

# Refugee professionals

– fulfilling potential  
and meeting needs

A way forward?



City Parochial Foundation exists to benefit the poor of London and to provide support for community organisations that have charitable purposes. Set up in the late nineteenth century with an endowment provided through the sale of redundant City churches and the pooling of their assets, it has helped establish and support a large number of organisations.

Tackling disadvantage has been a key theme over the years. Current priorities include action to support disabled organisations, those tackling discrimination, violence and isolation particularly among black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, lesbians and gay men, young people, women's groups and established communities, often predominantly white, in areas of long term poverty.

The needs of refugees and asylum seekers are another important priority, and CPF was involved in setting up Employability Forum which assists agencies helping displaced professionals to find appropriate employment.



Praxis has been working for the advancement of the human rights and social justice of people displaced by war and conflict for twenty years. With a membership of eight refugee-led community groups, we are rooted within the communities which we serve. Our services, accessible to new residents in the UK, include walk-in advice services and a support service to probation officers and to local GPs, health visitors, teachers and other professionals.

We provide accommodation to asylum seekers and to unaccompanied minors leaving care within private homes. We also focus on the economic empowerment of communities through our educational and vocational advice and guidance. In addition, our training programme ranges from Basic English and IT to a course for internationally qualified nurses preparing for supervised practice. Our most recent development is a partnership with City University and SOAS in a Foundation Degree in Public Sector Interpreting.

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*September 2003*

# Foreword

Refugees and asylum seekers face many hurdles on the way to restarting their lives and becoming settled and independent in what for most is a strange environment. Many refugees hold professional qualifications from their original homeland and face the additional problem of achieving recognition for these – or in some cases completing their education – so that they can take on appropriate work which will help them gain that independence and make a valid contribution to their new home.

It was a concern to do something about this situation that led City Parochial Foundation to work with Tudor Trust and Henry Smith's Charity to set up a scheme within Praxis to assist refugees through advice and, if needed, small grants. This report describes the success of the scheme and suggests ways in which the scheme might be developed. The scheme was eventually restricted to those working in the fields of health and social services sectors because of increasing demand on limited funds.

As the report shows, the scheme avoided bureaucracy, using streamlined systems, and a supportive approach within Praxis' advice service, so that asylum seekers could be advised on a range of issues and not just employment. This simple, flexible process made it highly accessible.

The report comes at a time when there is increasing interest in the issue. The National Health Service, particularly – but not exclusively – in London has been facing a serious staff crisis because of a shortage of qualified and experienced people.

In December 2002, the Greater London Authority published a report that suggested there were many women refugees who could help provide one answer. Then this summer, the King's Fund published another report that also suggested there were many qualified health professionals in the refugee communities who with the appropriate preparation could help fill the gaps. This report received substantial coverage in the London *Evening Standard*, including a supportive editorial.

At the same time there have been several news stories that health authorities have been recruiting staff from Third World countries – their departure is harming the health services in the countries from which they come. With refugees it is different. Many are fleeing persecution and are unable to continue practising in their country of origin. They want to make a contribution to their new country, and employing them will not disadvantage anyone – in fact, everyone benefits.

We believe that for relatively small amounts of money and through enhanced existing structures, such a 'virtuous circle' can be created. Not only would refugees be given a much better chance to settle and achieve independence, but they would also start contributing financially through tax and other payments from an early date.

This clearly is a scheme that needs be extended not only in health and social services but also to other sectors, particularly those also suffering from staff shortages, such as engineering.

The existing scheme has already proved successful and provides one model which could be adopted quite easily – though we would be keen to explore alternatives such as loans. We hope that this report will pave the way for constructing a long-term partnership between Government and the voluntary sector in line with its expressed wishes to deliver services in this way. For bodies such as local health authorities, this approach could assist them in meeting targets, such as ensuring that their skilled workforces reflect the diversity of the communities in which they operate.

This scheme is about enlightened self-interest. But it is not just about the obvious economic benefits, dramatic as they are. Such an approach also contributes to social well-being, surely a moral justification in itself.

**John Muir, Trustee, City Parochial Foundation  
and Chairman of the Awards Committee**

September 2003

# Summary

In 1996, City Parochial Foundation, Tudor Trust, Lloyds TSB Foundation and Henry Smith's Charity set up the Refugee Education Unit within Praxis to provide advice to displaced professionals to acquire UK qualifications or achieve recognition for their existing qualifications. Subsequently, CPF set up an awards scheme to provide small grants – Personal Study Accounts – for those who needed financial support for this.

