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ABOUT FREE PINT

FreePint is an online network of information searchers. Members receive this free newsletter twice a month: it is packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

Joining is free at <http://www.freepint.com/> and provides access to a substantial archive of articles, reviews, jobs & events, with answers to research questions and networking at the FreePint Bar.

Please circulate this newsletter which is best read when printed out. To receive a fully formatted version as an attachment or a brief notification when it's online, visit <http://www.freepint.com/member>.

EDITORIAL

When I started working for myself seven years ago, I remember looking for gems of inspiration and advice in a range of sources, from biographies to the business guides you find in airport bookshops.

I remember reading about an interview, held in the back of a stretch limousine, with a powerful self-made, poodle-laden and fur-wearing multi-millionairess. When asked what she liked most about working for herself, she said that the best thing was the job security. The interviewer apparently sniggered, to which the interviewee immediately retorted that she wasn't likely to make herself redundant.

I was reminded of this story when reading our interview with independent information professional Mary Ellen Bates which we've published today. I'm not saying I think Mary Ellen is a poodle-laden stretch-limo-using multi-millionairess - at least she hasn't struck me as such the many times we've met. Just that Mary Ellen talks about feeling like she has *more* job security as a result of becoming an independent. I love her suggestion for creating an effective '10 second pitch' and her take on giving new things a try. I also agree with her views on the opportunities open to information professionals and how marketing and adding value are the keys to success. Perhaps we could term a new phrase for this emerging breed of entrepreneurial information professionals: perhaps they're "Infopreneurs"?

You can read the full text of our interview with Mary Ellen at:

<http://www.freepint.com/portal/events/sla-2003/>

Whilst we're on the topic of jobs and job security, registered charities now receive a 50% discount on vacancy listings in FreePint Jobs <http://www.freepint.com/jobs>. We're actually in the throes of moving all the FreePint Web services over to Willco's modular community hosting system <http://www.willco.com/>. Please bear with us over the next few days as it's no mean feat to map some 60,000 FreePint member records and 20,000 Bar postings to a database system with a totally new structure.

ResourceShelf.com, Gary Price's daily newsletter for information professionals, has received significant press coverage in the States. Whilst DigBig.com, our free utility for shortening long URLs, has also had an incredible take-up since its launch just two weeks ago. Why not try it out for yourself at <http://www.DigBig.com>?

We really hope you find today's FreePint useful. Remember that the formatted version contains photos of the authors and looks great when printed out:
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/040903.htm>.

All the best
William

William Hann BSc(Hons) MCLIP
Founder and Managing Editor

Email: <william@freepint.com>
Tel: +44 (0)1784 420044

FREE PINT JOBS
<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

FreePint Jobs -- a great place for information vacancies.

VACANCY SEARCHING -- free search and set up a weekly alert profile.

VACANCY RECRUITING -- Complete the form and advertise a vacancy for just GBP195

Find out more today at <http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

This week's selected listings are below. All new jobs are posted to the Bar and Bar Digest (circulation 11,000+) and matched against the 1000+ live job seeker profiles. Last week's Bar 'new jobs' listing is at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b25359> and this week's at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b25471>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Senior Corporate Finance Researcher
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2633>
Maternity leave vacancy (initially 10 months) at high salary. Immediate start. 35 hour week.
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

Project Manager
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2646>
Work in Coventry; Web site content mgt; Know the educational field? Know how to make web content attractive? Good pay.
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

Temp Research Associate-Corporate Finance
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2651>
Business Research supporting the Consumer & Industrial Products Group.
Recruiter: City Professionals

Senior Marketing Officer - STN Agency
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2653>
Responsible for providing support for customers of STN and be involved in forward planning of marketing activities.
Recruiter: Royal Society of Chemistry

Free Pint Forthcoming Articles

* Open University Resources * Property Real Estate * Online Discussion Groups * Digital Preservation * Commercial Real Estate * Licensing * Rankings * Insurance Resources * Re-entry to Work * Visual Representation of Information *

If you have a suggestion for an article topic or would like to write for Free Pint then please contact <penny@freepint.com> or sign up for the Author Update at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

Online Information Conference

Super Early Bird Discounts until 19th Sept, so book your place asap!

