

Transitions Stakeholders' Advisory Network Meeting #8

Exploring Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Diversity Management and UK Highly Skilled Refugees

Workshop notes, 19th September 2013

Venue: The Social Enterprise Hub, City of London N1 9AB

Participants

SA, Crossrail, Civil Engineer
Dick Bacon, IET, Professional Development
Manager
Dawn Barker, Crossrail, Head of HR

Euan Burns, Carillion, Chief Engineer
Fay Cannings (part), Lend Lease, Head of
Corporate & Social Responsibility
Karen Elgy, EDF Energy, Sustainability
Performance Manager
Sharon Goymer, National Grid, Resourcing
Manager, Development Programmes
Iyob Ghebrekristos, Transitions candidate,
Electrical Engineer
Sheila Heard, Transitions

W.Issa Transitions candidate, Civil & Structural Engineer
Rebecca Lovelace, Circle Three

Colin Mitchison, IMechE, Senior Member Engagement
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Danielle Neale, Transitions, Administration
Mudher Takialdeen, Employed Candidate, National Grid,
Electrical Engineer, Administrator
Anya Todd, KPMG, Corporate Responsibility Project Co-
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Jenny Young, Royal Academy of Engineering, Diversity
Manager
AZ, Transitions Candidate, Biodiversity Scientist and
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Apologies

Kevin Bowsher, Diversity management
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Chris Dulake, Chief Engineer, Crossrail
Jane Dryden, BT Openreach volunteering
programme manager.

Introduction

The aim of the workshop was for delegates to advise Transitions on how its services can contribute to CSR and diversity initiatives and to exchange perspectives and information. The main issues, recommendations and suggested actions from the workshop are captured below.

Workshop outcomes

Assessment centres/telephone interviews

Often assessment centres and telephone interviews can be a barrier to candidates as they follow an inflexible format meaning that candidates may struggle to highlight their skills. Recruiters may not understand technical details, meaning that a candidate fails by not demonstrating UK experience, for example, when similar work was done overseas, but the recruiter doesn't have the technical knowledge to understand this. "Group assessment centre tasks sometimes don't consider how experienced refugee engineers will respond in contrast to younger UK-born graduates".

Outsourcing of recruitment makes engaging with refugee candidates problematic for employers. Embedding diversity awareness works better when recruitment is brought in-house, but there is a role for employers to connect Transitions to recruiters to facilitate increased diversity awareness and improved communication.

If candidates could highlight their refugee status upon application it would assist employers to offer more support. Whilst candidates may feel that they do not wish to promote their status as a refugee, by doing so it allows employers to understand that more support may be needed at the application stage. It also means that employers can better understand the potential diversity of their workforce. Recognition is needed,

however, that candidates “want to be treated the same, not differently” and not all employers are as aware/supportive of diversity issues as those present at the workshop. One issue is that there may not be enough awareness amongst recruiters of the role and validity of NARIC (Organisation that provides information and opinion on academic, vocational and professional qualifications from across the world).

The CV coaching that Transitions offers is “hugely beneficial” to candidates and support to build confidence and practice at interview/assessment stage is invaluable. There can be issues around language, with some feedback that candidates may have “language that is acceptable, but not outstanding nor as good as other UK applicants”.

How can Transitions ensure that the “multifaceted skills” of refugee candidates are made obvious to recruiters, for example, candidates often have greater technical skills, professional maturity, international experience & multi-lingualism. “It isn’t just about engineering skills”: “communicating how candidates have overcome significant barriers will help demonstrate their other skills”. Work undertaken by candidates prior to coming to the UK is not as highly valued as that gained in the UK. This can mean that employers miss out on best practice from overseas that could be implemented within UK businesses: “Candidates can be interviewed on overseas training and experience, as well as UK experience... Refugees have diverse skills from challenging post-war and new-build engineering situations and can bring expertise and new ideas to projects”.