The money for the awards was provided by CPF, with grants to individuals made by a sub-group of the Foundation's Grants Committee.

The scheme has proved an outstanding success. Analysis shows that:

- ▷ Refugees and asylum seekers with professional qualifications who have been granted legal rights to work in Britain have much to contribute to the economic life of the country if they are able to acquire relevant skills and gain appropriate employment. But unnecessary barriers prevent them from becoming self-supporting and making a contribution to their new homeland, something which they clearly want to do – and as quickly as possible.
- ▷ Small sums of money can make a real difference to the opportunities available to individual refugees and asylum seekers, especially through the provision of course fees, materials, travel and child care.
- ▷ Focused work relating to one employment sector – in this case health and social care - has enabled expertise to be built up and has shown how barriers can be overcome.
- ▷ Individuals have demonstrated a determined commitment to work and study. They manage in greatly impoverished circumstances to overcome the barriers and to restore their pride and confidence – they have real and demonstrable economic potential, and are most likely to be those who achieve financial independence most quickly, given appropriate support.
- ▷ The scheme is a 'virtuous circle': instead of becoming dependent on benefits, working refugees support themselves and pay taxes, at the same time as helping reduce the shortage of qualified people – particularly in the NHS.
- ▷ The experience gained by CPF and Praxis in developing the partnership has highlighted a number of issues. Although Government employment schemes are available to refugees, better specialist advice and help is needed. Government, education providers and employment agencies should consider ways in which improvements in existing practice could facilitate access to employment through specific financial support.
- ▷ Praxis and CPF have considerable experience in dealing with the issue and could play an important role - alongside existing approaches which help all refugees entitled to work - in line with the Government's stated desire to deliver services through partnership with the voluntary sector

# 1. Introduction

## Refugees in Britain

Britain has a long tradition of providing asylum to refugees, who come because they have suffered political persecution and fear for their lives.

This country will continue to be a haven for many as a result of that tradition and international obligations. This paper is a summary of the work of a scheme for people who are already here and who want to work to support themselves using their existing skills and experience

## The issues

Demographic statistics show that additional workers (and therefore taxpayers) are needed to support an ageing population – which among other things will make an increasing call on services such as health care.

A number of refugees and asylum seekers are highly qualified professionals who have much to contribute to Britain, to help tackle these issues. But they face problems. Quite rightly, it is necessary to ensure that their qualifications and experience meet UK standards.

At present, the Government structures available to assist them into employment are geared to more general jobs, and the advisors often do not have the detailed knowledge to assist this specific group.

## Finding solutions

Displaced professionals need ways to validate and update their qualifications: that means assistance in taking courses to improve their English and to bring them up to date on procedures, methods and research relevant to their disciplines.

Current arrangements mean that experienced doctors and other health professionals frequently end up in poorly paid manual jobs, or supported by the state at substantial cost, while contributing little. If they can be supported to achieve recognised qualifications to get them into appropriate work, within a very short time they cease to be a burden on the State and instead become net contributors, both through tax and national insurance payments, and through the work they do.

At the same time, by achieving a degree of stability and independence in their lives, they are less prone to suffer physical and mental problems experienced by many people who have had to leave their homelands – thus the State saves on additional costs in coping with such issues.

The work by CPF and Praxis reveals that even quite small grants can benefit refugee professionals enormously, and can help achieve this virtuous circle.

It has mainly covered the health and social services sectors, but the lessons apply to other sectors which also face skills shortages.

## CASE STUDY

Three years ago a 34-year-old Iranian left his country three years ago for political reasons.

He had become involved in a demonstration which was attacked and in the ensuing violence, ended up badly burned over 24% of his body. He spent 10 days in hospital, but fears that the authorities were after him led his friends to help him escape, and 40 days being treated while hidden. He was then spirited out of Iran.

He arrived in Britain and eventually received indefinite leave to remain. He was successful in obtaining a £500 CPF grant through Praxis, which enabled him to continue his studies in biomedical sciences at London Metropolitan University. Shortly he will qualify for his BSc in Medical Sciences – he is completing his project which centres on prostate and bladder cancer, the disease from which his mother died.

He is now actively seeking a job in a hospital or research centre, perhaps in a pathology lab dealing with microbiology or haematology. Ideally he would like to get support to continue his study to Masters level. He has been offered an interview at Chase Farm Hospital in North London and has three other applications in the pipeline.