2-4 December 2003, Olympia, London, UK <http://www.online-information.co.uk/conferenceregistration.html>Hear international leaders share insight, experience and often controversial thinking on information management, content management, searching, collaboration, digital libraries & info architecture <http://www.online-information.co.uk/ol03/conference.html>

You've Invested in Content and Business Applications, but are they working hard enough?

Factiva provides the tools and capabilities to build custom information solutions for integration into your business applications. With easy access to the right information in the right place you can make informed business decisions, increasing organisational productivity and reducing risk.

Visit <http://www.factiva.com/redirects/workflow/freepint> for relevant white papers and case studies.

Copyright & the Internet: Myth and Reality
ISBN 1-904769-00-4

"I am the librarian and webmaster for my organisation and - while trying not to be the 'copyright policeman' - do try to coach staff in what they can and can't do. This report will be absolutely invaluable! If they can see it in print (and the jolly librarian isn't making it up) then they might take notice!!"

<http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/copyrightmyths>

Run a network site? Offer newsletters, forums and more

Willco's modular community hosting system enables you to plug in the features you need to run a successful member-oriented site. <http://www.willco.com/>
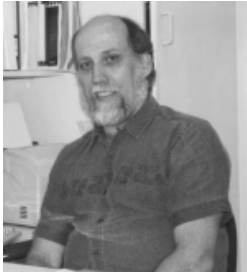
MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES
from Eric Oudyn

Eric Oudyn commenced his career in Medical Laboratory Technology in 1964 and is currently employed at Medlab Hamilton as the manager of the Haematology Department.

Tell us about your favourite Web sites. Check out the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>, then email <penny@freepint.com>.

As a Medical Technologist I find the following five sites very useful:

- <http://www.freemedicaljournals.com> - This site gives you free access to over 990 Medical journals, many with full text. Some journals just have abstracts with full text on issues 1-2 years or older.

- <http://www.quackwatch.com> - 'Your Guide to Health Fraud, Quackery, and Intelligent Decisions', this is an excellent site for the consumer, especially in the area of alternative therapies.

- http://www.emedicine.com/med/topiclist.htm - This site is a must for medical personnel and contains a very comprehensive range of articles on medical conditions and syndromes. Substituting 'ped/' for 'med/' in the address above brings up an equally comprehensive list of paediatric conditions.

- <http://www.bmj.com> - The British Medical Journal. This is a top medical journal with free full-text articles. The journals are also archived back to 1994.

- And lastly, for your desktop, a free medical dictionary you are able to download from <http://www.medical-dictionary.ro/>. Pity it's US English and not the real thing!!!

EVENTS

United Kingdom
- Wired Wessex have two networking events: Aldershot and Winchester on the 9th and 25th September <http://www.freepint.com/go/e235>.
- "STN Environmental Forum" Free event in London, 18th September <http://www.freepint.com/go/e240>.
- City Information Group have organised "Procurement - what's in it for me?" on September 22nd in London <http://www.freepint.com/go/e245>.
- "Electronic Document and Records Management for Financial Services" organised by Ark Group on the 24th - 25th September <http://www.freepint.com/go/e229> in London.
- "Successful Consulting in the Public Sector" including the politics of selling. On September 25th in Henley on Thames <http://www.freepint.com/go/e232>.
- "Thesauri and Taxonomies" organised by MultiTes at the British Library, London on the 29th - 30th September <http://www.freepint.com/go/e228>.
- "AUKML/ICLG Open Day" - graduate trainee day on October 7th in London <http://www.freepint.com/go/e239>.
- "Usable Search Tutorial" 10th October, also in London <http://www.freepint.com/go/e226>.

United States
- "OSS 03 Global Information Forum" in Washington D.C on 15th to 19th September <http://www.freepint.com/go/e238>.

Australia and Territories
- "Power Searching With the Pros", October 2nd & 3rd in Perth and 6th & 7th in Brisbane <http://www.freepint.com/go/e244>.
- On the Gold Coast is the "ALIA 2004 Biennial Conference" on September 21st to 24th <http://www.freepint.com/go/e242>.

Greece
- "Libraries Without Walls 5" in Lesvos on the 19th - 23rd September <http://www.freepint.com/go/e223>.

Submit details of your event today for free promotion. Simply complete the form at <http://www.freepint.com/events>.