Action:

- Connection by employers to HR departments and/or external recruiters for provision of diversity awareness training by Transitions;
- Could Transitions provide a ‘critical analysis’ of recruiters to demonstrate the importance of undertaking diversity training?
- Promotion of good practice by Transitions to encourage uptake and learning by others;
- Where a candidate has issues at recruitment stage is there a role for Transitions to lobby and inform at a higher ‘influencer’ level within the company? Maybe offer feedback from an impartial professional perspective with the offer of education and support to facilitate improvement?
- Leverage the benefits of candidates’ skills in speaking other languages, e.g. target companies with opportunities in non-UK locations;
- Signpost to support for candidates that may speak fluent English, but would benefit from, for example, pronunciation/accent support;
- Encouragement and education of employers to recognise the validity of overseas training and work. Can Transitions promote stories of best practice, e.g. SA’s tale of the Oxford Circus pedestrian crossing)?

Internships/work experience

The internship of four months offered to Transitions by Crossrail for SA was “just about the right time for an internship” as it was sufficient time for the intern to feel comfortable and part of the team, plus allowed for candidate development to genuinely add value to the team. Such a time period means that interns can do “real work” with a valid “opportunity to contribute”.

Demonstrating UK work experience is “very important”, but gaining this experience is problematic for candidates as most programmes focus on graduate and school leavers. Employers tend to not offer work experience for “older adults” as this does not fit in with “attracting pipelines of talent”. From a candidate perspective, gaining work experience/internships with high profile employers can be hugely beneficial to their careers, e.g. time spent with Crossrail is incredibly valuable for a candidate to have on a CV.

It is vital for Transitions to pick the right candidate for the first internship. If this is done successfully it paves the way for future interns with the same employer. Crossrail created vacancies for Transitions to fill as part of its CSR agenda: this gave both employer and intern the chance to learn about one another. Any longer than a period of four months would have been problematic in terms of non-payment of a wage to an intern.

Not all employers pay a wage to interns. Finding an internal system to reimburse travel and lunch expenses for interns can be problematic. The majority of employers at the workshop paid interns some form of salary to reflect work undertaken, but this wasn’t a universal offer.

A lot of jobs are filled “not through advertising”. However, it is important for Transitions to “use the proper pathways” as a CV and letter direct to the CEO may open the door, but it will annoy the HR department in bypassing official channels. Liaising directly (and informally) with the Chief Engineer can be a better way forward, whilst keeping the HR function informed and engaged.

Action:

- Promotion of successful internships to reassure new employers of the engagement of other businesses and the ability of Transitions to put forward the right candidate;
- Creation of a network of sector-specific senior-level decision-makers that can support candidates in navigating the recruitment system;
- Requesting that these decision-makers act as ‘champions’ to promote the work of Transitions to others;
- A role for Transitions to guide candidates through this network to the influencers, leveraging their contacts, knowledge and experience to the benefit of the candidate;
- Recognition that few companies target refugee candidates for internships, so developing an approach that fits with a conventional internship programme, but seeks to promote Transitions candidates to decision-makers and influencers that can then open the door to creating vacancies in an internship programme;
- Provision of support to companies that do not offer internships to “smooth the way” and reduce the element of perceived risk;
- Promotion of best practice to support employers to improve internship programmes.

What will make the difference between success and failure is access to decision-makers. If this can be done – without alienating the HR function – and a successful placement achieved, then next time Transitions can start the engagement process at a lower level. Networking by Transitions with high-level decision-makers in employing organisations is of huge importance here.

Role of client/supply chain

The client (employing the candidate/offering work experience) may be supportive of Transitions, but there is a challenge in Transitions continuing this success and engaging with the supply chain. Rather than a mandate to the supply chain that sub-contractors must engage with Transitions, it was felt that there is a role for the client to facilitate one-to-one meetings with the supply chain, to demonstrate leadership through action. Brokering and supporting access by Transitions to HR professionals on a direct basis would be of real benefit.

A suggestion that “you need to make yourself more visible” and the offer of support to several candidates by several organisations resulted from the workshop. Could this happen on a regular basis with Transitions able to access pro bono specialist knowledge to send candidates in the right direction armed with the right knowledge and contacts?

