes the need to promote *'diversity across the workforce'*, along with *'enabling policies to support the recruitment, retention and capacity to develop talent'*.

However even with a Refugee Strategic Planning Board in Islington Council, embedding work placements into the Local Authority was not possible, though it did lead to one placement. Head of departments expressed interest but did not follow this up.

- **Management experience:** promoting the programme as an opportunity for employees with no previous management experience to gain an opportunity to supervise – see the case study below

Case Study 1: Housing Officer, Islington

A senior practitioner was asked to supervise the refugee professional in his work placement, while simultaneously taking a first line supervision course.

'Supervising BB was very interesting, it gave me a new management role in dealing with a staff members issues. I gave him supervision every two weeks. Having a new person making sure they were aware of the service and how to make decisions takes a lot of time and it was a struggle to begin with because we were so busy. However I have learnt how to talk with staff in a management role and it is has given me insight into what my own manager does, how she prioritises work along side staff's needs. It has really developed my own work'.

2. Staff awareness of the aims of Diversity Works for refugee professionals

Refugee professionals placed in Local Authorities invariably find themselves working in highly diverse teams, in some cases with other refugee professionals as colleagues. More often than not supervisors and team managers are aware of diversity management issues as part of their role. Some have demonstrated this awareness during the work placement, particularly in their supervision responding to the refugee professionals needs sensitively, as illustrated below.

Case Study 2: Finance work placement, Camden Council:

The finance manager became aware that the Excel skills of the refugee professional, HH, were not at the level required for the agreed work placement role, although the individual had held considerable responsibility and a decision making role in her work in her country of origin.

The manager gave HH a series of exercises to help her develop the specific skills and arranged for her to attend in service training in the council. The refugee professional herself started an Excel FE college course at the same time.

After 3 months HH had achieved the advanced Excel level required.

The manager also became aware that HH was experiencing health problems, while being a single parent and trying to attend work placement punctually. He was aware that without family support in the country, HH felt vulnerable and exhausted. HH was very reluctant to stop the work placement as this was the first opportunity in 4 years since her arrival in the UK to gain relevant work experience, yet she was exhausted. He took this situation into account and arranged with HH and RAGU a schedule that supported her to get well again and helped her to feel confident to continue on the work placement.

The extent to which managers are aware of the specific needs of refugee professionals does however vary considerably. With the exception of a work placement in IRIS, many Local Authority managers that we have had contact with have not been especially aware of refugee issues in relation to entering the labour market, and this has included Equality staff. This may explain why in one department a refugee team member only felt able to disclose her status to her manager on finding herself working with a refugee professional on the Diversity Works programme.

One of the outcomes of the work placement programme is that managers say that they gained insights into the needs of refugee professionals of which they had previously been unaware. However there have been

curious contradictions which have surfaced and demonstrate how far many staff are from understanding this group as one of the most excluded in the labour market, as illustrated below.

Case Study 3: Housing Officer, Islington

The refugee professional was placed into a diverse team, where he demonstrated initiative, enthusiasm and was seen to be a valuable resource for all the team.

The manager commented:

I don't label BB as a refugee but as a colleague, as the team has people from many different backgrounds. He's fitted in well. Work placements are valuable to everyone not just for refugees. RAGU has given an avenue for refugees to get work experience - someone without refugee status won't have that opportunity, so BB has an edge over others I would say.

This suggests that while there is an overall awareness of diversity management issues by the manager, the individual's specific needs, as a refugee on work placement, were overlooked. This did in fact have some implications on the work placement, though none serious. However in our experience this is not an uncommon view from managers in the public sector. It means that agencies need to be prepared to discuss this issue with managers frankly and early on in the work placement.

3. Communication issues

During some work placements a few clients experienced difficulties communicating with a team member – this is not surprising as it happens in the work place generally. Clients usually discuss these and other issues with RAGU staff. We aim to give guidance to build confidence and if necessary provide coaching so that clients are able to discuss any problems directly with team members and with their supervisor in a professional way.

Two examples are given below:

Case Study 4:

In two cases two different refugee professionals on work placements felt that their colleagues were behaving in a way which they found challenging and confusing

'I felt confused by the managers behaviour and lost my confidence and concentration. I did not know why but I could see it was how she was with everyone that day. I decided to be normal and patient and friendly.'

'I did not know why the supervisor spoke to me that way, I only asked her a question. I felt hurt'.

In both cases the clients discussed what had happened with RAGU. Then they spoke with the person concerned to check if there was a problem. In both cases the team member explained that they had been stressed and explained this to the client and apologised. Both clients felt immediate relief. One client explained to RAGU after the event that the experience had given her much more confidence to talk with colleagues and to be open in a way she had not realised was possible in the work place.

