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BIRMINGHAM

Centre for Urban and Regional Studies,

Employability pathways: an integrated approach to recognising the skills and experiences of new migrants

November 2007

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Dr Lisa Goodson, Deborah Hennessy and
Dr Ergül Ergün, with Ricky Joseph and Pat Jones**

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Glossary of Terms

APEL	Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
AWM	Advantage West Midlands
BA	Business Administration
BCC	Birmingham City Council
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BNCN	Birmingham New Community Network
CEA	Construction Employment Alliance
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
CSWP	Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership
CURS	Centre for Urban and Regional Studies
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DFES	Department for Education and Skills
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EF	Employability Forum
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
FAFO	FAFO Institute for International Studies
FE	Further Education
GM	General Maintenance
Hact	Housing Associations Charitable Trust
HE	Higher Education
HND	Higher National Diploma
IAG	Information Advice and Guidance
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
JSA	Job Seeker's Allowance
LEA	Learning into Employment Academy
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NARIC	National Recognition Information Service
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NHS	National Health Service
NMC	Nursing and Midwifery Council
NRF	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OCN	Open College Network
OSAT	On Site Skills and Qualification Tests
PLAB	Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board
RCO	Refugee Community Organisation
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UCE	University of Central England
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
WE	Work Experience

Executive Summary

Chapter 1: The need for a new approach to refugee skills recognition

Studies undertaken by CURS and NIACE for the Learning and Skills Councils for the West Midlands region (Phillimore *et al* 2003; 2004; 2005) mapped, amongst other things, the educational attainment and employment needs of asylum seekers and refugees and identified extremely high levels of unemployment and underemployment within the refugee population.

Though around half had been employed in skilled or professional work in their countries of origin, for a number of reasons, their skills, qualifications and experience were not being recognised in the UK. Limited initiatives enable some professionals to practice in the UK but, for most, time constraints, current assessment practices by colleges and employers and the eligibility criteria for Jobseekers Allowance, thwarts their attempts resulting in a low pay/no pay cycle.

In 2004, CURS became a partner in the Progress GB EQUAL Development Partnership. For their part, CURS identified skills gaps in areas where intermediate skills were required and decided to create several integrated packages, known as an *Employability Pathways* to help refugees into education, training or employment. These were to be piloted in the West Midlands with the intention of rolling them out to other groups.

This report details what was undertaken in each of the pilot activities, the main barriers to success, key learning points and recommendations for the future.

Chapter 2: The initiatives

A number of pilots were developed in five different vocational areas: construction, general maintenance, social research, business administration and health care. Because of the demand by refugees and funding opportunities, the construction and general maintenance pilots were run twice. The lack of a national system of accrediting prior and experiential learning and the costs and time involved in developing a new system meant that it was not possible to develop a generic approach to skills recognition. Instead several different approaches to recognising refugees' skills were developed, depending on the vocational area.

Coventry Construction

The Coventry Construction pathway was piloted by a steering group comprising the LSC, the Head of Construction at City College Coventry, a housing association, CURS and the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Education, Training and Employment Co-ordinator, based at the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership Ltd. They recruited a Refugee Construction Skills Co-ordinator funded by the LSC and EQUAL.

Potential trainees were identified from a skills audit. The programme consisted of three main elements: vocational ESOL; construction, health and safety; and construction skills training in bricklaying, painting and decorating. Because it was possible to fund two cohorts, the structure of the course was modified for the second cohort and applicants were required to demonstrate their practical skills prior to

admission. Initially the course was delivered one day a week at City College Coventry for 14 weeks. As other needs were identified, trainees were offered further training. In the case of the second cohort, the course lasted 18 weeks to incorporate further training within the existing programme and deliver the entire course at City College. The steering group concentrated on locating work experience placements. Assessment was based upon practical outputs and at the end of the course trainees sat their CSCS test. All students were issued with a basic skills in construction handbook, and a scheme of work for ESOL, safety equipment, a dictionary and travel expenses where required.

The development of the Birmingham General Maintenance Pathway

The first Birmingham pilot was a partnership between South Birmingham Construction Employment Alliance (CEA), who were match funders, CURS and Q1tum, a training provider. They identified the need for a package covering:

- ESOL training for construction, to be delivered by GB Training
- Job orientation and job match, CEA
- Practical construction skills, Training4skills
- CSCS coaching, Q1tum
- Mentoring support, supplied by CURS.

Trellis, an employment initiative for refugees, used their database and that of CEA to identify potential trainees, who were invited to attend an initial briefing at CEA. The structure of the programme was as follows:

- 2 weeks ESOL for construction (16 hours per week)
- 2 weeks full time general maintenance intensive training in plastering, tiling, soft plumbing, painting and decorating, carpentry and joinery
- 1 week ESOL for construction (16 hours)
- 2 days CSCS coaching, revision and mock interview
- 6 days additional ESOL and CSCS coaching identified toward the end of the coaching and held over a 3 week period
- Job match, which initially took place during the 6 additional days.

In 2007 Birmingham City Council secured funding to re-run the pathway. Though the structure remained roughly the same, there was some change in partners and roles:

- Trellis and the TUC Centre for the Unemployed were responsible for recruitment
- The Learning into Employment Academy were responsible for ESOL and job orientation
- Q1tum were to deliver the construction skills and CSCS coaching
- Birmingham City Council was the major funder and co-ordinator
- CURS provided the mentors and mentor training.

Two groups of students were enrolled in this cohort; the first was skilled and the second unskilled. As with the Coventry pilot, all trainees were issued with safety clothes and given travel expenses, necessary since with both cohorts, as the training took place at different sites.

University of Birmingham Social Research

CURS developed three modules for research skills training, accredited by the Open College Network. These were used to train refugees from the Birmingham New Communities Network and from the hact Accommodate project. Trainees learned to develop interviewing techniques, interview guides relevant to the interests of their organisations and to conduct peer research. Additionally, they were trained to analyse their findings and put them in the form of a report. The skills, qualifications and evidence they gained, were not only put to use in lobbying and informing policy, but could be put on their CVs in the form of work experience, paid employment and academic/employer references.

The training took place at the University with each module involving sixteen hours teaching. Students were equipped with tape recorders and tapes to go and arrange and conduct interviews with people from their own communities. Their progress was monitored and encouraged by mentors from CURS.

The development of Business Administration APEL

After a number of consultations with training providers, City College (East Birmingham), agreed to pilot a programme whereby trainees with past experience and a good level of English could demonstrate their skills and experience in a structured work place environment.

The first two weeks training would consist of IAG and Initial Assessment. Suitable work placement organisations were also identified. On placement such tasks as reception duties, word processing, working office machinery and team working would be undertaken. Over the estimated 32 weeks in the placement the tutor could:

- Match observed skills to the NVQ requirements and assess what kind of top-up might be necessary and assess its feasibility
- Estimate the time required to achieve this and what kinds of evidence could be used to build a successful portfolio for an NVQ 2
- Understand what difficulties were involved in the trainee achieving the NVQ and build a picture of an alternative structure compatible with the NVQ framework

The development of a pre-adaptation course for Refugee Healthcare Professionals

The Faculty of Health, University of Central England, developed a programme based on the one delivered by Praxis in London, initially in partnership with the local Strategic Health Authority, the West Midlands Refugee Health Professionals Project, Bournville College of Further Education and the Royal College of Nursing. A number of obstacles hindered the commencement of a course, not least a lack of funding but eventually, with EQUAL funding and a partnership with CURS, the programme commenced.

Students were required to have the equivalent of 5.5 in the International English Language Testing System and some kind of evidence of qualification in the medical field from their country of origin. The purpose of the course was to prepare refugees for further training, or employment of some kind, in the health sector and to that end 12 weeks (120 hours) were given to:

- Providing knowledge and skills for undergraduate study
- Orientation in the UK Health Service
- Professionally orientated English language
- Discussing and developing key skills such as team working and interpersonal skills.

Essentially, this translated into three modules:

- Introduction to the Health Service (12 credits at level 4)
- Introduction to Higher Education (12 credits at level 4)
- English language development.

Continuous and ongoing employment advice and guidance was given by a dedicated worker within the UCE Careers Service.

Chapter 3: Learning from the pathways

Methodology of evaluations

CURS evaluated all of the pathways. We endeavoured to interview trainees face-to-face within the first two weeks of the start of the course. Exit interviews were conducted in the same manner and where feasible, telephone interviews were carried out three to six months after leaving the course. Tutors, trainers, supervisors, co-ordinators and steering group members were also interviewed at the end of the courses and were given feedback from the students/ trainees' comments about the course, their aspirations and expectations.

Registration forms enabled CURS to draw detailed socio- demographic profiles of participants in terms of employment history, age, gender, country of origin and refugee status.

Learning points

Factors identified as hindering the advancement of an individual are:

- Trainee's lack of confidence
- Lack of resources to pay for travel and equipment
- Language competency for some students
- Lack of cultural knowledge
- Student's consistency in attendance and timekeeping
- Accommodation problems.

The following were seen as positively contributing to an individual's progress:

- Identifying and dealing with an individual's welfare needs
- The allocation of a buddy, mentor or co-ordinator to deal with welfare, pastoral and academic concerns
- After course support to help to move on.

Overall, the following were identified as playing a significant role in the success of the pathways:

- An integrated package, which in itself is innovative, combining several elements, but drawing on existing courses, preferably all delivered in one location
- Flexibility. Regular meetings and continual assessment to adjust the programme or approach when required
- Team working. Where partnerships are involved it is crucial that problems are discussed and acted upon in a constructive manner
- Support for students increased the individual's chances of succeeding and increasing retention rates
- Realistic information, advice and guidance with regard to careers and work prospects
- Work experience
- Language and the provision of specialised support
- Engagement with employers.

Most trainees hoped they would gain a work experience placement, paid work or a place in education or training. However many recognised such things as their increased self-confidence, greater understanding of the job market and their sector as gains in themselves.

The outcomes for completers at September 2007 is shown in Table 3.7. Some 16 people (13%) gained permanent employment in a relevant skilled job as a result of the course. A further 38 (31%) also gained permanent employment as a result of the training but the employment although perhaps skilled, was not directly related to their area of expertise. Four people (3%) became self-employed in their area of expertise. Some 15 people (12%) went on to higher-level training in their areas of expertise. This training included a post-graduate degree, undergraduate degrees, HNDs and NVQs. Five (4%) individuals were waiting to re-sit their CSCS tests. Three people (2%) continued on their work experience programme and a further four were either heavily pregnant or had recently given birth and were planning to seek employment at a later stage. Eleven students (9%) were unemployed and no information was available for 27 (22%) individuals. Finally one individual had decided to retire, one was long term sick and a further individual had received funding to set up his own project as a result of his training.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

The key findings from piloting the pathways are that:

- To gain the trust of refugees and persuade them to take ownership of initiatives, personal contact is crucial and objectives must be realistic and clearly communicated
- An integrated approach to developing employability makes the course attractive and commitment to the course is strengthened by providing opportunities to meet employers
- There needs to be a proactive approach to identifying potential difficulties to give effective support to students to help them complete the course

- Providing an opportunity to practice skills either in the workplace or in a practical training environment, offers a means of evidencing ability and accrediting and increases self confidence
- A proactive approach to mixed ability is required, enabling individual support for the weaker students and encouraging mutual support among all the students reduces the frustration of the more able
- Ideally employers should be engaged by being involved at the course development stage, but awareness training for both employers and tutors/co-ordinators is also desirable with support being offered to both during training and work placement to maintain a clear understanding for both student and employer/tutor of what is on offer and what is expected.
- The outcomes of the programme are not simply tangible certificates, but also softer less definable, but equally valuable skills desired by employers, which funders often do not recognise.

Recommendations

Funding and delivery

Our approach in funding learning and supporting the unemployed into work needs to be reviewed. Welfare to Work has increased employment but also contributed to a situation whereby social mobility is at an all time low because there are no state supported opportunities to help those in low skilled jobs to progress into better quality, more sustainable employment.

- The Learning and Skills Council at national level needs to review course funding criteria so that funds can be allocated for achievement and not just contact hours. This will enable colleges to use an APEL approach
- DWP should review the 16 hour rule and encourage a system whereby individuals are able to study language or vocations in excess of 16 hours if they can demonstrate the ways in which the study will lead to sustainable employment
- DWP and LSC should work together to explore how they might resource integrated employability packages which bring together LSC courses with work experience programmes
- The new employment service envisioned as part of the National Refugee Integration Service should be tasked with supporting all refugees. It could have a role working with the LSC and DWP in developing integrated employability packages.

Employers and work experience

Work experience is critical to enhancing the employability of migrants. In order to make sure that it meets the needs of migrants and employers we need to take on board some of the learning from this EQUAL project. This includes:

- Build work experience into the courses and treat work experience as “proper” employment. Engage employers at the establishment stage and involve them in steering group meetings
- Begin to set up work experience places several months before they are needed
- Introduce employment advisers at the beginning of each course and provide one to one support

- Use the best trainees to lead the way into building employers' interest
- Ensure that supervisors in work experience placements know exactly what to expect
- Produce a directory of the voluntary work that is available.

Student support

The experience in this programme demonstrated that providing the right types and level of support is critical to developing trust amongst trainees and to maximising retention rates. Some suggestions for how this support might be provided include:

- Provide a co-ordinator or mentor to give ongoing support to students to increase attendance rates
- Recruit a co-ordinator with a refugee background to build trust with refugee students
- Provide specialised one to one support through mentors to help students overcome barriers to participation
- Build in time in the early stages of appointment to help familiarise refugee employees with organisational culture and provide ongoing support and guidance
- Maintain telephone and e-mail contact with students to remind them when activity is required in order to enhance attendance and retention rates
- Undertake a needs analysis at an early stage in the programme to identify potential barriers to full commitment
- Provide students with support whilst they are on a placement
- Give structured constructive feedback on individual's performance in work experience to help overcome problems around lack of familiarity with the UK workplace
- Try to work with an individual's JCP advisors to encourage them to be flexible and supportive
- Celebrate achievement through awards ceremonies and publicise success to help create positive images.

Partnerships

Many of the employability products that migrants need to help get them into work are already available. There is a need for the organisations that deliver these products to come together to link up their different initiatives. In order for partnership working to be effective, it is important to:

- Recruit committed partners with resources and local knowledge
- Ensure that one organisation has responsibility for leading the partnership and for monitoring progress against agreed goals
- Use a steering group mechanism to manage projects that are partnership based, meet regularly and minute discussions to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear, perhaps even put in a contract. This will ensure that allocated tasks are followed up.

Resources

A wider range of other resource factors need to be considered in order to ensure that a programme can run as effectively as possible. These include:

- When establishing new programmes for a hard to reach group, use face to face meetings to “sell” the programme and begin to start the word of mouth process
- Provide an integrated, interlinked, package of learning closely linked to the vocational area
- Provide support for tutors to familiarise themselves with the cultures and experiences of the group they will be working with
- Provide a clear induction at the beginning of each course so everyone knows what to expect
- Identify any available funds to pay for incidentals such as travel and lunch
- Deliver training with a recognised institutions such as a University or college to increase the status of the training and accreditation and therefore the participants commitment to the course
- Offer courses that have some focus on interpersonal skills to improve confidence and consequent employability of refugee groups
- Aim where possible for a cohort with similar levels of English or build in mechanisms for dealing with different abilities
- Be realistic about timescales with students for whom English is a second language
- Provide trainees with help and guidance about how to recognise their skills and to sell themselves
- Make workplace orientation part of the main package of training
- Deliver all training at the same site wherever possible.