Action:

- Request by Transitions that successful clients (e.g. National Grid and Crossrail) broker a supportive and encouraging introduction to their supply chains, highlighting the success they have had with Transitions and encouraging sub-contractors to do the same;
- Agree a means of monitoring and reporting as to progress with the above to keep the client engaged and informed;
- Explore the idea of creating ‘patron’ companies that support Transitions financially and also offer support in providing pro bono work and connections to supply chains (for example, CRASH: <http://www.crash.org.uk/patrons/>);
- Review all relevant professional bodies to understand which ones engage with Transitions and agree a means to keep them informed and engaged.

Geographical location

Transitions is a London-based organisation. As such, its work with refugee candidates is very much focused on the London area. There is no governmental support for refugee candidates to move elsewhere in search of employment.

There is an issue with local London engagement as this is often a requirement on construction projects, meaning that jobseekers benefit from being registered with local authority job brokerages as – if they have the right post code – they can potentially access local authority support and thus help in local employer achievement of targets around diversity and local procurement of services.

Action:

- Identify if Transitions candidates are also registered as looking for support in local authority job brokerages, e.g. Kings Cross Construction Skills Centre?
- Explore whether the offer to employers is minimised if Transitions can only offer a London-focused service. Are there other organisations with which Transitions can collaborate to extend this offer or should it become an aim to have a national remit over time?

Finance

Lack of money is a major barrier to candidates who are not able to afford fees for joining relevant membership bodies. Internships can be problematic in terms of those in receipt of benefits or if employers do not pay expenses/allowance for work undertaken.

Action:

- Decide to what extent Transitions should play a lobbying role to encourage such professional bodies to offer financial support to those unable to pay now, but that will bring benefit in the future? Could professional bodies “give something for nothing”, for example, free Associate membership using an allocated budget for fees for those unable to afford them?
- Signpost candidates to relevant funding/grant-making organisations for support;
- Engage more with bodies such as Business in the Community for the networking potential. (Transitions is a member of the Arc BITC Social Enterprise support programme and is making a presentation on Wed 2nd Oct to BITC)

Digital platforms

How can the refugee community be supported to access the relevant digital platforms? How can awareness be raised and issues in gaining Internet access be resolved? Are there opportunities for Transitions to collaborate with existing online platforms, e.g. We Connect Students and the Talent Retention Solution?

Online recruitment is problematic. Consultants will reject applications if there is a career gap or a perceived lack of relevant (UK) skills. Not being immediately ‘sifted out’ is a big issue. Access to a decision-maker helps here to make sure that refugees are not routinely deleted from the initial sift. Collaboration with HR, networking and knowing the decision-makers works better than candidates ‘cold calling’ and using online applications: “The system is not set up for refugee applicants”.

How can the Transitions website better showcase the opportunities individual candidates offer? Stronger promotion of existing successes with key employers such as National Grid and Crossrail would be beneficial. “Communication channels need to be improved between employers, candidates and Transitions”. LinkedIn offers a strong platform that could be utilised more by Transitions and by candidates.

Action:

- Exploration by Transitions of formal collaboration with sector-specific digital platforms and general websites relating to internships, for example, <http://weconnectstudents.com> and <https://talentretention.biz>;

It is also worth looking at the Engineering sector of the British Standards Society:

<http://www.bsigroup.co.uk/en-GB/industries-and-sectors/engineering/> and the Social Mobility Foundation: <http://www.socialmobility.org.uk>. Explore how Transitions can be cross-referenced/promoted via other platforms;