He was recently joined by his wife – they were introduced through family connections and spent many months getting to know each other through internet and webcam connections. They married in Turkey.

In his spare time, he listens to and plays traditional Iranian music. His instrument of choice is the santur, which involves 18 combinations of 4 identically-tuned strings. While he doesn't claim to be professional, he is happy that he meets his own standards.

## 2. The Refugee Education Awards scheme

### Background

Refugees and asylum seekers are members of economically impoverished communities. Many have dependants and live in temporary accommodation. Undertaking courses adds to the financial strain.

Those receiving support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) receive only £37 per week. Until recently this was given in the form of food vouchers. Although the new Asylum Registration Card (ARC) is much more satisfactory than the voucher system, the amount of money available to an individual is still inadequate for anything other than basic living requirements.

Once they have received the appropriate immigration status, they are subject to the rules of the Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA), which means that they are required to be available for any type of work. The effect is that refugees have to study part-time and work for the remaining time, thus prolonging the period before they gain the necessary qualifications.

While UK students can apply for student loans, refugees have to wait three years before they are eligible. Very often the three-year mark is reached during a course, but in this eventuality they are still not allowed to apply as loans can only be granted for new courses.

Under the rules of the Job Seekers Allowance, careers advisors in Job Centres link refugees and asylum seekers eligible for work with a category of long term unemployed people and encourage them into low paid work rather than developing their longer term potential. This is partly because they are dealing with general issues and do not always have the detailed knowledge needed for these special cases.

Praxis Education and Enterprise advisors work with refugees and asylum seekers to identify clear and viable pathways into employment, such as through education and training. In this way they work to enable individuals to achieve their maximum potential and aspirations. Frequently, refugees and asylum seekers find that finance is a stumbling block. For people with very limited or

no income and no family support, lack of even relatively small amounts prevents them taking up the opportunities available.

There are a number of organisations supporting initiatives to counter this. Many of them are members of the Employability Forum, which also has its roots in CPF. These initiatives aim to streamline bureaucratic processes, sensitise employers to the opportunities open to them in employing refugees, provide practical advice, guidance and support and ensure that solutions are found to any barriers that arise.

City Parochial Foundation has a long-standing commitment to the effective integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. The Foundation recognises that their economic capacity can make a significant and maybe essential contribution to the economy and well-being of London and all Londoners.

Economic independence is also vital to refugees' personal, family and community development. The Trustees, therefore, see it as good funding practice, consistent with the aims of the Foundation, to contribute some resources to assist them through education, training and access to employment.

In a time of low unemployment and skills gaps at local, regional and national levels, employment-led routes to refugee integration make strategic sense.

Despite the positive economic climate, real and perceived barriers to education and employment remain. Unemployment among refugees is disproportionately high in comparison to other communities. This is well documented in research and confirmed in practice.

In many cases, their education has been disrupted by conflict and repression.

### International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

The International English Language Testing System is the standard used for internationally qualified nurses and doctors. IELTS tests the complete range of English language skills which will commonly be encountered by students when studying or training in the medium of English. All candidates take the same Listening and Speaking Modules. There is an option of either Academic or General Training Reading and Writing Modules. Academic is suitable for candidates planning to undertake higher education study. General Training is suitable for candidates planning to undertake non academic training or work experience, or for immigration purposes.

IELTS is accepted by many organisations including the UK General Medical Council and the UK Ministry of Defence.

### Establishing the Awards scheme

Research undertaken in the early 1990s by City Parochial Foundation staff revealed that refugees found the overall cost of fees for educational courses and qualifications restrictive.

As a result CPF, with additional funding from Tudor Trust, Henry Smith's Charity and Lloyds TSB Foundation established a Refugee Education Unit in 1996 within Praxis. In addition, CPF separately provided a small fund of £10,000 which Praxis caseworkers could access to assist clients whose circumstances were such that they required some financial assistance with their education.

However, shortly after the initiation of the Unit, Government policies changed, making finance an obstacle for all asylum seekers accessing

#### CASE STUDY

Individual circumstances make it essential to receive additional money. For example, a 28-year-old Ethiopian doctor, who has been living in the UK for two years and at the time of her application for funds in April 2002, was in receipt of vouchers as an asylum seeker. Prior to coming to the UK she was working as a general practitioner in a rural health centre. She took the initiative and requalified through the PLAB I and II exams and IELTS. She was given a grant to become a Member of the Royal College of Physicians. She has secured two clinical attachments. This is a major achievement without any income.

educational opportunities. The Foundation increased its contribution to the fund and the scheme has become an essential part of the work of the Unit.

