

Transitions Stakeholders Seminar #21

Professional bodies & refugee engineers/architects/planners: Supporting mutual engagement

Welcome

Presentations by Transitions and 2 candidates. Please see slides.

Key points:

Refugee Civil Engineer (OM)

- Timeline: Took almost 3 years to gradually find organisations to help, including Transitions and Cardinal Hume Centre, then employers, via Transitions.
- In the meantime, had to work in retail, pressure from Jobcentre to do so. No Engineering career support from Jobcentre.
- Had no network, a career gap, English language challenge, lack of self-confidence

His mentor via Transitions, Sakthy Selvakumaran:

- Provided information and support
- Used own network to get a 4 week voluntary placement and 10 week paid placement for O.
- That greatly increased O's confidence and gave him a reference

His current Development Programme line manager, at Network Rail, Tom Wadsworth

- Working closely with OM
- O's Civil Engineering technical skills are strong and at the level needed for the role
- Enjoying working with O

Refugee Architect (RA):

- Registered with Transitions only one month ago
- Showcased extensive Architectural experience in Syria using visual images
- In UK, assisting partner with Architectural Design
- Next steps: more information, advice and guidance on professional development options in the UK including steps towards finding more experience and processes to gain Chartership.

Transitions – Vicky Johnson, Employment Advisor

Please see slides.

Notes from Questions/Answers during the event

Question: Why haven't you applied for Chartered Engineering Registration?

Answer: I don't have a Masters. I also mentioned earlier that the system is really confusing and I didn't know how to express my overseas transferable skills and experience to the professional body. Without recent UK experience and without access to my previous overseas employer and technical records it's not really possible.

Question: What is the Network Rail Development Programme?

Answer: It's essentially a Returners Scheme, aimed at engineers who are seeking to return to their professions.

Notes from Group discussions

Candidates:

What did you know about professional bodies when you arrived in the UK?
How did you find out about them?

It was confusing as the system is very different from (Syria). I asked around when I came to the UK. Was told it was very difficult to join RIBA. I wasn't aware of CIAT until last month (when I registered with Transitions). I was going to open days at University (I've done a Masters in the UK) but that was expensive and time-consuming and not very useful.

Through Women into Construction.

Through Cardinal Hume Centre

Through Refugee Council

Through UK University

It took me 2 years to find my way to become a Graduate ICE member - many refugee settlement problems to address at the same time.

I didn't know any. Transitions told me about several. Transitions helped me to register with ICE. (Another candidate - Cardinal Hume helped me, including paying for the Graduate Membership fee).

Nothing. Transitions gave me information. Too confusing online, when I had no prior knowledge of the UK system for anything.

What was your experience of joining your professional body? Was it easy?
Were there any challenges?

I studied at Brighton University. I'm an Affiliate member of RIBA (no title/affix). Most professional bodies require 2 years' experience (as part of the Registration period) but – chicken & egg – it's difficult to get that experience (Transitions has sourced a 6 month internship at the LLDC Olympics Corporation). CIAT is a good option for me to explore as well.

It was really confusing - the website is not clear, if you aren't already familiar with the maze of information.

Definitions of membership levels and processes are really confusing.

The application process was really confusing.

Student membership was automatic at University. I didn't realise I could make much use of it though.

Transitions assisted me to understand the processes and services.

The financial challenge was a real problem. (need to apply to charities to help).

If you are a member of a professional body how have you used your membership? Has it made a difference to your career? If so, how how?

I have got involved with RIBA South Coast/London group – but it's hard to get help/advice from members – they work fulltime (and I don't want them to know that I am a refugee). There is no formal mentoring scheme

I've been to events and used the mentoring scheme.

I've been to some events – though they weren't directly related to finding a job.

This process really requires a mentor – it's a confusing process and we lack self-confidence and contacts/support to go to events and interact. Can mentors from industry be found?

Professional bodies:

What do you offer? What is the advantage of joining for a refugee professional?

Networking is the main one – best way to get a job. However, if you can obtain Professional Membership/Registration at some level, that's a massive bonus for jobsearch. Many UK jobs are not advertised but filled through networks. Networking helps to showcase personal strengths/experience and get a foot in the door

Professional bodies can be confusing from the outside - there are so many of them, with different services and sometimes competing with each other.

Events for networking. A library (for members), CPD seminars/lectures, place to work/study. We offer equivalencing of overseas Degrees (Naric?)

It's good to be Chartered as employers want as many Chartered staff as possible. Eng Technician is also good and Incorporated Eng.

Financial help - if you are a Member.

Career advice - if you are a Member

Legal Advice – if you are a Member

Is there anything your organisation is doing to engage with refugee professionals specifically?

Nothing specific no.

Not specifically – could do a lot more. However, we're here at this seminar ! -and willing to do more, now it's on the radar.

We offer a reduced rate for people on low incomes. Requires a letter of proof. Otherwise nothing else apart from access for members to local members/networking.

Is your organisation involved with any programmes for 'returner' engineers or architects?

Not right now.

Only things like networking events

Some individual companies have Returner Programmes

We do some work with Returners.

Employers

Does being a member of a professional body make a difference to an applicant's chances of success when applying for a job with your company?

I heard from Laing O'Rourke that Membership would improve my chances.
Definitely.

How are your employees supported in relation to professional bodies?

My employer paid my subscription fees
My employer paid for some training but not subscriptions
My employer paid for both

Do you know if your organisation employees any engineers or architects from a refugee background?

I know of one Eritrean employee - who has been in the UK since they were a teenager.

All

What ideas do you have to make it easier for refugees to find out about their professional body, and for professional bodies to find out about refugees?

- A national approach
- JobCentre can put information about professional bodies on their website (DWP page on www.gov.uk)
- Central Government (Home Office) information page (www.gov.uk)
- Ministry of Housing engagement
- Government can collect and share professional profile information about individuals refugees with appropriate organisations to speed up relevant employment and reduce skills wastage.
- Professional bodies can actively support refugees by liaising with JobCentre and Home Office – early involvement
- Professional bodies to have easily identifiable staff members as the key point of contact around refugee inclusion. Eg One main contact and/or regional contact point
- Professional body websites having more easily visible sections/videos welcoming and supporting marginalised Professionals who are seeking to return to work/start professions.
- Drop-in evenings for refugees at Professional Body offices
- Local Authorities can actively engage in professional registration support
- Community sponsors
- Refugee Council – co-ordinating information/easy access
- Information packs
- Posters
- Videos
- Use of LinkedIn for information access/sharing
- Staff training and information for Professional Bodies. Eg Round-table events.
- CIAT have an online 'Match me a Mentor' scheme (eligibility?)
- Focussed workshops from Professional Bodies for refugees
- Information before coming to the UK
- Create links with Transitions
- Apprenticeships specifically aimed at refugees
- Money to bring in professionally qualified advisers and industry experts from engineering and architecture.
- Going back to University increases the chance of hearing about Professional bodies by refugees

Online information for/about accessing/supporting refugees is currently very bad. Eg Total jobs is used by many refugees but rarely gets results.

What could be done to speed up the process of refugee professionals finding relevant employment?

- Mentoring
- Career advice - CV support
- UK structured, paid, work experience/internships
- Orientation in local business culture and business English
- Go straight to employers
- Don't focus on jobsboards – unlikely to succeed that way
- Awareness in industry of the blockages between them and refugee professionals
- Produce videos