

Report of exchange programme in The United Kingdom



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Participant Data

Name	
Organisation	

Itinerary (List of places and people visited)

Brussels: at Fedasil with the staff of the HUB

Appledore Centre, Swattenden, Cranbrook, Kent County

Dover, Duty Team

Dover, Border and Immigration Agency

Dover, Transition East

Margate, Foster home

West Malling, Transition West

London, borough of Greenwich; asylum seeker visited with Young persons community support workers

Tonbridge, West Kent College, asylum seekers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, together with a social worker from Kent County Council, Transition Team East

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of a cooperative effort between Kalsang Phari Vespignani (Switzerland) and Jo Sigurd Aurvoll (Norway). The writers were participants of the ENARO exchange programme in October, 2007.

The exchange programme brought us to Kent County, in the United Kingdom. Our study was concentrated on how the Kent County Council receives unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) – which turned out to be a whole different structure than in our respective home countries. In Kent, the UASC are put into the ordinary child care system, just like other children in need of care. First upon turning 18 will the claim for asylum be processed.

The fact that children are also being asylum seekers poses some additional problems for the social workers. First, the children will not have a history that can be accessed by the social workers. Second, it is not even clear that the children are minors of age. This forces through an age assessment. In the UK this cannot lean on the use of x-rays of the wrist or a dental exam, like in some other European countries. Assessments will then be made, based on interviews and visual exams by trained professionals. This system also has its checks and balances – we will address this question later in the report.

During our close to two weeks in Kent County, we have travelled extensively and have had the fortune to join the Kent County Council (KCC) workers on several missions, in a diversity of fields. We have learned a lot from these experiences, more than can be read from this paper. We hope this report will not make injustice to the hard working professionals we have had the chance to accompany during our stay.

Where applicable, we have copied questions from the HUB Interview Guide, to help us structure our report. Time has been a limiting factor, and the exchange programme in Kent has been focused on units treating UASC. We have therefore chosen to focus our report on this group, rather than on vulnerable groups in general. We did not have access to the Internet, so, unfortunately, we could not retrieve statistics from the Home Office. The country information pages will, as a consequence, not be completed fully.

Tabula gratulatoria

This paper would not have been possible if not a great number of people had gone out of their way to help us, inform us, and generally tolerate our misconceptions and slack learning rate. The wonderful people at KCC SUASC (Kent County Council Services for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) have really made our stay a most pleasurable one, in addition to taking time out of a busy schedule to answer our numerous questions.

The information in the report is to their merit. The errors and misconception found in it can, however, not in any way be attributed to them, that will be our responsibility.

A big ‘thank you’ to Nigel Hewitt, and to John, Matt, Val, Murphy, Norman, Nasi, Lin, Sarah and Nadia, and to the rest of the staff and clientele we had the opportunity to talk to.

2. COUNTRY PROFILE / STATISTICAL DATA

Please provide data on the following for the whole of the country, if available, unless otherwise specified. This information will be used to compile a basic country profile database which can be updated yearly.

General Information:	
Country:	The United Kingdom
Organisation, address, website:	Kent County Council, Service for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Gibson Drive, ME19 4QG, West Malling, Kent
Governing institution:	Home Office, for elder than 18 years Department for Children, Schools & Family (DCSF) for those under the age of 18.
Total number of employees:	11 (HQ), 18 (Appledore)
Annual budget (EUR):	£ 13.2 million for 700 young people
Daily accommodation costs per one asylum seeker (EUR):	N/K
Asylum grant proceedings:	
Legal duration of asylum grant proceedings:	35 days in accordance with the New Asylum Model.
Organisation liable for asylum grant proceedings (if other than above)	
Legal regulations governing asylum grant proceedings, their last amendment	New Asylum Model of 2005, implemented fully from April 2007
Total number of asylum applications during: (indicate numbers and year)	Ultimo June 2007, there were 37 280 asylum seekers in the UK in BIA dispersal accommodation, and 10 865 in receipt of subsistence only support: Altogether: 48 145
Total number of granted asylum in accordance with the Geneva Convention during: (indicate numbers and year)	UASC (2005): 170 out of 2 835 ¹
Total number of provided subsidiary forms of protection: (indicate numbers and year)	UASC (2005): 1 795 out of 2 835 was given a limited leave to remain in the UK. ²
5 top countries of origin of asylum seekers: (indicate year)	1. Afghanistan 2. Iraq 3. Iran 4. Eritrea 5. Sudan
Accommodation of asylum seekers	
Total of accommodation capacity (number of beds):	27 (Appledore) + foster care + independent living
Types of accommodation:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> houses <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> hotels

¹ This includes humanitarian protection. Source: "Planning Better Outcomes and Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children", Consultation Paper for the Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate, February 2007 p 15. The directorate has now changed name to The Border and Immigration Agency.

² Ibid. This figure comes as a consequence of UASC being treated like abandoned children according to the Children Act of 1989.

