

***ASSET UK LEARNING FROM
TRANSNATIONAL
EXCHANGES***



**Asset UK and KOA
Report on Transnational
Co-operation Agreement**



EQUAL Transnational Co-operation Agreement

Final report on TCA "Open Global Learning" ID 1850

Ukgb-62 ASSET UK was a DP in Theme I for asylum seekers; SE-11, Kista Open Academy, DP 125, was a DP within the Lifelong Learning Theme E

Rationale and Objectives

Common interests/methodology/underlying problem

The general aim of ASSET UK was

(i) to improve the conditions for asylum seekers, to ensure a smoother integration process for those who receive a residence permit or leave to remain, and a better position for those who are ultimately rejected.

(ii) to explore the possibilities for facilitating asylum seekers' access to the labour market and / or for maintaining and improving their individual skills and competencies during the asylum procedure.

(iii) to look at the need to recognise a continuum between asylum seeking and eventual integration or return, while recognising the differences implicit in that process.

The general aim of KOA was

- (i) to build a network to realise the concept of the open university in Sweden for all
- (ii) to counteract social, economic and ethnic segregation by providing high-quality tools to enable disadvantaged groups to fulfil their needs for lifelong learning.
- (iii) to make it possible for adult students to study at different levels at the same time, e.g. SFI and university studies
- (iv) to check the rule systems and how they apply to the user groups
- (v) to improve the physical infrastructure in big cities (learning centres)
- (vi) to improve methodologies of approach to the target groups and to their own personal competencies and their ability to function independently in the society
- (vii) to increase diversity by involving and strengthening associations of ethnic minorities.
- (viii) to improve collaboration between actors in the fields of education and training, including the higher education
- (ix) to improve pedagogical methods for adult learning and training and information for the target groups

Contrasting issues

· Scandinavian governments have for several years funded integration programmes with entitlements for individual refugees via their municipalities, whereas UK has only recently embarked on an integration strategy, less well funded and mainly implemented through strengthening the organisations established to assist refugees. In Sweden there is a lack of diversity in strengthening established organisations to contribute to the reception of refugees and asylum seekers and

there are still barriers for refugees and ethnic groups with reference to possibilities for accessing study systems and life long learning

- Both the UK and Sweden have a system of dispersal across their national territory although in the UK this is specifically for asylum seekers while in Sweden it is also the policy for refugees during their 3-year integration period.

- Whereas the Swedish system is very experienced in working within accommodation centres the UK expected to be moving towards that model during 2002-3, though this did not actually take place.

- Whereas the Swedish asylum model had focused more on internal work within accommodation centres (including some language instruction) which would be of particular interest to ASSET UK partners, the UK had considerable relevant experience of working with asylum seekers within the wider community.

- In the context of current EU debates, the UK had had experience over several years of permitting asylum seekers to work, and Sweden too has permitted asylum seekers to work after a waiting period. However, the UK government changed this policy shortly after Action 2 began.

- In both countries there was significant work to be done with employers in both the public and private sector, not least in terms of developing diversity management; whereas the UK may have had more years of experience in relation to race discrimination issues Sweden may have had more experience in relation to gender equality in particular.

- Both DPs had partners representing those working directly with the refugee or migrant /ethnic community field, and also education institutions including universities, colleges and community-based centres of learning, local authorities, professional education / training organisations focussing on language and delivery of advice and guidance and basic skills, as well as higher education.

- Both DPs were large national 3-year projects working towards an improved process for disadvantaged people in general, in Sweden, including asylum seekers: in the UK the focus was entirely on asylum seekers.

