

Refugee Council

help and advice



September 2008

English

Refugees' guide to training and employment

This leaflet explains your employment rights and what options are available to you when accessing training or securing employment. Information in this leaflet is not designed to be comprehensive as each person's circumstances are different and will need different types of advice. You can find more specific advice on your individual circumstances from a careers adviser through:

- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) - <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/getadvice>
- A refugee agency such as the Refugee Council - <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>
- Learn Direct - <http://www.learn-direct-advice.co.uk/>

What are my rights and entitlements?

If you have been granted refugee status, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave you have broadly the same rights and entitlements to services as other UK residents and citizens. You now have permission to work, can use health services and apply for housing and welfare benefits in the same way as other UK residents.

It is important to note that an employer will need to see proof that you have permission to work. You will need to show immigration status documents from the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and official evidence of your National Insurance (NI) number, such as a NI card or a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions.

As a person who has now been given permission to work, you also have the right to set up your own business. For more information on how to set up a business see <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk>

Where can I go for help in finding a job?

Jobcentre Plus (JCP)

JCP is the organisation which deals with welfare benefits, it also helps people to find employment. They have details of job vacancies and can advise you on looking for work, applying for jobs, preparing for job interviews and starting your own business. More information on Jobcentre Plus can be found at: <http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk>

Recruitment agencies

Recruitment agencies are a link between workers and employers. They try to match the employers' needs with the workers' skills. Agencies may be privately owned or funded by Government. They may work in a number of sectors or they may specialise in one particular skills sector, for example finance. For a list of agencies go to <http://www.rec.co.uk>

Refugee support organisations

There are many other organisations which may be able to help and advise you further such as the Refugee Council or the Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU). They may be able to provide specialist advice and support you in finding employment and/or work placements - Refugee Council <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>, RAGU <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/>

Newspapers and press

Another good source of employment opportunities are the national and local newspapers. The internet also has many internet job sites which are useful when searching for work.

What training options are open to me?

I want to learn or improve my English

The most commonly available English language courses are called ESOL classes - English for Speakers of Other Languages. Courses are generally free to those out of work or on a low income. Before you join you will need to take a language assessment to find out what level of English class you need. ESOL classes are generally held at community training centres, further education colleges or through private colleges (where course fees apply). Colleges often have a high demand for courses and you may have to wait for a place to become available.

I want to learn a new skill

If you would like to update or learn new skills to improve your job opportunities, there are a wide range of training courses to choose from. Much of this training takes place at further education colleges where there may be fee concessions depending on your personal circumstances and the subject being taken. Private colleges however will charge fees for their courses.

Courses can be either full or part-time but check with your Jobcentre Plus office to ensure that the number of hours you study will not affect the benefits you get. For many of these courses you will need to have a certain standard of English.

For information on ESOL or vocational training in your area, contact Learn Direct at <http://www.learn-direct-advice.co.uk/>, approach your local further education college directly, or discuss with your careers adviser.

I have qualifications from my home country

You may already have qualifications gained overseas but need to find out whether they will be recognised. This can be complicated and specialist help is usually needed. The UK National Academic Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC) gives information on how overseas qualifications relate to UK qualifications: see their website www.naric.org.uk

It is important to note that you have to have particular qualifications and be registered in order to work in certain professions in the UK, for example nursing, medicine, law, teaching, architecture, pharmacy and many others. In certain professions you will be expected to retrain or do conversion courses to become familiar with UK working practices.

I am interested in doing voluntary work

Voluntary work is a way of helping charitable or voluntary organisations by offering them your time and skills without receiving payment in return. Volunteering is common in the UK as a way of helping other people in the wider community.

Volunteering can help you to improve your job prospects. It can help you to become more familiar with the UK working culture, gain new skills and experiences, improve your English and get a reference to help you apply for a job. Your travel expenses are usually paid by the organisation you are supporting. However, check first with Jobcentre Plus to ensure that volunteering does not affect your benefits.

You can find more information about voluntary work at: <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/> or <http://www.wearev.com/> (if you are between 16 – 25 years old). You can also search for current volunteering opportunities at: <http://jobseekers.direct.gov.uk/> or contact a refugee agency such as the Refugee Council at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/volunteering>

How do I apply for jobs?

When starting your search for employment you will find many employers will ask to see a Curriculum Vitae (CV), which is a summary of your educational and employment history. They will often ask you to write a supporting letter which should show how your specific skills and experience meet the specification of the job you are applying for. Other employers will require you to complete an application form with all this information. These are often the key tools in applying for jobs and it is important that you get them right.

The next stage is usually a job interview. How you present yourself at the job application and interview stages is very important, and may be different from the way things are done in your home country. It is important to get advice from a careers adviser on interview skills, application forms, supporting letters and how to write a CV.

What is national insurance and income tax?

National insurance is the money paid from your wages to the Government. It contributes to state pensions, welfare benefits and the health service. Each worker has a National Insurance (NI) number. You will need to have a NI number to start work. You should normally receive your NI number when the UKBA sends you confirmation of your status. If you do not have a NI number and require one, you should call 0845 600 0643. You can find more information about NI numbers at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/lifeevent/benefits/ni_number.asp

When you are employed, your employer will deduct the national insurance contributions and income tax from your pay. The level of income tax you pay is based on how much you earn. If you are self-employed you should arrange for the national insurance and income tax to be paid directly to the government department – HM Revenue and Customs.

What are my employment rights in the UK?

Employment contract

When you start work your employer should give you an employment contract. An employment contract is an agreement between you and your employer. The contract doesn't have to be in writing but you are entitled to a written statement of the main terms within 13 weeks. The contract should include a brief description of the work you will be doing, where you will be working, how much you will earn and when you will be paid. It should also include information about your hours of work and your holiday entitlement.

Minimum wage

Everyone who works in the UK is entitled to be paid the minimum wage. The amount of the minimum wage is set by the Government. Minimum rates vary according to the age of the worker. Your employer may pay you more than the minimum wage. You can find out the current minimum wage rates at: <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/nmw>

Employment Protection

There are many laws in the UK which protect employees from unfair treatment. In particular there are laws that say that you cannot be discriminated against at work because of your sex, marital status, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or age. The law protects part-time and fixed-term workers as well as full-time employees from unfair discrimination.

If you have a problem with your employer, you can get help from a Citizens Advice Bureau, a Law Centre or independent advice centre. Many of the organisations offer their services for free.

You can find more information about your rights, entitlements and responsibilities at: <http://www.berr.gov.uk/employment/> and <http://www.direct.gov.uk/Employment>