(more than one answer possible)	<input type="checkbox"/> bungalows <input type="checkbox"/> boats <input type="checkbox"/> caravans <input type="checkbox"/> tents <input type="checkbox"/> military barracks <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (shared) rooms <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify):
Number of facilities:	N/A
Average length of stay of asylum seeker in asylum reception facility:	Up to 5 weeks (Appledore)
Asylum seekers has possibility to live in private housing:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
Asylum seeker's freedom of movement:	<input type="checkbox"/> without restriction <input type="checkbox"/> restricted: daily registration <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> obligatory permanent presence in asylum facility <input type="checkbox"/> detention
Services provided:	
Types of catering:	<input type="checkbox"/> individual cooking <input type="checkbox"/> catering provided <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> combined
System of provision of financial and material aid:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> cash <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> payment in kind <input type="checkbox"/> combined
Asylum seeker's access to the labour market:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no (Appledore residents) <input type="checkbox"/> yes, specify conditions:
Lessons of local language available:	<input type="checkbox"/> compulsory <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> voluntary <input type="checkbox"/> none
Vocational training available:	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
Extent of health care provided:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> standard – same as health care provided for citizens <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> different, specify: Appledore: Own medical facility, dental check in first two weeks
Obligatory initial medical examinations:	<input type="checkbox"/> none <input type="checkbox"/> lung X-ray (TB) <input type="checkbox"/> venereal diseases <input type="checkbox"/> taking of biological material samples <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other, specify: No TB screening is made
Vulnerable groups:	
Definition of vulnerable groups – please indicate the categories which are considered vulnerable in the reception system:	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaccompanied minors <input type="checkbox"/> Single women <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant women <input type="checkbox"/> Families with children <input type="checkbox"/> Elderly <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete families (single women with minor children) <input type="checkbox"/> Mentally handicapped <input type="checkbox"/> Physically handicapped/disabled <input type="checkbox"/> Victims of trauma and other people with mental health problems <input type="checkbox"/> Others, specify

Please indicate number of asylumseekers for each category a) the whole country b) the reception facility – when available

Unaccompanied minors	17 th October 2007: 700 in total (long term) and 57 (temporary shelter). The last group is divided between 25 (Appledore), 22 (hotel), 7 (foster care) and 3 (supported lodging)
Single women	
Families with children	
Elderly	
Incomplete families (single women with minor children)	
Mentally handicapped	
Physically handicapped/disabled	
Victims of trauma and other people with mental health problems	
Others, specify	

Source: Kent County Council, Transition Team West

3. APPLEDORE

Appledore is located at the Swattenden centre, Cranbrook in the South of Kent. It is an assessment centre in Kent County where Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) stay for up to 5 weeks while they are being assessed for age and for skills that are to determine the level of education most suitable for them. In exceptional cases, they could stay longer, but Appledore is not meant to be a permanent solution. They will also be assessed for basic skills, like cooking, basic English, washing and hygiene before they subsequently will be sent to semi-independent housing or to a foster home. The Appledore centre only contains boys.

Appledore has capacity to house 26 boys, in 13 rooms. UASC girls will be sent directly to foster homes, as will boys below the age of 16. The centre was completely rebuilt two years ago – it has, in fact, been constructed to house both boys and girls. It is still being debated whether a centre like this could be unisex.

Reception

After an initial screening by the Border and Immigration Authorities (BIA), the alleged minor, given the benefit of doubt, will be sent directly to the Appledore centre. The Duty Team of Dover will take part in this assessment. If the alleged minor is assessed to be more than 18 years old, he or she will be diverted to the closest National Asylum Support Service (NASS). In some cases, further assessment will be deemed necessary. Then, further interviews will take place. If Appledore does not have the capacity to receive the minors, they will be temporarily lodged at selected hotels.

Services provided

Meals and food will be provided to the residents, both cooked, as at lunch and dinner, and for making themselves, as for breakfast. They also have access to stacked refrigerators, if they should feel for a snack. We observed that a copious amount of fresh fruit was made available to them in their common drawing room. This was a very welcome supply. Assessing the residents' ability to prepare their own meals is one of the objectives of Appledore.

Appledore also has a GP and a nurse provided, two to three days a week. They operate out of a well-equipped reception room. They will do the obligatory health assessments as well as function as a normal health service for the residents.

The residents will share rooms and are expected to keep them tidy. There will be common showers and toilets, both western style and "Turkish" style.

Assessment of education

Appledore has an education assessment service. Its objective is to get an assessment of the residents' level of education. This will be of necessity in order to pigeonhole them to the right level of schooling, once they are deemed to be able to live semi-independently, outside Appledore. Standardised tests are administered to evaluate what kind of previous schooling the resident has undergone, his verbal skills, his grasp of geography, mathematics and ability to spatial orientation, among others. A checklist will be followed and a final recommendation will be given by a skilled worker. The ENARO exchange students were not altogether sure whether they would have passed these exams, or not.

Staff

18 people work at Appledore. Three will work in support, while three teams of five will be on a rota, since services are provided 24/7. Staff will include skilled and unskilled workers, but all will be experienced in working with children, and will be in a training matrix to further evolve work-skills. Kent County Council employs some of the staff, while others are “agency workers,” sub-contracted through private agencies. Typically, the turnover rate will be two new workers every four months, amounting to a typical length of employment of about two years. To us, the staff seemed to be sturdy people with an easy-going tone in dealing with the residents of the centre. A remarkable number of them would be large, powerful men, but they did not seem to intimidate the boys, rather they would function as “unclefigures” (a term we coined here and now as a take on “fatherfigure.”)

Finances

Financial records are kept on “Young Person’s Financial Sheets” – broken into the categories “Initial shopping” and “Monthly clothing/toiletries” which will be 10 pounds per month. The residents will also be given clothing items, if needed, and a weekly allowance of ten pounds, where five will be made out to be “telephone money.” In cases of vandalism or serious non-compliance, up to two pounds can be deducted from the weekly allowance. More can be taken, but would have to be returned after a week.

Age assessment

Case study. We each took part in a child in need assessment . Since asylum seekers do not have a known history in the UK, this will also include an assessment of age. The following is an anonymised synopsis of the two.

New residents are to be given this assessment within two weeks/one week upon arrival. The staff of the centre will put their individual assessments in a standardised form, but the social worker responsible for the assessment will, as a rule, not look at these until after making up her own opinion. Present at the assessment will be one qualified social worker from the Duty Team, one internal social worker, a professional interpreter and the resident. The assessment has a set procedure, and the social worker will fill in this form during the assessment. First, a lengthy introduction will be given. The social worker will explain the objective of the assessment and stress the importance of the meeting. The resident will also be told that only the result of the age assessment will be conveyed to the Home Office, and that it will not influence the asylum proceeding. The social worker then gives an explanation regarding laws (especially those relevant to children), procedures and the amount of interviews to be expected. It is stressed that qualified legal advice will at a later stage be given by an appointed solicitor. The confidentiality of the situation is emphasised from the beginning.