Chapter 1: The need for a new approach to refugee skills recognition

The flow of refugees to Europe is not a new phenomenon. The past forty years have seen the arrival of significant numbers of asylum seekers and refugees (European Commission 2001). Until recently most refugees arrived in the UK under the auspices of specific refugee programmes set up pan-Europe or beyond as a result of international action pertaining to particular global political issues, for example the so-called Bosnian crisis, Vietnamese boat-people or the expulsion of Asians from Uganda (Sales 2002; Kuepper *et al.* 1975). It was not until the 1990s that the numbers of asylum applicants arriving spontaneously in Europe as individuals, rather than part of a programme, began to increase to the extent that successive Governments have felt the need to create specific policy initiatives to deal with the influx.

In common with elsewhere in Europe, the UK has seen the arrival of large numbers of people seeking asylum. In response to the pressure asylum seekers were said to have been placing on support services in London and Southern England, the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) was established in 1999 to co-ordinate and fund the dispersal of asylum seekers around the UK. In 2000 the West Midlands Regional Consortium signed a contract with NASS to house asylum seekers in the West Midlands. Subsequently, the region has become one of the largest receiving regions in the UK with a population of asylum seekers and refugees second in size only to London. Birmingham and Coventry are two of the cities in the West Midlands that serve as a dispersal area. Birmingham houses the largest number of asylum seekers and refugees in the region. CURS and NIACE undertook studies for the Learning and Skills Councils in Coventry and Warwickshire and Birmingham in 2002 and 2003 respectively (Phillimore and Goodson *et al.* 2003; 2004). This research aimed to map the population of asylum seekers and refugees in the sub-regions and explore their education, training and employment needs and aspirations.

The research located a refugee population of around 800 people with a further 3200 asylum seekers living in Coventry, and 8250 refugees and 3792 asylum seekers living in Birmingham. By the time of the West Midlands Regional Housing and Spatial Studies (Phillimore and Goodson 2006) it was estimated that the highest proportion (39.5%) of the region's asylum seekers were housed in Birmingham and a further 12.7% in Coventry. It was estimated by the end of 2007 some 27650 refugees would be living in Birmingham and 1220 in Coventry. The LSC studies indicated that refugees in both cities were experiencing extremely high levels of unemployment with only 12% in employment in Birmingham compared to a sub-regional average employment figure of 68%. In Coventry only 24.2% were in employment compared to a sub-regional average employment figure of 74.1%. Half of interviewees had been employed in their countries of origin and of these around half had been employed in skilled or professional work. Those employed in the UK were exclusively employed in unskilled jobs. The research also revealed that the newcomers had a similar level of education to the general population in the sub-regions but were struggling to get their skills and experience recognised in the UK. Furthermore the vast majority of individuals were keen to work immediately and favoured returning to their former careers, at least in some capacity. One of the many recommendations of the report was the need to recognise the skills and experience of refugees and to offer them

structured work experience opportunities to help them build up some UK work experience that they could enter on their CV and use to gain a UK employer's reference.

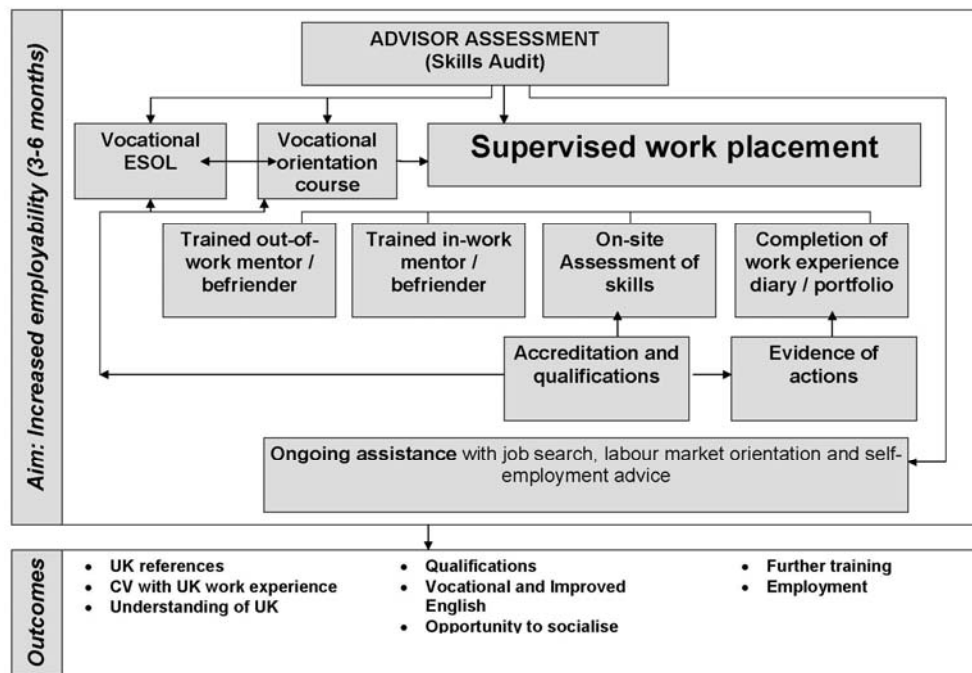
Surveys have indicated that a sizeable proportion of refugees arriving in the UK possess high levels of skills and education (e.g. Bloch 2002; Aldridge and Waddington 2001). For example Kirk (2004) found that 23% of refugees who provided details of their occupation before coming to the UK worked in skilled professions and a further 22% were managers or senior officials. This compares to 12% skilled and 15% managers amongst UK born people. However many struggle to evidence their skills because they lack employer's references or certificates. Those that do possess certificates find that the NARIC system of assessing UK equivalence either does not recognise their qualification or downgrades it. In addition, employers are said to be nervous of non-UK qualifications because they do not understand them. The outcome of all these difficulties is a situation where skilled and professional refugees struggle to return to their fields of expertise or gain employment commensurate with their skills. NIACE have warned that without high quality advice, guidance and access to a means of re-qualification, the majority of refugees end up in a low pay/no pay cycle. In response to this difficulty, it has been argued that a system of vocational re-orientation or accreditation of prior experience or learning (APEL) is required (Aldridge *et al.* 2005; Phillimore and Goodson 2001).

At the present time provision is extremely limited to the occasional professional programme, for example the Refugee Doctors programme run by Refugees into Jobs in North London, which are funded by regeneration or community cohesion funds rather than through the mainstream education budget (Phillimore *et al.* 2006). Although the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system can be applied as an APEL system, the way in which Further Education is currently funded on the basis of contact hours means that refugees cannot be assessed for an NVQ without either attending a college course or finding an employer prepared to facilitate their assessment. Financial imperatives or Jobseekers Allowance regulations mean that it is difficult for refugees to attend lengthy vocational training courses and refugees may be reluctant to attend a prolonged course to re-qualify. Clearly a change in the system is required to take on board the needs of new arrivals in the UK. It was with this situation in mind that CURS became a partner in the Progress GB EQUAL Development Partnership in 2004. Whilst it was clear that some unskilled refugees were gaining employment in unskilled jobs, and there was a gradual move to introduce initiatives to help refugee professionals to re-qualify, no work was being undertaken to help utilise the skills and experience of those refugees with intermediate skills in areas such as construction and social care where there were well documented skills gaps.

In order to scope the types of activities that might help skilled refugees to gain employment in their field of expertise, CURS undertook a study of organisations providing employment support to refugees and migrants in 2005 (Phillimore *et al.* 2005). The study aimed to identify good practice in enhancing the employability of skilled refugees and migrants and employed a postal questionnaire with follow up site visits across the whole of the EU and Norway. It concluded that the most effective approach to enhancing employability was to create an integrated package or pathway of activities including vocational language training, work experience and accreditation

of prior learning either through testing or through the provision of workplace based opportunities to demonstrate skills. A model that became known as the “employability pathway” was developed to demonstrate the idealised way in which refugees could be helped into education, training or employment commensurate with their skills (see Figure 1.1). CURS then sought to pilot the model in the West Midlands to explore what could be learned from the implementation of an integrated approach and to examine prospects for mainstreaming the recognition of refugees’ skills. It was hoped that if successful the learning from the pilot could be rolled out to other groups who struggled to utilise their skills, for example economic migrants.

Figure 1.1: The employability pathway



This report details what was undertaken in each of the pilot activities, the main barriers to success, key learning points and recommendations for the future. The report begins with a description of the five employability pathways that were piloted in the West Midlands. Chapter 2 discusses how the pathways evolved and the types of activities that were undertaken in each pathway. Chapter 3 looks at the learning that has emerged from the evaluations of the pathways. It sets out the mechanisms used to evaluate the initiatives, how recruitment and assessment were undertaken, and the main barriers to progress and how they were overcome. This chapter considers factors that were important in facilitating success, the main barriers to progress and the key gains that followed involvement in the pathways. The final chapter draws some conclusions about the types of initiatives that are needed to enhance the employability of skilled refugees and makes some recommendations for policymakers and providers.

Chapter 2: The initiatives

The piloting of the model was originally expected to take place on a small scale but as we explored the form in which we might implement it several opportunities were forthcoming which led to the development of a number of pilots in five different vocational areas. These were social research, construction, general maintenance, health care and business administration. A range of factors, largely a combination of high levels of demand for places on the pathway and the availability of match funding, enabled both the construction and general maintenance pathways to be run twice. We were able to incorporate the learning from the first pathway into the second and deliver a more sophisticated approach to the second cohort of students.

Originally it was envisaged that CURS would seek to work with Awarding Bodies in the UK to develop new ways to accredit the existing skills or experience of refugees. However meetings with both Awarding Bodies and Colleges revealed that there were major funding barriers to the development of a new APEL system that meant we had to work within the existing framework. Consequently we took several different approaches to recognising refugees' skills depending on the vocational area. Basic information about the establishment and delivery of each of the pilots and, where appropriate, their evolution into a second phase, is set out below.

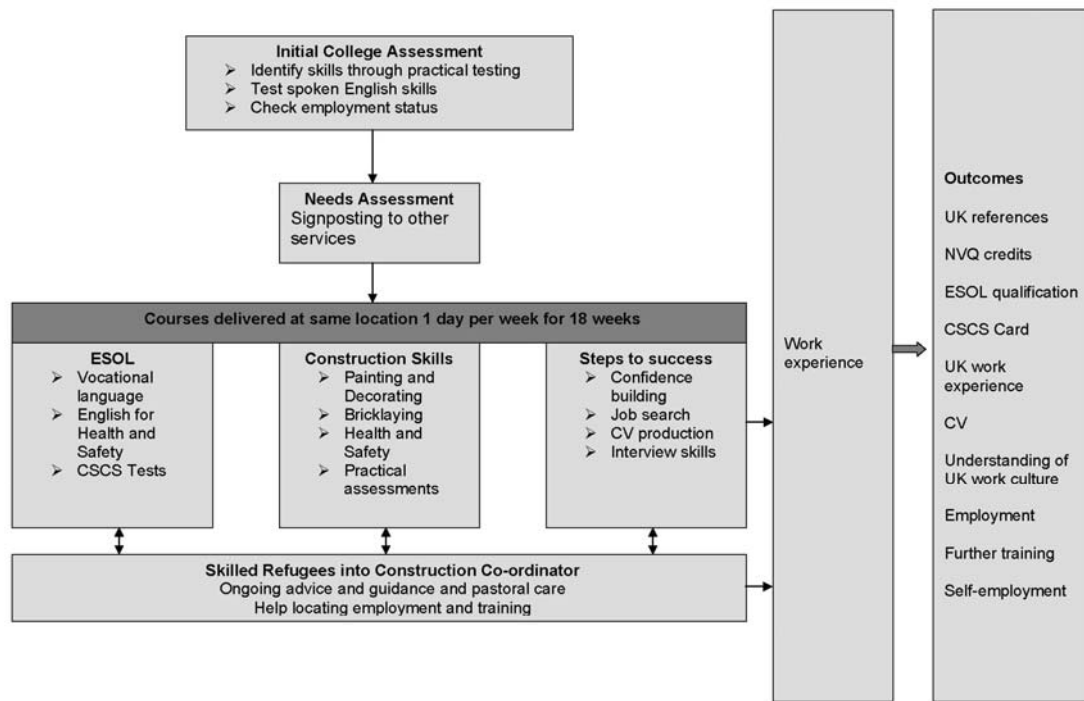
Coventry Construction

Following the publication of the LSC Coventry and Warwickshire report, an Asylum Seeker and Refugee Education, Training and Employment Co-ordinator was funded through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and based at Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership (CSWP) Ltd to fulfil this role. She undertook skills audits of 380 asylum seekers and refugees and identified around 25 individuals from a construction background. In 2005 the Co-ordinator called a meeting between the LSC, Head of Construction at City College, a Housing Association and CURS. Together they agreed that funds would be sought to employ a highly skilled refugee from the construction sector and to train that individual to become an assessor to assess and accredit the construction skills of individuals on the database. The LSC provided some funds and these were matched by EQUAL. All of the applicants were refugees but none met all the criteria. Their skills were assessed through practical testing and their language ability identified through interview. The eventual recruit was a refugee architect. A steering group was established to manage the programme to be developed by the newly appointed Refugee Construction Skills Co-ordinator. He was to be based at Coventry College with responsibility for his induction taken by the steering group. He was introduced to all the agencies working with refugees in the city.

City College developed a construction programme for skilled refugees bringing together single units from the NVQ in construction. It was to consist of vocational ESOL, LSC construction skills training, and health and safety training. Successful students would receive a CSCS card and NVQ credits in construction. The steering group would seek to link them to work experience placements and then eventually to construction employment. All the elements of the course were delivered in the same place on one day a week for 14 weeks for the first pilot and 18 weeks for the second. The three main elements were bricklaying, painting and decorating, and construction

health and safety. The two cohorts of students were recruited in Coventry. Slightly different processes were used for each pathway but core elements are the CSCS, ESOL and construction elements. Figure 2.0 indicates the main elements of the construction pathway and how they linked together.

Figure 2.1: The Construction Employability Pathway



Once in attendance at the college, students were asked about their construction skills and their language ability was assessed. Those with Entry Level 2 and above were accepted. Work with the first cohort revealed that not all of the recruits had the appropriate skills level. Assessment for cohort two comprised an element of practical testing to ensure that applicants possessed all the skills they claimed. An action plan was developed for each cohort setting out the workplan for the duration of the course. The main components of the course were practically based with assessment focused on practical outputs. Thus the students were able to demonstrate their skills in an appropriate situation and were helped by tutors to adapt to the British approach to the different practical activities. Each student was issued with basic skills in construction, painting and decorating handbook that sets out the activities for each week. They also had a scheme of work for ESOL setting out weekly activities. These include:

- Use of a tape recorder to teach people to listen for information
- Identification of tools
- Use of dictionaries
- Toolkit bingo
- Role playing health and safety procedures
- Quizzes

Each student was provided with safety equipment, a dictionary and travel expenses where necessary.