In 2001, a review of this Educational Awards Scheme acknowledged that the increasing demand on the programme meant that either the value of individual awards would need to be reduced or the scheme would need narrower criteria. After careful consideration of options, the Trustees decided to award grants at the same level but to restrict access to the scheme to those wanting funds for educational opportunities which provide pathways into employment in the health and social care sector. These grants were renamed Personal Study Accounts and continued to be linked to the casework undertaken by Praxis.

The same year, the Unit was fully integrated into the overall programme of Praxis, merging with the Praxis Training Programme to become the Praxis Education and Enterprise Programme with continuing support from CPF and others.

### Health and social care professions

The rationale behind the decision to limit the scope of awards arose from the need to give the Awards Scheme some focus to deal with the growing number of requests. In the face of potentially limitless demand, clear boundaries needed to be set. However, the need for a wider scheme, linking to a wider range of professions, remains.

The health and social care sectors have severe skills shortages, especially in inner city areas, where the shortage of accommodation impacts upon availability of staff. Strategies in these areas also seek to ensure that the workforce reflects the make-up of the local community. Refugees have tended to live in inner city areas as they often have family commitments to keep them there – these are also the areas where they benefit from community support and employment opportunities. There are advantages, therefore, for employers in recruiting from within the local refugee population.

Praxis is building up expertise in this specialist field and developing strong working partnerships with the health sector especially, but by no means exclusively, in north east London. As a result, clients receive a more effective service.



## What has been achieved

Since 1997, the City Parochial Foundation has awarded £228,358 of grants to 746 individuals. Of the students who have received grants for education and vocational training leading to employment in the voluntary sector, 59% were for fees, 21% for travel, 17% for books and materials and 3% for childcare costs.

Students have accessed a wide range of courses, the majority being at undergraduate level. A sample of subjects includes accountancy, business economics, electronic engineering, electrical installation, food science, internet engineering, law, maths and computing, politics, and psychology.

Grants have been awarded to doctors undergoing English language tests, pharmacists, nurses undergoing pre-adaptation and IELTS training, social care staff and interpreters.

Doctors preparing for Professional Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) have received support through the Personal Study Accounts. They have also been used to fund applications for membership of the Royal Colleges, which are seen as improving chances of employment. Nurses preparing for IELTS, registration and participating in the Praxis-led pre-adaptation courses have received money, as have students undertaking degree and other professional studies in professions allied to medicine, such as pharmacy.



The *London Evening Standard* ran the above report on the King's Fund report published in July 2003 and backed it with a sympathetic editorial.

In it, the writer referred to the 'immediate resource' of 'skilled refugee doctors who come to Britain. Up till now they have encountered an almost insuperable hurdle, in that they cannot afford to support themselves and their families during the time it takes them to qualify under NHS regulations, and have to find other work'.

The comment also referred to the King's Fund report's 'instructive examples of how Britain can benefit from asylum seekers and economic migrants, if they are talented and trained. What London needs is for such doctors to be brought more quickly into the system'.

## How grants are made

A committee of CPF Trustees reviews all applications for Personal Study Accounts based on a report on the applicant prepared by Praxis staff.

The following criteria have been established by the Foundation:

- ▷ There is a limit of £500 (£600 for those receiving NASS support) per application
- ▷ Awards can meet part of the costs of payment for fees, books and materials, travel and childcare (in a limited number of cases)
- ▷ Awards are restricted to the health and allied

health professions, social care and public service interpreting.

- ▷ Awards can be for both men and women of all ages.
- ▷ A personal statement must accompany all applications from the recipient together with supporting documentation from the relevant educational establishment.
- ▷ The route into employment must be explicit and clearly stated in the application.

No awards are made for post-graduate courses, as refugees are in the same position as UK citizens regarding fees for postgraduate courses.

Praxis' Preparation Course for Supervised Practice for internationally qualified nurses is innovative and has trained 66 nurses, 39 of whom are now working in NHS hospitals. The course covers medical and colloquial English, an introduction to the NHS, the nursing profession in the UK and interview preparation.

