



Setting up a placement: notes for companies

Assessing your capability

When considering working with asylum seekers and refugees in the work place, start with your past experience of offering work placements in your organisation. Although there are specific requirements when offering placements to asylum seekers (see Chapter 10, Compliance), the basic principles are the same. If your company understands the value for both shadow and employee, for other work shadow/work experience schemes, then you will see the same benefits accrue when working with our client base.

The main benefits for companies are:

- Addressing equality and diversity needs of your business
- Developing the mentoring/coaching skills of your staff
- Demonstrating a commitment to social justice
- Empowering both employees and those who you bring into the work place
- Delivering a commitment to people from the local area
- Identifying potential future employees - although job outcomes are **not** an essential or monitored outcome of the Bridges approach
- Providing people with opportunities to make the most of themselves, both employees and others

The programme is flexible enough to fit all sizes of company and all levels of experience.

If your company/organisation is large enough to have a volunteering policy, then this would be your starting point in terms of managing the programme. If your company or organisation encourages and rewards staff for volunteering or community work then that might be your starting point for recruiting suitable staff to be a work place mentors.

If your company or organisation is small and completely new to work placements then this offers different opportunities. Small companies and organisations, by their nature, get a whole host of hands on, immediate benefits from having someone new in the work place that affects everyone in the business and not just the one or two specific mentors. The whole company or organisation gets involved in designing and running the placement and it can be a good way of bringing staff from different areas together for a common project.

When beginning to assess your organisation's suitability you need to consider the following things:

Review your resources:	staff, premises, shadow opportunities on offer
Review the impact:	time, productivity, costs
Review your staff:	commitment, skills and abilities
Review your company:	What have we got to offer that's special, would the person fit in?

1.) Reviewing your resources

How many of our staff could reasonably mentor someone and share with them all aspects of their job?

We don't need a whole host of people willing to do this, just one. In fact one dedicated mentor for a client is preferable to a very large number of people, that way the client knows who their main contact point is, although its fun if someone can see other aspects of a company and it may be that more than one member of staff gets involved at various times throughout the placement, even if it's just chatting at coffee or lunch.

What makes a good mentor?

Mentoring styles are very independent, but the following characteristics, in no specific order are worth considering:

- Able to maintain confidentiality
- Honest
- Trustworthy and reliable
- Non-judgemental
- Able to maintain commitment
- Good understanding of other people's needs
- Friendly
- Sense of humour
- Easy going and practical
- Calm in different situations
- Calm in difficult situations
- Good listener
- Understanding

Bridges offers training for companies who wish to work with us, which can be particularly useful for organisations for whom this is a new activity. **(See later in the Chapter, support available).**

Are our premises safe, do we have the right facilities?

Bridges check out host companies' Health and Safety policies and insurance and we ourselves have extensive Public Liability Insurance to cover clients out on placement. Very few companies don't have facilities that can't cope with people of either gender, and if disabled access is an issue for you

we would seek to place someone for whom disabled access is not an issue. Our clients are there to gain experience of existing jobs, so **if your premises can sustain staff they can sustain a shadow**. One thing is worth bearing in mind however and that is where possible and relevant to the job, shadows should have some work space that is their own, such as a desk space, access to a telephone etc.

Do we have the right jobs that can be shadowed or support supervised experience?

All jobs can be learnt and taught. **If you have facilities for on the job training for new staff then your jobs are suitable for work experience/shadow placements**. Remember we wouldn't approach you if we didn't think you had something to offer one of our clients that was appropriate. Bridges encourages companies to make-up work plans in advance so that everyone knows what to expect. If you don't know where to start, we have lots of examples and can help you draw up a work plan for a strong placement around the existing jobs your staff do. There is an example later in this chapter.

What is appropriate activity?

Doctors, for example, even if they have a surgical background, are offered placements in General Practice, in the first instance, until they qualify through the Refugee Doctors Programme, so there's no question of someone doing open heart surgery on a placement!

2.) Reviewing the Impact

How much time will this take up and can we afford it?

