

Benjoly from the Congo fled to the UK in fear for his life. Unable to speak a single word of English when he arrived, within two years he was studying for a degree, thanks to the English classes that had been provided for him. He now lectures in Maths and Electronics at an FE College in Islington.

“ If I had to wait six months to learn English, like people have to now, I probably wouldn't have gone to university and become a teacher. Like so many others I would have felt excluded and my motivation and ability to learn would have dropped. Learning English has helped me to make many friends here and it has helped me to get to where I am today. ”

WHAT YOU CAN DO

It is not acceptable that in a civilised society people are denied of their basic human rights. Through this campaign NIACE and its supporters will work to lobby Government to change the ESOL policy towards asylum seekers. If you wish to help:

- Join our campaign by contacting us at voicecampaign@niace.org.uk
- Are you a member of a local organisation? They can sign up too!
- Write to your MP ask them to support the campaign
- Write articles to generate media support
- Are you a refugee and would like to share your story, contact us at voicecampaign@niace.org.uk

In addition, NIACE is setting up groups of asylum seekers, supported by volunteers, to meet weekly and help each other. For these sessions NIACE has created a 20-week programme of English learning activities to support and welcome asylum seekers to Britain. If you would like more information to participate or volunteer please contact us at voicecampaign@niace.org.uk



**The campaign to
allow asylum seekers
to learn English**

IN 2007 THE UK GOVERNMENT WITHDREW THE RIGHT OF ASYLUM SEEKERS TO ATTEND ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSES FOR THEIR FIRST SIX MONTHS.

An asylum seeker must now wait for six months, or until they receive refugee status, to begin funded training. This aggravates feelings of isolation, affecting mental health, well-being and inhibits community cohesion. It also creates additional difficulty in understanding medical advice or communicating with public bodies. The damage to the individual and society is significant!

ON THE 10TH OF DECEMBER, AS THE WORLD CELEBRATED THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, NIACE LAUNCHED A RIGHT TO A VOICE.

The campaign highlights the injustice and damage of ESOL policy changes upon asylum seekers. Over 100 organisations and individuals, including Oxfam, the Refugee Council, the Open University and the Archbishop of Canterbury, have already joined us in trying to change Government policy.

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS STATES: EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION REGARDLESS OF NATIONAL OR SOCIAL ORIGIN, BIRTH OR OTHER STATUS.

It is the UK's moral duty and responsibility to help those seeking safety in our country by providing, at the very least, their basic human right to education from the day they arrive. The ability to speak the language in a country of exile is fundamental; without this, asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to a life of poverty.

ESOL policy must display flexibility, to ensure human rights protection is available to ALL. A just system would allow asylum seekers to receive free English language classes from the moment they arrived, would continue provision if claims were accepted and stop if rejected.

“ Speaking English is the greatest asset you can possess for getting involved in your community, and getting on and doing well for yourself and your family. Research has shown that 60 per cent of people believe not speaking the language is the biggest barrier to integration. ”

Communities Secretary Hazel Blears MP

THE COST OF NOT FUNDING ESOL IS A FALSE ECONOMY!

Cost to the individuals:

- ❑ Isolation, affecting mental health and well-being
- ❑ Difficulty in communicating with public bodies, leading to misunderstandings
- ❑ Difficulty in understanding medical advice, children used as interpreters, leading to possible ill-health
- ❑ Individuals do not integrate within their host community and are even harder to reach

Cost to the State:

- ❑ Income support/income based – Job Seekers Allowance
- ❑ Housing benefit and council tax benefit
- ❑ Incapacity benefit
- ❑ Translation costs for schools/hospitals
- ❑ NHS
- ❑ Crime and police investigation

ESOL provision could potentially save taxpayers £22,000 in benefit payments over a 12-month period, whilst also allowing asylum seekers to better integrate into the community.