Techfugees

A tech community response to the needs of refugees

Access to English for refugees and asylum seekers

Conference Report

Once again, thank you for showing such great enthusiasm towards the 'Access to English for Refugees and Asylum Seekers' conference held in Cambridge on Saturday 29 October. **Techfugees** and **Cambridge English Language Assessment** would like to thank you for your continued support.

It is our hope that this report will provide a summary of the day's events, with key speeches, in addition to summaries of the lightning pitches which were expertly delivered at the end of the afternoon.

The introduction to the day was offered by **Juliet Wilson**, Director of Assessment at Cambridge English and **Geoff Stead**, Director of Digital and New Product Development. In her opening remarks Juliet delivered the cold hard truth of the problems that refugees are facing across the world, referencing the absolute perseverance that is required by the international community in order to overcome such issues. Juliet talked of a visit to an exhibition being held at MOMA (Museum of Modern Art). The exhibition referenced a number of UN figures, one which stated that approximately 65 million men, women and children have been displaced by conflict. In his introduction, Geoff talked about his interest in finding out whether less conventional channels and methods of delivery would be effective in increasing and strengthening education opportunities for refugees. This brief introduction to the day highlighted the continued need for people and organisations to step up and take action.

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Geoff Stead, *Cambridge English*

Juliet Wilson, *Cambridge English*

The Conference

Gillian Ragsdale, *Teacher voice*

Delivering an introduction to Techfugees, **Tom Hayton**, Global Creative Director, talked of the vast steps that Techfugees have made in such a short period of time since its inception. For example, 'Meshpoint' a mobile Wi-Fi product, was rolled out providing up to 150 refugees with access to the internet from just one device. The fact that up to one million refugees have arrived in Europe, via sea in the last year, highlights the need for connectivity and communication. In concluding his talk, Tom shared some advice that was taken forward throughout the rest of the day. He argued of the importance of actually speaking to refugees, stating "don't make assumptions about what they need". For more information please visit: techfugees.com/

> "Up to one million refugees arrived in Europe via sea in the last year"

Gillian Ragsdale represented many of the conference guests who had identified an exact area in which help could be quickly and simply provided. Initially organising convoys comprising teaching and learning resources, Gillian was involved in the creation of a school for refugees so that the adults and children living in refugee camps in Calais were able to access education. She later worked with **Kate McAllister** on **The School Bus Project**, which brought a mobile classroom to the camp. These developments proved an overwhelming success. However, the vulnerability, fragility and unpredictability of living in a refugee camp was never far from sight. To follow **The School Bus Project**: schoolbusproject.org/

Dr Tony Capstick, from the University of Reading, highlighted the positive effects that initiatives like **The School Bus Project** can have in areas facing daily challenges. In delivering the key findings of the report '*Language for Resilience*', co-authored by Marie Delaney, Tony talked of the ways in which language teaching can be used to enhance resilience and promote positive side effects. The research was conducted over the course of six months with input from refugees, internally displaced people, and non-governmental organisations across a multitude of countries including Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The report is available to read here: britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language-for-resilience-report-en.pdf

Tony Capstick, *University of Reading*

Fiona Pape, from the British Council, facilitated a discussion with **Fiona Robertson** and two refugees, **Rizghar** and **Shereen**, who are now currently living and working in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. This reinforced all that Tony had talked about in the previous discussion on the importance of language in the region.

Fiona Pape, *British Council*

Ahmad al-Rashid, a former refugee currently studying for his MSc in Violence, Conflict and Development at the University of London, echoed the message of Tony and the British Council. In telling the story of how he managed to flee Aleppo, Ahmad represented all that is possible through the power of education and language. Not only did Ahmad continue to learn English using various forms of technology, including MOOCs, but was offered not one, but four different university scholarships.

Ahmad Ah-Rashid, *MSc Student*

Florian Rücker, *Project Manager- Kiron*

"The only way to rebuild Syria is through education. Education is a weapon of mass construction"

Julian Harty, *Tech Expert*

Poignantly, Ahmad is best placed to make the claim that "Syria is destroyed" and offer the argument that "the only way to rebuild Syria is through education. Education is a weapon of mass construction". This reinforces the argument that was made by, not only Gillian Ragsdale and Ahmad, but everybody that we spoke to during the day; that there is a clear opportunity for people to do something that will make a real difference.