Once the students had passed the course and CSCS tests (they were offered a re-sit for both), we identified that they all required help to develop their CVs and to build their confidence for interviews. A local authority funded programme, 'Steps to Success' was put on specifically for the students to develop their confidence and recognise their existing transferable skills. The students also attended an employability programme (delivered by the ESOL Department at City College) to develop job seeking and interview skills. Meanwhile the steering group worked on locating work experience placements. In the later cohort, the work orientation programme became part of the main programme and was offered on site at the college increasing the number of weeks attendance to 18. All achievements were celebrated through the awards ceremony with certificates being presented by a local employer. They were also publicised using images and text provided by the co-ordinator to the local media.

In addition a local regeneration organisation offered the opportunity for refugees to attend five one-day courses teaching restoration skills for older properties in Coventry. There was said to be a dearth of restoration skills in the construction industry. The restoration courses offered individuals an opportunity to broaden their skills whilst making connections with the local community. A construction company working on a local restoration project offered to interview two "graduates" of the restoration programme for work experience places. Eventually they did this and gave detailed feedback about all applicants, which helped to shape the types of job search support given to them. At the end of the process, no refugee was employed because they required individuals with driving licences.

The development of the Birmingham General Maintenance Pathway

In 2005 a series of meetings were held to discuss the viability of a construction pathway to meet the training and employment needs of new migrants with past experience in the construction sector. The delivery of the pathway entailed a partnership approach in order to bring together organisations with a range of skills. The aim of the programme was to provide trainees with a package of support covering a range of needs:

- ESOL training for construction
- Job orientation and job match
- Practical construction skills
- CSCS coaching
- Mentoring support

The pathway was funded by South Birmingham Construction Alliance through Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and matched by EQUAL. This pathway was piloted twice. The organisations involved in the first pilot project and their roles are outlined in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Pilot 1 partners and roles

Organisation	Role
Trellis ¹	Recruitment and identification of work experience places
GB training	ESOL
Training 4 Skills	Construction skills
Q1Tum	CSCS coaching
Construction Employment Alliance (CEA)	Job match and funder

The recruitment phase was led by Trellis who used their own database and that of South Birmingham College to identify individuals with some construction experience interested in re-entering their trades or related work. CURS also worked with Birmingham New Community Network (BNCN)² and the Wardlow Road Refugee Resource Centre to publicise the opportunity. Once sufficient numbers had been identified, Trellis contacted potential recruits by telephone to inform them about the course and to conduct a short personal assessment to gauge some insight into their training needs and existing skills. They were then invited to attend an initial briefing session at South Birmingham College. At this session individuals were given details about the course and the nature of the construction sector to raise their awareness of what employment in the sector entails. At the end of this session CURS conducted first stage evaluation interviews with all trainees to gauge their expectations of the course, future aspirations and perceived barriers to securing work in the sector.

Training format

The training comprised of a short two week, full-time, intensive programme with core learning focusing on ESOL for construction, CSCS and training in General Maintenance. As a result of assessing trainees' needs, the original 5-week programme was extended in order to provide additional ESOL and CSCS coaching. The format of the course is illustrated in Figure 2.2 and can be described as follows:

1. ESOL – 2 weeks ESOL for construction (16 hr week)

This element of the course was delivered at GB Training and focused on English language for the construction sector and covered aspects relating to health and safety, how to read and understand signs and instructions as well as day-to-day vocabulary relating to construction machinery, tools and equipment.

2. General Maintenance - 10 day intensive training (full time)

This aspect of the course included 5 short course units covering plastering, tiling, soft plumbing, painting and decorating, carpentry and joinery. This part of the course was delivered at the Training 4 Skills Centre. The Centre's facilities and design of the course enabled trainees to gain practical skills experience. The centre offered a makeshift work environment with different areas of the centre focusing on different skills sets. For example, for painting and decorating trainees were required to strip a disused door re-paint and varnish it; for soft plumbing trainees were able to work on a makeshift bathroom.

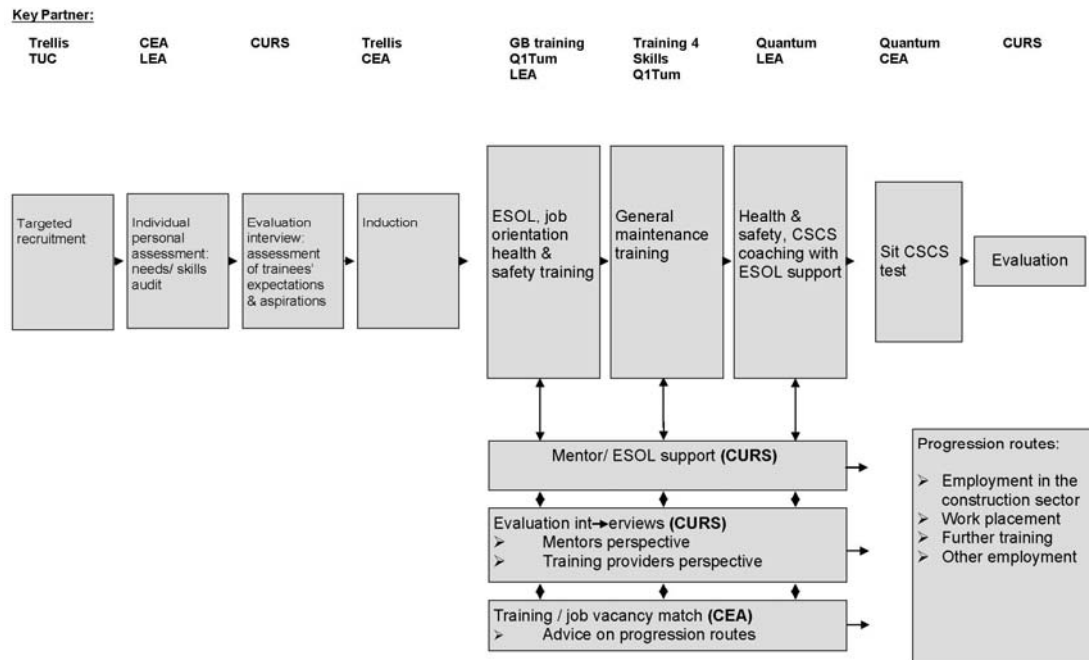
¹ The Trellis Project is an Employability Forum run project aimed at getting refugees in employment in Birmingham

² BNCN are a network organisation representing over 70 Refugee Community Groups (RCOs)

3. ESOL – 1 week ESOL for construction (16 hr week)

This was a continuation of the English language training received prior to the General Maintenance course.

Figure 2.2: Birmingham General Maintenance Pathway



4. CSCS coaching – 2 days revision and mock interviews

This part of the training was originally a 1-day session and focused specifically on preparing trainees for the CSCS test. Because of the recognised language constraints the CSCS coaching was delivered over two days as it was felt that this would provide trainees with more time and support to familiarise themselves with the necessary materials.

5. Additional ESOL and CSCS coaching – 6 days (held over a 3 week period)

At the end of the programme it was evident that trainees still required extra support with language, health and safety and CSCS materials in order to prepare them to sit the test. Trainees received an extra six days tuition in these areas. After this additional input, a test date was organised and successful candidates were awarded their card.

6. Job match

During the additional ESOL and CSCS coaching, staff at South Birmingham college, dedicated to matching individuals to job and placement opportunities, held a short session to outline ways in which they could work with trainees to identify suitable progression routes i.e. jobs, placements and further training. One to one meetings were then arranged with the job match officer to explore trainee's future aspirations. Trainees were also encouraged to make contact with the office on a regular basis to check on emerging placement and employment opportunities.

In 2007 Birmingham City Council (BCC) secured funding to re-run the Birmingham construction pathway. A key criterion included the need to get BCC residents into jobs ideally with some kind of added value training. However, the funding could not

be spent on replicating existing or standard provision and the training offered needed to provide an element of innovation, or build on something that had preceded it. Given continued reports of construction trades skills shortages and TRELIS and TUC IAG workers also reporting high demand for the construction skills training, with both organisations having people awaiting such courses, it seemed appropriate to build on the previous construction partnership model. In January 2007 BCC arranged a series of meetings with Q1Tum, University of Birmingham and CEA to discuss the key learning from the programme, what had worked well and what areas of the programme could be improved upon.

These meetings considered the key content and features of the programme and served to reach agreement on ways to restructure and improve it. Service delivery assurances were also secured from both CEA and Q1TUM that there would be relevant employment options for those completing the training. Following this, the programme and delivery mechanisms were assembled and a steering group set up to support and oversee the programme. The Coventry construction project was also visited by staff members from CEA, BCC and University of Birmingham in order to draw on any learning which could be integrated into the programme design.

The second pilot consisted of two groups, skilled (Group 1) and unskilled (Group 2). Fourteen trainees were recruited onto Group 1 and 15 to Group 2. Whilst the basic principles of the course remained the same, there were some changes to the format and delivery organisations. It was apparent during Pilot 1 that trainees required more time to maximise their training opportunities. The second pilot was designed to run over a 12 week period. In order to improve coherence across the different aspects of the training, it was recognised that the number of organisations and centres involved in the delivery of the training should be reduced where possible. The organisations involved in the second pilot project and their roles are outlined in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2: Pilot 2 partners and roles

Organisations	Role
Trellis	Recruitment
TUC	Recruitment
Learning into Employment Academy (LEA)	ESOL and job orientation
Q1tum	Construction skills, CSCS coaching
Construction Employment Alliance (CEA)	Job match
Birmingham City Council	Funder and co-ordinator

LEA were appointed to deliver ESOL for construction and job orientation. LEA had experience of working with new migrant groups and were well placed to offer an improved ESOL and job orientation package. This aspect of the course was delivered at their offices in central Birmingham. At the start of the programme students were issued with induction packs, which set out the rules and responsibilities for both trainees and the delivery organisation. This helped trainees understand what was expected of them and what they could expect from LEA. Other aspects covered during the course included:

- ESOL for construction
- ICT Key Skills and basic numeracy for the construction sector
- Interview preparation – role play mock interviews, time keeping, appearance, attitude, body language, communication skills,

- Video recordings of students learning to enable them to observe themselves and each other and identify good practice
- Letter writing and specimen application practice sessions
- Developing a C.V. and understanding the meaning of a C.V. and its purpose as a tool for marketing an individual's skills
- British citizenship awareness

During this aspect of the programme trainees were also registered with recruitment agencies in order to familiarize them with the processes of looking for work. Students were encouraged to give presentations on their experiences of registering with the agencies. From this key barriers that trainees faced were identified. Friday was introduced as a 'smart dress' day to get trainees in the mindset of looking for work. Short booklets and handouts were also issued during the course to supplement trainees' learning on work orientation. Throughout the course a range of 'soft' skills and practical issues were addressed to help prepare trainees for the workplace, including:

- Working in a team environment and sharing good practices on employment related issues
- The importance of respecting different cultures and understanding individual's values
- Developing good communication skills
- Having the right documentation and identification to work in the UK.

Once students had completed this part of the training, future progression options were discussed and live action plans developed with one to one support from a life coach at LEA. This was followed up after the course to discuss trainees' progress in looking for work. One to one support enabled trust and better working relationships to develop as well as being able to address the personal barriers that individuals faced.

The second part of the programme in General Maintenance and CSCS preparation was delivered by Q1Tum. The practical general maintenance training was offered at their new training centre in Moseley and the CSCS coaching was provided in tandem with ESOL support at the LEA offices. General maintenance covered similar aspects to that of Pilot 1.

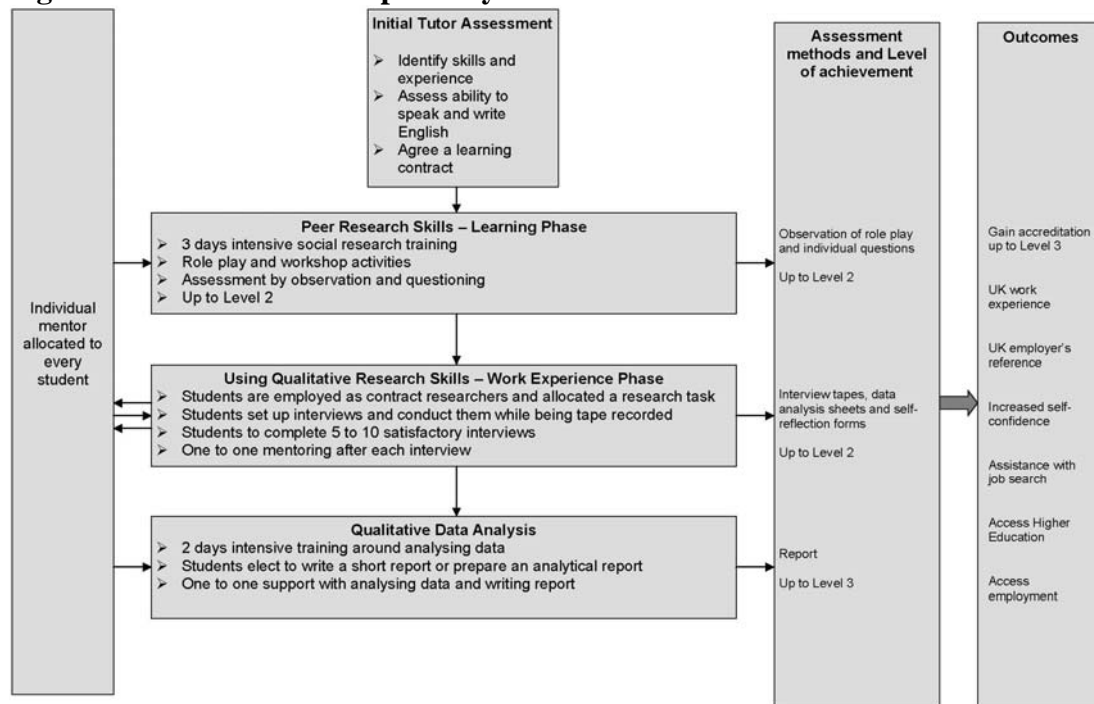
University of Birmingham Social Research

In 2005 CURS were approached and asked to join a partnership aimed at building the capacity of Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) to use evidence to influence policy and service provision. Following discussions with Birmingham New Communities Network (BNCN), it was decided that the project offered an opportunity for CURS to develop their community research skills course in a way that would aid recognition of the communication and data collection skills of RCO leaders and to develop those skills to be accredited by the Open College Network and, if possible, the University.

Based on the integrated employability pathway, CURS developed a proposal which brought together opportunities to use and develop existing skills, get the skills accredited, and practice them through work experience as well as developing a relationship with a personal mentor. In the same year CURS were also undertaking

an evaluation of the hact Accommodate initiative and developed a proposal with hact to train community researchers to take a role in the evaluation. The ideas for both these initiatives were combined. The social research pathway can be viewed in Figure 2.3. The OCN social research programme which had been created by CURS for individuals with poor language and literacy skills was adapted to fit the pathway model, building on the ideas that had emerged from the research on employability initiatives (Phillimore *et al.* 2005).

Figure 2.3: Social research pathway



There were three parts to the training each of which was accredited by OCN. The parts were:

- Peer research skills
- Using qualitative research skills
- Understanding qualitative data

When it was identified that some of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) community researchers lacked a computer on which to undertake their work, they were offered the opportunity to attend a two-day computer course wherein they were given a laptop computer and training in the use of this computer. Handbooks, which included learning materials and workshop suggestions, accompanied all courses.