International Information Industry Awards

FREE PINT BAR
In Association with Factiva
a Dow Jones & Reuters Company

If your desk is anything like mine then it has the ability to play hide-and-seek with your calculator just at that crucial moment when you need to be able to put your hand on it. Problem solved -- check out the new Google Calculator which we've tested and think is great <http://www.freepint.com/go/b25459>.

There have been lots of document management queries at the Bar recently, both hard copy and digital documents. There are some smashing tips on re-using material from PDFs <http://www.freepint.com/go/b25300> and can you help someone developing a database to store and index a few hundred PDFs <http://www.freepint.com/go/b25396>?

Whilst a learning centre is being revamped, all the books are being held in a sports hall. So can you help with security <http://www.freepint.com/go/b25436>? Or do you have knowledge of open-source software for library automation <http://www.freepint.com/go/b25483>?

Finally, we're always calling on FreePinters to get involved with information causes and here's two more chances for those in the UK:

- If you work with business information, then complete the latest survey from our friends at Business Information Review <http://www.freepint.com/go/b25469>.

- There's been shock at the announcement that Westminster City Council are closing "Information for Business" - if you have a view on this then make some noise soon <http://www.freepint.com/go/b25401>.

The FreePint Bar is where you can get help with your tricky research questions, for free! <www.freepint.com/bar>

Help with study for information-related courses is available at the FreePint Student Bar <www.freepint.com/student>.

Twice-weekly email digests of the latest postings can be requested at <www.freepint.com/member>.

TIPS ARTICLE

"Searching Free Design Databases on the Web"
By Steve Van Dulken

There is a lot of advice on the Web about searching for patents, but relatively little for another form of intellectual property, designs. The word 'design' in intellectual property indicates a distinctive look that has been deliberately given to an object, rather than any functional aspect (which is covered by patents). Copyright is also available as protection, but registered designs exist as an alternative method.

As a general rule it can be said that copyright gives a right against copying for the lifetime of the creator plus 70 years (in Europe and the USA). Someone else who by chance creates something identical is in the clear, as they have not copied it. In many countries it is automatic, but in some a certain amount of registration is required. Copyright can cover many forms of expression (films, books, art and so on) and in some fields registered designs are available as well. Registered designs provide protection for a shorter period of time, such as 25 years in Britain, and (like patents) ensure that the proprietor holds rights even if someone else independently thinks of the same look. Old designs will act as 'prior art' to prevent others from applying for newer designs, even in other countries, although some important systems such as the British and the new Community Design do not search for novelty (which extends to all similar material, not just designs). "Des." or (mainly American usage) "D" may be used with a number to indicate that a product has a registered design associated with it.

An increasing number of free databases and official gazettes are available on the Web, but the problem for many is knowing how to search them properly. The topic is not as simple as it may seem and the searching possibilities vary wildly from country to country. There is also the difficulty of having to search many sources if checking possible usage or registration across the world.

Classification Schemes

The Locarno Classification <http://www.wipo.int/classifications/en/locarno/about/index.html> came into being in 1968 to help those searching within particular subject areas such as furniture, lighting or soft toys. It is used by most European countries but is much less popular elsewhere: Canada, the USA, Japan and Korea do not use it. The first class in it is 01/01 (or 01.01, or 01-01, depending on the database), which is for bakery and confectionery products.

The British national database uses a more detailed version, so that for example the same 01/01 is subdivided into nine subcategories such as lollipops, /07. Similarly, Australia <http://pericles.ipaustralia.gov.au/adds2/adds.adds_simple_search.paint_simple_search> uses more detailed classes in many subjects, e.g. 02-01a. There is a link to definitions of these classification codes.

The USA uses its own design classification scheme as explained at

<http://www.uspto.gov/go/classification/> (which includes a concordance to Locarno). They are numbered in the format D1/116, which is for ice cream cones. The classification is often much more detailed than Locarno.

International Registration Systems

Every industrialised country will have its own system of registration to provide protection in that country, but there are also international systems. The British Library lists numerous databases and gazettes at <http://www.bl.uk/services/information/patents/deslinks.html>. Generally, databases will have, as a minimum, those designs which are still in force, and often those which are pending registration (i.e. roughly 20 to 25 years' worth).