- Develop Transitions' LinkedIn presence by creating opportunities to raise the profile of candidates and to promote the work of Transitions through:
 - Creating an engineering-specific LinkedIn group and encouraging others to join,
 - Endorsing candidates and requesting endorsements of Transitions from (well connected) individuals and companies,
 - Regularly adding links to articles and useful material,
 - Linking to candidate profiles from the Transitions website,
 - Requesting that successful candidates put a 'supported by Transitions' statement on their LinkedIn profiles,
 - Following relevant organisations and requesting that those engaged with Transitions follow back,
 - Keeping material up-to-date and interesting to ensure group members/connections remain engaged,
 - Being aware of security issues around candidates when writing professional profiles;
- Use Twitter as a similar promotional vehicle as LinkedIn: Tweet often – but keep it relevant. Start discussions, engage individuals and organisations and use hash tags to widen the audience and focus the discussion. Follow other Twitter users back and reference the Transitions website in all social media. Use the (can be automated) Direct Message facility to engage with new followers;
- Undertake a review of the Transitions website to understand how it could be developed to improve candidate visibility. Could there be a facility for employers to post jobs via Transitions or for a searchable database of candidates?
- Explore the role Transitions can play in supporting candidates to access the Internet to meet job search needs (signpost to free resources?);
- Develop a means of supporting the education of recruitment consultants and HR departments to understand what being a refugee means, why there may be gaps in CVs and that such applications need closer examination. (A workshop has been developed for staff development but not yet widely promoted or delivered)

There is a role for Transitions to play in showing that there need to be “application mechanisms that highlight candidates are different, rather than non-compliant”. Actions that offer candidates wider opportunities to “showcase their skills” would be beneficial, as would provision of support to recruiters and employers to “think differently”. Focusing on the skills that make refugee candidates different, e.g. Experience of overseas engineering systems & international projects plus multilingual skills could help promote the wider opportunities they bring, both in the UK and overseas.

Notes from small group discussions

1. *Organisations: Would you say that Transitions' services to organisations relate more to CSR or to diversity management? Why?*

The general sense was that both issues were of relevance, but Transitions' services tended to be seen more as CSR than diversity, although with the potential to become more diversity-focused at a later stage. Businesses are bound by diversity legislation, but none exists to include refugees as a specific group. CSR is required to educate, promote and unlock barriers and Transitions plays a role to encourage the positive and active incorporation of refugees into employment.

Crossrail sees its engagement with Transitions as part of the CSR agenda. Within KPMG what might start as a CSR driver could later become part of the diversity agenda as the business benefits become clearer.

Carillion made the point that refugee candidates provide a great resource that is not recognised by the industry: It is worth changing the way a business operates on order to get candidates to fit, as refugee candidates can bring added value over non-refugee candidates and businesses need educating as to this.

Some candidates saw the role of Transitions as more focused around diversity management, with organisations taking the CSR and diversity management angle and embedding this across the whole organisation and every role.

2. *Organisations and candidates: Please provide examples of best practice initiatives to widen the diversity of professional talent pools (i.e. candidates above level 4):*

From an employer's perspective, National Grid commented on how there is a preference for working with a diverse range of partners to build up best practice and to increase opportunities for learning from partners.

The IET offers a women's engineering division and awards, with general award programmes for innovation, etc. KPMG aims to recruit talented individuals, from lower socio economic backgrounds, into KPMG through their school leaver programmes. The 6-year Audit school leaver programme supports individuals through their university degree and professional qualifications while paying them a salary and offering on the job work experience. One hundred and forty young people were taken on to this national programme in September 2013. KPMG's 11-month STARS work placement programme offers a paid, and high quality experience of the world of work, to 20 students each year in London.

Internships bring in new talent, enthusiasm and ideas for relatively low costs with huge potential for results. Refugee candidates are different to the regular graduate/experiences hire pool though the strengths they bring and benefits to the CSR/diversity angle.

Other examples given of best practice included: apprentices; work experience (people with disabilities); graduates, students/internships, experienced hires, working with diversity experts/partners in areas such as disability, ethnicity, gender, youth unemployment, charities, etc. Being open-minded and prepared to try new ventures is important.

3. *Candidates: Please describe how you have tried to find engineering work experience in the UK and what the result was.*

Comments were that: "The job centre wasn't helpful". Transitions was the only organisation offering support around work experience. Volunteer roles and part-time work were undertaken.

Bodies used included: agencies; websites; company websites; LinkedIn; Transitions; Job centres; direct approach to HR; professional bodies; careers fairs; universities; company careers events; national job fairs.