The qualitative research training was comprised of three modules, which were delivered by CURS lecturers supported by a team of mentors. These modules were designed by CURS to bring academic social research skills to a range of different communities who may find the use of written media challenging. All modules were taught through a range of techniques including role-play, workshops, group work, self-directed learning and one to one support. In the first module students were taught the principles of social research over sixteen hours. It covered issues around the purpose of interviewing, ethics, subjectivity and researcher bias, listening and

inquiring, questioning, probing, question and topic guide design, body language, identifying respondents, setting up interviews and collecting data. During this module the students worked on the wider theoretical issues through consideration of specific topics. In the case of the JRF students there were two topics: ESOL and well-being, which were identified in conjunction with BNCN. In the case of hact, there were five different research areas that related to the wider evaluation. Students worked in small, guided groups to brainstorm the issues around these areas, considering what they felt their organisations and stakeholders needed to know in order to help understand the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers.

The whole group then worked closely with their trainers to develop research tools. An interview guide was produced as one of the assessed outcomes of the training. Assessment was generally undertaken through observed group sessions with some individual work or questioning. At the early stages, little written work was expected of the students and most emphasis was placed upon building confidence and developing and honing their communication and interviewing skills. Students were partnered to pilot the topic guide and to practice their interview techniques. Each mock interview was observed by a trainer and followed by a self-reflection session in which community researchers and their interviewees completed a self-reflection form about their performance. The interviewer was then given constructive feedback by the other parties before the interviewee was given the opportunity to interview their partner. This process was repeated several times to encourage development of interview techniques prior to the students entering the field. Throughout this module students were assessed on their engagement in group tasks, materials produced as a result of interactions including interview questions and a script for introducing themselves to their interviewees, and through one to one observations and discussions.

The next module began with each student being allocated a mentor. They were also issued with a tape recorder, tapes, copies of research tools, pens, paper, an A-Z of Birmingham (JRF), envelopes, postage pre-paid stickers and a diary. They were given a small budget to cover travel and interview expenses and then guided by their mentor to undertake some research for either the JRF or hact research programmes. The mentor ensured that their students understood the work required in order to complete the task. They were asked to follow a process:

- Identify an interviewee according to the criteria of the project
- Set up an interview in an appropriate place
- Introduce themselves and the hact or JRF project
- Ask permission to record
- Undertake and record the interview
- Complete a socio-demographic information questionnaire
- Summarise the findings from the interview in a data analysis table
- Complete a self-reflection form
- Post the tape, table and form to their mentor
- Await detailed feedback from their mentor
- Speak to their mentor about their feedback
- Repeat the process building on the feedback they received.

This process was repeated ten times within six weeks for JRF and five times within six months for hact³. The data analysis tables and accompanying socio-demographic information formed the basis of the data for the next module. The goal for accreditation was three to five “successful” interviews. These constituted interviews where the community researchers were able to collect the data needed in the manner outlined and where materials submitted were accompanied by a self-reflection form.

The final qualitative module taught students, through a number of sessions over a sixteen-hour period, how to analyse their data in a systematic fashion and then how to write it up into an academic style report. Once again group work was employed to collaboratively develop themes, codes and a data analysis framework. However students then developed their own version of their framework and, with the support of their mentor, themed their data and prepared a report. Community researchers had the choice of a simple bullet-pointed account of their findings or a detailed academic style report, which encompassed quotations and critical analysis of the findings. Students who chose to complete this aspect of the training forwarded a draft report to their tutors. They were then offered feedback and given the opportunity to re-draft their report before submitting a final version for accreditation. At the end of the programme, students were able to enter the time they had spent undertaking research on the different projects as work experience on their CV and ask their University tutors and mentors for employment references when needed.

The development of Business Administration APEL

CURS were also aware of a significant number of people registered on the Trellis database with skills and experience from their country of origin in business administration. In light of this CURS conducted a number of interviews with training providers offering NVQ courses in Business Administration to consider the suitability of these courses for refugees and ways in which courses might be adapted to account for the existing skills and qualifications that refugee trainees already possessed. Whilst NVQ's were originally intended to be flexible allowing learners to progress at their own speed, in practice few providers appeared to offer such personalised learning opportunities due to the cost of individual assessments, especially the cost of external verification. Colleges have tended to offer courses that last a set duration, sometimes with a period of structured work experience. Private providers appeared to be more flexible calling in external verifiers on a more frequent basis but were still constrained by the cost of this and, as a result, often failed to offer assessments to match the learning pattern and achievements of learners, particularly those that already have the skills in place. Such a personalised learning approach would mean calling in external assessors on demand, an economically unattractive model for most organisations. With this in mind it was felt that the potential of newcomers with existing skills could be lost due to a lack of opportunities to get their skills and qualifications recognised.

During discussions with City College (East Birmingham) CURS set out the need for more flexible course delivery and explored the scope to build in an APEL approach in order for trainees with appropriate skills to evidence existing competences, and

³ The information about interviewees for the hact Accommodate project was held by partnerships in the participating cities. Sometimes operating problems in the sample area meant that there were delays which held up the identification of potential interviewees.

receive additional training and support in areas where their competences did not satisfy the assessment criteria. This, in theory, would enable experienced trainees to demonstrate and evidence their past experience and skills, in a structured work placement environment, and progress to the completion of an NVQ 2 faster than the standard two year programmes offered by the college. The aim of such an approach was to understand:

- How well newcomer's skills fulfilled the required criteria set out by the NVQ system. What sorts of top-up training might be necessary and how might this be delivered?
- How quickly those with existing skills can meet the assessment and evidence requirements of the NVQ system e.g. how long would it take an individual with skills and experience in Business Administration to put together a successful portfolio to complete a NVQ 2?
- What difficulties do newcomers face with the NVQ system? How might future courses be structured and delivered to overcome some of these difficulties?

City College had some experience of the APEL system having used the approach in conjunction with some of their NVQ programmes. However, the approach never became embedded in their delivery largely due to the rigid and onerous nature of NVQ accreditation and portfolio requirements. The college were keen to get involved in the EQUAL project and agreed to develop an APEL programme mapped to the national standards for Level 2 NVQ Business Administration.

Given past difficulties, CURS had some concerns about how an APEL approach would work with the NVQ portfolio system. East Birmingham explained how the NVQ system had undergone revision in recent years and how the portfolio requirements have become more flexible and less paper based. More cross-referencing had been introduced into the system making it possible for learners to fulfil a range of criteria whilst demonstrating a particular task. It was felt that the former emphasis on written work would make completion of NVQ's difficult for refugee learners, time consuming for assessors and unattractive to work placement employers. The college had experience of using mixed evidence to develop NVQ portfolios, including:

- Photographs or video clips – trainees are required to explain what tasks they were completing when the photo or video clip was taken.
- Direct observation – trainees are observed whilst completing a certain task.
- Witness testimony from employers.
- Expert witness from a peer with experience in a certain aspect of the job.
- Professional discussion – a confidential discussion between trainees and external assessors.
- Written statements from trainees describing their ability to complete a certain competency.

The proposed integration of an APEL approach was perceived as less challenging given that the collection of a varied evidence base had become more acceptable by awarding bodies. This meant that evidence could be put together more speedily and relied less on written outputs. To aid greater flexibility in portfolio building, it was

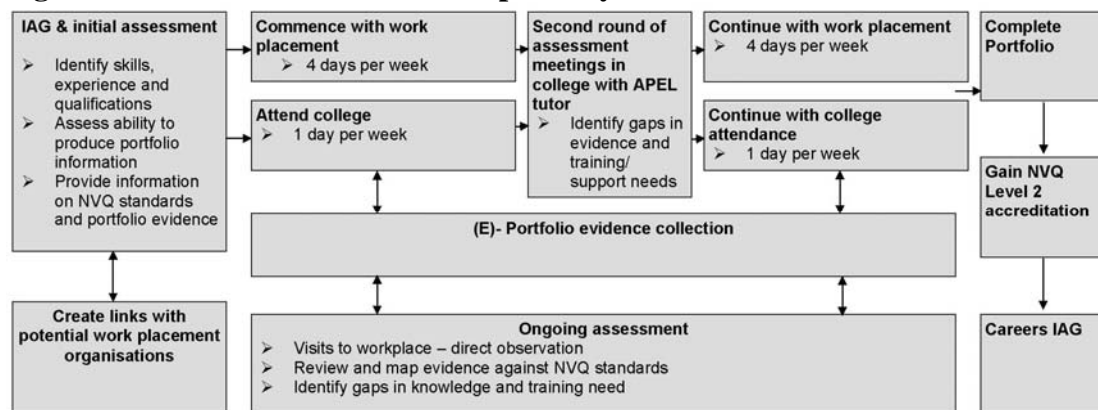
proposed that an electronic portfolio system be developed for students to record and track their progress.

The new NVQ in ICT, the ITQ qualification, is an example of the revised NVQ system. City College had previously been involved in one of the largest national pilots of ITQ with 70 students having successfully completed the course using an e-portfolio and localised virtual learning environment (VLE). This e-portfolio approach also incorporated video evidence and audio conversation. During the consultation phase of the EQUAL project, the e-portfolio developed for the ITQ qualification had yet to be rolled out to other NVQ courses but was considered to have considerable potential for adaptation on the Business Administration APEL programme. The College agreed to develop this system for integration into the overall programme. Owing to operational difficulties the e-portfolio system was never actually implemented.

Training format

The entire programme was offered over a 34-week period with earlier exit routes available to those trainees able to evidence and meet the NVQ criteria. Entry requirement included having some past experience in Administration and a good level of English. The course commenced with a two week IAG and initial assessment period. During this phase trainees discussed their skills, experience and qualifications in depth and an assessment was made of their potential to produce portfolio evidence. Trainees were provided with information about NVQ standards, portfolio evidence and assessment requirements in order for them to grasp an understanding of what was expected of them and what their portfolio should look like. During this time links were also made with possible work placement organisations. Figure 2.4 shows the business administration pathway.

Figure 2.4: Business administration pathway



After the initial assessment period, trainees commenced their work placement. Trainees were placed with a range of organisations, including Family Housing and the Refugee Council, for four days a week. On placement trainees were expected to undertake tasks such as word processing documents, reception duties, operating office machinery and working within a team. Alongside this, one day a week was spent in college to provide classroom based activities to supplement trainees' learning. At this stage, trainees commenced the evidence collection phase through their combined work placement and classroom based activities. Whilst on work placement trainees

were visited by an assessor on a number of occasions. The visits enabled direct observations and development of portfolio evidence to take place. After trainees had spent some time developing their portfolio evidence, they were invited to a second round of assessment meetings. These meetings were aimed at reviewing and mapping evidence against NVQ standards. Internal assessors considered what trainees had produced, whether the evidence they had produced was current⁴, whether it met current standards and whether it could be verified. Assessors also worked with trainees to identify gaps in knowledge and ways forward. This entailed considering:

- What further training was required?
- Are further observations appropriate and sufficient to fill gaps in evidence?
- Are alternative evidence mechanisms required to enable trainees to demonstrate knowledge in specific areas? E.g. assessor questioning, case studies, diary evidence, professional discussion, role-play etc?

This process was repeated until trainees had reached the required standard and completed all the areas covered in the NVQ assessment criteria. Whilst it was anticipated that some trainees may complete the course in less than the 34 week period; in reality, trainees' language skills, unfamiliarity with the UK work environment and protocols meant that trainees needed to complete the entire programme to bring their skills and experience in line with NVQ 2 standards.

The development of a pre-adaptation course for Refugee Healthcare Professionals

Many refugee health professionals hold qualifications from their country of origin that are not automatically recognised by relevant professional bodies in the UK. In order to become registered and then apply for jobs, they have to either take further academic programmes and/or periods of supervised practice, an adaptation programme or, in the case of nurses, the Overseas Nurses Programme (ONP). A recognition of the needs of this group of health care professionals led to the development of a dedicated programme at the Faculty of Health, University of Central England (UCE). The programme was developed in consultation with teams running successful pre-adaptation programmes at Glasgow Caledonian University and at Praxis in London (see Peacock 2006).

The forerunner of this type of programme was Praxis. This programme has been cited as a model of good practice in the Silver Lining Strategy, a strategy drafted by the Refugee Nurses Task Force, launched in 2004, which aims to integrate refugee nurses into the workforce.

During the developmental stage of the programme partnerships were made with the local Strategic Health Authority, the West Midlands Refugee Health Professionals Project, Bournville College of Further Education and the Royal College of Nursing. Whilst there was a great deal of interest to pilot the course, a number of major challenges were faced including:

⁴ Trainees were able to use evidence up to 2 years old. This may include evidence of task undertaken in previous work placements or jobs.

- Lack of funding
- The loss of some partners
- The re-organisation of the Strategic Health Authority
- Recruitment problems in the NHS
- Negative stereotypes of refugees in the media.

Through the EQUAL programme and previous work carried out on refugee employability for a number of LSCs in the West Midlands, CURS were also aware of the barriers facing refugee health care professionals wishing to re-engage with their previous profession or secure work in a related health care field. In the early stages of the EQUAL project, CURS undertook a series of interviews with health care training providers to explore the type of training available and ways in which refugee health professionals could benefit. Discussions were held with providers offering NVQs in Health Care and consideration given to ways in which refugee professionals could be fast tracked through an APEL type approach.

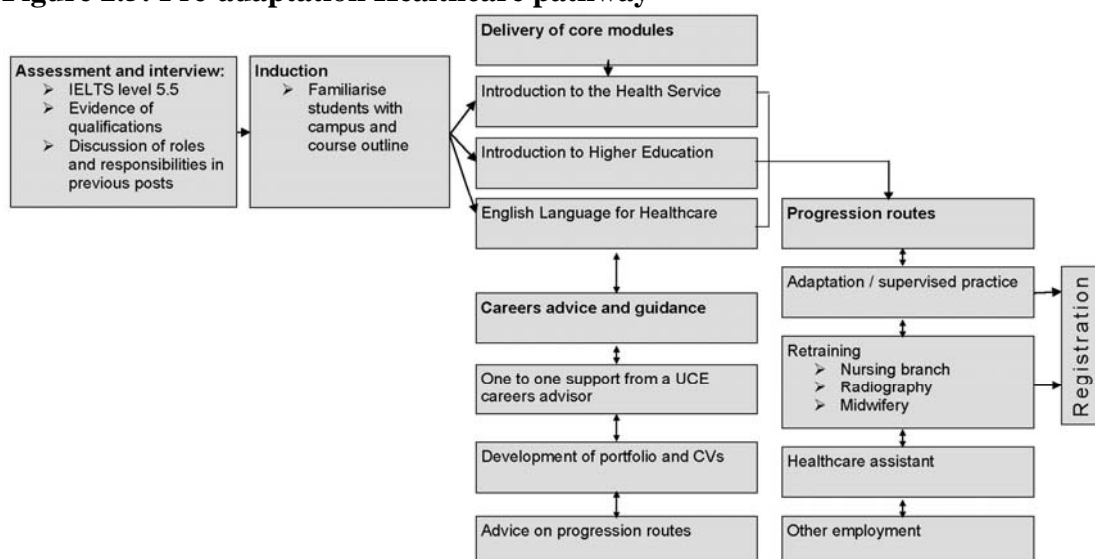
Training format

The purpose of the pre-adaptation programme was to prepare refugees for further training or employment in the health sector. It aimed to address the need for English language development including professional English and an orientation to the Health Service.