The questions of the assessment will include personal data, the history of the asylum seeker (“anamnese”) and education, but also questions made to measure the applicant’s emotional maturity and bonds of attachment to his family. The UASC will also be questioned about health matters. The social worker will go to great lengths in order to make the child feel comfortable in the interviewing situation, and will try to make the applicant talk as much as possible, as this will increase the quality of the assessment. The assessment will last from two hours and a half to three hours, but as far as we know, there is no set time limit. With a greater level of co-operation, the duration could be shorter. The social worker also considered the child’s response to the questions, his behaviour during the interview and the physical appearance (such as wrinkles, crow’s feet, Adam’s apple, a pronounced jaw line, a beard shadow and the muscular evolution) with regards to the age and maturity assessment. At the end, the applicant is kindly asked to leave the room, while the social workers interchange. At this point, they will also consult the reports from staff, regarding the

behaviour of the assessed boy. A joint decision is reached and communicated to the child. If he is assessed to be above 18, after reasonable doubt has been considered, he will be evicted immediately, by the first taxi available (this happened in both our cases). The applicant is informed about the possibility to challenge the assessment, and is referred to his solicitor for further information about this. In the meetings we attended, the applicants had claimed to be 15 and 16 years of age, respectively. The assessments made them out to be 18 and 20. Interestingly, they both proceeded to give their right age, 19 and 20. One of these boys asked for a speedier exit than the hour originally estimated for the cab to pick him up.

In our opinion, these assessments were made in a very professional way. The social workers doing the assessment had long experience both with age assessment and with working with children. They both also had experience working with children of this specific nationality. They took pride, and rightfully so, in the fact that their “score rate” at age assessments was better than the GP’s.

4. MANDATORY ASSESSMENTS AND FOSTER HOMES

(Source: an independent social worker)

UASC will after they have been assessed likely to be minors of age, will qualify as “Looked after children”, eg boys under 16 will automatically be put in foster care under section 20 in The Children Act of 1989. This is what is commonly referred to as “being accommodated.”

Assessments

Every unaccompanied child is then allocated a social worker. There is a statutory obligation to visit the child at least every 6 weeks. The plans and assessments made will then be:

- Education assessment (initial) – done by education specialists.
- A placement plan - part 1 and 2.
- Essential information - part 1 and 2.
- An action and assessment record has to be started.
- A statutory review is made every 6 months (encompassing health, education, social and emotional development). This is made by the “Fostercarer” and an independent reviewer (IRO). This will all be recorded in the “review process.” The IRO is paid by, but not answerable to, the local authorities. The IRO can take the local authorities to court (in the extreme) if needs are not met according to law. Normally, just recommendations will be made if he/she is not satisfied with the results of the review.
- PEP (personal education plan) for every child looked after.
- The care plan turns into a “pathwayplan” (after the child turns 14,5-15 years of age. This will last up to the age of 21. If a child has been under care for 13 consecutive weeks it will be considered “a relevant child,” which entitles it to services according to section 24 under the leave in care act of 2000.

According to the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) (a system for titling), the case workers in handling UASC (and any other children in the Children Act of 1998) will be:

- Social workers – works with section 20 cases. Social workers have to undergo a training matrix (they need 90 hours a year or 15 days to sustain their qualification and have to report every three years.
- “Young persons community support workers” (not qualified) – works with section 24 cases.

Foster homes

Every foster home is registered and inspected every year by Offstead. There will be one announced inspection and up to two unannounced.

The fostercarers to be have to send in an application: afterwards they undergo a lot of checking and are given an information package if they look promising. They will then go through:

- A three day course - “skill to foster”
- They will undertake an assessment (F form) –in 3 parts;
 1. practical information about family, income, children, housing
 2. the psychodynamic aspect, which is very intrusive (about their own upbringing and their childrearing ideas)
 3. competencies (4 different, with 14 subsections)

- All this will be sent to a panel (consisted of about 14 people). The panel gives a recommendation about the family which is sent to an “agency decision maker” (mostly to rubberstamp it).
- This process takes about a year and ends in a specific approval. This will indeed be specific: it will include duration of stay, sex of the children they can receive, the amount of children that can be cared for simultaneously, etc.)

In addition to these foster parents chosen by KCC, there are lots of independent fostering agencies.

Foster parents are paid between 300-500 £ a week per child. “These are large amounts, but broken down to hourly rates it only makes about 40p per hour.” If you work for local authorities – the pay will vary according to age range. In addition, there will be special projects, when the need arises. Independent agencies will charge overhead costs. For children with special needs there are also “Therapeutic agencies” with their individual specialists. For these the payments are split up into a professional fee and a fee for basic “looking after.” In these cases the carers (foster parents) are not employed by the agencies. According to the “Fostering regulation,” special fostering teams (EK1 and EK2) will follow up this.

Nationally there is a lack of fostercarers. The shortage is approximately for 8000, which equals 16 000 children not cared for according to plan. This includes both English and asylum seeking children. As a result, fostercarers are often given exemption to take more children than originally assessed for.

Children’s homes

The UK also offers residential care. This is commonly referred to as “children’s homes” and are run by the state and independent agencies. The price is about £ 2000-3000 a week per child.

5. WEST MALLING – TRANSITION TEAM WEST

The Transition Team West is located at West Malling, in a large building originally designed as a depot. It houses several companies in addition to the KCC Transition Team. It also includes some support functions, like wages. The transition Team West is responsible for handling UASC cases who have undergone the initial assessments and are living in the Western part of Kent County. They follow up both children in foster homes and children living semi-independently.

