



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

## RIGHT TO WORK FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

Currently some asylum seekers wait two or even more years for a decision on their asylum claim in the UK. In the mean time they receive asylum support from the public pot, instead of being allowed to earn their own money to support themselves or contribute to the UK.

**The EU Reception Directive, which the UK has opted out of, places an obligation on member states to provide access to the labour market no later than 9 months from the date of the initial application for asylum. Eleven EU countries not only abide by this but have gone further by allowing asylum seekers to work after six months or less.**

The UK does grant the right to work after 12 months if the applicant is still awaiting a decision. BUT the job must be on the Shortage Occupation List, so very few indeed qualify under this.

Those seeking asylum here want to work and have skills they could use, if only they were allowed to do so. It is degrading that they are not able to put their ability and time to best use for their community and have the dignity of being able to be able to support themselves if they can.

Those who do not have their claim for asylum accepted, but cannot, through no fault of their own, return to their own country of origin (for instance it is not safe to do so, or that country will not accept them), are then destitute, with no support and no means of being allowed to earn a living.

Liberal Democrat policy has granted the right to work after six months and aims to make sure that appropriate training and volunteering opportunities are made available so that asylum seekers can make a contribution to society and be better prepared to find work. Asylum seekers who cannot work, or who cannot find work, will remain in housing funded through the Home Office and on the section 95 rate of benefits.

This policy means that an asylum seeker has 6 months in which to settle in and pick up language and cultural ways, before needing to be available to work— so that the policy cannot be said to be a “pull factor” for anyone wishing to work here to come to the UK.

**New Liberal Democrat Policy** means that asylum seekers would be allowed to work after 3 months.

Current restrictions of occupations in which seekers of sanctuary can work will be lifted, thus saving the taxpayer money. As in previous policy, after six months all working age asylum seekers would be required to work if they were able. We would ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place so that nobody who is not fit to work is compelled to seek work (note that it is already Lib Dem policy that sanctions on all in the UK who are not able to find work would not be applied).

A new unit would complete an initial assessment of the applicant. Any serious concerns about the individual taking up their right to work would be addressed at this point, as would the necessary preparations to assist the asylum applicant into work, for example, arranging for a National Insurance number to be issued and facilitating access to ESOL, conversational and higher-level English, mentoring, training and accreditation of relevant qualifications.

We support “Lift The Ban”, which is a coalition of over 150 charities, faith groups, businesses and unions campaigning for the right to work for asylum seekers.