The training comprised a 12-week (120 hour) programme and was piloted with 10 refugees and two migrant health professionals. Overall key aspects of the programme are illustrated in Figure 2.5 and can be described as:

- To provide the knowledge and skills for undergraduate study
- To give an orientation to the Health Service in the UK
- To provide professionally orientated English language input for both further study and for work in the Health Service
- To discuss and develop key skills such as team working and interpersonal skills

Figure 2.5: Pre-adaptation Healthcare pathway



Entry requirements for the course included English language skills at International English Language Testing System (IELTS) level 5.5 or equivalent. This level was identified with the view of progressing students to level 6.5 by the end of course - the level required by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Trainees were also asked to provide some evidence of having qualified in their country of origin. This was supplemented with a discussion about role and responsibilities held in previous jobs.

The programme started with an induction to familiarise students with the campus and the course outline. Over the 12-week programme learning was split across three modules, whereby trainees could acquire credits at various levels:

- **Introduction to the Health Service** (12 credits at L4). This module aimed to introduce students to working in the Health Service in the UK and to develop the interpersonal and team working skills to establish a career in the Health Service. As part of this module, trainees studied the UK as a multi-cultural society, the structure of the Health Service and the changes in progress, accountability and confidentiality, working in a multi-disciplinary team and communication in client-practitioner relationships. During this module, trainees also began to develop a portfolio and learnt how to produce CVs and letters of application.
- **Introduction to Higher Education** (12 credits at L4). This module aimed to establish the academic and personal skills required to undertake further undergraduate study in a Higher Education Institute. The module provided students with an introduction to academic writing, reading strategies, the use of evidence, numeracy and IT skills, using library resources, an introduction to reflection, personal development planning and recording.
- **English Language Development**. This module aimed to establish a level of professional and general English language skills that would enable trainees to engage effectively in academic study and in the health service environment. The module enabled students to develop their listening, reading, speaking and writing skills in the context of Health Service language. Whilst this part of the course still aimed to develop trainees' general English skills to the level of various professional bodies, it also addressed the jargon and colloquial idioms that trainees will encounter on a daily basis in the Health Service setting.

During the course and upon completion, trainees were given employment advice and guidance from a dedicated worker within UCE careers service. A number of progression routes leading to registration were identified including a period of supervised practice plus the Overseas Nursing Programme; or retraining in a nursing branch option, Radiography (2 yrs) or Midwifery (full training). Within the nursing branch, two main routes were available: the first being a three year Diploma in HE in Nursing specialising either in mental health learning disabilities, child or adult nursing. Whilst this route offered the potential to secure some financial assistance in the form of a bursary, courses require trainees to have secured a placement with a local Healthcare Trust and gaining such a placement is very difficult. The second option available was a three-year BSC degree in Nursing. Upon completion of these courses, trainees can apply for NMC registration and are in position to apply for work.

In order to improve trainees' progression prospects UCE tried to negotiate a number of placements with local Health Care Trusts and obtained agreement with the Health Faculty at UCE about the possibility of introducing an APEL element to their nursing programmes which would enable some trainees to be fast tracked onto the second year of these courses. Other progression routes were into employment as healthcare assistants or other employment.

Chapter 3: Learning from the pathways

Methodology of evaluations

An in-depth evaluation was undertaken of all the pathways aimed at identifying the learning from each approach as it evolved. All evaluations were undertaken as longitudinal studies and included the perspectives of all partners and trainees involved. We sought to undertake face-to-face interviews with all participants within the first two weeks of the commencement of each programme to explore their aspirations, expectations and the types of support they might need to complete their training and reach their long term goals. Data from the interviews were fed back to the trainers responsible for each programme or elements of the programme to enable them to respond and shape the course to the needs of the students. At the end of each course face to face interviews or focus groups were undertaken with course tutors and co-ordinators, work experience supervisors and lecturers to examine the main learning points from each programme. Exit interviews were undertaken with each student to examine the extent to which the course met expectations, successes and challenges, outcomes for the student and the types of ongoing support required. A further stage of telephone interviews was planned to follow graduates up three to six months after leaving the course. At the time of writing these follow up telephone interviews have not yet been undertaken with graduates on the business administration pathway because the students had only very recently completed their training or work experience. Full details of the stages at which students were interviewed and the number of students contacted can be found in Table 3.1. In each case we attempted to interview all students that had enrolled. Changes in telephone numbers and addresses meant this was not always possible.

Table 3.1 Evaluation interviews

Pathway	Initial interview	Exit interview	Teacher / co-ordinator interviews	Follow up interviews
Coventry construction 1	10	11	6	11
Coventry construction 2	14	12	6	n/a
Social research (JRF)	14	10	45	n/a
Social research (hact)	10	14	0	n/a
General maintenance 1	14	11	2	12
General maintenance 2	23	23	2	n/a
Business Administration	7	5	7	n/a
Health care	12	8	6	9

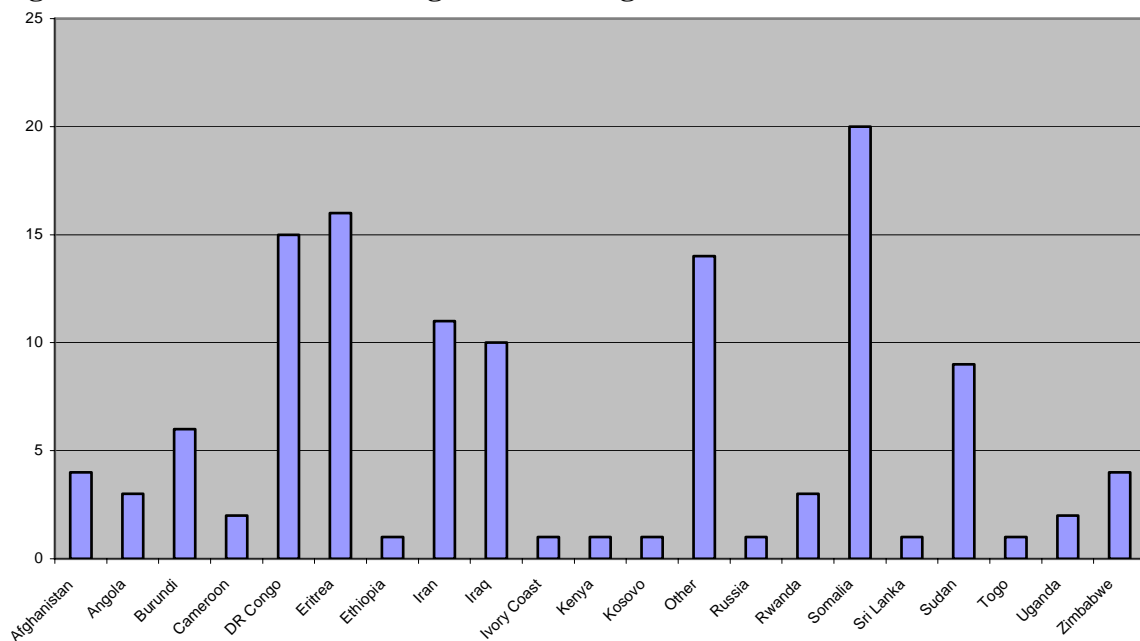
Profile of participants and outcomes

Some 135 individuals started the employability pathways and 123 of them completed (91%). The co-ordinators of each pathway asked the students to complete an EQUAL

⁵ In the case of the social research pathways the tutors were also the evaluators. For JRF we sought to interview the steering group members who had a role in managing the course

registration form. They were then asked to complete a leaver's form when they had finished the programme. It proved very difficult to get the forms completed, as they were lengthy, complicated, and asked for information in English. However these forms were completed for 126 individuals. The forms enabled detailed socio-demographic information to be collected although not all forms were fully completed. Some 26 women joined the programmes of whom eight had some kind of employment when they commenced. One hundred men joined the programmes of whom 27 had employment at commencement. Some 118 individuals had gained their refugee status in the UK, the remaining eight gained status elsewhere in Europe. A number of refugees were long-term unemployed when they joined the programmes. Of the 84 that responded to this question 15.5% (13) had been unemployed over 36 months, 21.4% (18) 24 to 35 months, 32% (27) 12 to 23 months, 19% (16) 6 to 11 months and 9.5% (8) less than 6 months⁶. For those who were, or had been employed, often this employment was temporary or part-time and was also invariably low-skilled or within the refugee support sector. These refugees joined the programmes because they wanted to seek skilled employment. The refugees on the programme came from 20 different countries (see Figure 3.2):

Figure 3.1: The countries of origin of the refugees



The data collected on educational attainment and former employment was by no means complete. In terms of education levels it was clear that only two individuals stated that they had reached degree level education in the UK with the majority of qualifications being in the areas of ESOL or practical certificates. However at least 51 trainees had degree level qualifications from outside the UK indicating high levels of achievement particularly, but not exclusively, those from the social research, healthcare and business administration pathways (see Appendix 1).

⁶ 2.5% did not give a comprehensible response

Data about the previous employment was even patchier than that on education. The information on UK qualification relates to the last job held in the UK. In many cases the individual was currently unemployed and had not worked for several months or years. Few specified their career in their country of origin. Where this information was available, it was apparent that when employed the trainees on the programme had been underemployed (see Appendix 2).

Recruitment

The recruitment was undertaken in different ways combining the use of leaflets, databases, and networking. The method used for each pathway is set out in Table 3.2:

Table 3.2: Recruitment methods

Pathway	Number sought	Number of applicants	Number recruited	Methods used to recruit
Coventry construction 1	12	13	13	Telephone individuals registered on skills audit database.
Coventry construction 2	15	25	18	Word of mouth from first cohort, liaison with local refugee centre and other NGOs.
Social research (JRF)	10	25	16	E-mails and telephone calls to Birmingham New Communities Network (BNCN) ⁷ members.
Social research (hact)	25	32	24	Leaflets and word of mouth distributed by Accommodate Partners ⁸ in the partnership areas.
General maintenance 1	15	20	17	Leaflets and word of mouth via Trellis and BNCN.
General maintenance 2	30	29	29	Leaflets and word of mouth via Trellis and TUC.
Business Administration	15	35	8	Leaflet distribution via college, Trellis Project ⁹ , TUC Centre ¹⁰ and BNCN.
Health care	12	12	12	Word of mouth, UCE database, via Trellis and through a previous refugee healthcare project and established networks.

Whilst recruitment levels were on the whole pretty high there were initial problems recruiting for the first general maintenance pilot and the business administration course. In the first instance we sought to undertake a wide circulation of a promotional leaflet via e-mail. It was quickly realised that the most effective method of spreading information about the opportunities was by face-to-face meetings or telephone calls. CURS subsequently telephoned RCOs and individual refugees whose contact details they had been given, visited RCOs and telephoned employment advisers in a wide range of organisations. When this approach was adopted, the majority of difficulties were overcome. Once courses were underway or completed, the refugees on those courses told their peers and many enquiries were received. The

⁷ BNCN are a network organisation representing over 70 Refugee Community Groups (RCOs)

⁸ *Accommodate* is a programme sponsored by the Housing Association Charitable Trust (hact) aimed at improving refugee housing options through multi-agency partnerships. The Accommodate partners differed between cities. They included RCOs, local authorities, housing associations and NGOs

⁹ The Trellis Project is an Employability Forum run project aimed at getting refugees in employment in Birmingham

¹⁰ The TUC Centre for the Unemployed was one of Birmingham City Council's Employment Resource Centres and was the main hub of the BCC's focus on getting refugees into employment.

second run of the construction and general maintenance courses were easy to fill because they were established and there were plenty of word of mouth opportunities. Several lessons were learned about recruitment:

- Personal contact is always preferable
- E-mails in English are not effective even if the individuals speak English well
- Never assume an individual knows how to get to the training venue – provide advice, guidance and materials to help them find it
- If recruitment takes place more than a couple of days before the course starts telephone the individual, remind them about the course and re-iterate directions
- Open days are useful to inform people about what they can expect and what will be expected of them, to re-assure people so they feel less nervous about engaging, to screen candidates to make sure they are suitable and to give them an opportunity to find the venue before programmes commence.

For each of the pathways it was necessary to provide some kind of criteria to ensure that the applicants were well matched to the programme. English language was a fundamental issue. All courses had a minimum language requirement but we were careful to ensure that the level was not set too high so as to exclude all interested parties, particularly in the more practically orientated sectors. Entry Level 2 was the minimum requirement for the construction and general maintenance courses. The requirements were higher for the other courses with the social researchers needing to be able to speak English well, and the health care and business administration applicants needing to be able to both speak and write English. Whilst some of these trainees had not undergone formal ESOL examinations, their level of spoken and written English was assessed at an initial meeting. We also asked that applicants had previous experience of working in a job at least related to the relevant sector, albeit in their country of origin. In addition students applying for the construction and business administration courses that were part LSC funded, needed to be in receipt of benefits in order to be eligible for fee remission. Whilst verbal confirmation was taken as evidence of previous experience for the first cohort of trainees, the second cohorts undertook some practical tests to enable them to demonstrate some evidence of skill. Those students who did not meet the criteria were signposted elsewhere. Some of those applying for the first construction pathway joined a waiting list in case we were able to offer a second opportunity. Where courses were oversubscribed, we selected the most suitable students and signposted the others to alternative provision where possible.

Assessment tools

The types of assessment tools varied across the pathways. The provision of work experience or practical sessions was central to all of the pathways except health care. Using this approach students were given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills through action rather than written activity - although in the case of business administration many of the actions involved the use of computer programmes such as Word, Excel and Outlook. Examples of the ways in which students were assessed are given in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3 Approaches to assessment

Pathway	Assessment methods
Coventry construction 1	Collection of evidence of competencies via photographs of achievements CSCS test
Coventry construction 2	Collection of evidence of competencies via photographs of achievements CSCS test
Social research (JRF)	Levels 1 and 2: observation of participation in group discussions, role-play sessions and production of research tools. Collection of evidence including interview tapes, data analysis tables and self-reflection forms Level 3: Production of a report
Social research (hact)	Levels 1 and 2: observation of participation in group discussions, role play sessions and production of research tools. Collection of evidence including interview tapes, data analysis tables and self-reflection forms Level 3: Production of a report
General maintenance 1	Collection of evidence of competencies via photographs of achievements Observation of practical skills CSCS test
General maintenance 2	Collection of evidence of competencies via photographs of achievements Observation of practical skills CSCS test
Business Administration	Assessment of materials collected from previous experience (via APEL) Development of a portfolio or e-portfolio of materials collected whilst on work experience Work experience supervisors statements of evidence Assessors visits to observe activities in the work experience setting Photographs of materials Personal statement outlining achievements for each unit of study
Health care	Written outputs IELTS test

Students on the business administration course were allocated an assessor at the beginning of the course and given an assessment plan that covered all the different aspects of their training. The assessor visited them regularly at their work placement, observed them carrying out their administration duties, looked at how they applied theory in practice, gave them feedback about their performance and then wrote a feedback document that then served as evidence in their portfolio. Some of the assessors also met with the students' workplace supervisor to discuss their performance. Assessment on the other courses was undertaken by tutors with external verifiers attending to ensure that the evidence collected was satisfactory.