During the exchange we accompanied one “social worker” and one “young persons community support worker” during their work. The following will be two case studies.

Case 1: Visiting a pregnant 18 year old asylum seeker.

The asylum seeker came originally to the UK through Heathrow Airport, as a 16-year-old. She came with a “friend of her mother’s.” As a girl and an unaccompanied minor, she was immediately put in foster care, after just two hours at the BIA. After approximately half a year, she decided to move out, into semi-independent lodging. In this process, she was assessed to be sufficiently mature to handle this. The reason being her wanting to study at a higher level.

When we visited her together with her assigned community worker, she lived in a one-bedroom flat in Greenwich, London. The rent is paid by the KCC, fully furnished. She had a TV-set, but had to pay the licence herself. She also had a computer, given to her by a previous case worker (KCC), but had problems with the Microsoft licence. The neighbourhood was nice and quiet, the apartment was of good standard and nicely kept. The rent was £ 800 a month, not including gas and electricity. Normally, asylum seekers (UASC) are given £ 46.85 a week (paid by the KCC in this case), but this girl being pregnant, she will be eligible for income support (£ 59.15 a month – since she is over 18 – and a further £47.45 for the newborn a month amount, but paid by the government). The community worker was helping her with the application procedure for this during our meeting. After giving birth, she will also receive support for the child, and some money for fresh fruit (2-3 pounds a week). The KCC will open a bank account in the name of the newly born, with an initial deposit of £ 250. The sum could be doubled after a year, if the mother chooses to save the money instead of withdrawing the amount.

This asylum seeker had good proficiency in English, and was also good at coping with her stay in the UK, according to her case worker. The community worker explained to us that she would normally have a more intense visiting and follow up programme early in the asylum seeker’s history, this would make them more capable of supporting themselves thereafter.

One of the objectives of this meeting was to discuss the need to change the housing. The current apartment had a small bedroom and a steep staircase. It would also be problematic to stow the baby pram in it. The KCC is very willing to help with this, and if the rent had to be upped to £ 1 200 a month, this would not be a problem. During the visit, the community worker also checked the refrigerator (for food habits), the general level of cleanliness and if bills were paid on time.

Case 2: Visiting English as a Foreign Language-class at West Kent College

While the asylum seeker in case 1 was above 18 years of age, the asylum seekers visited this day were below 18 – thence they had a qualified social worker handling their case (in accordance with section 20 of the Children Act of 1989³).

We went to West Kent College at Tonbridge together with a social worker from The KCC Transition Team West. The visit had two objectives, 1) to talk to an alleged minor who had had mental problems and needed close follow-up and 2) to discuss some matters regarding the acquisition of a winter coats.

After signing in as visitors to the college, we found the 17-year-old boy we came to visit and had a talk. The boy had recently lost his keys, and the social worker had got him a new set. The boy made a timid impression, was soft spoken and polite. He had a history of self-hurting and the social worker was very attentive to his body language. During the conversation he asked if he could change domicile, to something nearer London. The social worker politely refused this. We then followed him to his language class, where we sat in for ten minutes. The class consisted of three students at the highest level of proficiency (EFL). An attendance roster is taken at these classes. The students are only allowed five absences before they lose their place. Normally, the class would consist of about ten students. The social worker was not 100 % convinced of him being a minor, but he had been given the benefit of doubt, and he also was assessed to need closer follow up than an adult would.

We then proceeded to a cooking class. They were not cooking today, but discussing terminology. One of the boys had brought two new pictures for the social worker, for his ID. We sat in for a few minutes and the social worker made an arrangement for Friday regarding the buying of heavier coats for the winter.

³ Law For Social Worker, 8th edition, Brayne and Carr, Oxford, 2003.

6. ON CHILDREN, INCLUDING UNACCOMPANIED MINORS (UAMs)

Reception of clandestine (= illegal) entrants/ port of entry claimants

How are clandestine entrants/ port of entry claimants received?

Asylum seekers, are detained in Dover by the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA). Their personal belongings will be taken from them and marked. They will not have freedom of movement at this stage. As soon as possible they will be screened for age by the Duty Team. The minor of age will be taken to the premises of the Duty and Assessment Team in Dover for further interviewing and assessment.

Are suitable facilities offered to children?

See chapter 3, on Appledore.

Do children receive information on their rights?

Their rights will be explained during initial assessment, at Appledore, and, finally, by their solicitor.

Age determination

What are the procedures for age determination?

Are they compulsory?

How are children prepared for and supported throughout the procedures?

Age determination in the UK does not rely on x-ray exams or dental analysis. Rather, the age is assessed through a series of interviews and by the evaluation of the reception centre workers (for boys placed at the Appledore centre). This kind of evaluation is compulsory, and a part of the “child in need” assessment required by The Children Act of 1989 and 2004 (amendment). The assessment could be challenged with the assistance of the applicant’s solicitor. A doctor’s opinion could then be asked (one local doctor is used for this, it is unclear to us whether this person has any special education to this regards). The doctor’s assessment can be discarded if it will not agree with the case presented by the solicitor, but it can be used in the asylum procedure if it should happen to support the claimant’s allegations.

Age definitions

What is the age definition of a ‘child’ in the asylum process and what are the implications of this?

A ‘child’ will be any person under the age of 18, or a person that could be given the benefit of doubt to be under 18. If an asylum seeker stakes his or her claim before the age of 18, they will remain ‘children’ until the age of 21 if they live in foster care, and up to the age of 24 if they study at university level.

What happens when an asylum-seeking child reaches the legal age for adulthood?

Upon reaching the legal age for adulthood, the case for asylum will be (re-)opened and (theoretically) given a decision within two months. This decision can be appealed.

Interview arrangements

Are the interviewers trained in interviewing children? “Yes!” (Source: social worker at Dover. No further details were given.)

