

REFUGEE TRUST SURVIVAL

Access to Education & Employment grants

June 2009 to May 2010

This report incorporates the evaluations which resulted from the Oxfam funding covering the period June to November 2009

Introduction

The Refugee Survival Trust (RST) has been giving Access to Education and Employment grants to asylum seekers and refugees since 2005. There is no other source of such funding available to these two groups who are supported by Section 95 or Section 4 payments from the UK Borders Agency while their claim for asylum is processed or by Job Seekers' Allowance or other mainstream benefits from the Department of Work and Pensions once they achieve refugee status.

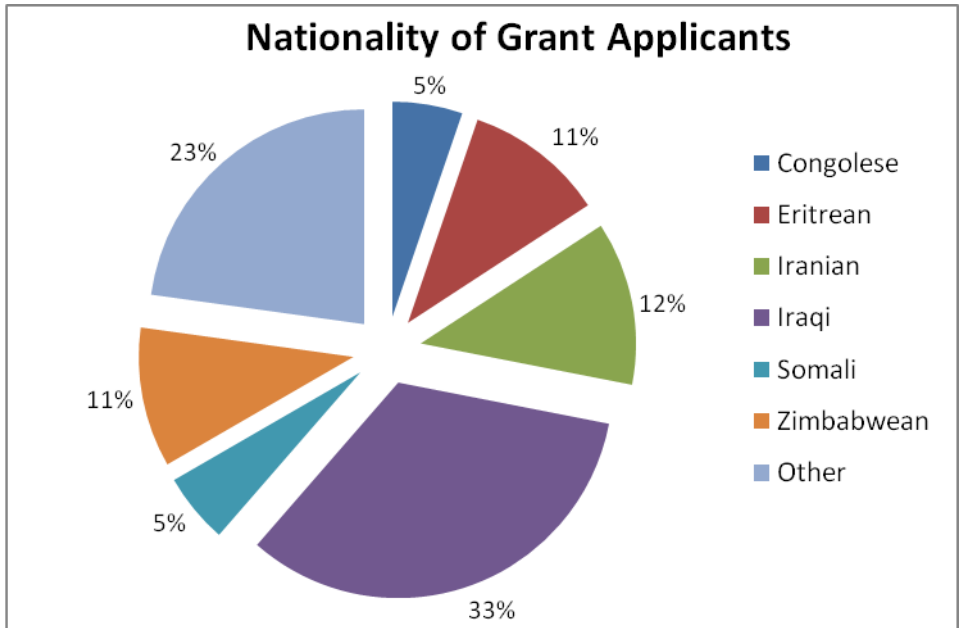
Since 2007, course fees have been paid by SAAS for refugees but asylum seekers do not have fees paid and have almost no access to cash to meet the costs of travel and other vocational expenses. The grants given by RST are modest, capped at £150 to any one individual in any one year but they are crucial in allowing clients to progress their chosen path. The purposes of the grants are limited and may, for example, buy study materials, pay for an equivalence certificate of their qualifications, pay travel to a class or volunteer placement, get help with upgrading driving skills or buying a home computer.

Funding for the grants was originally made available by the Scottish Executive but this source of funds ceased at the end of 2008 and from January to May 2009 inclusive, RST had to discontinue grants. However grants were resumed in June 2009 thanks to support from Oxfam, initially £3000, followed by a further £2000. We used this new funding to strengthen our evaluation process: after a six month period we request feedback from the supporting bodies (generally Careers Scotland or the Scottish Refugee Council) on the outcome of the funding.

Grants approved between June 2009 and May 2010

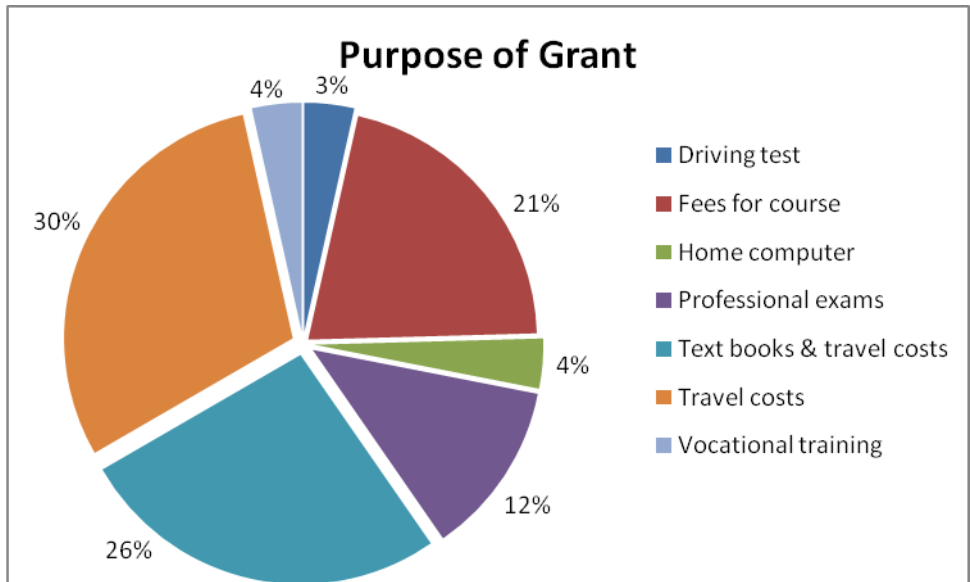
A total of 57 grants amounting to £8042 were approved in the period from June 2009 to May 2010 with £5,000 from Oxfam and £3,042 from other grants income. Of these 57 applicants, 14 (25%) were asylum seekers and 43 (75%) refugees: 44(77%) were men and 13 (23%) women. Three of the women had children who were of school age so did not require assistance with child care but had no cash available for travel costs. One was suffering from health problems due to persecution at home and strain of going through the application process here but, with support, was trying to access education.