Personal Study Accounts have provided supplementary financial support. For example, this has been used to pay for the official translation of essential documents, childcare costs, books, and additional interview preparation.

In the past year, 27 qualified doctors, 35 qualified nurses and 3 dentists have received grants leading to recognition and employment in the UK. Other grants have been for education and vocational training in pharmacy, counselling, interpreting, osteopathy, social work, nutrition, and polymer engineering.

## Summary

The Personal Study Accounts are not the complete answer to what is undoubtedly a complex issue. However, experience demonstrates that they make a significant contribution within the overall process. Financial help for the individual linked to professional advice and guidance are essential components in the process of becoming economically active.

An important factor in the success has been the integrated approach providing personal support and a wide range of general advice, which Praxis gives through separate funding. In addition Praxis' wide knowledge has meant that it has been able to advise colleges and professional bodies such as the BMA, and ease some of the obstacles.

## CASE STUDY

A 31-year-old asylum seeker from Iran was given a grant to complete his degree in polymer engineering. During his studies he undertook a project to design an asthma device. The project impressed GlaxoSmithKline who offered him a job on completion of his degree.

### Professional Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB)

There are two separate stages (PLAB I and PLAB II) both costing similar amounts – the total cost of PLAB tests is £675.

They are essential for registration with the General Medical Council. Membership of the Royal Colleges is not a requirement but refugee doctors need to be able to compete in job interviews with UK trained doctors and need a competitive edge.

# 3. Costs and benefits

Apart from the strong moral arguments for assisting refugees to achieve financial independence, there are compelling economic reasons to provide assistance. As this section indicates, many of these qualified people can rapidly become net contributors to the economy – as well as helping relieve severe shortages – rather than remain dependent on benefits.