Identifying other needs

The ability to identify the wider needs of students depended very much upon the resources available at each pathway. However there is no doubt that the wider welfare needs of students impacted on their ability to participate fully in each pathway and in some cases surprised the course co-ordinators

“the degree of the dependence of the students was very high. A lot of them looked for tutors to do everything for them.....They had to be shown everything from the beginning...I would say they needed 50% more support than we anticipated” (Health care Co-ordinator)

Fatima, aged 36, a nurse from Sri Lanka,

Fatima worked as a care assistant at Selly Oak hospital before she enrolled on the Pre-adaptation Programme. She had qualified as a nurse in Sri Lanka in the 1990s and worked for 10 years before coming to the UK. Once here, she was caught in the NMC's requirement to pass a supervised placement before being allowed to register, so she could not practice as a nurse until this had been completed. Unfortunately there were no supervised placements in the whole of the West Midlands area. She had waited for an opportunity for 4 years before finding the Pre-adaptation Programme. She passed the Programme with flying colours and because of her exceptional results she was allowed to APEL onto the second year of the Diploma in Nursing course at UCE. Since then she has received glowing reports from her practice placements. She will qualify in 2008.

A dedicated individual was needed to tackle these issues as they arose. The initial approach was to allocate each student a mentor, buddy or co-ordinator who they were asked to contact in the event of needing any kind of assistance. This reactive approach was effective for some students who willingly contacted their mentors when difficulties arose, for example with accommodation or benefits issues. The evaluation interviews revealed just how valuable students found their mentors or co-ordinators. The main area of support was help with assessments but mentors also explained concepts that students did not understand, provided signposting to help with welfare issues or made telephone calls to try to resolve problems. There was a tendency for some students not to mention their welfare problems until they became critical or until those problems caused them to leave their course. The second run of the general maintenance and construction courses enabled us to experiment with a more proactive approach to identifying problems.

In Coventry, the wider needs of the first cohort were identified through personal interviews with the Co-ordinator. His approach was very "hands on", he maintained telephone contact with individuals throughout the course and routinely explored whether they had any barriers preventing their attendance. In particular, some individuals were extremely unconfident. Through developing a relationship with the Co-ordinator, they were able to share their concerns and feel encouraged to continue. The Co-ordinator was also able to advise individuals about how to deal with specific problems or to signpost them to others within the college, Coventry Refugee Centre and other agencies. For the second cohort, we were more proactive and developed a needs analysis that covered:

- Language ability
- Need for a driving license
- Knowledge of UK recruitment process
- Self-confidence and skills recognition
- Knowledge of self-employment
- Knowledge of Jobseekers Allowance rules
- CSCS experience
- IT skills
- Future aspirations
- Other personal or welfare issues

Actions and pathways were offered for all of the above, some within the college i.e. IT learning, and others with outside agencies i.e. driving theory test training.

The second cohort of general maintenance (GM) students were each allocated a buddy. The buddy was a refugee who had passed either the general maintenance or social research courses. They received a half day training from CURS setting out their role which included meeting twice weekly with students to ask them if they were experiencing any difficulties with the course and whether there was any support they needed more generally. They were asked to report back to course tutors weekly to give feedback on student's progress and to alert course tutors or CURS if any problems were identified.

Barriers to engagement or achievement

The main barriers to engagement in the project were lack of resources to pay for travel and equipment, and the trainees' lack of confidence. These problems were overcome where we were aware of them by the provision of a fund for equipment and through intensive one to one support from their Co-ordinators, tutors or mentors. However not all students told their tutors about the problems they faced and not all tutors communicated the problems they became aware of to CURS. Funds were provided to pay for a wide range of materials including safety equipment, dictionaries, tape recorders, childcare and travel.

Language was a difficulty for some students and although they were signposted to further ESOL provision or, in the case of business administration, literacy classes, progress was not fast enough to ensure barriers were completely overcome. Both students and tutors struggled at times because the language, skills and educational ability of students were so varied. The healthcare course had to be slowed down significantly to allow the least able students to progress. This frustrated the more able students. All tutors found they were able to achieve less than anticipated because progress was so slow. The social research course used mentors to help those students who were struggling by giving them extra one to one sessions. The general maintenance students were paired so that the more linguistically able students could support those with less developed English whilst the health care course provided students with a glossary of NHS terms that they could take away and learn or refer to in class.

Cultural knowledge was a particular problem for some refugees. Examples of this include how to present themselves in interviews, what to do if unable to attend a meeting and how to respond to questions. Getting the balance between delivering an honest answer to a question and being overly frank was one concern. For example when asked by a potential work experience employer if he had a driving license, one of the students responded that he did not but that he had a car and had driven to the interview. Others simply gave insufficient answers. It also proved extremely difficult to get the students to understand the meaning of the term "unpaid work experience". Despite several different people on the steering group explaining the term and constant re-iteration from the Co-ordinator, several students thought there was a paid job waiting for them at the end of each course. Another was disappointed to find he was not paid at his work experience placement.

A further barrier to successful engagement in the problem was the reliability of some students. A core group of individuals attended regularly but there were a small number on the periphery of each pathway whose attendance on the course was erratic, who sometimes did not turn up for meetings or who did not appear when expected for their work experience places. These same individuals were often not punctual. A number of reasons emerged as to why some individuals were inconsistent:

- There were clear signs that some students were depressed
- Students had to attend appointments with their Employment Advisor or Doctor and did not realise it was possible to reschedule
- They were unwell or had to deal with an emergency but did not realise that they should inform their tutor or employer
- They agreed to attend an event or course because they were trying to please someone but did not really wish to attend so put in a “token” appearance.

The construction students received very high levels of support from a dedicated Co-ordinator throughout the duration of the course. He was able to continue offering this level of assistance until the second cohort started but even at this point continued to help previous students by adopting a mentoring role. The steering group sought to find support for any need identified by the Co-ordinator. This included travel expenses, fees to cover a short course and further courses/support via signposting. However after a while, in the absence of a regular programme of lessons, some individuals from the first cohort drifted away or showed sporadically at the other activities identified. The Birmingham general maintenance partnership lacked the benefits of a dedicated Co-ordinator but tutors and programme Co-ordinators offered a high level of support wherever possible to deal with emerging issues such as housing or benefits problems. Without doubt this one to one support would have been better managed if a dedicated Co-ordinator had been appointed. However, resource constraints and the timing of the funding meant this was not possible.

A further barrier to engagement was the accommodation problems facing some students. Students reported frequent house moves that were very disruptive as well as living in overcrowded and/or poor conditions. For example living in a hostel makes it difficult for a student to concentrate on training and looking for a professional job

“They put criminals to the same place with gentle people. The basic accommodation condition needs to be provided. If your life is quiet you can be successful. If not it is very hard to concentrate”.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to the programme was locating sufficient work experience places. This will be explored in some depth later in the report.

Help to move on

Once students were settled on their courses or engaged in their work experience placements, their confidence rose and they were able to dedicate themselves to the programme. However the transition from pathway to employment took some of them out of their “comfort zone”. They needed a considerable amount of support in order to make their next move either to higher education or employment. Originally it had been intended that they would be offered one to one specialist employment support by the advisers at the Trellis Project. However due to lack of resources, this was not

possible and Trellis moved to hosting vocationally specific job fairs. In addition we identified other ways of providing support. Help was offered in a range of different ways depending on the resources available and the needs of the individual. The types of move on support offered is set out in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Move on support

Pathway	Move on support
Coventry construction 1&2	Steps to success programme One to one support by mentor Support from a CURS mentor and pathway manager Access to the Trellis construction employers' job fair Advice about self-employment
Social research (JRF and hact)	One to one support from the CURS social research mentors Access to the University of Birmingham careers department
General maintenance 1	Support from the Construction Employment Alliance job placement department Access to the Trellis construction employers' job fair
General maintenance 2	Support from the Construction Employment Alliance job placement department Support from Learning into Employment Academy QITUM Job Club Access to the Trellis construction employers' job fair
Business Administration	Access to the University of Birmingham careers department Access to the Trellis business administration employers' job fair.
Health care	Support from the UCE careers department

Some students were quite resourceful and located opportunities through networking or agencies. The QITUM job club was developed because a small number of the general maintenance graduates were struggling to find the help they needed. These students were consulted about their needs via a series of telephone interviews and then CURS worked with QITUM to develop a programme covering interview skills, job search and self-presentation.

Outcomes

Information about outcomes was collected through exit interviews and follow-up telephone calls. Whilst some gained employment or a place on a higher-level training course before the end of the programme, others took a little more time. In the case of the JRF social research students, the health care students and the construction students, the CURS programme Co-ordinators had built personal relationships with the students, which made staying in touch relatively easy. It was harder to maintain contact with the general maintenance students because we did not have a direct relationship with them. In addition, the hact students lived too far away from the University to maintain regular contact. The business administration students completed their course just as this report was being written and are currently in the process of seeking employment. After the final interview, it was very difficult to maintain contact with some of the completers because we were reliant on telephone contact and some had changed their telephone numbers or did not return the evaluator's telephone calls.

The outcomes for completers at September 2007 is shown in Table 3.5. Some 16 people (13%) gained permanent employment in a relevant skilled job as a result of the course. A further 38 (31%) also gained permanent employment as a result of the training but the employment was not directly related to their area of expertise. Four people (3%) became self-employed in their area of expertise. Some 15 people (12%) went on to higher-level training in their areas of expertise. This training included a

post-graduate degree, undergraduate degrees, HNDs and NVQs. Five (4%) individuals were waiting to re-sit their CSCS tests. Three people (2%) continued on their work experience programme and a further four were either heavily pregnant or had recently given birth and were planning to seek employment at a later stage. Eleven students (9%) were unemployed and no information was available for 27 (22%) individuals. Finally one individual had decided to retire, one was long term sick and a further individual had received funding to set up his own project as a result of his training.

Table 3.5: Outcomes for programme completers

Pathway	Number starting	Number completing	Outcomes for completers
Coventry construction 1	13	13	2 in permanent construction employment 2 self – employed kitchen fitters 1 into further construction training 3 into other employment 3 unemployed 2 unknown
Coventry construction 2	18	14	2 into construction employment 2 into other employment 1 into Higher Education (construction) 3 awaiting CSCS re-sit 1 into Further Education (construction) 2 work experience 3 unknown
Social research (JRF)	16	16 ¹¹	1 about to have a baby 7 in employment (2 also engaged in HE) 2 self-employed 4 unknown 1 higher education 1 retired
Social research (hact)	24	22 ¹²	17 in employment 1 recently gave birth 1 too ill to work 1 secured funding for own project 2 unknown
General maintenance 1	17	14	2 into construction employment 2 into other employment 1 into Further Education 2 unemployed 7 unknown
General maintenance 2	29	27	7 into construction employment 7 into other employment 4 into Further or Higher Education 4 unemployed 5 unknown
Business Administration	8	5	1 has business administration employment 1 will continue voluntary work 1 about to have a baby 2 seeking employment
Health care	12	12	2 employed in health care 5 applying to full time nursing programme (1 joining in year 2 as UCE course used for APEL) 1 recently gave birth 2 seeking employment in health care whilst awaiting

¹¹ Sixteen completed at least one of the accreditations and eight completed all three

¹² Twenty-two completed at least one of the accreditations and six completed all three

			IELTS or PLAB exams 4 unknown
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Factors impacting on success

The outcomes of the pathways suggest a considerable degree of success with at least 47% entering some kind of permanent or self-employment compared to the 27% who were employed largely in temporary work prior to the commencement of the programme. A range of different factors impacted on the degree of success of each pathway. These are discussed below.

The importance of integrated packages

The vast majority of students on the pathways lacked UK work experience and were unfamiliar about workplace culture, the vagaries of the UK labour market, how their skills related to actual jobs and the vocational language required to undertake a job in a particular sector. The pathways brought together several necessary elements into one package, generally delivered at a single venue. Students appreciated the integrated nature of the courses: *“It’s good to have a course where problem with language is taken as part of the course”* (Healthcare). They found the knowledge they developed about how their skills related to the UK labour market invaluable and as a result of the course they were able to have a sense, for the first time since arriving in the UK, about how to move forward in their sector: *“Before I start this course I had no idea how to go forward. Now I know what I need to do. I have more strength. I am ready to go....”* *“Now I have an idea how to prepare myself. We have done many things in a short time”* (Construction). The combination of workplace orientation with skills accreditation led to some of the students feeling much more confident about their future and about themselves generally.

Sarah, aged 35, a graduate from Rwanda

Sarah attended the CURS Social Research Training Programme and undertook some work experience collecting information about refugee mental health issues. She found the programme particularly useful in developing her communication skills and building her self-confidence. Encouraged by her tutors she applied for a place on a University of Birmingham Masters Programme and was successful in being accepted and offered a bursary to cover fees. Whilst undertaking her Masters programme on a part-time basis, she has worked as a research co-ordinator and interviewer and a community development worker and hopes to continue working in these areas when she graduates.

The need for flexibility

Perhaps one of the keys to success was the ability of the courses to be flexible. Given that all were conceived as pilots it was stressed to all involved parties that the approach was new and we needed to understand what works well and how we could learn from our mistakes. Regular meetings to discuss the difficulties faced meant solutions could be identified and the approach altered. Much was gained from undertaking a second run of the general maintenance and construction courses. When language problems were identified more ESOL was introduced, as were further health and safety training when there were indications that the students were struggling with their mock CSCS tests.

Henry, aged 53, a painter and decorator from Zimbabwe

Henry attended the CURS Coventry Skilled Refugees into Construction course one day per week for 14 weeks, had his skills assessed and accredited through practical work and some focused training. He was taught the language and knowledge he needed to pass the mandatory Health and Safety qualification. Once he had passed Henry undertook some work experience painting a community centre before being offered a full-time job as a painter and decorator. Throughout the course, David, the Refugee Construction Co-ordinator supported Henry and his cohort of 12 students.

Team working

All of the pathways with the exception of social research depended on partnership working. The social research was delivered entirely by CURS, supported by a team of eight staff. Action on all the pathways required teamwork. Where this was forthcoming, the benefits were enjoyed by staff and students. Regular steering group meetings ensured that everyone involved on the construction pathway was aware of their role and responsibilities so that as issues arose it was clear who the Co-ordinator could approach to help seek a resolution. When problems emerged the group met to discuss them and all used their contacts in Birmingham, Coventry and across the UK to try to find solutions. Different staff in different parts of the colleges involved in delivery came together to develop materials, for example, ESOL with construction, or health and safety language. CURS tutors relied heavily on student mentors to monitor student progress and provide one to one support that would not have been possible with 40 students.

Where partnerships did not translate into teamwork, problems were caused for both staff and students. This mainly related to the issue of communication. Students needed to know what to expect for the entire programme and different providers also required information about the courses being taught to ensure that they could relate their teaching and materials to those being provided by others. When this did not occur students became confused and disorientated and tutors irritated. These problems were reduced with the introduction of much more frequent steering group meetings with CURS acting as mediator. Minuted meetings with clear action points were important as evidence of agreement to take responsibility for a particular action. In some cases CURS needed to remind partners of their agreement in the minutes to ensure activities were completed before the next steering group meeting. There were additional problems between some providers around competition over targets and outcomes.

Support

The welfare issues faced by students were raised above. These can be a major limiting factor in a student's ability to succeed. The provision of buddies and mentors was critical to the success of the programme and high student retention rates. The support offered came in three formats: practical help with problems or course work; material help with finances such as travel, equipment or childcare; and moral support through encouragement and the opportunity to have someone listen to their problems. Many of the staff working on these pathways had not worked with refugees before and were a little nervous about how to address the students in a culturally appropriate way. Most learned through their experiences. The construction Co-ordinator offered college staff in Coventry a great deal of assistance whilst he himself was heavily supported in understanding college culture by his Head of Department.