4. Local Area Agreements: equal opportunities under question

LAA's are in principle highly supportive of community development in a whole range of areas including economic activity. However Diversity Works uncovered two aspects of LAA's in action which proved challenging and counter productive.

a) **Residency entitlement:**

In two boroughs, Camden and Hammersmith and Fulham we faced the restrictions of the LAA. Managers interpreted the LAA in relation to the work placement programme as a provision that could only be made available to borough residents. Diversity Works has traditionally selected clients from across London based on their skills. The Diversity Works programme is based on the premise that refugee professionals are given an equal opportunity regardless of their residency and that we seek to place them into the most suitable placement regardless of location.

By contrast Islington Council saw no contradiction with their LAA commitment and in providing work placement for clients from across London as part of a potential skilled workforce.

There needs to be a very careful rationale interpreting LAA, especially where it screens people out of council initiatives and opportunities. Boroughs without a high refugee population or those with a relatively homogenous population compared to some of the highly diverse inner city boroughs may be in danger of choosing 'people like us', and maintaining a status quo in their workforce that sits uncomfortably with the Equality Standard.

b) Confidentiality

Case Study 4: Housing Management, ALMO, Hammersmith and Fulham

JJ, a refugee professional and resident in the H&F borough requested a placement in housing. This resulted in RAGU establishing links with the borough ALMO Equality team. The Equality team initially raised the issue of the LAA but JJ's residency entitled him to be considered for placement by the Housing team.

JJ was days away from starting his placement when a Housing manager contacted RAGU to say that it was no longer possible for the work placement to go ahead. RAGU was told that JJ had a pending housing complaint in the same area Housing office into which he was to be placed and this had only just come to light. It was felt that it was not appropriate to place him in the team while the issue was being resolved and RAGU should explore work placements in other area offices in the borough.

Weeks later JJ had been re-housed and RAGU approached the original Housing team to start the work placement. We were told that the team no longer felt it possible for JJ to work there for reasons of confidentiality, i.e. he would have access to his file and that of his neighbours. RAGU subsequently contacted other area Housing teams in H&F to set up a work placement and exactly the same issues were cited.

RAGU raised the following objections:

- JJ would have had to sign a data protection and confidentiality contract as part of Diversity Works as with all employees (paid or unpaid) and he was no more likely to contravene this than any other member of the workforce
- LAA's encourage residents to apply for jobs locally and therefore the chances of local people housed by H&F also working in the housing offices were high. The issue of confidentiality of was therefore one the Housing office would have faced and they should have had measures in place to deal with this without limiting residents employment opportunities
- In this case the staff involved appeared to demonstrate a negative perception of the refugee that resulted in excluding him from a work placement opportunity to which he was well matched. Therefore RAGU raised questions regarding equality practice.

Although this is a one off case and probably the most extreme RAGU has experienced in setting up work placements in 5 years, it illustrates how far

there still remains to be travelled to a gain a full awareness of equality practice in all areas, even with legislation and policies in place.

Another case of confidentiality arose early on in the Diversity Works programme:

Case Study 4: Finance placement in Asylum Team, Haringey

The client, ZZ, an asylum seeker at the time of her work placement in 2001, was placed into the asylum team handling her case. Neither she, nor RAGU, nor initially her manager were aware of this situation, which only surfaced after 4 months. It was felt by the team manager that ZZ should no longer continue in the office, although there was no evidence of a breach of confidentiality at any time.

Both Cases 3 and 4 highlight the importance of agencies checking with clients first if they have any dealings with the immediate Local Authorities team into which they are to be placed and discussing this immediately with managers concerned.

5. Unions

Only one trades union has raised an objection to a work placement in a Local Authority in 5 years. The shop stewards concerned questioned whether the work placement was a form of cheap labour in a team who had problems finding skilled staff. The problem was dealt with by the HR department for that section and described as 'an employability intervention'. No details were disclosed as to how the matter had been dealt with.

Nonetheless the incident alerted us to the concerns that can arise. Certainly if work placements were established more strategically within a Local Authority, union support would be an important part of the process. As it is RAGU has work directly with the TUC developing placements.

Work placements do not and should not raise concerns for unions. They are neither a source of cheap labour nor a back-door entrance to employment. The roles given are developmental for the individual placed and at the same time contribute usefully to the team in which they are placed. Without unpaid work placement programmes many refugee professionals would simply not gain the work experience they need to be able to compete in the labour market fairly.

6. Funding of employment support programmes in Local Authorities

Overlapping funding streams for work placement programmes may impact on how these can be managed by a Local Authority working in partnership with agency. This was the case in Camden.

Once Camden Council established RAISE the refugee-specific programme in 2005 RAGU believed that mechanisms were now in place to develop work placements for refugee professionals more easily within the Council. (Three has already been set up). However this proved optimistic.

RAGU's Diversity Works programme, like RAISE, was at that time funded by the European Social Fund, (ESF). These target driven projects are funded largely on the basis of outcomes such as the delivery organisation securing a work placement and the client finding a job at the end of the provision. With both RAGU and RAISE funded by ESF the question of double-funding came up and put a stop for months to further placements into a Council team who was willing to host another work placement.