Placements last for a recommended 12 sessions in the first instance, that can be one day a week for 12 weeks or more days per week for less time. It has to fit in with client's other commitments such as English classes, not contravene any benefit rules or any Home Office guidance on job substitution or unpaid work (see Chapter 10, Compliance). It does have an impact on the productivity of the staff member being shadowed, as a lot of time, especially in the first few days will be taken up explaining, illustrating and demonstrating tasks and, hopefully if the client is really engaged, answering lots of questions. If the productivity issues are a real concern consider taking up Bridges offer of job coaching (see below). On the other hand sometimes having a shadow can help productivity as you realise that the way you have always done things is not perhaps the best way, and it can help you review systems. **Think about the time you spend in supporting a shadow just the way you would invest in someone who is a new trainee.**

What will it cost us over and above lost productivity?

All we ask is that you agree to pay travel costs for shadows, bus or train fares. If the company has a staff canteen or a system for providing lunch at no cost or reduced cost then that is welcome too, although most clients are happy to bring sandwiches. **On no account can you provide any additional payment for the work a shadow carries out.**

3.) Reviewing your Staff

Do our staff have the right commitment, skills and abilities to participate?

Very often the decision to get involved with the Programme comes from senior management, which is great, we can't do it without that sort of support. But if that support is imposed from the top down and a member of staff is simply told that they will have someone attached to them for a few weeks without any "buy in", experience shows that the process won't work. We have to face facts: asylum seekers and refugees sometimes get a bad press. Many people, without ever having met someone from that background, will still have opinions about them, and often that's based on misconceptions, myths and just plain mis-information. The best approach is to convey to staff that the company supports this initiative and is looking for volunteers, adding that support and training will be provided if necessary. Bridges offers all participating companies awareness raising training, and as well as giving support to the mentor, it's a good way of extending support to a larger team.

Staff who are going to mentor need to be in possession of some key skills and qualities like the ones listed above. Developing mentoring and coaching skills however is a valuable core and transferable skill for anyone and it might be a suitable and relevant piece of Professional Development for a member of staff. We encourage employers to think how working with Bridges might help staff who mentor, achieve CPD targets or benefit their staff appraisal systems.

4.) Reviewing your company

Will the person fit in with us?

You know your company best:

- Who your internal and external stakeholders are
- Who your customers and users are
- What sort of community you are based in or serve
- Who your competition is and what gives you or them a competitive edge if anything
- What your company or sector needs to be sustainable
- What sort of company you want to work, or have others work, for

If demonstrating an openness to diversity, opportunity, talent, creativity and innovation meets some or all of these criteria then working with Bridges seems a natural development. Remember that awareness raising training can be delivered even before a placement starts or even as part of your decision making process.

What else do we have to offer?

By the time you are asking yourself this question, you are probably on the point of making that first appointment with us. Some of the things that other companies offer in addition to a placement is CV advice, careers advice, access to training, social activities, references, networking opportunities. Remember every shadow is an individual, so sometimes you won't know until you meet them.

Meeting the needs of the clients

While you are considering how your company might fit into the programme and benefit from involvement **you might consider how offering a placement might meet some of the needs of the clients.** There are many barriers facing asylum seekers and refugees getting back on their feet with respect of the labour market and at Bridges we know that placements are a very practical way of addressing some of them. If you can think of ways that your company could help address the barriers below then you certainly have something to offer. The examples of the companies listed for getting involved is just a tiny snap shot of reasons, but maybe some of them will be relevant to you.

Checklist to a Successful Company Placement

Before the shadow arrives

- Have you briefed your team about the shadow's arrival and how they can support him or her?
- Has your team learned how to pronounce the shadow's name?
- Have you arranged an awareness training session to allow staff to ask questions about the real situation of asylum seekers and refugees?
- Have you given staff who will be working with the shadow a copy of the Do's and Don'ts advice sheet?
- Have you spoken to security/reception about which days the shadow will be working? Do you need to arrange any special access arrangements e.g. visitor's badge or security code?
- Arranged any necessary equipment for the shadow to perform their work properly and know that their contribution is valued e.g. desk space, telephone, computer, protective clothing, uniform or tools?
- Discussed learning objectives for the placement?
- Put together the beginnings of a workplan?