Information, advice and guidance

Whilst some students found their courses offered the information they needed, the lack of specific IAG around job search was the major omission in the pathways. This support was originally meant to be provided across all pathways by one of the partners but their lack of capacity and a change in management meant the one to one help with job search, which should have occurred throughout the programme, simply did not happen. Tutors, the Co-ordinators, mentors and steering group members did what they could to help students gain work but dedicated one to one help was really what was required. Some attempt at remedying the situation will be made before the end of the EQUAL programme through joint work with the Trellis project to put on specialist job fairs.

Michael, aged 22, from Burundi

Michael was working full time in a factory and volunteering for a local RCO when he became involved in the community research programme. Michael heard about the programme through Canopy HA in Leeds one of the organisations involved in the *Accommodate* Refugee Integration Partnership. Despite working long hours and doing shift work he was committed to the training because he wanted to learn research skills that he could utilise within the refugee community to help raise awareness some of the re-settlement difficulties newcomers face. Michael completed and gained accreditation on all three of the programme modules in qualitative research. He found that the interviewing skills he had acquired helped him gain confidence and improve his self-esteem. At the end of the programme Michael, together with two other community researchers, facilitated a workshop as part of a seminar to share good practice about community research. This event was attended by a wide audience of academics and practitioners and was a real testimony of how his confidence has grown. Michael was nominated for a national Adult Learners Award and with references from CURS he went on independently to secure funding to set up his own furniture re-cycling project. He is keen to get involved in further research on new migrant issues and is seeking opportunities in his area.

Work experience

The provision of work experience placements was seen as the cornerstone of the pathways but also proved to be the most challenging element to manage successfully. One major problem was the Jobcentre Plus (JCP) 16-hour rule. At the consultation stage of the project development, CURS consulted JCP about their idea to introduce work experience to refugees and sought specific advice about how Job Seekers Allowance claimants might comply with regulations whilst attending work experience. It was agreed that JCP would allow refugees on the programmes to attend work experience for as many hours as necessary because JCP viewed work experience as an excellent mechanism to enhance employability. Once the programme was developed, JCP in Birmingham changed their advice and stated that claimants must not be in work experience or training in excess of 16 hours per week. A loophole in this regulation was identified. Claimants were permitted to *volunteer* for unlimited hours providing they could demonstrate that they were seeking work. This meant that in Birmingham all the work placements needed to be sought in “not for profit” organisations, making identification of placements even harder. Even once this rule was identified, three students had to leave pathways because their benefits were stopped though they were complying with the 16-hour rule.

Identifying work placement opportunities was extremely time consuming and generally outside the experience of most of the partner organisations. Whilst one of

the key partner organisations had originally agreed to locate experience places and did so for the business administration pathway, they were unable to provide the resources to identify employers for the other pathways. Once employers were identified through other means, both employers and placement students required extensive support to ensure that both parties understood what was expected of them. Whilst this information was communicated there was still confusion. For example, an employer in Coventry had originally agreed that work experience would be offered for six weeks and then the individual would be interviewed for a job. A change of personnel meant that upon arriving at the organisation the student found that the interview offer was no longer available. These and other problems might have been overcome by development of a contract within which employers would agree what they were offering and students would agree their own offer.

Language

The issue of language is central to the problems faced by refugees, and indeed all new migrants, when seeking employment and therefore the provision of some vocational language was crucial to the success of the pathways. The provision of specialised CSCS ESOL, developed through the joint working of ESOL and construction trainers was critical to the ability of students to pass their CSCS test. In order to speed the development of their language abilities students were encouraged to communicate in English whilst on their pathways.

Retention rates

Overall the drop out rates from the courses was low and pass rates high for those who completed the pathways (see Table 3.6). The pathways were particularly successful in this regard because of the intensive support offered by the co-ordinators, tutors and mentors. The level of commitment offered by the Coventry Construction Co-ordinator was recognised by the awarding of the City College Tutor of the Year award. Interlinking provision in the areas of practical skills, language and health and safety meant that the students had their support and learning needs in one package and were guided through all this by one individual, which meant there was little room for confusion.

Table 3.6: Retention and pass rates

Pathway	Retention rates	Accreditation	Pass rates
Coventry construction 1	66.5%	NVQ 1 unit CSCS card	100% 72.7%
Coventry construction 2	77%	NVQ 1 unit CSCS card	100% 100%
Social research (JRF)	94%	Peer research skills Using qualitative research Understanding qualitative data	100% 93.3% 53.3%
Social research (hact)	92%	Peer research skills Using qualitative research Understanding qualitative data	54 % 100% 27%
General maintenance 1	78.6%	NVQ 1 unit CSCS card	100% 72.7%
General maintenance 2	88.9%	NVQ 1 unit CSCS card	Results awaited 55%

Business Administration	62.5%	NVQ 2	100%
Health care	75%	Level 4	88.9%

The level of commitment and motivation of the co-ordinators and mentors combined with their interpersonal skills were critical to the success of the project. The students had low levels of confidence in training and education largely because many of them had endured negative experiences of learning since arriving in the UK. They fully engaged with the programme because of the trust they invested in their Co-ordinators and tutors. The construction students were prepared to trust their Co-ordinator because he was a refugee and understood what they had been through both in their experience of seeking asylum and crucially the multiple disappointments they had experienced in failing to gain employment in the UK. Others gained trust in their tutors because regular contact was maintained through e-mails and telephone calls. Those who did not appear for sessions were called or texted and asked if they were "OK". Solutions were offered to any problems identified. Financial support in terms of travel and childcare helped to keep people on track. In addition when the general maintenance tutor noticed that students were not returning after Friday prayers she offered prayer space within the training venue to minimise disruption. Only one student stated that they left a course because it was not suitable. Five departed because of ill health, five left because they gained employment, five left the UK, three because of problems with their benefits and one left for family reasons.

Gains from the pathways

All courses were subject to a two-part evaluation. Students were asked at the early stages of the training what they hoped to gain and were re-interviewed at the end of the training to explore the gains made and the problems encountered. The construction, general maintenance and business administration courses had only recently completed as the second stage evaluations were undertaken for this report so it is too early to know how many students will yet gain employment. Contact will be maintained until the end of the EQUAL programme.

The majority of participants in the programme hoped that the outcome would be a work experience place, a paid job or a place on a further or higher education or training programme. The social research students had slightly different objectives. Whilst some were optimistic about gaining work the majority were seeking the following:

- Confidence
- Qualifications
- Life skills
- Communication skills
- Research skills
- Increased knowledge about the communities they serve
- The ability to analyse and use information

There was universal agreement that all the social research expectations had been met with the exception, for three trainees, of locating sustainable paid employment. In particular, community researchers stressed the impact that the training had on their

confidence and communication skills. The students also made other gains that they had not anticipated. These included the ability to:

- Analyse quantitative data
- Do research in a consistent and credible manner
- Engage with high profile people
- Write reports
- Work under pressure
- Work to a deadline.

From the perspective of the community researchers, research training was viewed as a successful. They cited a number of reasons for this including the fact that the training was held and run by the University of Birmingham and the name of the University on the certificates gave it status and value. Agreeing training days in advance to suit the schedules of the trainees, the flexibility to offer the training at weekend and on the occasional evening all helped to ensure attendance as did efforts put into reminding students about training sessions the day before training was held. Provision of computers, tape recorders and all materials necessary for study meant all community researchers operated from the same playing field. The focus on role play and group work meant students bonded, made new links between organisations and quickly developed friendships within which they supported each other.

Construction trainees gained an understanding of the construction sector, learned how to look for employment in the sector, how to prepare a CV, saw an improvement in their interviewing skills, gained a better understanding of language used in the construction industry, had an opportunity to demonstrate and practice their construction skills, got a CSCS card, learned health and safety, learned about material, gained confidence, developed an understanding of self employment, and how the system works and saw an increase in their motivation generally: “*a spark to ignite people’s motivation*”. Those who went on work experience valued the opportunity this gave them to have some work experience history from the UK to place on their CV.

In the healthcare programme the lack of proof of previous career remained a problem for those students who wish to become doctors and nurses. However the course helped students to develop knowledge about the NHS, to plan their own personal development, increase their knowledge of higher education and their ability to locate career relevant information through the use of IT. Crucially students developed knowledge about how to access employment in health care and felt they developed knowledge of UK work culture that may have taken years to acquire without the course. The course was described as “*the shortest and a vital way to go back to work*”. The course was said to have considerable impact on the self-confidence of those who took part in it.

General maintenance students developed their understanding of the general maintenance sector and how their skills could be employed in that area. In particular students learned a great deal about how to look for employment, how to become self-employed and how to produce the materials needed to access employment. They worked on developing a CV and improving their interview skills and generally felt

they were far more employable within any job, rather than just general maintenance, than they were before the courses.

Business administration students felt they gained a great deal from their work experience because they were able to undertake a wide range of activities in the UK that they had not had the opportunity to undertake previously in this country. Having the opportunity to practice skills was found to be particularly useful. Students also welcomed the opportunity to develop softer skills associated with working in an office environment such as working in a team, dealing with a wide range of people from different backgrounds and taking responsibility. Volunteering in business administration helped students to understand what it was like working in this sector in the UK. All the students found that the course helped to develop their self-confidence.

Working with employers

Lack of UK work experience and a UK reference are often stated as two of the key reasons that refugees in the UK are unable to gain employment. Through development of the employability pathways we hoped to overcome this problem and also provide a site where refugees could demonstrate their skills, learn new skills and gain accreditation. The extent to which these objectives were met varied between the pathways.

The main problem faced was how to identify potential work experience places and how to support the students to understand the nature and opportunities of work placements. In terms of work experience places, attention was paid to this issue too late in the first run of the construction and general maintenance pathways. The amount of time and lead up required to set up placements was not appreciated. All of the steering group members were extremely busy working on other aspects of their jobs and the Co-ordinator was fully engaged in course provision and student support. In the second course, we sought to involve organisations with a wider remit to help us locate places. They made commitments but were ultimately unable to meet these because of pressure of work or a change in priorities. Work is currently ongoing to source placements. Existing employers who offered placements to earlier cohorts will hopefully re-engage with the programme and housing associations in the sub-region will be contacted.

Some relationships with employers have been particularly successful. Those employers who have a social agenda appear keen to engage with refugees and provide them with support. In Coventry, we had more success with smaller businesses that had the opportunity to see evidence of student's ability at a work experience placement and could envisage how that individual might fit in to their organisation. Larger organisations were more problematic because of their tendency to rely on sub-contractors. Midway through the first programme employers were invited to watch the students working and suggested that they might be most attractive to employers seeking general operatives rather than specialist bricklayers. A particular problem was that whilst the students had high levels of skills in their country of origin, these skills did not translate to the UK at the same level because the materials used, for example in Ethiopia, are entirely different. Following this event we amended the training available to the second cohort to make it more generalist and place more emphasis on painting and decorating. For the first cohort we held a business breakfast

that was attended by 12 construction employers. Three of the participating organisations offered work experience places. One of the organisations sent its employees on a course arranged by CURS and delivered by Bournville College in Coventry. This course explored the kinds of support that refugees undertaking work experience might require. Eventually six work experience places were located with a community organisation, and four with private businesses. In Birmingham the second cohort were given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills to employers. Several trainees were offered work as a result but failed to take the opportunities up. Enquiries revealed that individuals were concerned about rates of pay and the expectation that they would be self-employed. Whilst self-employment is a common route in construction, our trainees were nervous of it, perhaps because they were unsure how it would work and how they could sustain a secure income once they lost their benefits. The issues and practicalities relating to self-employment is an aspect that should be strengthened for the delivery of future courses.

Roger, aged 39, a carpenter from Democratic Republic Congo

Roger is a qualified carpenter and worked as supervisor for a construction company in his home country. Despite having nearly 10 years experience, he had no evidence of his qualifications and struggled to find work in the UK. Roger enrolled on the first general maintenance pathway in Birmingham and passed with flying colours. During the course of the training he gained a Level 2 certificate in ESOL, acquired his CSCS card as well as gaining an understanding of the UK construction sector and adapting his skills to meet UK practice. Roger went on to become a paid mentor for the second general maintenance pathway. In this job he played a valuable role in supporting a group of refugee to complete their own training. Roger was then successful in gaining a placement in general maintenance with a national housing association. In addition to his work as a mentor he was able to further his UK work experience and gain a reference from a respected organisation. He is now looking to use this to help secure further work in the construction sector.

The packaging of the community research programme as work experience was useful for community researchers, particularly those without employment. The research phase of the project was treated as employment with the community researchers having targets and deadlines to adhere to, something which was not universally popular or respected, but ensured that in the main work was completed in a timely and professional manner, students could enter the work they had undertaken on the programme as employment on their CVs and ask CURS for a reference. Several of them used this facility and have subsequently been successful in gaining employment.

When seeking work experience places for business administration in Birmingham, providers were asked to ensure that the employer was from a “not for profit” organisation thus enabling the student to undertake the number of hours appropriate for the course, generally three or four days per week. This restricted the range of employers available but ensured students were able to comply with Jobcentre Plus rules. In Coventry JCP was more flexible and students were able to take places with private companies. Business administration students saw work experience as a way of helping them to be more employable - *“It’s a way of learning “the British way of working” and putting training into practice”*. The combining of assessment with work experience was seen as a particularly useful model in this pathway. Students had a chance to apply their learning and skills and enjoyed the opportunity to work in a team, deal with people from different backgrounds, and take some responsibility.

They found the familiarisation with the UK workplace particularly useful and experienced an increase in self-confidence as a result of the work experience. Initially students found the work experience setting a little uncomfortable and were a little nervous about certain tasks such as answering the telephone, being on reception alone or placing files in alphabetical order. However they overcame their concerns with the help of their colleagues and workplace supervisors. All supervisors expressed satisfaction with the performance of their volunteers.

As a response to capacity issues, the partner organisation that had taken responsibility for helping pathway graduates access employment decided to arrange job fairs rather than provide one to one support. At the present time the fairs are being organised. It is anticipated that the construction fair will be held at a venue in Birmingham and will provide the opportunity for practical demonstrations of ability at a construction training centre so that employers can see skills in action. A business administration fair is also planned. Originally the health care course was to be linked to work placements. The course co-ordinator found, despite her repeated efforts, the NHS showed little interest in refugee professionals.

Innovation

There was much that was innovative in the pathways implemented in the West Midlands but virtually all the pathways relied upon existing courses which were linked and shaped to make them integrated and refugee appropriate.

Integration of resources

Rather than seeking to “re-invent the wheel” CURS sought to explore the resources that were currently available and to link them together in an integrated fashion through partnership working. Previous research in the region had indicated that students were getting “lost” after attending courses, struggled to know where to go next or were finding that their lack of UK work experience meant they were unattractive to employers. The integration of products that are normally offered separately was critical because it enabled many of the refugees’ multiple employability needs to be met within one package. Once linked, skills orientation and recognition, vocational ESOL, job search support and work experience were a powerful combination that attracted high levels of interest from the refugee community and had considerable impact on refugees’ employability.

The integration of resources required leadership and development time to bring together different organisations, consult about what was possible and then crucially encourage organisations to act upon their ideas. Early in the process we realised that turning words into actions took strong leadership and careful management. Meetings alone were insufficient. What was needed were frequent progress checks and clear allocation of roles and responsibilities. Several organisations lacked confidence dealing with what was to them, a new client group, and welcomed having a lead organisation to ask for advice and to help make decisions. Within two pathways, health and construction, a specialist Co-ordinator was in place to manage the different elements of the programme and seek to ensure it met learners’ needs. The employment of an on-site Co-ordinator was a very effective way of ensuring needs were met, difficulties identified as soon as they arose and decisions communicated to appropriate partners.