Underlying problems

Refugees suffer serious problems of unemployment and underemployment and discrimination in both countries. Both countries shared common underlying problems relating to the basic antipathy to asylum seekers and migrants within the broad public perception; there might be a need for the EU to fill skills gaps or labour shortages but asylum seekers are rarely seen as part (albeit a small part) of a possible solution; there is little hard evidence to date about the level of skills and experience, or about the possible contribution that asylum seekers who do eventually stay in the territory, may bring with them; there is a need to share experience about the methodologies of approach to asylum seekers with reference to their preparation for the labour market, to their own personal competencies (basic skills, host language acquisition, training, recognition of previous experiences and qualifications etc., the continuation of their own disrupted education), and their own ability to function independently, whatever the result of their asylum application.

The common objectives of the DPs

To facilitate learning and the flow of information based on the needs of individuals who may be marginalised for a number of different reasons

To exchange experience and 'know-how' on transnational working and development of new teaching methods and technology

To jointly develop a new study environment that satisfies demands of a particular target group (asylum seekers)

To enable participants (individual asylum seekers or migrants) to make use of each others' flexible education systems

To create training courses for those advising or teaching asylum seekers; to create advice and orientation packages and learning packages specifically for individual asylum seekers, or for a variety of different minority groups including asylum seekers, and especially for isolated asylum seekers

To influence European practice and policy development on appropriate models for international open and distance learning systems

To share 'know-how' and get a tandem learning situation in advising and teaching asylum seekers and early immigrants based on empowerment and own initiatives in the group.

To develop common models and modules for learning packages specially for individual asylum seekers and small groups of immigrants.

General objectives

- to develop new processes and methods and materials, including through online technology, for orientation towards the labour market via new and appropriate methods of delivering information and advice. Delivering training to advisers. Dissemination nationally and internationally, relating to new ways of delivering basic skills & ITC training, and language provision
- to empower asylum seekers as part of the development of a planned approach to a refugee employment strategy that sees asylum-seeking and the acquisition of status as a "continuum"; the emphasis will be on empowerment to ensure that the individual asylum seekers' capacity to act can be increased no matter whether asylum is granted or not.
- to try out innovative approaches to advice and guidance /language provision in order to justify appropriate recommendations at policy level, leading to mainstreaming

The (common/complementary) products/deliverables foreseen

ASSET UK/ RAGU's [London Metropolitan University, Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit] focus within the UK was on the following:

To establish a UK wide network of educational institutions (including universities, further education colleges and refugee community organisations)

To deliver training to (150) staff working with asylum seekers and giving them information and advice

Production of (6) on-line orientation and information resource packs for asylum seekers

ASSET UK / The Sheffield College: their focus especially within this TCA was on curriculum development and the development and evaluation of English language programmes. This will be as part of the objectives of the DPA to develop new ways of delivery or materials for English Language and basic skills. This work will focus on intensive higher level programmes, English for specific purposes, a language support assistant scheme, and empowering people to contribute to a wider delivery of language provision.

ASSET UK/ Basic Skills Agency: focus on the development and piloting of innovative paper-based and ICT materials to be mainstreamed via ESOL practitioners including volunteers and community providers working with asylum seekers. Products developed through the project aim to give asylum seekers essential basic skills that are a prerequisite for mobility, orientation and the seeking of employment opportunities.

In Sweden the municipality-based centres focussed on development of guidance and coaching of the target group. There will also be a survey to check up all the systems and rules which will be an obstacle for international open distance learning for the target groups. The survey will be matched about the systems in partner countries and if there is a need international proposals for changing rules will be proposed

The universities and the further education sector in Sweden focussed on developing actions and a model for a curriculum for a college course adapted to the target group by offering integrated language support in Swedish and English and with a close connection to the labour market, in collaboration with transnational partners in UK specially the Sheffield college.

Expectations for TCA dissemination:

- Improved methods and contents of orientation and advice for asylum seekers (approaches, materials for delivery of language teaching or basic skills; ways of disseminating information and of delivering advice to individuals;)

Added value of the strategy and intended results of each of the DPs involved;
The contexts of the two countries differ in such a way that transnational partners expected to learn from each other's experiences and thus increase the quality and effect of the work carried out by the two projects.