It was in this vein, that **Florian Rücker**, Product Manager at Kiron Open Higher Education, was invited to talk at the conference. Florian was able to share with guests what is being done in order for refugees to access Higher Education. Florian outlined the core purpose of Kiron, with its key aim being that universities recognise any learning completed online and respect this as contributing to the overall degree. The special thing about Kiron is its partnerships and the fact that its online courses are free for people to access and offer far more than purely education focused learning. Other facilities include buddying and counselling services. For a link to Kiron: kiron.ngo/

From a large organisation to a single person, the talks at the conference illustrated the varying ways in which all sorts of people from all backgrounds are able to help those that need it the most. **Julian Harty** delivered a passionate speech about the ways in which he provides the technical devices that schools require and lets the schools discover themselves the best ways to use them. From delivering tablets pre-loaded with educational materials to devices run purely on solar power, Julian displayed the value of an innovative approach to dealing with the refugee crisis. Identifying the fact that smart phones play a large part in the everyday lives of many refugees, Julian has specifically focused on the way that education can be delivered via these phones without the need for any internet connection.

Michele Chang-McGrath, a Partner at ReD Associates echoed the sentiments of other speakers, talking of a research project that had been undertaken on behalf of a client focusing on ways that organisations can create educations solutions for refugees. The project was focused upon Jordan, a country that has opened its borders to millions of refugees fleeing their own war-torn nations. Michele's talk provided the perfect springboard for the challenges of the afternoon workshops.

Workshop Group

The Solutions

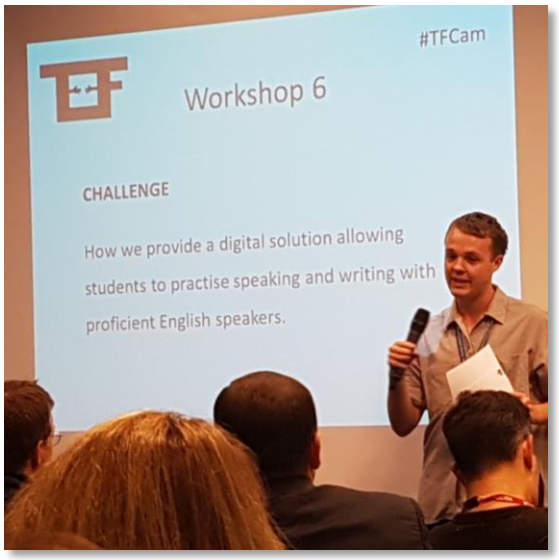
Many of you have contacted us to let us know that you thoroughly enjoyed the workshops and that you want to be involved in the continuation of projects that you pledged your support to. The following sections of this report will summarise each of the 'lightning pitches' from the end of the day. The pitches have been summarised with the key points being presented in this report.

- Volunteer teacher toolkit
- Diagnostic ability test, digital CV creator
- Online speaking practice using volunteers
- Access to higher education (HE) MOOC
- Offline content viewing

The challenge solution that was devised from project workshops 1 and 2 was focused on **developing a volunteer teacher toolkit to be used in refugee environments**. The idea was to **create a platform that could be accessed on mobile devices.**

A suggested outcome from workshops 4 and 7 was a **diagnostic test that is able to identify a refugee's English language level as well as an app that would create a digital CV** that employers could access from anywhere around the world via a simple link.

Another workshop solution proposed that **speaking practice could be delivered to refugees using volunteers who donate a small portion of their time**. This is a simple concept that would make a tangible difference to the language learning experience for refugees and asylum seekers.



William Saville, delivering pitch

Solutions that are able to be implemented relatively quickly include **tailored MOOCs (Massive Online Open Course) with content designed to inform on how to access Higher Education.** In addition, a major focus of the day was the discussion of how content could be viewed offline; a workshop group devised a number of solutions that we look forward to exploring with our partners in the near future.

Conclusion

In all, the conference can be deemed a success based on our goal of reaching a point where solutions could be identified and projects taken forward, in collaboration with partners and guests of the conference. Techfugees and Cambridge English are committed to working on some the solutions from the day and we hope that you will join us. Many of you have been invited to a LinkedIn group in order to carry on the discussion of what and where to go next. Here we will publish some data on the pledges and inform you of any new developments.

To follow the progress of the projects or to get involved, please visit and join our group on LinkedIn, at: linkedin.com/groups/8576968 alternatively, the group is called 'Access to English for refugees and asylum seekers' and can be accessed via the search box on LinkedIn. In addition, you can follow Techfugees on Facebook and Twitter.

Once again, thank you for your support and enthusiasm!

To get in touch please contact, Partnerships@cambridgeenglish.org