The Hague scheme has been around since 1925 and permits citizens or residents of member states to make a single registration with effect in designated member states. At present these are largely continental European countries. The 1934 Act registrations merely listed the designs and did not show what they actually looked like. Their numbers have reached to just below 77,000. The 1960 Act registrations are now much more common, and do give a drawing, and are numbered in the format DM/63247. Many, seeing such a citation, take them for patents. The database for registrations of either variety from January 1999 onwards is at <http://www.wipo.int/hague/en/hague_express.htm>. They can be searched by English or French title words, by the proprietor or by Locarno classification. Britain is intending to join the scheme.

From the 1 April 2003, it has been possible to apply for a Community Design at the OHIM office in Alicante. This is a unitary right for the entire EU. At the time of writing a gazette containing registrations but not a database was available at its <http://oami.eu.int/en/design/default.htm> site. It will never be printed on paper. It is intended to provide a database. In the meantime, the same URL offers a "Bulletin quick search" so that a single word such as 'toy' or the Locarno class 01-01 can be searched in the archive, with a list of images of the design being offered as a result. This is much faster than looking at the PDFs of each issue, as they take ages to load.

The third international system is the Benelux, used since 1975 for the Low Countries in place of their national systems. At present they do not have a Web database or gazette.

National Systems

The British designs database is at

<http://webdb1.patent.gov.uk/>. It can be searched by the number, by enhanced Locarno, proprietor, or by a combination of Locarno and proprietor. The USPTO likes its ability to display 32 (or on request up to 128) images at once that it is routinely used in its design searches.

France provides for free the current fortnightly gazette at <http://dm.inpi.fr/inpidm/>. There is no free database but there are priced databases such as a Questel.Orbit offering.

A cause of confusion is when Germans talk in English of "designs" when they mean Gebrauchsmuster (utility patent, a simpler type of invention than a patent) and not Geschmacksmuster (a design). They have a site which requires free registration, , which is searchable only by name, place or design number. It also offers status information.

Japan has a priced database, Patolis, at <http://patolis-e.patolis.co.jp/>, which has data from 1965.

The USA has had "design patents" since 1842, and they are available on its official database <http://www.uspto.gov/patft/index.html>. They can be searched by class or number before 1976 and since then by other data elements -- including, uniquely, search reports. This means that earlier (or later) design patents can be traced by following the hypertext links. However, their own, free software must be loaded from the Help key to see the actual images. Designs can be singled out with the code apt/4 on the "advanced" search. The last few years of US designs are now on the Esp@cenet database <http://ep.espacenet.com/>, worldwide option, where they can be searched for in the publication number field as USS specifications, while DepatisNet on already has all of them (as "S" coded documents). These databases both use Adobe Acrobat.

Free design databases for litigation plus official manuals and some laws are listed at the British Library's <http://www.bl.uk/services/information/patents/deslinks.html#laws> site.

Future Changes?

Designs unfortunately have a Cinderella image as the least sought-after of the trinity of patents, trade marks and designs. This may be partly due to the lack of a "Derwent for designs" where a single database allows searching for prior art across many authorities. As in patents, evidence of prior registration in another country will normally prevent registration. One reason for the absence of such a database may be the problem of sorting registrations for the same design in different countries into "families". Although claiming six months' priority is permitted, it is rarely claimed, and some (like the British) do not even record it in their publications. Other problems are the fact that some countries do not use Locarno, while titles will of course be in the local language. Even so, such a database would be very useful and would encourage greater use of designs.

In March 2002, the European Community Design Regulation came into force in EU countries. A highly simplistic summary means that the registration of a design will cover all

articles to which that design is applied. Hence a cartoon character could be used in many kinds of objects. This is likely to make use of the Locarno Classification awkward in the future, and may stimulate research into ways of computer searching the look itself. The scope of what can be protected is also being extended, and will include for example graphic designs.

An unregistered Community Design with three year terms has also been introduced, which by definition cannot be searched for. It is anticipated that it will be used mostly for quickly changing designs such as clothing. More information on these changes can be found on for example the Vossius site <http://www.vossiusandpartner.com/eng/flash/design.html>. The text itself of the Regulation is at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/indprop/design/01-1803.htm>.

