

## Chapter 8: SOURCES OF HELP AND INFORMATION

*In this chapter there is information about:*

- *Help for refugees and asylum seekers*
- *Libraries*
- *The Citizens Advice Bureau*
- *The police*
- *Sources of information*
- *The internet*
- *and general tips on how to get information and advice.*

### ***Introduction***

In the UK, there are many different organisations offering all kinds of help and advice. In other chapters of this book there are details of where to go to get further information on a particular subject. This section tells you more about the services offered by advice centres, libraries and about other sources of information.

### ***Be prepared***

When you are looking for information or help, consider the following advice:

- Before you ask for information think carefully about what you need to know. Make a few notes about the key things you want to know
- Take a pen and paper to make notes about the information you receive
- If you do not understand English very well, take someone with you to help, or ask if there is an interpreter available
- Take all the relevant documents with you. Sometimes you will have an account or reference number for your case
- Try to avoid long explanations
- Make a note of the name of the person you talk to so you can refer to it if you need to phone or visit again.

### **Public libraries**

Every town and city in the UK has one or more public libraries. You can find the address of your local library in the phone book. Most of the services offered by public libraries are free. They are paid for by national and local taxes. Anyone may use a local library, but if you want

to borrow books and other items you usually have to become a member. To become a member you usually have to show proof of your identity and your address.

## **Children**

There is usually a separate section of the library for children. Libraries encourage children to read books and sometimes there are special reading activities for children.

## **Books and other items**

Members can borrow books for a specific period of time. At some libraries it is possible to borrow CDs, audiotapes and DVDs. There are often books in languages other than English. There are also books on audiotape (called 'talking books') and books with large print for people with sight problems. If you do not return books and other items on time, you will have to pay a fine. If the library does not have a book you need, they can usually order it for you from another library.

## **Reference**

In the reference section there are books such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, telephone directories, Yellow Pages and Thomson Local guides. Sometimes there are newspapers. The reference section is helpful if you need information on something in particular. The library is also a good place to ask about local and community facilities and events. If you do not understand English very well, some libraries might offer a translation service.

## **Computers, photocopiers and fax machines**

Libraries also have computers which the public can use to do work processing, send and receive emails and browse the internet. It is also possible in some libraries to photocopy and to send faxes. There might be a charge for these services.

## ***Citizens Advice Bureau***

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) gives free, confidential and impartial advice. It is an independent organisation with trained advisers. Most towns and cities have a CAB office. You can find the address in the phone book, the local library or visit the CAB website at [www.nacab.org.uk](http://www.nacab.org.uk) Before you visit a CAB office you should check the opening times of your local office. Help is also available by email. Details about this are available on the website.

## **Practical help**

CABs give advice and help across a wide range of topics. These include money, benefits, pensions, employment, the NHS, housing, immigration, domestic violence and consumer problems.

The CAB can also help with completing forms and writing letters. They can also help if you have to go to court or a tribunal. If you have problems understanding English they may be able to provide interpreters. The CAB also runs an information website at [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) which gives information on a wide range of topics. It is available in English, Welsh, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Punjabi and Urdu.

## ***The police service***

The main role of the police is to deal with crime, but they also offer protection and assistance to the public. They are expected to be friendly and helpful to people seeking their assistance. If you are worried about your personal safety or have a question about the law or crime, the police will be able to help you. In some parts of the country there are special telephone information lines for this purpose. In many communities there are community support officers (CSOs) who work at a local level to provide a visible presence on the streets and reassure local people. They may give talks on safety issues in schools and community centres and generally help the police with their local duties.

## **Contacting the police**

If you need advice or you need to report a crime which is not dangerous or life-threatening you should phone the local police station. The number is in the telephone book under 'Police'. DO NOT phone 999 or 112 unless there is an emergency.

If there is a danger to life or a crime in progress, dial 999 or 112. The operator will ask which service you require: police, fire, ambulance or coastguard service. You will be asked where you are calling from and the location of the accident or emergency. Do not call 999 or 112 under any other circumstances.

## ***Other sources of information***

- Yellow Pages: a yellow telephone directory which gives details of organisations, services and businesses in the local area. There is also a website at [www.yell.com](http://www.yell.com)
- Thomson Local: a guide to your local area (available in Great Britain), similar to the Yellow Pages.

- Local authorities: all give information about their services such as education and social services. The numbers for each section of the local authority can be found in the phone book. Most local authorities have useful websites. Some have information and advice centres open to the public.
- Tourist information centres: give information about local attractions as well as on transport, places of worship, doctor's surgeries and so on.
- Post offices: the main role of the post office is to collect and deliver mail. They also provide information about benefits and state pensions. You can also open a bank account at the post office and pay bills. At the post office you get application forms for driving licences, other licences and passports. They can also check passport applications before you send them to the passport office.
- Helplines: many organisations have special telephone lines which give advice on specific issues or problems. You can get these from the CAB or public library or from the internet (see below).
- Newspapers: these are either national or local. Local newspapers are good for local information such as the opening times of late night chemists.
- Television and radio channels: these are either national or local. Local radio stations can be a good source of local information.
- Directgov: this is a Government-sponsored website that gives information about local and national government issues, ranging from how you complete a tax return to how you renew a library book, [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

## ***Using the internet***

The internet can be accessed through a computer either at home, in the local library or in an internet café. To get information from the internet you need to know the address of a specific website (this usually begins with 'www') or you need to use a search engine. The most popular search engine is Google at: [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk) The search engine uses key words to find information about a specific thing. If you enter the key words (consumer rights, for example) into the search engine, it will look for both words separately and give you millions of results. If you put inverted commas around the words ('consumer rights') the search engine will look for websites only with words in this combination.

## ***Websites***

There are many addresses of useful websites in this guide. A particularly useful website is the BBC website at: [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) This gives you access to local, national and international information and has a news service in over 40 languages. It also has sections on education, history, science, business and law and provides links to other valuable sources of information.

**Make sure you understand:**

- What services libraries offer
- What services Citizens Advice Bureaux offer
- What help and advice you can get from the police
- When you should phone 999 or 112, and when you should NOT phone those numbers
- There are many sources of advice and information in the UK, such as the local authority, the post office and advice centres
- There are also helplines and other resources, such as local newspapers and telephone directories
- The internet is a very useful source of information