Grant applicants were predominantly of African or Middle Eastern origin and their nationality is shown in the chart below:



The national distribution of applicants was skewed in this period because of the special arrangements for fast-tracking asylum applications by Iraqis who had assisted the British army in Basra, a group of whom were dispersed to Scotland. Most of these applicants were trained engineers and have been given entry to university at third year level to renew their qualifications.

The purposes of the grants approved is as follows:



Over 62% of grants were given for travel costs and text books, reflecting the problems experienced by applicants in accessing cash to meet these expenses. The majority of grants (85%) were for the maximum amount of £150 and the other 15% were for payments of £42 - £120 depending on specific examination costs or the period of travel involved. Six applicants had received earlier grants and were progressing to a higher level of education having satisfactorily completed their initial courses.

Evaluations received for grants given between 1 June and 30 November 2009

As a result of the six month evaluation time lag, the figures given in the following sections of this report relate to the period from 1 June to 30 November 2009.

1 Numbers of applicants

Grants made	39
Evaluations returned	28 (4 limited due to lack of follow-up contact)
Total value of grants awarded to the 28	£3902

25 out of the total of 28 applicants received the maximum £150.

2 Profile of applicants

Average age	33
Gender	27 male, 1 female
Status: Asylum seeker	7 (of which 3 later gained refugee status)
Refugee	21
Nationality: Iraqi	11
Zimbabwean	4

The nationality of the 13 remaining was 7 - from Congo, Eritrea, and Iran; 6 were from Burundi, Cameroon, China, Lebanon, Palestine, Somalia. Country of origin varies regularly and, as would be expected, reflects the patterns of global political and social unrest.

3 Purpose for which grant was given

Study materials & travel	13
Travel only	4
Course fees	5
Driving test	2
Home computer	2
Professional exam fee	1
Vocational training	1

The sums granted are relatively small and can only make a contribution to high-cost items such as course fees or long-term travel. In most cases they supplement what the individual provides either from a college or from relatives or friends. However they are seen as a significant source of funding which not only provide practical help but also give official recognition to individuals and can enhance self esteem at a vulnerable time of their life.

4 What applicants said the grant provided

Accessed new opportunities	22
Overcame barriers	22
Became more employable	18
Found employment	2
Became more independent	5
Ended dependence on benefits	9
Reduced isolation	22
Improved language skills	20
Improved confidence	22

It is clear from the above that the majority derived strong personal development advantages (new opportunities, improved confidence, reduced isolation). This certainly made them feel more employable, more able to seek work even though only 2 recipients had actually found work. It takes time and persistence to seek out work that is appropriate and builds on skills learnt in the country of origin or demands new skills. Time, however, is well spent in the search to maximise both the individual's satisfaction and also the appropriate economic and social contribution to the adopted country. We know, for example, that many of them continue with higher education and further/vocational training while working part time. Some re-apply for RST support in subsequent years, indicating progress through the education and training systems. In this sample 6 have been re-applications.

There is also a clear relationship between growing competence in English and the confidence to engage in the wider community. For example, some may take up volunteering while seeking work (3 in this sample) and a contribution to travel is vital, supplementing basic benefits, without which they would be more confined to the home and less able to integrate. Also while language classes may be free of charge (although this practice is inconsistent) travel and books have to be purchased and make all the difference to regular attendance and motivation. It is evident that, in a small but significant way, these small grants provide more opportunities to go out, make new contacts and meet more people.

5 Additional outcomes provided

On university programme	5
About to start university	7
Completed FE college programme/about to start another	3
Working	2
Seeking work	4

Qualifications sought are varied – initial training (pre-course access, English) and further studies (engineering, IT, medicine, teaching, security industry, driving). Once refugees have official status they have access to home student fees and these may be paid by SAAS but asylum seekers are not

eligible for these benefits. Notionally, asylum seekers who have been awaiting a decision for a long time, are able to work but this presents so many problems with their UKBA support that almost none do so and many of the applicants included in this report would not be eligible. Some have the opportunity to work part-time but part time study becomes a challenge on low benefits.

Conclusion

The success of this project has allowed us to achieve the expected impact described in our original application to Oxfam. In other words, it has enabled both refugees and asylum seekers to overcome barriers that prevent them from training for or accessing employment; to move towards financial independence; to become better prepared for life as contributing members of the wider community; to avoid mental health difficulties brought on by inactivity and isolation.

In addition RST has been able to build on its previous pilot evaluation scheme and establish a more formal process. This will benefit both RST and new applicants as more robust feedback will inform the process of review on an ongoing basis. It will contribute to a more strategic analysis of the information gained from grant-making, will be used to provide clear evidence of need to future sponsors and contribute to policy developments in the wider political field. For example, a follow-up report to our original publication “21 Days Later”, compiled jointly with the Red Cross in 2009, is shortly to be published. It has already benefitted from input from this evaluation.

We are most grateful to OXFAM for this support which has enabled us to continue to make such valuable grants, to re-focus our activities in this area of grant-giving and to review and redefine our priorities.

Jenny Newman, Janet Price, Duncan Ross
Refugee Survival Trust

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