- Co-operation was expected to result in well-founded arguments for recommendations at policy level, leading to mainstreaming.
- Sweden has a wider client focus including asylum seekers whereas the UK has a focus specifically on asylum seekers: this will have the added value of testing the two approaches

Specific added value;

Results- leading towards more appropriate national programmes linking the asylum processes to integration processes as a continuum; helping asylum seekers and refugees become more easily and appropriately educated, trained and therefore employable;

ASSET UK provided a large DP focusing entirely on one of the Swedish project's target groups; Kista Academy hoped to have funds to develop technological know-how; UK partners had a depth of experience in this particular target group and included national specialist organisations in adult learning, the delivery of education and training programmes, language and basic skills, as well as representatives of two levels of public education provision i.e. the university and the further education college levels.

This transnational work wanted to add value both in development of materials and methodology in both the UK and SE to an important sector of the DP relating to Information and Advice, and language and basic skills provision

Work Programme priorities & working methodology.

Organisational and Decision Making Arrangements

The TCA activity budget was viewed as "owned" by the TCA and therefore all decisions on activities were made by consensus. Principal contacts for transnational arrangements were made via the two transnational co-ordinators throughout the partnership, in consultation with the partners involved in this area of work. ASSET UK advisory group for the Swedish partnership included the transnational manager, and representatives from RAGU and Sheffield College. They formed the TN management group. Ultimate responsibility for decisions rested with the two Partnership boards

Transnational activities foreseen

Exchange of information and experiences	****
Parallel development of innovative approaches	***
Import, export or adoption of new approaches	****
Joint development	**
Exchange of trainees/trainers/staff	***

Name of the activity

1 Stimulate creation of transnational networks of universities and learning centres

Stimulate creation of transnational networks of universities and learning centres; exchange experience and know how within different project areas within EQUAL; develop a new study environment that satisfies asylum seekers as a particular target groups; enable educators to work internationally; enable beneficiaries (asylum seekers) to study internationally. Dissemination, development and exchange of material relating to work with asylum seekers that is already on-line; or using existing materials that are not yet on-line; facilitate access to ICT for asylum seekers to enable them to access such materials, e.g. on-line or distance learning in English / Swedish [Koa and RAGU]

RAGU developed a network of universities working with asylum seekers and refugees and although there were attempts to make a connection between Swedish partners in Stockholm University and RAGU's HERAN university network this work did not really make much progress as the Swedish partners were not doing anything similar, nor did they in any case have a focus on access for asylum seekers or refugees. The Stockholm University work with refugees and new

academic immigrants, and RAGU did a study visit in the " Studentbyrå" (Student Information Centre) but unfortunately and very much because of changes in the staff at that time there were no possibilities to work out any model for collaboration.

2. Develop and offer flexible advice and information processes, training courses for advisers; [KOA and RAGU/BSA] Lessons learned from KOA/RAGU/BSA exchanges

RAGU focused on the development of seven on-line orientation packs to address the particular needs of dispersed asylum seekers. The website <http://www.asset-uk.org.uk/ragu.htm>, as it developed, covered areas such as improving English, understanding the UK education system; getting into Further and Higher Education; recognition of qualifications; preparing for employment; and requalifying.

During TCA exchanges contributions were welcomed from KOA partners from a number of Swedish agencies who took the time during the exchanges to look at RAGU's website and give helpful feedback. A particularly useful part of the staff exchange visit to Sweden was getting the benefit of Swedish experience of a 1-1 advice on-line, and additionally with information on-line on the Sollentuna website. This meant that RAGU had a useful exchange of views, tips and ideas for their website development. Kista Open Academy did not have the funds in the project for piloting, but a method of flexible active search in guidance and counselling was practised in Kista and Sollentuna. This method has also been examined by two students and the results were presented on the seminars in Kista in autumn 2004.

