

Transitions' Stakeholders' Seminar #19: Exploring assessment and equivalencing of qualifications and experience of refugee graduate engineers

Thurs 16 March 2017 2–5pm

Participants (A-Z)

HA, Employed Transitions candidate (Network Rail), Electrical Design Engineer
 OA, Transitions candidate, Civil Engineer
 David Clark, **Engineering Council** International Affairs Manager
 Lisa Collett, **UK NARIC**, Head of Global Division
 Olivia Frost, **Laing O'Rourke**, Strategic labour needs & Training Advisor

MGS, Transitions candidate, Mechanical Engineer
 FH, former Transitions candidate, telecoms engineer
 Sheila Heard, **Transitions** Managing Director
 Jon Hull, **Carillion** Head of Resourcing
 Vicky Johnson, **Transitions** Employment Advisor
 YK, Transitions candidate, architect

Introduction: Sheila Heard, Managing Director of Transitions

Slides available at <https://goo.gl/8cKS7Z>

- Sheila thanked Jon Hull and [Carillion](#) for their sponsorship of the seminar.
- Aim of seminar: Transitions' Stakeholder's Seminars take place approx. three times a year, and are a means of consulting key stakeholders (skilled refugees, employers, supporting organisations) on a range of topics related to Transitions' ultimate aim: increasing the numbers of skilled refugees hired by employers, whether through the Transitions agency or directly
- The unemployment rate for refugees remains far higher (approx. 70%) than for the general population.
- Key Transitions services which aim to contribute to an equitable labour market: social enterprise employment agency, positive action internships, advice & guidance for candidates, diversity & inclusion workshops for employers.
- One of the common barriers for skilled refugees is employers not understanding overseas qualifications and their comparability to the UK system, the theme of today's seminar.
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Presentation #1: HA, Employed ex-Transitions candidate, Electrical Design Engineer at Network Rail

Slides available at <https://goo.gl/OY7zF3>

Post-presentation discussion:

- HA joined The IET after obtaining Leave to Remain. He found out about The IET through his own online research into professional bodies for engineers. **Suggestion:** Engineering Council to publicise professional bodies to newly-arrived professional refugees. (How to do this? At the moment there is no statutory matching of people granted refugee status with relevant occupational information.)
- HA's tips for refugee professionals:
 - Don't prioritise a Masters degree over work. A Masters degree is not necessary in order to find relevant engineering work.
 - Find a professional careers advisor
 - Join a relevant professional body
 - Improve your CV

Presentation #2: David Clark, Engineering Council International Affairs Manager

Slides available at <https://goo.gl/R7F7aj>

Post-presentation discussion:

- Check to see if your degree is part of FEANI or a similar accord system: if it is this could help with professional registration (Turkey and Cyprus are part of accord systems, for example)

- If someone has not been able to bring any certificates with them from their home country it may be possible for them to be interviewed by their professional body

Presentation #3: Lisa Collett, UK NARIC, Head of Global Resourcing

Slides available at <https://goo.gl/EyVIRn>

Post-presentation discussion:

- NARIC's decisions regarding comparability of qualifications are not legally binding. They are informed guidance.
- Some overseas Bachelor degrees are assessed by NARIC as being comparable to a Diploma of Higher Education (lower than a UK Bachelor.) This does not necessarily prevent someone from being accepted on to a British Masters course; always check with the individual university.

Group discussions

Q1: Suggestions of how employers, professional bodies, NARIC, Jobcentre Plus, other government agencies and other organisations could make the qualifications, skills and experience of refugee professionals recognised more easily in the UK:

- Promotion of opportunities from the beginning. At the moment, when someone is given refugee status and leave to remain, they receive no information and/or guidance relevant to their profession.
- Need a joined-up, over-arching, high-level approach coming from govt, consulting NARIC, JCP and Engineering Council to develop guidelines and procedure, and an obligation for employers to follow a standardised process when assessing qualifications
- Reinstate statutory specialist employment support for refugees
- Jobcentre Plus need guidance and procedures around careers advice for refugees, or an in-house refugee specialist
- Issue around the attitude of some JCP advisors towards the potential of refugees: often highly-skilled professionals are being pushed towards cleaning and other similar low-skilled work
- How can JCP advisors assist refugees if they don't know the person is a refugee, and don't know where to signpost for specialist support? Need a systematic identification system and easy to access referral information.
- Education: for JCP advisors re . discrimination, and for refugees re. their rights.
- Employers: work placements make the most difference to skilled refugees in terms of restarting their careers. There is a skills shortage, possibly to be exacerbated by Brexit, and employers are increasingly conscious of the business case for a diverse workforce, so it makes sense to have work placements for skilled refugees as part of a company's talent attraction strategy.
- Awareness of NARIC is rising amongst skilled refugees – need employers to be more aware of it too (some employers say the number of applicants with overseas qualifications is too small to justify using NARIC.)

Q2: Please select one or two of the suggestions that your group discussed and compare them to skills assessment systems in other countries. Do you think they could work in the UK? Why? Why not?

- Engineering is a vast area, and every country is different. Degree course recognition can be easier between countries, but there isn't an automatic way of recognising it.
- Qualifications aren't necessarily the problem – might be discrimination, attitudes towards refugees
- Need to simplify information about professional bodies, and make it easier to access it
- Suggestion: engagement days/workshops between professional bodies, Transitions, employers, engineering projects in order to share with refugee engineers the qualifications and levels expected, next steps and job opportunities.
- Regarding a government-administered qualification checking system: Norway: qualification comparison is legally binding – new arrivals have qualifications checked while on Norwegian programme. Similar system in Netherlands. Both countries have more centralised social systems.
- Norway: the regulated professions are involved in providing work experience. Skilled refugees are matched to an area of the country in need of that profession. Could the UK replicate this?