Is the purpose of the interview explained to the child in a way that he/ she can make sense of it? Yes. (see also our case study in chapter 3).

Initial Accommodation

Where are children placed for accommodation, and how are the accommodation facilities like? (See the chapter on Appledore). If necessary, children will reside temporarily at a hotel.

Are children accommodated separately, or with adults? Separately, after an age assessment. They will normally be accommodated together with other minors.

Guardians

Are UAMs assigned a guardian? No.

How are the guardians selected?

Language support

Are interpreters available for children?

Yes. Professional, face to face interpretation will be used when necessary. The service will be provided by private interpreters, normally the booking will be by an agency.

Are they trained in communicating with children? N/K

How is trust built between the interpreter and the child? N/K

Do all children receive training in the host language?

At the reception centre: made by volunteers. At the foster parents' this will happen both in family and in ordinary schools.

Information

Do children receive adequate information at all stages of the asylum process, and are children explained their rights, in a language they can understand? Yes. This question is also treated elsewhere.

Do children in families and UAMs differ in the extent of information they receive? N/A

Legal support

What kind of legal services are on offer for children?

A solicitor is appointed (or selected by the child). The solicitor will deal with everything concerning the claim for asylum. This is free of charge, the solicitor will be paid by the Home Office.

Family tracing

Do children receive services for tracing their families?

Can children and UASC in particular keep in touch with their families or friends abroad, if they wish to do so?

At the Appledore centre, the children will be given money for calling their relatives (or others). They will also be given stationary and stamps if they wish to send letters to their relatives at home. The centre has developed a checklist making sure that this information comes through and that addresses and/or telephone numbers of any friends and relatives in the country of origin or in the UK is obtained.

On a more general basis, and for those living outside Appledore, a free international tracing and message service is provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies worldwide. This service is administered by the British Red Cross.

Waiting times

How long do children have to wait for decisions in their case, and how are they prepared for and supported throughout the waiting?

In the UK, children will not get a decision until they are of age, if they are deemed to be UASC.

Access to education

What kind of education do children receive?

Basically the same rights as native children.

Is the schooling mainstream or separate?

Mainstream.

Health and mental health screening

At what stage are children screened for health/ mental health?

This should be done as quickly as possible, at least within the first week. Screening for mental health will only occur if the GP orders it. Then the UASC will be referred to the CAMHS (Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service) for assessment. This could lead to treatment, but more commonly; to counselling. Inoculations will be given, if wanted. As part of the pathway planning, info on sexual health is given. If suspicions arise with regards to the UASC' mental health, he or she could be referred to the Early Psychosis Unit, which is run alongside the other mental health teams.

Are there any specific health services for children?

Our study only involved children.

Are adolescents (in families/ UASC) offered information on sexual health?

Yes.

What kind of mental health services are offered to children?

Are children aware of the health/ mental health services on offer?

The children are assigned individual social workers who will inform them of this. Depending on whether the child will sort under chapter 20 or 24 of The Children Act of 1989, it could also be assigned a community worker, these workers will normally have a portfolio of about 25 cases.

Psycho-social support

How is trust built between children and professionals?

We observed trust to be built by using open body language and a conversational tone in handling the questions of the asylum seeker. Great care was taken in explaining the answers, not simply giving them. We also observed staff at Appledore interacting with the residents (all boys). There, a jokingly atmosphere prevailed.

Are members of staff trained in communicating with children?

The staff is given a training matrix that includes communication with children and adolescents (Source: a trainer at one of the transition teams.)

Are members of staff familiar with cultural and religious differences in the experience of childhood?

We were able to observe social workers and the staff at Appledore dealing with children/adolescents. They all seemed familiar with the cultural and religious differences in the experience of childhood, although this question would be impossible to answer in full.

What information does the centre collect about a child's past, and how does staff treat this information?

Speaking for the Appledore centre, the staff would learn whatever the children choose to tell them, as part of the ordinary day-to-day programme. Staff members who are also qualified social workers will assist at the child in need assessment being held (and led) by the Dover Duty Team. This information will only be recorded by the Duty Team social worker. In principle, the staff will have access to information about the children's past, but they will not collect this information systematically. The main reason being that the centre is not a branch of the Border and Immigration Agency or the Home Office. Any information collected from the children will, as a consequence, not be passed on to the immigration authorities.

Do children have the opportunity to engage with children from the host community?

The Appledore centre is a short term facility for newly arrived minor asylum seekers, they will not engage as a rule on this point. It is possible, though, eg during church service or at the local mosque. Children being accommodated with a foster family will stand greater chances of engaging with children from the host community, either the family's own children or at school. Adolescents living in semi-independent housing will work or study. Any engaging would be at their own discretion, but they are encouraged to contact resident groups, especially with similar background. Support can be given in the form of bus tickets and the like.

Do UASC receive support/ coaching in every-day life-skills?

Their skills will be assessed at the Appledore centre. If necessary, coaching will be given at the centre or in the foster family. We visited a cooking class for UASC at West Kent College. This is an offer for UASC living outside Appledore. The students were taught cooking, hygiene, besides English.

Are there activities that bring together children at the centre as a group?

The Appledore centre had a soccer field connected to it. The centre also has a common drawing room with a diversity of board games. There is also a DVD-room at the premises. The centre has a pool room.

Are there any special programs available for enhancing children's well-being?

We were told that excursions are arranged, but we did not witness any during the exchange. We did observe preparations for community work, like fence mending and gardening.

Children's voice

Are children being heard as individuals at the reception centre?

All children seemed to interact with the staff also on an individual basis. A social worker at the centre informed us that they made special care of encouraging this, especially so when taken into consideration that this is an assessment centre preparing adolescents (16-18 year olds) for semi-independent living.

Do they take part in decision-making processes?