FREE PINT BOOKSHELF
<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

**"Web Project Management - Maintaining and Evolving
Successful Commercial Web Sites"
Written by Ashley Friedlein. Reviewed by
Richard Eskins**

I was quick to volunteer to review Ashley Friedlein's 'Maintaining and Evolving Successful Commercial Web Site' as the title held promise for some interesting reading. As I teach web design with a strong focus on the site development process I also thought that it may be a potential reading list candidate!

For someone who grew up reading comics rather than novels, Ashley's book, coming in at around 400 pages, was just about manageable. The first commendation is that it manages throughout to remain clear and concise on a variety of quite complex issues. Broken up into four clear sections including Change Management, Content Management, Customer Relationship Management and Site Measurement, it preaches practical, common-sense solutions.

In Part One, on Change Management (CM), you get a breakdown of the processes and practices that all but the very smallest web sites can follow to effectively maintain an evolving site. This provides some very practical theory that we may not all be able to practice, but gives us a standard at which to aim. It does however become clear that many web sites may never need to move beyond this stage if they get CM right.

Under Content Management, a series of excellent descriptions make it easy to identify where your own site sits. These describe the evolution of a site towards a Content Management System (CMS), starting with the 'webmaster phase', then the 'database phase' and finally reaching full CMS. The section breaks down the whole process of moving to CMS including nine excellent pages that would provide anyone about to purchase a CMS with most of the selection criteria they would ever need.

Richard Eskins lectures in web design on the undergraduate programme in The Department of Information and Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University. Routes on the programme include Web Content Management, Information Management, Information and Communications, Information Architecture and Information and Library Management <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/h-ss/dic/>.

Related links:

- Find out more about this book online at the FreePint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/project.htm>

- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/1558608303/freepint0c> or Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1558608303/freepint00>

- "Web Project Management" ISBN 1558608303, published by Morgan Kaufmann, Written by Ashley Friedlein.

- Search for and purchase any book from Amazon via the FreePint Bookshelf at <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

What is the ResourceShelf?
<http://www.resourceshelf.com>

ResourceShelf is a free daily update containing news of interest to information professionals around the world.

Topics include the latest news with web search engines, research tips, new web resources, and much more.

Part Three focuses on Customer Relationship Management (CRM). I've always tried to get my students to focus on their users, now I have a name for it! The focus is on who the current users are and how they are served. I'm always amazed at how many web sites still hide their contact details or insist on the telephone as the point of contact rather than email!

For someone who has consistently failed to get to grips with log files and analysers, Part Four on Site Measurement is enlightening. This part gives details on what should be measured and analysed because, as Ashley rightly points out, 'any reporting that cannot be analysed to come up with actions has little value'.

Like all other parts, this section is enhanced by a number of well written case studies, although there are shades of a mad professor in a DeLorean sports car caused by a typo in the Autoglass study which states that they implemented their 'first Web measurement solution in 1898'!

I always use the daft phrase that 'a website is for life' when people ask for my advice at the start of a project. We all learn quickly that once up and running, a site can take over. Ashley provides us with the tools to tame the beast and to ensure it develops and (hopefully) succeeds as a commercial entity.

FreePint Interviews Mary Ellen Bates

Read the views of this respected independent information professional:

<http://www.freepint.com/portal/events/sla-2003/>

FREE PINT

Contributors to this issue:
William Hann (FreePint Managing Editor), Penny (FreePint Administrator), Annabel Colley (FreePint Relations), Eric Oudyn, Felicity Heyworth, Steve Van Dulken, Richard Eskins, Plain Text <http://www.plain-text.co.uk/> (proofreading).

Advertisers/Sponsors of this issue:
Royal Society of Chemistry, City Professionals, Sue Hill Recruitment, Resourceshelf, Imark, Glen Recruitment, Factiva, Willco.

Managing Editor William Hann BSc(Hons) MCLIP
william@freepint.com

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FEATURE ARTICLE
"Informing the Asylum Debate"
By Felicity Heyworth

Felicity Heyworth is the Information Manager of The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR). ICAR is the only independent centre set up to collect, record, compile and disseminate up to date, comprehensive and academically credible information about refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. It aims to raise the level of public debate and to promote better understanding of the issues. It is based within the School of Social Science and Public Policy at King's College London
http://www.icar.org.uk

You will probably have noticed that the issue of asylum in the UK is a controversial one at the moment. Opinions about the right to refuge, the costs of offering it and its implementation are heated and divided. These tensions are further exacerbated by the fact that the information that informs, encourages or contradicts them is itself often controversial, contradictory, incomplete or overwhelming. But this is not to suggest that the asylum sector from which this information emanates is in disarray. On the contrary, it is an active, productive and reflective sector full of examples of innovation, rigour and candour. But it is also a large sector that covers a myriad of disciplines, has innumerable policy influences and impacts, and is geographically disparate.

