

Minutes for Transitions Stakeholders' Advisory Network meeting #5
Theme: Transferring overseas qualifications and experience: Engineering

Date: Friday 29th June 2012 Time: 2.00 – 5.00

Venue: Stockwell Community Resource Centre, SW4 6RA

<http://www.stockwellcommunity.com/content/view/90/124/>

Present & Apologies: 19 colleagues present. 19 colleagues requested minutes.

NAME	(A-Z)	ORGANISATION/Role
Sanjay	Aggarwal	Managing Director TLM Search Recruitment Ltd
H	A	Mechanical Engineer, Transitions candidate
Dick	Bacon	Professional Development Manager, IET Engineering Professional Body
Bassam	Bashir	Mechanical Engineer, Transitions candidate (Speaker)
Karen	Bayless	Senior Manager of the Membership and Professional Development department at IMechE
Saffa	Gabber	Civil Engineer, Transitions candidate
Iyob	Ghebrekristos	Electrical Engineer, Transitions client
Sharon	Goymer	National Grid Graduate Resourcing Manager
F	H	Telecommunications Engineer, Transitions candidate
Sheila	Heard	Transitions Managing Director
Paul	Horton	CIWEM Professional Body, Director of Membership and International Affairs
Indira	Kartallozi	CARIS Haringey Senior Adviser
Hayatullah	Khan	Civil Engineer, Transitions candidate
Katherine	Latta	UK NARIC, Head of European Programmes (Speaker)
Beryl	Randall	Director, Employability Forum
Andrea	Rannard	Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Volunteer Engagement Manager
Jeanita	Snowden (or Richard Breedt)	Cardinal Hume Centre, Adviser
Mudher	Takhialdeen	Electrical Engineer, Transitions candidate
Rosemary	Ward	Metropolitan Housing

Apologies (A-Z)

Khalil	Ayub	Campus Futures Graduate Recruitment, Managing Director
Ian	Basset	Deputy Director, NARIC (Speaker)
Andrew	Braye	Finance Manager, British Red Cross
Justin	Brett	Transitions Director/ Circle Housing Employment Adviser
Yvette	Giles	HR Officer, ODI
Andy	Gregg	Refugee services consultant
Biniam	Haddish	Electrical/Electronics Engineer, working for national grid. Recruited via Transitions
Mulugeta	Hagos	Sanitation Engineer/Water Chemist, Transitions client
Arash	Hesami	ICT Engineer, Transitions candidate
Heather	Knight	Kingston Refugee Action
Alastair	Lomas	CARA UK Programme Assistant
Shelley	Partridge	RAGU
Gill	Price	International Programmes Director, RedR
Veerinder	Puri	HR Director, ODI
Alex	Robertson	Crossrail Job Brokerage Consultant
Ben	Rosen	CES Inspiring Interns
Louise	Salmon	Refugee Health Professionals programme manager, RAGU, London Metropolitan University
Isar	Sarajudding	Transitions steering group member, political scientist, Transitions candidate
Katy	Turff	Head of International, Engineering Council
Sara	Wickert	Migrants Resource Centre, External Projects Co-ordinator

1) Welcome and introductions.

Short powerpoint presentation by Transitions on objectives/structure/outcomes to date of Transitions and the Stakeholders' Advisory Network. Highlighting small numbers of refugees in UK and that Refugee Status dates back to the 1951 UN Convention on refugees, has saved millions of lives and no country has ever withdrawn from it.

The key question for the meeting was: What are connections between the systems of assessing overseas qualifications and experience and the extremely high unemployment rates in the UK of experienced graduate engineers with refugee background? Many engineering employers are experiencing staff shortages while engineers in this group remain unemployed.

2) Presentations by

Mechanical Engineer from Iraq, Bassam Bashir.

13 years' Graduate experience in major companies in Iraq as an engineer. Specialism in air conditioning.

- NARIC opinion of Degree: Diploma of Higher Education
- 3 years with no Home Office decision, during which time not allowed to work
- 2011 given permission to work
- Employers appear to see him as either over- experienced for posts or under-qualified
- UK Work experience would assist employers to understand and value his profile more
- Not yet member of IET; unsure if he would be rejected for above reasons.

Questions/Comments

Discussion around whether it was more/less difficult to find employment with refugee status than overseas students or other graduates. Refugees do not require a visa. They experience a wide range of other difficulties, most of which are founded on avoidable mutual miscommunications between employers, professional bodies and other stakeholders. Refugees often highly uninformed on how the system works in the UK graduate jobs market. Employers & professional bodies often highly uninformed on the difficulties described by the speaker.

Refugee Health professionals who have been forced out of their countries by persecution have a more obvious 'pathway' to assessment and employment than other professionals who have also been persecuted. Engineers very exposed to an open market that they are not familiar with. Not competing on a level playing field.

Suggestion that refugee engineers should go to their Professional Body local branch meetings more and ensure that employers/colleagues know they are there and looking for job opportunities to apply for. Meetings are advertised on the professional body websites and may be free.

Discussion around attitude /conflict of interest for recruitment companies, whose main aim is financial and would rarely put a refugee engineer forward over a more competitive 'mainstream' candidate. Refugee engineers with no UK experience are very rarely selected for interview.

This is common for applicants who apply directly to employers as well.

Mainstream misinformation that refugees do not have permission to work - which is wrong.

Some asylum seekers also have permission to work.

UK NARIC, Katherine Latta, Head of European Programmes (kindly standing in for Ian Bassett, Deputy Director who was ill).