On the shadow's first day

- Introduced the shadow to all the colleagues they will be working alongside
- Given the shadow a copy of the staff handbook, relevant procedural manuals and an organisational chart indicating lines of responsibility?
- Have you given the shadow a tour of the building? A map? Are you sure they know their way around?
- Have you arranged an induction to help the shadow learn the basics about your organisation?
- Have you explained how the shadow must comply with health and safety requirements?
- Do you need to a risk assessment with them in regard to health and safety?
- Have you explained the fire evacuation procedures?
- Is it necessary to discuss the security or confidentiality of information the shadow may come into contact with? Does the shadow need to sign a confidentiality agreement?
- Organised some tasks for the shadow to do which will give you an indication of their level of competency?

Throughout the placement

- Prepare ahead of the shadow's days so that you always have work ready for the shadow to do and avoid wasting their time?
- Do you or other members of staff involve the shadow in work-related social events?

- Are you involving the shadow in team or other meetings that might help them build a picture of how the organisation operates?
- Are you providing a mixture of tasks, some that are easily achievable to build confidence and others that are more challenging to help the shadow learn?
- Are you giving the shadow regular feedback on their performance?
- Are you meeting the shadow for weekly supervision sessions?
- Have you discussed membership and the support offered by your professional or trade body or you union?
- Do you keep in regular contact with the shadow's caseworker by phone or email?
- Do you involve the shadow in any formal internal or external training opportunities if available?

At the end of the placement

- Would you consider writing a testimonial for the client or acting as their referee for the shadow for future placement or employment opportunities?
- Ensure that all feedback material is sent to Bridge and complete the on line survey

Advice on Dos and Don't's in a work placement during a placement

Do

- If English is not the first language of the person coming into the workplace, try to avoid slang, idioms and complex phrasing. Sometimes it is helpful to give instructions in advance, in writing and orally, to give your shadower time to figure out what needs to be done.
- Sit down with the shadower on their first day and go through the programme of activities which has been agreed. This will make it easier for the placement to run smoothly, and for both you and your shadower to get the maximum benefit from your time together.
- Include the shadower in your *entire* daily working day. For many refugees, the social side of the workshadowing can be as valuable as professional development.
- Take time to explain how your profession works in the UK. If possible, give contact details for your professional or trade body.
- Take time to learn about your shadower's background and culture. Shadowing should be a two-way learning process.
- If you feel that your shadower is lacking a vital skill please pass this information on to the supporting organisation so that we can ensure the shadower is referred to the appropriate college course or training route.
- At the end of the placement, please consider giving a reference. Lack of UK references are one of the main barriers for refugees trying to enter employment; taking the time to write a reference could make all the difference to your shadower's future.

DON'T

- Give the shadower a large and unsupervised task, which you would otherwise pay someone else to do. This would breach Home Office legislation, and could result in your shadower being sent back to their home country.
- Make assumptions. Just because your shadower was a professional in their own country does not mean they will understand how the same job works in the UK. Jobs can vary vastly between cultures, and feeling comfortable with the basics could make a large difference when your shadower moves back into the workplace.

- Ask the shadower why they left their home country. Some refugees' experiences have been extremely traumatic and we would prefer that this information remains confidential unless it is volunteered.
- Underestimate how much of a leap moving into the workplace is. Although your shadower may have been a highly respected professional in their own country, they will probably never have been in a UK workplace before, and may have been unemployed for many years due to the lengthy asylum process. Under such circumstances, returning to the workplace can be a daunting experience even for the most confident individual. Friendly support and a non-threatening environment make all the difference.
- Offer the shadower any financial reward for their time with the company over and above what arrangements have been agreed for travel expenses and/or lunch expenses. An asylum seeker would be in great trouble if found taking money from any source and it could prejudice their case. If someone has refugee status and you think their work deserves financial recompense, you should be considering employing them. In addition it could adversely affect their benefits and lead to accusations that they are working and not entitled to Job Seekers Allowance.