RAISE managers were generous enough to recognise that RAGU's provision of placement support specifically to refugee professionals was a small part of their work and unlikely to draw huge funds from their project and they prioritised on the clients needs. Therefore after months of negotiation two further placements were set up by RAGU.

The experience highlights the need to check the funding criteria of both the Local Authorities employment projects and they agency with whom they work.

Conclusions

Our experience shows that Local Authorities are well placed to host refugee professionals in a variety of positions. It is clear that both the refugee and Local Authority team into which they are placed benefit in numerous ways. Yet in spite of this it is very difficult to establish placements in Local Authorities.

There are already a sufficient number of policies in place within Local Authorities to support Diversity Works programmes. Yet even with refugee-specific programmes established in some Local Authorities developing successful work placements is a far from guaranteed activity.

Relying on the goodwill and interest of individual managers in Local Authorities places a considerable and disproportionate responsibility on those people. They may be in positions to bring about strategic change or not, but they cannot be expected to bring about change across the organisation without comprehensive strategic support.

Programmes such as Diversity Works not only need individual managers time and commitment, they need a responsive informed team, responsive and informed department heads and most of all responsive and informed corporate decision-makers.

How can Local Authorities take up the challenge of creating employment opportunities for the communities they serve?

Over the next years refugee support and services will increasingly be funded under programmes aimed at migrants, both forced and economic. In some

respects including refugees in the larger mantle of equality and diversity focused programmes may reduce the negative perceptions in which refugees and in particular asylum seekers are held. However it could mean that the specific needs of this vulnerable group are over-looked and that refugee professionals in particular will continue to face the hurdles of finding meaningful employment, even within Local Authorities.

3. Recommendations

For Local Authorities:

- Workforce development teams could create partnerships with the local voluntary and community sectors to promote positive action schemes for recruitment to the workforce of minority groups
- Establish a corporate strategic commitment to work placements in which Local Authorities actively sign up to programmes as part of their duty to deliver the Equality Standard.
- Strategic boards need to be established within Local Authorities to represent the needs of specific socially excluded groups in the borough and the boards need to actively endorse Equality projects
- Locate 'champions' from within the organisation who act as a mediators for work placement projects and agencies and with Local Authority managers, promoting schemes from within
- Establish Equality targets in each department, which includes work placements for specific groups identified in the local population as excluded from the work force.
- Managers given strategic tools and support for hosting work placements as recognised parts of their work, rather than relying on their individual good will.
- Provide Local Authorities team managers with incentives and support to host work placements for minority groups. This can include additional resources in terms of increased staff support to teams hosting work placements, additional space and equipment and CPD opportunities for staff to develop supervision skills.
- Market projects promoting diversity management such as work placements programmes via intranet and council newsletters and in team meetings

For Organisations delivering work placement programmes:

- Promote work placements in Local Authorities using current Equality legislation and policies to support the case
- Establish contacts in Local Authorities through a variety of approaches and identify individuals who can champion the programme at different levels in the organisation and encourage them to work together
- Provide Local Authorities managers with information and case-studies of work placements in similar roles or departments in the public sector
- Find out how Local Authorities refugee-specific or employment programmes are funded to ensure that funding issues do not interfere with work placement development
- Check whether the client is a service-user of the Local Authorities team into which they are being placed before the work placements starts.
- Challenge discriminatory practice – managers may not be as aware of issues relating to refugees as other minority groups

Appendix

Diversity Works Placements in Local Authorities 2002 - 2007

	Clients Profession	Date	Placement	Job Outcome where known
1	Human resources administrator	2002	Islington Council	HR Employment at Islington Council
2	IT technician	2002	GLA	
3	IT technician	2002	GLA	
4	Accountant	2002	Haringey Council	Finance Employment at Haringey Council
5	Accountant	2002	Haringey Council	Finance employment in voluntary sector
6	Research for Health Policy	2003	Greater London Authority	Employed temp by GLA
7	Finance	2003	Haringey Council	
8	Accountant	2003	Merton Council	Finance employment at Merton Council
9	Architect	2004	Islington Council	Architect employed at Islington Council and then in private sector
10	Architect	2004	Islington Council	CAD technician employment via agency
11	Accountant	2004	Camden Council	Finance employment in Private Sector
12	Electronic Engineer (street lighting placement)	2004	Camden and Hackney Council	
13	Accountant	2004	Merton Council	
14	Accountant (Payroll placement)	2004	Merton Council	Employed at Barclays bank
15	Accountant	2004	Merton Council & Waltham Forest Credit Union	
16	Accountant	2004	Camden Council	Employed with Tower Hamlets then Camden council
17	Teacher	2006	Camden Council	Temp employment, Camden Council
18	Accountant	2006	Camden Council	Temp. employment, Camden council
19	Accountant	2007	Camden Council	Employed as accountant, Camden Council
20	Community Development officer	2007	IRIS, Islington Council	Currently job searching
21	Housing Officer	2007	Housing Support, Islington Council	Currently job searching
22	Accounting Assistant	2007	Camden Council	Currently on placement

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