Definitions and Contextual Information

The terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' are often used interchangeably, which can introduce confusion and inaccuracies. An asylum seeker is a person who has applied for asylum or refugee status, but whose application has not yet been decided. A refugee is a person who has been granted permission to stay under the terms of the 1951 Convention or because of other protection needs. The 1951 Convention and the accompanying 1967 Protocol <http://www.unhcr.ch/1951convention/> are the documents that regulate the legal status of refugees and the obligations of their signatories at an international level - 145 states have signed the Convention and/or the Protocol and they are the primary instruments against which asylum claims are weighed.

The asylum process in the UK can be divided into two main stages: First, an asylum application is made and processed. Then, if it is successful, the newly arrived refugee is 'integrated into UK society' and becomes eligible for citizenship after five years. The first stage has many elements, and might include the provision of state support, access to legal advice, detention, one or several appeals, dispersal to a region outside south-east England, and removal or return to one's country of origin. If the application is granted and the second stage comes into play, it can include efforts to access and become involved with cultural activities, English language provision, employment opportunities, permanent housing arrangements, and educational and health services. The Home Office website is a good starting point for information about both asylum <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?pageid=15> and integration and citizenship <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?pageid=90>.

The experience of identifying and tracking information on UK asylum and refugee issues is complicated by the very fluid and fast-changing international political setting in which these issues are examined and applied. Even when working solely within the UK setting, one must be aware of other types of migration (environmental, economic and illegal, for instance), the migration policies of other receiving countries, and the causes of flight in countries of origin.

But let's limit ourselves to the UK. Asylum policies and procedures are managed and implemented by the Home Office, but many other players make up the sector as a whole. Information about asylum seekers and refugees flows in to and out from four 'pillars of knowledge': academic research; refugee agencies; government policy and research departments; and the experience of asylum seekers and refugees themselves.

Academic Information

The academic study of asylum and refugees involves many disciplines, including statistics, sociology, law, anthropology, geography, psychology, international relations, political science, development studies, history, economics, and education. But contrary to stereotypes about a gap between academic research and wider policy and community concerns, many academics with an interest in refugee issues are actively involved in disseminating their findings to a wide audience and are keen to contribute to and inform policy and practice through their research. They do this by evaluating or contributing to projects, investigating a particular topic or group in order to inform more tailored policy or advocacy, and forming research partnerships with practitioner organisations and policy makers. The innovative dissemination of their findings through conference participation, electronic publication, and repackaging for specific audiences further contributes to their efforts to participate in debates and discussions outside the hallowed halls.

Academic research is commissioned and/or funded by several UK and EU government departments, voluntary sector organisations and charitable trusts. For a description of UK-based academic departments in this area and those they conduct research for, visit <http://www.icar.org.uk/content/res/rch/refresacad.html>.

Refugee Agencies

'Refugee agencies' is shorthand for the many voluntary sector and non-government organisations operating around the UK that provide practical support for asylum seekers and refugees, advocate on their behalf, and implement many of the day-to-day systems that regulate the asylum and integration processes. These agencies provide legal advice, locate emergency and temporary housing, brief newly arrived asylum seekers on their rights and responsibilities, and guide them to health, educational and community services. They also conduct research. A core team of six national agencies and several refugee community organizations (RCOs) also administer the Home Office's National Asylum Support Service <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?pageid=89>, which came into effect as a result of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act <http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1999/19990033.htm> and which provides support and accommodation to destitute asylum seekers in dispersal areas outside the south-east of England, which was felt to be carrying an unfair share of the financial and administrative responsibilities of new arrivals <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/infocentre/entit/sentit002.htm>. This practice is coordinated by regional consortia, which form umbrella groups of all the voluntary sector organizations, local authority and statutory agencies, and private housing providers involved in the day-to-day lives of asylum seekers dispersed to their

region (see for example <http://www.refugeeaccess.info>).