4. *Organisations: Do you recommend positive action and/or recruitment targets (for jobs and interns) focused on specific groups? (e.g. women, postal codes, young people, ex-military service). Why? Why not?*

Crossrail's response was to have overall targets to aim for, not internal targets, but larger project targets. This avoids "becoming so obsessed with the target that sight of the overall aim is lost" as "there are other ways of getting a diverse workforce". National Grid agreed that targets discourage and make it hard to maintain momentum and there is not enough clarification as to what makes a realistic target anyway. Using specialist diversity media in which to advertise is extremely expensive. Apprentices are recruited from a postal perimeter of emergency response time, as well as for CSR reasons.

There was a general sense that "people want to be treated the same, not differently" and "surely experience is the important issue here?", however there was also recognition that if organisations do not measure for diversity then they cannot understand their diversity performance and cannot therefore implement changes that could be supportive of minority groups. For this reason, employers said "tell us [about your background] so we can help you and better understand how we as employers are doing".

Targets can provide an initial focus, but become unsustainable over a longer period of time. It is more important to have recruitment measurement techniques in place than to have targets: "Targets should not be set for jobs because you risk the possibility of compromising the right people for the right roles".

Internships should be tied into CSR/diversity policies and these should operate as positive action as they "provide the opportunity/platform for future jobs". It is important to promote that your business is keen to recruit people from diverse backgrounds, so "use positive action in respect to attracting people, but not targets, although outcomes should be measured". Candidates "don't want to be treated differently, but treated fairly".

5. *Organisations and candidates: What would you say are the reasons (external and internal to organisations) that mature refugee engineers find it so difficult to access work experience in the UK? Should/how can that be addressed?*

The main issue appears to be prejudice/ignorance related to origins/refugee status. There is a lack of internal HR understanding at the application stage. Candidates need help with confidence and to better understand UK processes and requirements.

6. *Organisations: Do you have a strategy to attract and support refugee professionals? Why? Why not?*

"No, but it is being worked on". There is a role here for professional bodies to more actively assist refugee engineers and other refugee professionals to successfully build a professional profile with professional bodies and employers. A strategy could be developed with the support of the CSR teams.

Typically work experience is offered to young people with a history of being in the UK. Those without experience means more time and effort is required from the business. There is a history of taking people with connections to friends or family of the business. It is very important to have strong interns as "if it is a bad experience it can turn the business off".

7. Recommendations to overcome organisational barriers in sourcing refugee talent:

The main recommendations were: perseverance; patience; determination; collaboration and knowledge-sharing; provision of opportunities to promote and learn from best practice such as provided by the workshop; educating HR and the business; having positive successes. Transitions should focus on the skills that make the candidates different and highlight their wider offer, plus recognise the industry/role blockers that cause issues for the refugee community.

8. How can Transitions help address these barriers?

There is a role for Transition to play in supplying information and statistics, organising ongoing future events and facilitating the journey. Also, for Transitions to promote and recommend good quality candidates and to develop a searchable (skills against requirements) database.

Summary: Key issues and recommendations

Transitions offers a service that is recognised by those present to be of benefit by major employers such as (A-Z) Carillion, Crossrail, EDF Energy, Lend Lease and National Grid, as well as professional bodies that include the IET, IMechE and the Royal Academy of Engineering. Leveraging this support and engagement can bring great benefit to Transitions as it develops and improves its service to thus benefit refugee candidates, as well as the engineering sector.

Very little support is available to refugees seeking employment support in the UK and Transitions sits in a niche market, albeit one that is financially restricted with a low profile and minimal governmental support. Engineering candidates make up a large proportion of those Transitions aims to help and the sector has a recognised need for more professionals to join its ranks. Supporting candidates and employers to connect and to better understand the opportunities that are available is an important role for Transitions. By “facilitating the journey” Transitions can help employers find valuable staff and help refugee candidates to add value to employers.