They are duly consulted regarding their career plan, and also as to where and with whom they wish to share housing when they go into semi-independent living. They also have the choice as to which voluntary groups they are to participate in. We learned of one Afghan boy who had become a Christian and who took great interest in church activities.

Are children in families treated differently compared to UASC?

We are not able to answer this from this exchange programme.

Freedom of movement

Are there any restrictions on children's freedom of movement?

This answer will have to be qualified according to form of living. UASC living semi-independently will have freedom of movement, but not of settlement (if they are to receive any support from KCC). Children living with a foster family may have freedom of movement, but will have to consult their foster parents. The social worker handling their case will also have a word in when it comes to who they are allowed to visit, and in which manner. We observed one case of restrictions being laid with regards to visit with alleged relatives. In this case, the social worker asked to be present and involved in the arrangements. With regards to the Appledore centre, two different things were told (by different staff members, at different times): one mentioned that the residents would, at times go to London to visit friends. Another said residents would be taken off the roster after two hours of absence. The latter could have in mind that permission to leave could be agreed upon in advance, but this is not stated in the "Appledore Residents' Rules 2007" document.

Dispersal practices

Is there a dispersal policy for children?

There is a lack of approved foster families in Kent County (as it is in all of the UK). Subsequently the KCC cannot make decisions based on geography, other than the fact that only families in Kent County are to be used. Often, a temporary permit to house more children together will be given to cope with this problem.

How long can children normally stay in one place?

The maximum time a child can stay at a foster family (theoretically) or in semi-independent living is up to the age of 24, given that the resident is studying at a college/university. At the Appledore reception centre the resident will normally not stay longer than five weeks.

How are children prepared for and supported during dispersal?

This question is the focus of the rest of our report – we will refer to the previous chapters.

Transportation

If dispersed, what are the practical arrangements for travelling to a new location?

All is paid and arranged by the KCC. Trains, taxis and the cars of the social workers are used.

How are children prepared for the journey?

They are told in advance about the journey taken place.

Financial support

What kind of financial support do children receive?

In semi-independent living, the children will receive £ 46.85 a week, until the age of 18.

There can also be given supplementary aid (clothes, transport, schooling fee/tuition money).

In a foster family, the family will receive money (£ 300-500 a week for normal cases) and the pocketmoney will be given at the discretion of the foster parents. A welcome packet will be given with regard to clothes, of the value of £ 60. At the Appledore centre, £ 10 a week will be given, in addition to house and board and clothing, if needed, of which £ 5 is labeled "telephone money."

Are there any conditions attached?

The amounts are based on the ordinary amounts paid to receivers of social help. The KCC will normally reserve the aid for residents of Kent County.

Recreational activities

What kinds of play facilities exist for children of different ages?

Do children have the opportunity to engage in sports or games?

Do children have the opportunity to engage in arts, music, reading and other recreational activities?

This study focuses on UASC in the age group of 16-18. Most of these will group around the higher end of this range. Given the benefit of doubt as a rule, many will likely be well over the claimed age. For students, the 'child' can be up to 24 years of age in the UK. 55 children lived in foster homes (as of 31.08.2007), while 385 had independent accommodation. Both groups will be followed up by social workers or community workers who will encourage them to take part in recreational activities. The facilities, however, will be the same as for every other Kentish child in the same age group.

7. GENERAL RECEPTION CONDITION

Initial reception

Where are asylum seekers placed when they first enter the country?

Asylum seekers are detained in Dover by the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA). Their personal belongings will be taken from them and marked. They will not have freedom of movement at this stage. As soon as possible they will be screened for age by the Duty Team. The minor of age will be taken to the premises of the Duty and Assessment Team in Dover for further interviewing and assessment.

The initial screening: all new arrivals were gathered in a room. Those who claimed to be minors were called upon, and a crude first assessment was made. Staff from immigration, together with representatives from the Duty Team made this screening. We had the opportunity to witness one of these screenings. Three asylum seekers claimed to be brothers and minors. They were picked out for immediate transfer to a foster home, even if the age could not be proven beyond doubt. In cases like this, the alleged minors will be given the benefit of doubt.

We took part in the dispersal to the foster home of the three mentioned above. Upon arrival at their new home, the social worker checked the sleeping arrangements. We had a good talk with the foster parents and the newly arrived were presented to the residents of the house. During the trip, one of the brothers expressed the wish to call upon an uncle in Manchester. The social worker told them to postpone this until after arriving at the foster parents'. When the time came to call the uncle, the social worker made the initial contact. The uncle was given some control questions about his "nephews." The social worker, dissatisfied with his answer, would not allow him to visit the children without a social worker present. (In this particular case, the uncle knew neither the names, nor the age of his alleged nephews.)

Medical screening

What are the minimum practices on medical screening (health and mental health)?

A medical screening by a general practitioner (GP) is given as soon as possible, normally within the first week of arrival. At the Appledore centre a GP and a nurse will be present 3 times a week.

Inoculations will be given free of charge if wanted by the unaccompanied minor asylum seeker.

Information

Do asylum seekers receive information on the asylum process?

The staff at Appledore informs the residents about the asylumseeking process, its possible outcomes and consequences.

Do they receive adequate information on their rights?

The rights of the UASC are taken care of by their appointed solicitors.

Legal services

What type of legal services are offered?

The unaccompanied minors at Appledore are given legal counselling. Their rights will be explained to them in various ways: Some information will be given by the staff at Appledore, but a Kent County Council social worker will also explain the process during the age assessment. Further, if one of the boys is assessed to be an adult, he is entitled to challenge the age assessment and is referred to the legal council. In the South Kent County area there are two private solicitors, one in Dover and one in Maidstone, which will normally be recommended, but the asylum seeker has right to chose whichever solicitor he or she wants. If the assessed has family outside the KCC he might – as an exception contract a lawyer outside the area. As a rule it can be said that the age assessment is accepted.

