



**Transitions**

Accessing the skills of  
refugee professionals

## Notes taken during small group discussions: Seminar on Talent Commissioning for Inclusion: Engineering, Architecture and Business Services

*Seminar Objective: To share good practice and challenges related to talent services commissioning to attract diverse talent and fill skills gaps. Particular reference today to refugee engineers, architects and business services professionals.*

### **Small group discussions**

#### **Objectives of small group discussions:**

- To assist participants to reflect on what they've heard
- To assist employers to think about how to keep their talent pipelines inclusive
- To learn from each other in the small group
- To give useful feedback and ideas for Transitions.

**A Transitions candidate can host/facilitate each group:** the Transitions candidate hosting the group talks at the start about what they're doing now, challenges/successes in UK jobsearch/experience of Transitions Returner Programme/other employment support services they found.

**Suggested aspects to include in discussion:** Return on investment, Returner programmes, advice and guidance for refugee returners, Equality Act 2010 Protected Characteristics, skills gaps, hiring manager comfort zones, staff training and development, supporting staff during returner placement, business case,

## Organisations:

- **How does your organisation approach inclusiveness in the talent pipeline, especially in a wider supply chain?**
- **What are the challenges?**
- **What are the benefits?**
- **How can the pipeline be improved, in terms of diversity and inclusion?**
- **How are/can staff be supported, especially if they are hosting a placement?**

### Notes shared by all groups:

- Recruitment processes are complex
- Refugee marginalisation in the jobs market is not a well-known topic
- Refugees have to compete in the market along with 'mainstream' candidates who are seen as much more competitive. How to level the playing field so employers can select more talent (ie there are talent shortages) from a broader pool?
- Common misperception that refugee visa is complex. In fact it is very easy to check a refugee visa on the [Employer Checking Service](#).
- Supply chains involve many contractors - difficult to manage diversity and inclusion good practice without targets.
- Events such as today start conversations that can improve practices
- Price/cost almost always wins. Therefore a clear inhouse business case is necessary for attracting diverse talent.
- HR and recruitment processes haven't caught up with the changes in the landscape, such as increased diversity in the talent pool eg Telephone and video interviews disadvantage many BAME candidates.
- Employers are trying to address large numbers of applications. But in trying to do so, some groups/individuals are marginalised by those number-crunching processes and potential good hires are lost.
- UK Engineering hiring language can be confusing to Engineers arriving from overseas. There is often unnecessary jargon.
- Many diversity approaches are short term project based and not ongoing. Eg 1 year project to engage with more women returners

### Suggestions:

- **Invest in increasing the diversity of selection methods** so that the talent pool is larger. Eg
  - Run all levels of apprenticeships (1-7)
  - Returner Placements
  - School placements
  - as well as the usual Graduate schemes and experienced hire system
  - avoid asking marginalised talent to do telephone or video interviews

- or have 3-5 years continuous employment history or have only UK qualifications (or from specific UK Universities)
  - train staff in how to assess overseas Qualifications
  - Blind assessment of applications is becoming a mainstream activity. It helps.
  - Mention on websites that refugee applications will be fairly and inclusively assessed. Include 'refugee status' on application ID dropdown menus
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- **Universities such as University of Birmingham can help to evidence issues and solutions.**
  - **Jobcentre and Home Office could be lobbied more to provide employers with information about refugee permission to work and to identify refugee and other jobseekers with the skills that employers need.**
  - **Some supply chain procurement contracts (eg HS2) put a targeted requirement on the whole supply chain to demonstrate specific inclusion achievements.** Such as work placements for BAME graduates, Returners, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. This pushes diversity forward and is recommended.
  - Such reporting requirements can be challenging but become easier as they are repeated.
  - **Give hiring managers financial incentives to achieve diversity targets**
  - **Internal diversity and inclusion networks** can drive forward the corporate approach to diverse hiring
  - **Audits** can push diversity strategic planning forward.
  - Ongoing good processes and reviews are key – including **staff development and reward.**
  - **Train recruiters in assessing diverse ranges of experience and monitor their decision-making.**
  - More focus on **diversity at higher skills levels** as well as an entry level 3 (eg Level 5/6/7 Apprenticeships for Returners with career gaps)
  - Many organisations' recruitment practices need to be reviewed and relate more closely to the diversity of applicants. For example, how inclusive are online processes? (eg Are overseas skills and experiences and refugee work entitlements fairly identified and assessed?)
  - **Professional and Cultural orientation:** through structured work placements and through **1-1 corporate volunteer coaching/mentoring.** Transitions provides both.
  - **Long-term embedded diversity initiatives** rather than short-term
  - **Co-ordination of refugee sector** to clarify to employers what services exist
  - **More services** by more organisations like Transitions
  - Free services (ie funded) like Transitions, for employers
  - Engineering and Business Jargon can make job applications a challenge for Engineers from overseas. **Jargon can be reduced and Engineers can ensure they familiarise themselves with local jargon.**

## Refugee professionals

- **What kind of challenges did/do you face when applying in the UK to employers?**
- **What suggestions do you have for employers?**
- **How do you feel you could adjust your approach?**

### Notes shared by all groups:

- Not working in your field can create a serious gap in knowledge if the gap grows longer than 1-2 years.
- Many candidates contacted frequently by recruiters for telephone interviews. But rarely hired; lack of strong-enough local UK examples to refer to, lack of self-confidence without a strong UK profile, cross-cultural communication common, recruiters often struggle to assess overseas profile.
- Need for local professional experience is key to finding a long term job. Even with UK University qualifications on top of overseas qualifications.
- Structured skills assessment and effective jobsearch support needed by refugee professionals jobseekers including during Returner Placements
- Many are unaware of how best to engage with professional bodies or how to express their technical skills effectively on UK application forms and in interviews.
- Cultural differences often interpreted as a 'not good fit'.
- Many refugees face severe financial pressures: lack of personal savings, old laptop, lack of internet access, often using a phone to apply for most jobs.

### Suggestions:

- A website providing lists of all organisations that support refugee jobseekers, including employers that have specific projects
- Support from Jobcentre Plus or the Home Office to find a job
- Professional development assistance from Professional bodies while jobseeking
- Professional profiling and CV development support is very important
- For cultural and professional orientation:
  - Returner Work placements
  - Peer coaching (Transitions provide both those services)
  - or volunteering with charities for communication skills orientation