The key issues highlighted at the workshop were the importance of communication, persistence, innovation and high-level networking to help Transitions achieve its goal of “enhancing corporate capabilities to manage and widen diversity in the pool of experienced hire and intern candidates and deliver measurable Corporate Social Responsibility outcomes”.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations for Transitions to consider (some of which it already implements) are as follows:

- **Coach candidates:** The more that candidates are able to demonstrate the positive aspects to their refugee status and the more confidence and up-to-date knowledge they have of the UK engineering sector, the stronger they will be when seeking employment/internships. Support with CVs should reflect this;
- **Choose candidates for internships well:** One success will shape and influence an organisation, therefore extreme care in Transitions putting forward the right candidate is vital;
- **Educate and inform others:** High levels of company awareness are needed as to the issues that are specific to refugee candidates (and the application process);
- **Collaborate and engage with industry:** Collaborate with existing initiatives and membership services to support the development of a sector-specific network of influencers, mentors and pro bono volunteering services;
- **Create an engineering advisory panel/patron group:** A group of senior level supporters, specific to engineering, would support Transitions to access up-to-date advice and guidance, pro bono, from individuals employed within the sector, potentially with funding opportunities too;
- **Create an alumni group:** This group of former candidates/others from the refugee community could form part of an advisory panel, be used to open doors, provide guidance and support: “research others who have made the journey before you, find them, phone them and take them for coffee. Ask them to connect you to the decision-maker in the organisation”;

- **Ensure that mentoring is available:** both to candidates seeking employment and those that are established to help ensure their success;
- **Use clients to access supply chains:** A personal introduction by a successful client (e.g. Crossrail) to a decision-maker in the supply chain will open more doors than the standard application process: It is the successful employer's perspective and the influence that tier one contractors/clients hold that will encourage others to sign up;
- **Creating internship vacancies is more realistic than using traditional routes:** What worked for Crossrail can be promoted and replicated elsewhere;
- **The system is not set up for refugee applicants:** Therefore, highlight the extra percentage of difference candidates bring to roles and use innovative ways to create vacancies without alienating (HR) supporters;
- **Network, network, network:** Especially at high levels where decision-makers can support Transitions;
- **Marketing:** Is Transitions making the most out of opportunities for self-promotion? Crossrail has "a first class employee because of Transitions" and Transitions provides a service that "offers employers a good untapped market". Shout this story from the rooftops;
- **Website:** Develop the Transitions website to promote individual candidates and to include a sector-specific search function for employers/collaborate with an existing website for this;
- **Benefit from social media:** Use LinkedIn and Twitter to raise the profile of Transitions, the refugee agenda, benefits to the engineering sector and to encourage others to engage;
- **Policy development:** It is likely that as awareness of the refugee and diversity agenda increases companies will start to write policies to reflect this. Transitions has an opportunity to lead the way in advising on best practice and supporting policy development.

Conclusion: The business case

There would certainly appear to be a business case for using Transitions' diversity/CSR recruitment-led services, primarily demonstrated by the universally agreed feedback from Crossrail about its successful recruitment of SA "We gained a first class employee because of Transitions"... "What shone through was the enthusiasm of the candidates"... "The refugee community offers a good untapped market".

Transitions provides access to "highly skilled individuals" and "fits well with the CSR agenda". Candidates were "qualified and eager, wanting to do a good job" and the internship did not only "provide potential recruitment opportunities", but also gave both parties the opportunity to "sound each other out" and decide if a long-term career was viable. SA, as the Crossrail intern, brought enough relevant experience that he was able to "do a real job" which was of benefit to Crossrail, especially in the area of research where he dedicated a great deal of (unpaid) time assisting colleagues.

The offer by Transitions to introduce experienced engineers to a sector in need of employees would appear to make tremendous business sense, both in terms of the cost savings (as opposed to using more traditional recruitment consultants, plus the lower costs associated with internships), but also the added value of the accompanying benefit to diversity and to CSR. Notwithstanding the less recognised value of experience gained elsewhere and applied to a new geographical location.

What is needed is for the engineering sector to more widely realise the benefit of this offer, to engage with and empower Transitions and to support Transitions and candidates to operate more effectively through sharing resources, knowledge and contacts. As before, "the system is not set up for refugee applicants" and employers "need to work to lift their internal barriers". There is an important and beneficial role that Transitions can play here that adds tremendous diversity and CSR value to the engineering sector, not least the cost savings afforded through its recruitment services.