We each had the chance to sit in on one of the three assessment meetings made that day at Appledore. Both residents were assessed by one internal and one external social worker to be of age and had to leave the centre immediately. They were sent away with the first available taxi to NAS, Dover. As one member of staff put it: "We have to assess the minors properly since it is about the safety of the real minors staying at the centre."

How are asylum seekers supported in making their application?

This question will be at the discretion of their solicitor.

Interpreters

Are professional, culturally sensitive and gender-matched interpreters available for asylum seekers when required?

Professional interpreters are used. The ones we talked to worked free lance. They were coursed in the ethics of an interpreter, but did not have any official education or qualification as interpreters. Telephone interpreting is not used for assessments (but occasionally for other matters), the interpreting in formal business will always be face to face. If wanted, the UASC can ask for an interpreter to be present at the meetings with his or her social worker.

Waiting times

How long do asylum seekers have to wait for a decision in their case? Please provide examples.

The UASC will not have their case processed until they are alleged to be 18 years of age. The processing should then be done within 35 days.

Detention

Are any asylum seekers held in detention/ detention-like facilities? Please provide statistical data if available.

All asylum seekers are held in detention until they are assessed by a professional team. We were shown were a detention centre for adult asylum seekers was located, in Dover, but did not visit. This was also outside the scope of our programme.

What are the conditions and practices around detention (e.g. lengths of time spent in detention, material conditions, services available for detainees)?

The centre we visited was locked at all times and had Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance. It was guarded by a security company, G4S (Group 4 Security). The abode of the detainees was kept locked at all times, as far as we could discern.

The UASC are guided by the staff at all times at Appledore. The staff has no policing authority, and cannot prevent a minor from disappearing if he so wants, but his place will be cleared after two hours.

Dispersal

Is there a dispersal policy for asylum seekers?

The UASC arriving in Kent is to be given a foster home in Kent, unless relatives are accepted as foster family or he/she is adopted or is deemed fit to live in semi-independent accommodation. The UASC are to be assessed for educational- and living skills at Appledore, but due to limited capacity

Staff

How are staff at the reception centre trained?

A staff member at Appledore put it this way: “At Appledore, personal qualifications are very important, as important as a diploma.” The employee was probably referring to the big diversity of challenges the staff would meet on a daily basis in their work with recently arrived unaccompanied minors. At the Appledore reception centre we met, beside the “residential workers” also colleagues who were qualified social workers according to the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). Social workers in general are required a training matrix of 90 hours or 15 days a year to keep their qualification. This will be assessed every three years.

What is the level of involvement by staff members in their clients’ experiences at the reception facility?

Appledore provides care 24/7. Each member of staff has its weekly night shift. For this reason the centre provides the staff with sleeping facilities.

What is the turnover rate of members of staff?

In the last six months we lost one or two fulltime staff, we were told by a staff member.

Client information

How much information does staff have about their clients?

Everything is in principle available to the staff. The residents will not have a previous history in The UK – their files are started during the period at Appledore.

How is this information obtained?

Appledore: Information is obtained through assessment reports from staff and from questionnaires from interviews with the residents.

How is client information recorded, and how are the records maintained and accessed?

Appledore: Originals are kept in folders in filing cabinets at the premises. These will be locked up with regards to former residents and in bookshelves with regards to current residents. The information is in paper format only.

Dover: the assessments made will be kept in paper format in the folder held by the assigned social worker. The folders will also be stored electronically, but will not be divulged to the Home Office (HO) – only the result of the age assessment will be given the HO. In

exceptional cases, eg when dealing with dangerous people, some information will be shared with the HO.

Schooling and education

What kind of educational opportunities are available to asylum seekers?

We had solely the opportunity to study the conditions of UASC during our stay.

Do they receive language training?

“Here at the centre (Appledore) we do not have a government provided language training, though volunteers will come to teach our boys.” (quote from member of staff at Appledore).

Health care

What kind of health services is available?

Asylum seekers in general have access to the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK.

To what extent do asylum seekers have access to medical aid and treatment?

The access to aid and treatment is, at least in theory, the same as for any other citizen of the UK. We were informed that dental services, however, are in short supply in the NHS of the UK. All citizens and asylum seekers will be entitled to the same services as provided by the NHS.

Mental health care

What are the provisions for mental health care?

The provisions for mental health care has changed significantly for asylum seekers over the last 2-3 years. They used to be referred to the Medical Foundation in London, a charity NGO originally dealing with victims of torture. Now asylum seekers will be referred to ordinary mental health services by their GP. The treatment and counselling is consent based, as stated in the Mental Health Act (Same as for all UK citizens).

Food – Accommodation - Financial support

What are the arrangements around food provision?

If the asylum seeker has not enough money to sustain himself, he is to address the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) – a part of the Home Office. NASS will then provide for accommodation and subsistence.

Where are asylum seekers housed at various stages of the asylum process?

The arrangements for housing and transport are made by the Migration Helpline (MH).

Are they able to choose their own accommodation?

They can choose accommodation if they have the means to pay for it. Otherwise the MH will house them around the bigger urban centres in the North of the UK (like Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Aberdeen). This will normally be in former hotels.

What kind of financial support do asylum seekers receive? How do they receive it (cash, cheques, bank account).

The income support is paid through a bank account, if the asylum seeker has one. In most cases, the support will be paid through the postal service.

Clothing

What kind of arrangements exist for clothing, including shoes, winter garments, etc.?

Essential living needs are provided by NASS.

Freedom of movement

Do asylum seekers have freedom of movement in the country? If not, how is this controlled?

Freedom of movement is granted if the asylum seeker can provide for himself.

Religious practice

Are there facilities for religious practice?

“Every Appledore resident has his religious space in his room.” In Addition to that each Friday there is a ride to nearest mosque.

Host community

To what extent can asylum seekers engage with members of the host community?

This is left to the initiative of each individual.