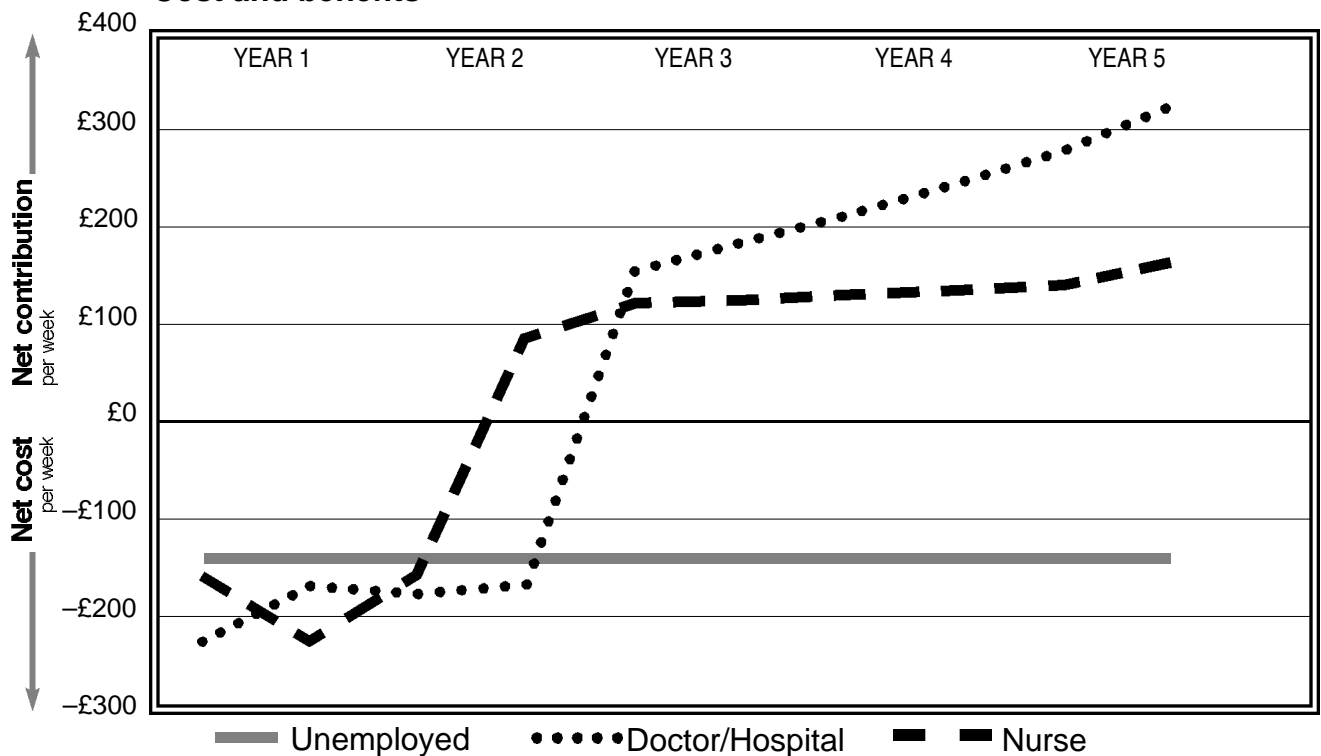
## Scheme costs

Under the existing scheme, while each student receives a grant of up to £600, there is an additional cost which falls particularly on Praxis for support and administrative work and some to

CPF. The current unit cost is £1,300 per student per year inclusive of the grant. A scheme for 100 students each year could be delivered for £130,000 and for 250 for £325,000.

It is also possible to demonstrate that money spent is an investment in the future of both the individual and society. If a person is unable to access employment at all or is under-employed there is a cost to the common purse. Needless to say a taxpayer with spending power is a net contributor to the economy.

## Cost and benefits



## Assumptions

- 35 year old single adult in privately rented flat in Tower Hamlets
- Six monthly time snapshots shown as annualised weekly figures
- Estimate 50% of earned income spent on VATable items
- Claiming IBJSA (job seekers allowance) with no extra premiums, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and has average fuel costs

- Contributions are strictly tax, National Insurance and VAT. Council tax is constant, so not counted as contribution.
- Costs are benefits plus the costs of training
- All salaries for nurses are on grades with cost of living allowance and Inner London weighting
- Source of salary figures – NHS Careers website.

## Salary assumptions

The salaries for the nurse and doctor used to compile the chart are based on NHS salary scales and likely progression – these have then been used to calculate the tax and National Insurance payments once they begin to earn.

### Doctor

The first two years for the doctor contain no earnings during IELTS and PLAB qualification, followed by a six month unpaid clinical attachment. For the next two years the doctor takes a post as senior house officer where the basic salary likely is £25,000 (though out-of-hours allowance and intensity supplement mean that earnings could be as high as £40,000). After this the doctor moves to a post as a registrar for the fifth year. The basic salary here is likely to be £30,000 (though typical earnings including out of hours working and intensity supplement are likely to be nearer £50,000).

### Nurse

The first eighteen months involve registration and study towards IELTS. However, from this point earnings start through supervised practice at a probable Grade C – starting point £13,465 pa. This would be followed by a move to Grade D – starting point £16,525 pa – which is the level for newly qualified staff. Then follows 18 months at Grade E – starting point £17,660 pa - and the final six months covered by the chart at Grade F – starting point £19,585 pa. This is posited on considerable professional experience before arrival (maybe ten years post-qualification experience) and the likelihood of rising rapidly through grade levels in view of London skills shortages.

## Potential benefits

For doctors the costs are higher to start with, as they need to achieve IELTS, PLAB 1, PLAB 2 and clinical attachments. During this time, they earn nothing and their travel costs have to be paid by the fund. Once they start earning they immediately come off all benefits (as single people the thresholds are not high) and begin contributing very soon. Indeed, within five years they are likely to be paying tax at the higher rate.

For nurses the story is slightly different. There are no PLAB costs while registrations costs are very low. They still require help with travel costs – and in many cases IELTS. It is assumed they do this in the second six months after starting to requalify. However, they are able to earn a low salary while on supervised practice. Once reaching the required standard, they then progress through the grade scale.

## CASE STUDY

One former beneficiary of a grant is working in a major computer company. His first class honours degree and good interview performance made them enthusiastic to employ him. His difficulty was that having been granted exceptional leave to remain twelve months earlier, he still had not received the papers from the Home Office verifying this. Intervention from Praxis staff reassured the employers that they would be employing the individual legally.

## 4. Conclusions

### Findings

- ▷ Refugees and asylum seekers eligible for work have much to contribute to the economic life of London if they are able to acquire relevant skills and overcome barriers to employment.
- ▷ The problems can be resolved through a variety of approaches, one of which is the provision of small sums of money, which enable refugees to access courses. Such small sums of money make a real difference to the lives of individual refugees and asylum seekers, by enabling them to raise their expectations.
- ▷ Focused work relating to health and social care has enabled expertise to be built up and the specific barriers inhibiting employment to be overcome.
- ▷ City Parochial Foundation and Praxis believe that this is a pattern of work which has been shown to be successful and economically advantageous, and which can be replicated for other areas.
- ▷ The Personal Study Account is only one example of initiatives which seek to assist refugees and asylum seekers into employment. It has, however, pointed the way to a simple and relatively inexpensive way of benefitting both UK society and those refugees and asylum seekers who come to join it.