BSA's on line work focus was on preparing a CD-Rom on citizen skills which was demonstrated at a number of its stages during the TCA exchanges.

The work in RAGU has given Kista Open Academy very much inspiration and the work will continue. Nova Distance will take over the homepage and fulfill the task to create a site for information in Sweden in the same way as the RAGU model. Sweden has a lot of very useful sites but they are often too complicated for our target groups.

The exchange of experiences and the work done by RAGU has been very inspiring for SE and the intention is to produce a similar on-line service for Sweden next autumn. Training courses have not been carried through courses as such. Instead there has been a 'tandem learning' situation because of staff exchange in the group of counsellors.

3. Creation of basic skills network for asylum seekers

Stimulate the creation of a basic skills for asylum seekers' network including transnational partners, materials for ESOL /basic literacy-numeracy learners, an ICT CD Rom application aimed at asylum seekers focussing on citizenship, and a video to be produced on differentiated learning; developing support materials and training that relates to orientation support for asylum seekers, to policy development and capacity building for organisations working with asylum seekers.

An informal network for further collaboration has been developed and the contacts between one of the municipalities and Sheffield College will definitely continue. It has been a weakness in the Swedish Equal project that there were no funds for piloting, but in the partnership there were actors working with these issues. In SE

also Learning Centres were started up in three participating municipalities who did practical courses in basics skills and preparation for the target groups to qualify the individuals to be able to adopt vocational training for getting a job. Also in a big partner organisation (Lernia), and in ABF (Popular Adult Education), language courses were developed and given to new immigrants during the whole project period.

The Municipality Adult Education organisation, Västerorts Komvux, has the responsibility of offering basic education in literacy-numeracy to immigrants, refugees and also to Swedish citizens and they have also been actively involved in the project.

Experiences from UK and these activities produced a lot of experiences that were shared in workshops and common activities. SE really got a big input as a result of the long experience in UK and the work done in Sheffield (ESOL) and RAGU.

The conference with ASSET UK's Danish transnational partners, in Bornholm, Denmark [May 2003] was of a great value as well because the workshops focused on these issues and gave a good orientation and input from work in Denmark, Ireland and Holland.

4. Evaluation and testing of curriculum material [KOA and Sheffield College]

Development, testing and evaluation of new curriculum materials which meet the specific needs of asylum seekers; establishing the scope of provision in the further education sector; mapping levels and quality of support relating to curriculum development, student support, advice and guidance, staff awareness, in order to provide a guide to colleges on the development of provision for asylum seekers

Within the Sheffield College and KTH and Further Education programme for EQUAL, the development, testing and evaluation of new curriculum materials which meet the specific needs of asylum seekers; establishing the scope of provision in the further education sector; mapping levels and quality of support relating to curriculum development, student support, advice and guidance, staff awareness, in order to provide a guide to colleges on the development of provision for asylum seekers. Different new tools were also presented e.g. a database for teachers where learning objects can be put in modules that will be useful for all teachers and support flexibility and individual study programmes. The database has been installed in Stockholm municipality and at the national Agency for Flexible Learning in Sweden (who support development of upper secondary and further education on national level). This collaboration and contacts will be going on even after the project ends.

KTH has started up a distance based course for teachers who will start up to use this database and many teachers are now involved. This is also a possibility for further collaboration.

Also an on-line dictionary and a method for language learning has been presented and discussed in the groups. (This tool has not been developed by Equal money, but because of the Equal network it has been implemented in a project in West Sweden in completion of national higher education for medical doctors and nurses from other countries to get an identification of their examination.)

SE, Kista Open Academy created a flexible model curriculum for college education bridging the gap for adult students between upper secondary school and university,

where courses will be mixed from both systems during one year. This will increase the possibilities for students with lack of practice from higher studies to overcome the barrier they often have to university studies. It will also help new immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers with absence of language competence to fill this gap at the same time. (In the future it is hoped that the university part of the studies can be in their mother tongue through distance learning and the second part will be intensive Swedish language studies.) These issues (among others) have been discussed with colleges from Sheffield together with The Royal College of Music and Nova Distance, and the exchange of experience was useful.