The interaction of these consortia and refugee agencies with asylum seekers and refugees is an invaluable source of information about the number, background, needs, and views of this section of the population that can sometimes prove hard to access. Most agencies record their meetings with individual claimants or refugees, resulting in a client profile containing demographic data, skills and qualifications information, health status, and insight into conditions in their country of origin.

But for several and often obvious reasons, this information is not widely available. The agencies involved do not have the time to process and repackage it, or to fully research and implement the protection mechanisms arising from the publication of personal information. But the sector is becoming increasingly aware of the potential of this information and of the impact it might have on research, advocacy and policy work, and ways of sharing and using the data in safe and anonymous ways are being explored.

Government Research and Policy Departments

Asylum falls within the remit of the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk> Here you will find information not only on asylum, but on related matters of immigration, visas and work permits, and citizenship. Asylum claims are informed by what is known about the situation in the claimant's country of origin, information which is provided by IND's Country of Origin and Policy Unit <http://194.203.40.90/default.asp?PageId=88> and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office <http://digbig.com/3bqx>.

But administration is the implementation of policy, and this policy is increasingly informed by research. In an effort to build a sound knowledge base and convincing pool of evidence, the Home Office commissions and conducts research as outlined above, but is also influenced by related research in other government departments, such as the Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Health, and the Department for International Development. For a complete list and brief description of the government departments involved in asylum research visit <http://www.icar.org.uk/content/res/rch/refresgove.html>.

The Experience of Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Of course all of this research, policy and practice must be based on, and reactive to, the experiences of those it hopes to manage and help: the asylum seekers and refugees themselves. Gathering their stories can be difficult - there can be language barriers, and they have many reasons for not wanting to differentiate themselves or revisit their often traumatic past. Their information can also be hard to elucidate as much of it is held by RCOs, which are usually underfunded and without Internet presence of any kind. RCOs are formed by and serve individual refugee populations, and have had a hard time tapping in to the wider service arena. But their value as sources of rich and detailed information is being recognised,

and contact between them and other service providers is growing. The release on CD-ROM of the Refugee Council's national directory to voluntary agencies and RCOs (RADAR - see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/publications/pub005.htm>) has contributed greatly to communications amongst and between these organizations.

Oral history projects and 'real life' web features are also impacting on the volume of information available in this area. See for example Migrating Memories <http://www.migratingmemories.net>, the Vietnamese Oral History Project <http://www.refugee-action.org/viet_oralhistory.asp>, the Voices of Victims Archive <http://www.holocaustcentre.net>, and the real lives links at <http://www.icar.org.uk/content/res/reallive.html>

The Role of the Internet

As in all sectors, the role of the Internet in coordinating and diversifying the work of the asylum and refugee sector has been enormous. Many of the players in the 'four pillars' discussed above maintain websites containing substantial background and up-to-date information about their activities. There are also numerous information portals, which aim to compile and organize all available information on a specific area of the sector and serve as first- or one-stop shops. For instance, information on international forced migration is available from Forced Migration Online <http://www.forcedmigration.org/>, and the health and mental health of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK is the focus of Harpweb <http://www.harpweb.org.uk/>.

In a sector where policy changes are frequent and media and public interest is constant, the immediacy of email listservs and distribution lists is invaluable. These vary in form and content, offering a huge array of information on subjects like refugee education <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/refed/>, female asylum seekers and refugees <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/RWRP/women's%20asylum%20news%204%202003.htm>, international forced migration <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/forced-migration.html>, deportation <http://www.ncadc.org.uk/>, health <http://www.doh.gov.uk/asylumseekers/newsletters.htm>, and media coverage <http://www.asylumsupport.info/newsletter.htm> and <http://www.cis.org/immigrationnews.html>. Other email services provide summaries of the activities of particular organizations, which can alert the subscriber to interesting research, conferences and possible collaborations and quickly update busy people about the priorities and concerns of their colleagues.

As I hope the above has outlined, the asylum and refugee sector is simultaneously disparate and intertwined. But it would appear that it is in a slow but constant shift from the former to the latter. Information is always most powerful when it is varied, voluminous and attributable, and the initiatives and attempts to share and widely disseminate existing knowledge are to be welcomed.