### CASE STUDY

After studying for no less than 22 years, one refugee will be happy when he starts working, because he is 'fed up with sitting around at home'.

He comes from Afghanistan, and has been in Britain for five years. He and his family have indefinite leave to remain, and aim to apply for citizenship when they qualify.

They left Afghanistan after experiencing harassment under the Taliban, partly because his wife is a Catholic from Lebanon. Eventually, he left his hospital where he worked in accident and emergency and fled over the border to Pakistan.

Frustrated at the length of time it was taking for him to get his medical qualifications ratified – he spent six years doing his original medical training followed by three years specialising in A&E in Lebanon – he eventually decided to switch directions and took a two year degree in Osteopathy. He now plans to work in the NHS.

He received a £500 grant from Praxis last year to support his degree and has applied for another to help him complete the course.

When he first came to London, he drove a minicab to

support his family, but the dangers and the attitudes of some passengers forced him to give it up.

He also joined a job search programme, but believes this does little more than help pass the time. Most of the time applicants sit around and drink coffee as there is little else to do once they have scoured the papers and other resources for opportunities.

However, he has now secured employment as a lecturer in disease and disfunction at the College of Osteopathy, linked to Middlesex Hospital.

His positive attitude showed when the bombing of Afghanistan started last year – he phoned Downing Street offering his services, pointing out his vast experience in A&E and his ability to help soldiers communicate, but unfortunately, never heard back.

This positive attitude also extends to his new life in Britain. He is actively involved in voluntary work in his local community in Redbridge where he is chair of a supplementary and mother tongue school that provides tuition to children in their native languages, and also helps mothers learn English. The community group also runs football teams for adults and children and has recently started a music course for children.

## Recommendations

- ▷ CPF and Praxis believe that with a flexible approach to existing policy important benefits could be achieved. One route might be to enable existing systems now operating through Job Centres and New Deal to achieve flexibility in options available to advisers.
- ▷ The specialist knowledge required could be provided through partnership with the voluntary sector and enhance and improve the services that can be offered.
- ▷ That specialist knowledge is already available in the voluntary sector, and by using, say, a fast track referral system backed by the limited funding needed beyond its current level, a successful public-voluntary sector partnership could be achieved.
- ▷ This approach would be very much in line with last year's Treasury Cross-cutting Review, which acknowledged the voluntary sector's close relationship with service users that meant it has "*a distinctive approach to service delivery, based on its specialist knowledge, experience and skills*".
- ▷ As this report has revealed, the scheme has been restricted to health professionals. There is a need for a wider scheme which could provide resources for other professions where there are also serious skill shortages, and for the scheme to be extended to other parts of the country.

## Next steps

- ▷ The scale of a successful scheme along the lines indicated above will need commitment from a range of funders, Government, employers, professional bodies and agencies, to a long-term approach, combining flexible finance arrangements and a strong support system.
- ▷ The scheme might be adapted to provide loans thus requiring support from the banking sector. The advantage of loans is that after the initial few years, repayments should mean that a self regenerating fund would be built up thus requiring continued finance only for administrative support.
- ▷ In developing this, the scheme should also explore alternative ideas and maintain a flexible approach, and provide advice and guidance to the agencies which would administer it for their particular areas and/or sectors.
- ▷ City Parochial Foundation and Praxis are willing to take the lead from the voluntary sector in establishing a group to develop the scheme, hopefully in partnership with others.





6 Middle Street London EC1A 7PH

Telephone: 020 7606 6145 Fax: 020 7600 1866

E-mail: [info@cityparochial.org.uk](mailto:info@cityparochial.org.uk)

Website: [www.cityparochial.org.uk](http://www.cityparochial.org.uk)

Charity Registration number: 205629



Pott Street London E2 0EF

Telephone: 020 7729 7985 Fax: 020 7729 0134

E-mail: [admin@praxis.org.uk](mailto:admin@praxis.org.uk)

Website: [www.praxis.org.uk](http://www.praxis.org.uk)

Charity Registration number: 1078945