Lessons learned by Sheffield College

During the action 2 phase of the Equal ASSET UK project the Sheffield College has worked with Kista Open Academy in Sweden as part of the transnational agreement.

Members of the college have visited Sweden and we hosted one visit from our Swedish partners.

The college has found the exchange of ideas and methodologies useful in terms of considering alternative approaches to similar issues. In particular sharing ideas around:

- Language accusation for asylum seekers
- On-line learning and the benefits for asylum seekers

The college has taken on a 'passport model' which was used for SFI (Swedish for immigrants course) which gives a small 'passport' providing students with essential information regarding the college, their particular course and progression route.

Although the project will come to an end, the college will continue to liaise with the Swedish partners to share information, good practice and new methodologies/ideas. Hence, overall the transnational activities with the Swedish partners has been of benefit to the college.

5. On line delivery (not done for lack of additional funding)

Developing of an infrastructure for online delivery of materials for distance learning (text, graphics, audio /video); interactive aids to help search for courses (Subject for benchmarking and only to funding from Swedish partners in an additional fund, and for later stage in EQUAL if UK funds are available;

SE, Kista Open Academy did not develop its own on-line material delivery system but in and around the partnership there have been developed new tools that have been implemented in Stockholm City's school system, and this has been presented in Sheffield as well. The system is a hub for learning modules produced by teachers, free for all in the network to use to create flexible new learning objects for groups or even for individuals. In the same way a new tool for language learning (also via mobile phone) and an on-line dictionary service for higher vocational studies has been developed in Sweden and it has been tested in a first version from autumn 2004. This has also been presented to colleges in Sheffield, but still not tested. Kista Open Academy has no possibility to develop or make piloting itself but it has worked as a catalyst to disseminate partners new tools to support development for the target groups.

The final comments from Kista Open Academy is that the collaboration could have been even better had there been funds for piloting as well as was planned but were very pleased with the contacts that were established. There have been periods of less contact when changes occurred in UK about the organization and structure but this did not cause much disturbance..

The seminars were very valuable, the staff exchanges were very interesting; the collaboration at management level worked very smoothly. The great experience in this field that the ASSET partnership represented has been very valuable for our own development of new structures and the collaboration will go on in a very positive atmosphere. Specially the target groups' associations, who have been members in the Kista Open Academy partnership, have established many valuable contacts. The diversity in the UK models has inspired them and they have made several of their own contacts with fellow-country men to get more information. A valuable contact has been established by the Iranians and Somalis. (The Somalis were invited to KOA seminars) in Birmingham and Stockholm. This has resulted into several project applications and approvals at a national level and also at EU-level (The INTI-initiative).

The structure of the reception of asylum seekers has been changed in Stockholm the last year (from Jan -05) and our associations have been very active in this process. In Sweden the processes always have been very local authority- centered and the target groups have not been involved. Now they have essentially strengthened their position

Dates of all meetings and exchanges held

Management meetings

EQUAL transnational management meeting, ASSET UK, 5th September 2002 with Kista Open Academy, Sweden.

EQUAL transnational management meeting for UK- Swedish partnership, 9 October 2002 in London at St. Giles Hotel.

Equal transnational management meeting for UK-Swedish partnership 12th and 14 February 2003.

EQUAL Asset UK and KOA transnational meeting on Wednesday 16 March 2005 2.30pm – 4pm at the Jury's Inn, 245 Broad Street, Birmingham.

Transnational exchanges

Task group exchanges on ESOL [KOA and ASSET UK/Sheffield College]

Asylum Seekers/Refugees and New Immigrants Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, 13-14 February 2003. A workshop was given on 'University collaboration and learning environment, transnational networking', that focussed partly on higher education by distance.