- UK Naric licensed to provide an informed opinion to range of stakeholders, including Universities, employers, professional bodies and individuals
- Around 10 staff carry out assessments
- Recognised institutions in each country
- Many factors involved in the evaluation, including entry requirements, duration, content, structure, date of qualification, learning outcomes, teaching/learning methodology, like-for-likeness of modules, grading schemes, quality assurance
- The assessment is an average and is not about individual institutions
- For assessment, original documents in the original language are required

Most UK colleges and careers services have UK Naric subscriptions and can offer free information from the UK Naric database to their students/enquirers.

Questions/Comments

Discussion about the criteria used by UK Naric and request for the criteria to be made available.

Discussion about the UK Naric opinion being a powerful opinion and sometimes not clear that it is an opinion that is optional for institutions to use or not.

For refugee teachers, engineers and other professionals can be a great source of problems when looking for work or further study – without an assessment of experiential learning to balance any low UK Naric opinion.

Question about whether UK Naric takes into consideration published work by experienced professionals/ academics. That should be at least made clear on CV and application forms.

Payment – opinion available free from careers services who have a UK naric subscription.

Discussion that UK Naric's view is only one part of someone's profile that they present to employers and professional bodies and Colleges. Employers are not assessing applicants against Chartered Status. They are assessing against Job Descriptions/Person Specifications. The key is mutual communication. Also to clearly present added value that an experienced professional from overseas presents to a UK employer.

3) Small group notes: (4 groups) Questions:

What are the main issues keeping employers and professionals who are refugees apart? What are some reasons for those issues existing? What can be done?

Key written points recorded by small groups:

- **Rights** Many employers and particularly recruitment agencies are under-informed about the legal and skills status of refugees in the jobs market. Many believe that refugees may not work or require complicated visa applications, which is not the case. Refugees do not require a visa and already have a national insurance number.
- **Assessment systems** Many organisations have systems for assessing overseas qualifications or experience that disadvantage experienced overseas professionals who are forced to come to the UK, with no professional contacts. This especially affects mid-career professionals, who have not yet had the opportunity to gain UK experience. This eventually drives them out of the market.
- **Presentation** Many refugee candidates do not effectively present their overseas qualifications and experience to UK organisations in ways that those organisations can easily access. Most refugee professionals are not familiar with UK employer/assessment expectations to present information in terms of competencies, especially soft competencies, and are more used to presenting qualifications and length of service.
- **Pathways** There are no clear pathways for experienced overseas professionals to re-start work in the UK. Many experienced professionals re-qualify and still face unemployment. They miscommunicate with their professional body and are usually not selected for jobs, as either being non-UK experienced or over/under skilled.
- **Market Awareness** Most employers are unaware that this is happening and that there is a pool of refugee professional applicants being turned away by most employers. They believe that inviting all applicants to apply is adequate in terms of finding staff fairly. Virtually no employers include refugees in equalities systems developed to ensure that they fairly enable people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups to compete for jobs, such as the double tick system or work experience programmes. Refugees are not seen as facing specific barriers. Refugee applications are rarely monitored.
- **Catch 22 situation** of often having a career gap because of having to flee from overseas. Gap makes finding a job more difficult and increases the gap...
- **Government services** The Coalition Government has closed all statutory employment services for refugees in the UK, including those in Jobcentre Plus. Refugees are not protected under the Equalities Act 2010 and they are required to negotiate the jobs market without statutory help and are mainstream customers of Jobcentre Plus, with no specific assistance. 7 out of 10 are unemployed. Regardless of skill level.
- **Government services** Pressure from Jobcentree Plus to intensively jobsearch to find any skill level jobs, where they are mostly seen as over-qualified and under-experienced and rarely selected. Highly

distressing and stressful. Jobcentre Plus colleagues often continue to be confused about the right to volunteer of jobcentre plus customers.

- **Financial barriers** of applying for UK Naric opinion and Professional Body services.
- **Work experience** hugely assists employers to recognise skills and assists refugees to compete in the jobs market.
- **Mutual adaptation/enhancing diversity** Some issues are mutual cross- cultural assumptions and miscommunications. Work experience greatly assists with both demonstrating technical skills and cross-cultural /diversity adaptation of candidates and employers. (Note from Transitions: Most Transitions' work experience placements result in employment.)
- **Recession**

Written actions recommended by small groups

- **Rights** Organisations can ensure staff are informed of refugee employment rights. Organisations can state that they welcome the applications of refugees.
- **Assessment systems & Pathways** Adopting enhanced/alternative methods for demonstrating and verifying overseas qualifications and experience that link UK Naric and Professional Bodies and employers more effectively/easily. NB Mid career professionals. **UK Work experience** key to this.
- **Collaboration** Employers and Professional bodies to consider liaising with refugee supporting organisations such as Transitions to assist in this process, for mutual benefit. Collaborative publicity campaign to allow the labour market to access the skills of refugee professionals.
- **Information** Organisations to consider offering information and advice workshops to groups of refugee professionals
- **Government services to the jobs market** Collaborative lobbying for Coalition to reinstate some statutory employment services for refugees on behalf of employers and other labour market organisations.

Round discussion

Work experience a highly effective way of addressing/enhancing diversity management skills in organisations/recruiting from this group without shortcutting rigorous competitive recruitment systems. Work experience candidates apply for advertised jobs and can compete more effectively in that open market.

Need for flexibility by all.

Government refugee policy appears to be targeted at reducing asylum applicants by making the experience extremely difficult. This causes great difficulties for those who are given refugee status and trying to rebuild their careers and lives.

Professional bodies have range of essential services to assist, many are free online: jobs boards, sector information, advice, route to Chartered status. Most refugees currently reluctant to engage and doubtful of success.

Many refugees have limited access to computers and finance.