Communication and media

Do asylum seekers have access to phonecards, telephones and/ or mobiles?

In Appledore we saw most of the residents with their own mobile. However, they have access to a public phone (land line) at the centre and are given £ 5 a week in telephone allowance.

Do asylum seekers have access to the Internet, TV and radio?

From Appledore: When visiting the young asylum seekers in their room we could see and hear that they would listen to the radio. In the communal area they watch the musical programmes on TV. TV in the morning is not allowed. A separate room exists for watching DVDs.

Withdrawal of benefits

Are there any circumstances in which benefits or services may be withdrawn from asylum seekers?

Resident at Appledore get a ten pound allowance per week. They could be charged ten percent of the value of a destroyed good, but a most a quarter of their pocket money.

Complaints and participation

Do asylum seekers have the opportunity to make official and/ or informal complaints against practices in the residence facilities?

At Appledore: the residents are explained how to file complaints and where to deliver them at the beginning of their stay. This is on the check-list for new arrivals.

How are complaints processed?

Procedures for processing the complaints exist. It will depend upon who or what is the object of the complaint.

Are asylum seekers involved in any aspect of the ways in which the facility operates?

From Appledore: the residents have to tidy their own rooms. They will also take turns in cleaning teamugs in the drawing room.

1. CONCLUSIONS

The Children Act of 1989 makes sure that any asylum seeker assessed to be under 18 years of age will be entitled to being accommodated in accordance with chapter 20 of said Act, after a “Child in need” assessment. This will, basically, be the same care as any native child would receive. Neither of us work with UASC at home, the conclusions will therefore be grouped according to interest.

Equal opportunities

UASC arriving in the UK are entitled to the same care as a native child, being and leaving the claim for asylum until reaching the age of 18. The same type of structure exists to cater for basic needs as there is for English children – the biggest exception being that the structures we visited dealt exclusively with asylum seekers in this age group. This is a generous system that unfortunately could easily lend itself to abuse, as the following quote from a paper from the Home Office illustrates: “Nonetheless, the number of age dispute cases is illustrative of a serious level of abuse of the system.”⁴

The level of care being the same for English and for asylum seeking children shows the concern of providing high a level of quality to the treatment given UASC. This, however, poses the question of age. UASC will not have a history in the UK so the social services are forced to assess the claimants for need and for age at the port of entry.

Age assessment

The UK does not use wrist x-rays or dental examination to assess the age of the claimant. In stead, there will be a series of interviews and assessments made by experienced social workers. The asylum seeker can challenge the assessment, but normally the appointed solicitor will not take the challenge to court.

Quality

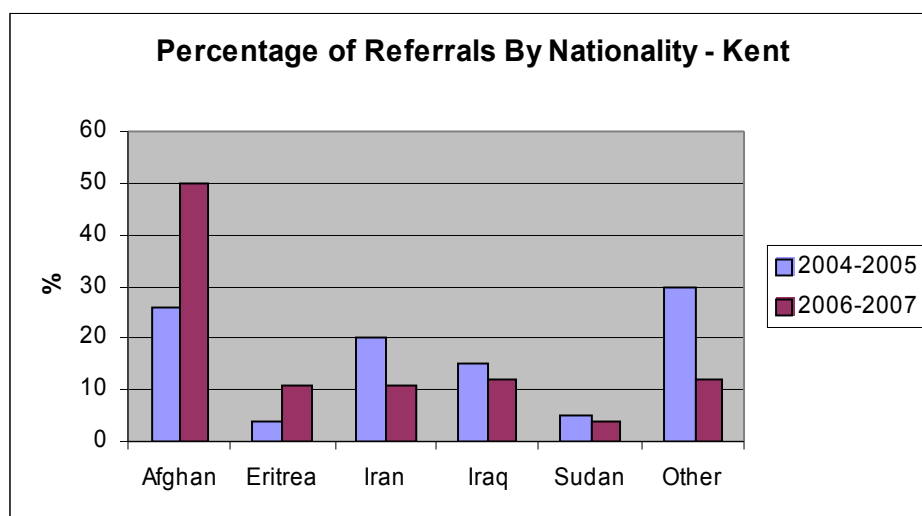
The wellbeing of the child is taken care of without retorting to asylum reception centres. The children are either put in foster homes, or put in semi-independent living (after an assessment of living skills). Support in the form of health services, including dental care, and education is also given on the same level as to any other English child. Since children have the right to benefits up to the age of 24 under the current legislation,⁵ the UASC could live in a limbo for many years, even if the NAM puts as short a limit as 35 days for the processing of an asylum claim (which in turn can be challenged if given a negative outcome). This happens because a claim will not be processed until the UASC is 18, but will be given a limited leave to remain in the UK. The negative side to this level of quality might be the cost side. In addition to this: the UASC are housed in the most expensive area of the UK, thus adding further to the costs.⁶

⁴ Source: “Planning Better Outcomes and Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children”, Consultation Paper for the Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate, February 2007 p 12

⁵ If they are undergoing a study programme at a college/university

⁶ A comparatively large part of the UASC are received in Kent County, due to the ports of Kent, and especially the port of Dover, being big entry point for asylum seekers.

1. TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS



Source: Report upon Migration and Asylum in Kent for discussion at Cabinet Briefing 24 September, 3rd draft – 14 September 2007, by Mr Alex King, Cabinet Member, Policy and Performance and Dr Tony Robinson, Lead Member for CFE

Table 1

	Before NAM (2005)	After NAM (2005)
Asylum applications per year	90 000	23 000
UASC per year	3 000	3 000

Table 2

People in KCC custody, broken down into age groups and type of care as 31.08.2007
Source: SUASC Performance and Finance Team 09.10.2007

	< 16	16-18	> 18
Foster care	29	25	1
Independent Accommodation	0	117	268
Other	6	4	7
Residential	10	16	0