Equal Opportunities for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, A EQUAL Transnational Conference in Birmingham, England on 15-17 June 2003. At this conference KOA gave a presentation on an introduction to the e-learning environment. Part of this conference also involved a Refugee Week open event called Learning from Each

Other: Model Strategies for the Integration of Asylum Seekers, where KOA gave a presentation on the Swedish perspective on reception and integration.

Asset UK meets Kista Open Academy, Equal transnational visit to Sheffield, UK, 12-13 February 2004.

Sheffield College visit KOA in Sweden, Monday 29 to 31st March 2004.

Sheffield College visit to Sweden May 11-13 2005; report

Task group exchanges on online delivery of materials KOA and ASSET UK /RAGU and BSA]

Exchanges

Asylum seekers / Refugees and New Immigrants Conference in Stockholm Sweden, 13-14 February 2003. A workshop was given on evaluation and testing of online curriculum materials and another workshop was given on 'University collaboration and learning environment, transnational networking', that focussed partly on higher education by distance.

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Asset UK Meets Open Global Learning, a EQUAL transnational meeting in London, 12th and 13th February 2004. [ASSET UK/ RAGU and BSA]

Asset UK meets Open Global Learning, an Equal transnational visit on 17th - 18th May 2004 in Kista, Sweden. ASSET UK/RAGU]

Documentation

EQUAL transitional management meeting, ASSET UK: Notes of key points from Stockholm meeting 5th September 2002 with Kista Open Academy, Sweden.

EQUAL transnational management meeting for UK- Swedish partnership, 9 October 2002 in London at St. Giles Hotel (minutes)

KOA partners made presentations at ASSET UK launch in Leicester October 2002

Report on Asylum Seekers / Refugees and New Immigrants Conference in Stockholm Sweden, ASSET UK partners visit to Sweden; 13-14 February 2003.

Asset UK Meets Open Global Learning, An EQUAL Transnational Meeting in London, [RAGU/BSA] 12th and 13th February 2004 (minutes).

Report on Asset UK Meets Kista Open Academy, A Equal Transnational Meeting in Sheffield College, UK, 12-13 February 2004.

Report for Staff Exchange Programme, Open Global Learning on 17th - 18th May 2004 in Kista, Sweden, ASSET UK/RAGU.

Report on Asset UK /Sheffield College visit to KOA in Sweden, Monday 29 March to 31st 2004.

EQUAL Asset UK and KOA transnational meeting on Wednesday 16 March 2005 2.30pm – 4pm at the Jury's Inn, 245 Broad Street, Birmingham (minutes).

KOA partners participated in ASSET UK's mainstreaming event in Birmingham [March 17 2005] joining workshops run by Sheffield College and RAGU/BSA

Report on Asset UK /Sheffield College visit to KOA in Sweden, 11-13 May 2005.

Monitoring and Evaluation Procedures

Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating of transnational experience and results

The TN management group was responsible for the transnational monitoring and evaluation and it was an ongoing agenda item. Sub-groups with participants from both partners undertook the evaluation and to produce the evaluation report for each activity. The evaluation was to identify the impact of transnational work and collaboration for each DP.

The aim of the evaluation was to:

- identify factors leading to best practice
- establish a baseline for benchmarking strategies, activities and results
- monitor activities and developments of TN work with a view to improve impact of common use

One main evaluation report at the end of the project.

Ongoing Contact points:

David Hudson,
Refugee Council
240 –250 Ferndale Road
London
SW9 BBB
David.hudson@refugeecouncil.org.uk
Tel: 020 7346 1098
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Saba Khan
Refugee Council
240 –250 Ferndale Road
London
SW9 BBB
Saba.Khan@refugeecouncil.org.uk
Tel: 020 7346 1099
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Rashid Chowdhury/KOA Rashid.Chowdhury@kista.stockholm.se
Ebba Träskelin/Nova Distance ebba.traskelin@novadistance.se