Selecting the right partners was extremely important for ensuring that the different needs of students could be met. Regular steering group meetings meant that problems could be discussed and solutions identified through steering group members or their networks.

Vocational orientation

The combination of vocational language provision and vocational orientation was powerful. Whilst refugees possessed skills in the different vocational areas, they had little knowledge about how those skills related to the local labour market or the relevant sector. In some cases there was little relationship between an individual's experience and labour market requirements. This was particularly the case in construction where buildings and materials in some countries differed markedly from the UK. Identifying at the early stages of the programme, with the help of local employers, that specialist craft work in fields such as bricklaying and carpentry were unrealistic, enabled a change of emphasis in the course to prepare students for entry into construction via general groundworking or painting and decorating. Orientation helped students to make decisions about whether the sector they were familiar with would offer them the type of job they wanted to do. It also helped them to understand how much work was required in order to get to a point where they could re-enter their career. This was particularly helpful for healthcare professionals who lacked understanding about the requirements of the NHS before they engaged in the course. Orientation could be described as a "reality check". Students were given a realistic assessment of their potential and signposted to support to help them meet their goals as quickly as possible. Students, some of whom had struggled for years to find a way forward, welcomed the clarity and support offered by the course. Orientation then sought to take students to the next stage in their journey, to get their skills recognised.

Skills recognition

Whilst we realised fairly early into the process of exploring how skills might be recognised that (for the time being) because of the way education is funded in the UK APEL is difficult to implement on a large scale, we still wanted a mechanism for recognising refugees' skills. Evidencing those skills was important to employers who wanted some independent, UK based, assessment of abilities in terms that they understood. It was also very important in the empowering of refugees because it increased feelings of self-worth and self-confidence. Perhaps the best example of skills recognition was the combined use of work experience and college based work to offer the business administration students the chance to evidence their abilities in 38 weeks rather than two years. The ability to demonstrate skills in the workplace was critical to providing evidence for assessments but also giving students a realistic view of careers in their chosen sectors and building their confidence.

Elsewhere skills recognition came through providing students with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in a practical way through provision of materials and a site to practice/work in, through role-play or volunteering. This differs from the more usual approach of written assessments or portfolios. These activities were recorded through observation, photographs or witness testimonies and certificates awarded for units rather than entire programmes. The award of certificates indicating the numbers of credits at particular levels provided important evidence to employers that students could undertake activities to a particular standard. Moreover the celebration of success through awarding a certificate from a UK institution and presenting the

certificate at a formal event had an enormous impact on individuals. It also provided

Rosie, aged 39, a midwife from Burundi

Rosie's original story in her own words:

I came from Burundi because of the war. It was in 2002. I was working as a midwife and one day I came home to find my house burnt down and my husband and four children had disappeared. I ran from the fighting with my uncle. We went firstly to Zambia, running through the bush for 3 days. After that we travelled to Kampala and took a plane to England. When we arrived we went to a hotel. I fell sick with pneumonia and was in hospital for a month. After that I claimed asylum. First time they turned my application down. On appeal I was given refugee status.

Since then I have searched for my family. A pastor helped me find two of my children who had been taken to Malawi by a friend. Recently I have found my other two children and brought them to England. I still do not know where my husband is. When I applied to the NMC for registration, they turned me down. Firstly they wanted references from Burundi. Then they said my training was not sufficient. I trained for three years as a nurse then a further year as a midwife. I have 11 years experience.

Rosie enrolled on the Pre-adaptation Programme and worked very hard to pass both the modules, despite having to settle her two most recently arrived children in school and look after the family by herself. Once she completed the Programme she decided to apply for retraining as the only way to be able to get back into practice. However, she had to delay her application for this training as she had news of her husband so she went back to Africa to be reunited with him and to arrange for him to join her. She is now enrolled on the three year Diploma course and she should be qualified in 2010.

Mentoring

Whilst there are mentoring programmes in the UK, most notably the Time Together programme, these do not have an employment focus. In addition our mentors were paid and treated as professionals rather than volunteers. We sought to build on Scandinavian and Dutch models where individuals are allocated a mentor with expertise in a vocational area and are matched to trainees in order to help them with their skills development as well as with pastoral needs. In the social research pathway mentors were all researchers who had some community development background. They were asked to provide structured support to help students with their learning and to provide feedback on a regular basis to help students to develop their interpersonal skills. Those students who used their mentor in this way made more rapid progress. The mentors were able to offer one to one support that targeted the particular needs of each student. They also helped, where possible, with any personal problems that emerged. Regular meetings between course tutors and the mentors enabled them to raise problems that had emerged with their peers and the pathway leaders so that it was possible to learn from experience and brainstorm problems.

The general maintenance programme also relied heavily upon mentors, who in this context were called "buddies". Their role was to act as intermediaries between students and tutors, and specifically to support students with language difficulties. They met their mentees on a twice-weekly basis and were matched by language. They were trained by the University and given a set of tasks to undertake on a regular basis to track progress and good practice. They were also asked to explore any difficulties the students were having and report these directly to the University. The use of buddies in the general maintenance programme helped keep retention rates up by offering a friendly face who could identify problems before they became insurmountable. They also helped to reduce the gulf between language abilities and help tutors to progress without frequent breaks to help those students less able to speak English.

Student support budget

EQUAL provided CURS with the ability to “oil the wheels” of the pathways by providing a budget for incidentals. Although the amount expended on each student was generally low, this budget could make the difference between success and failure. The contribution to childcare costs that was made available to those undertaking the health care programme enabled women to take part who would otherwise not have been able to attend. Travel costs were provided for individuals to attend work experience and small items like dictionaries helped students with their language difficulties. In Coventry a small budget was provided to enable the tutor to offer tea and biscuits to the class. Coming together to have a drink helped to build team spirit which later, when the crew went to do some work experience together, proved invaluable.

Work experience

Offering work experience is not a new initiative but offering work experience linked to mentoring and vocational orientation is innovative and resulted in a number of positive outcomes. Jobcentre Plus’s 16-hour rule was a major constraint on our ability to offer work experience as extensively as we wished. We were largely able to overcome this problem by engaging with the “not for profit sector”.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

There are some key findings of this project that need to be considered in any future attempts to enhance refugee employability. It is well acknowledged that the trauma of the refugee experience brings with it a loss of confidence generally but particularly in state institutions (see Phillimore *et al.* 2007a; Crowley 2003; Gorst-Unsworth and Goldenberg 1998). Lack of trust in employment initiatives is exacerbated by negative experiences with JCP initiatives (see Phillimore *et al.* 2003; 2004; Goodson and Phillimore *et al.* 2005). The first hurdle in developing initiatives for refugees is rebuilding trust between trainers and providers and the refugee community. This is not easy to achieve but progress can be made through working closely with community organisations to ensure they have some ownership of initiatives, through talking to people and “showing your face” rather than relying on electronic media, and through employing skilled refugees who are respected by their communities. Clear communication is very important, particularly at the early stages of a programme. This includes explaining to students exactly what they can expect from the course and setting out what will happen during each session and at various key stages of the programme and their assessment. Building relationships within groups of students is also important because they can offer valuable support to each other. Developing employability from the early stages in a programme is critical, as is explaining to students why workplace orientation and job search training is important in their particular areas. Providing opportunities to meet employers also strengthens commitment to a course. In general it is important to communicate what makes a particular course different from those courses that refugees have encountered before. In the case of this programme, it was the combination of skills recognition, vocational orientation and work experience that made the courses attractive.

A further challenge faced when dealing with those who have been through the refugee experience is the wide range of problems that some refugees face which can impact on their ability to commit to training or work experience. This is evidenced by extremely low retention rates on ESOL and other LSC funded courses (see Phillimore *et al.* 2007b). These include dealing with JCP, utilities and immigration, coping with overseas family emergencies, health problems, homelessness and mental illness (see Phillimore *et al.* 2007a). Rather than waiting for problems to turn into crises, adopting a proactive approach to identifying potential difficulties and helping to provide solutions, or at least advice about how to deal with an issue whilst remaining on the programme, can be invaluable. It is important also to communicate that missing one session does not mean the student cannot continue on the course. The use of Co-ordinators or mentors on the employability pathways was critical to the success of the initiative. Students were telephoned before each session to check that they were able to attend and helped to get around reasons why they might drop out. This approach was particularly important in the first few weeks of training. A mentor also helped to support students to understand the cultural nuances associated with their vocational area.

Previous research has indicated that the vast majority of refugees are extremely keen to gain permanent work and although most will undertake any work, re-entering their vocational area is important because it enables development of self-esteem as some

semblance of former status is retained. The process of flight from persecution means refugees rarely enter their host country with little other than their skills and the clothes upon their back. Lack of evidence of qualification or experience is the reality for most refugees. Providing an opportunity to practice skills and assessing those skills in either a workplace or practical training environment is critical in building confidence and finding a way of evidencing ability. Provision of certificates for a number of credits, even if they do not amount to an entire NVQ for example, provides evidence to employers and refugees of ability - the value of which cannot be under-estimated. While many vocational training programmes begin with a set of students with equally negligible knowledge about a skills area and they are taught exactly the same skills, assessing refugees' skills in an accredited programme is far harder because of the sheer diversity of skills and experience. All students will be different and furthermore will have different language abilities. Mixed ability is the norm and needs to be addressed pro-actively through focused one to one support for those students who need extra help. Developing team spirit and encouraging mutual support helps to bring on the weaker students and to reduce the frustration of the more able.

Working with refugees is a specialist job. Through running these initiatives we learned that it is important to build the capacity of tutors and co-ordinators to work with refugees. Initial fears about causing offence for example if questioning a student about their lack of punctuality and misconceptions about certain behaviours were easily overcome through explanation, but require pro-active capacity building if programmes are to be run effectively. Furthermore, work with employers also requires specialist knowledge and ideally would be undertaken by a specialist organisation with excellent networks and an understanding of the social responsibility agenda. However, in the absence of such an organisation, it is important to devote sufficient time and capacity to engaging employers and encouraging them to offer work experience places to give refugees a chance to demonstrate and prove their skills. Ideally employers should be involved in course development. They also need a very clear understanding of what to offer and what to expect, which would ideally be in a written format.

EQUAL funding enabled CURS to go far beyond their original remit and to run eight employability pathways in the West Midlands. The major investment in this project has been development time. This involved scoping the field, identifying potential partners and products, working with organisations who were unused to dealing with refugees and supporting them to understand refugees' needs, and then delivering integrated packages of employability products in a bid to move skilled refugees into skilled work. In over 2400 interviews undertaken for the Learning and Skills Councils, Birmingham City Council and Urban Living Housing Market Renewal Area, CURS and their partners can count the number of individuals who had managed to re-enter skilled employment in the West Midlands on one hand. Certainly few of the beneficiaries of the CURS pathways were in skilled employment before the programme and few were even employed. The pathways were successful in getting some refugees into skilled work in their fields of experience but in addition, through developing confidence and softer skills, the pathways helped beneficiaries into other types of skilled work and into higher or further education. The outcomes of the programme move beyond the tangible, hard outputs to helping refugees to develop softer outcomes that are viewed as skills by employers (see LSC 2004) but often overlooked by funders of education and training. These included understanding

workplace culture, communication, team working and the self-confidence to present oneself. The piloting of employability pathways has demonstrated what can be achieved through the integration of employability products. Joined up or partnership working achieved, through a degree of trial and error, success in helping perhaps the hardest to reach group in the UK not only into the labour market but into skilled work. It is hoped that the learning from this project will not be lost, as so much knowledge is, as funding runs out and priorities change, and that an integrated approach to developing employability will become part of mainstream delivery for hard to reach groups.

Recommendations

Funding and delivery

Our approach in funding learning and to supporting the unemployed into work needs to be reviewed. Welfare to Work has increased employment but also contributed to a situation whereby social mobility is at an all time low because there are no state supported opportunities to help those in low skilled jobs to progress into better quality, more sustainable employment.

- The Learning and Skills Council at national level needs to review course funding criteria so that funds can be allocated for achievement and not just contact hours. This will enable colleges to use an APEL approach.
- DWP should review the 16 hour rule and encourage a system whereby individuals are able to study language or vocations in excess of 16 hours if they can demonstrate the ways in which the study will lead to sustainable employment
- DWP and LSC should work together to explore how they might resource integrated employability packages which bring together LSC courses with work experience programmes
- The new employment service envisioned as part of the National Refugee Integration Service should be tasked with supporting all refugees. It could have a role working with the LSC and DWP in developing integrated employability packages.

Employers and work experience

Work experience is critical to enhancing the employability of migrants. In order to make sure that it meets the needs of migrants and employers we need to take on board some of the learning from this EQUAL project. This includes:

- Build work experience into the courses and treat work experience as “proper” employment.
- Engage employers at the establishment stage and involve them in steering group meetings.
- Begin to set up work experience places several months before you expect to need them
- Introduce employment advisers at the beginning of each course and provide one to one support
- Use the best trainees to lead the way into building employers’ interest
- Ensure that supervisors in work experience placements know exactly what to expect

- Produce a directory of the voluntary work that is available

Student support

The experience in this programme demonstrated that providing the right types and level of support is critical to developing trust amongst trainees and to maximising retention rates. Some suggestions for how this support might be provided include:

- Provide a co-ordinator or mentor to give ongoing support to students to ensure attendance rates
- Recruit a co-ordinator with a refugee background to build trust with refugee students
- Provide specialised one to one support through mentors to help students overcome barriers to participation
- Build in time in the early stages of appointment to help familiarise refugee employees with organisational culture and provide ongoing support and guidance
- Maintain telephone and e-mail contact with students to remind them when activity is required in order to enhance attendance and retention rates
- Undertake a needs analysis at an early stage in the programme to identify potential barriers to full commitment
- Provide students with support whilst they are on a placement.
- Give structured constructive feedback on individual's performance in work experience to help overcome problems around lack of familiarity with the UK workplace
- Try to work with an individual's JCP advisors to encourage them to be flexible and supportive
- Celebrate achievement through awards ceremonies and publicise success to help create positive images.

Partnerships

Many of the employability products that migrants need to help get them into work are already available. There is a need for the organisations that deliver these products to come together to link up their different initiatives. In order for partnership working to be effective it is important to:

- Recruit committed partners with resources and local knowledge
- Ensure that one organisation has responsibility for leading the partnership and for monitoring progress against agreed goals
- Use a steering group mechanism to manage projects that are partnership based, meet regularly and minute discussions to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear - perhaps even put in a contract. Ensure that allocated tasks are followed up.

Resources

A wider range of other resource factors need to be considered in order to ensure that a programme can run as effectively as possible. These include:

- When establishing new programmes for a hard to reach group, use face to face meetings to "sell" the programme and begin to start the word of mouth process

- Provide an integrated, interlinked, package of learning closely linked to the vocational area
- Provide support for tutors to familiarise themselves with the cultures and experiences of the group they will be working with
- Provide a clear induction at the beginning of each course so everyone knows what to expect
- Identify any available funds to pay for incidentals such as travel and lunch
- Deliver training with a recognised institutions such as a University or college to increase the status of the training and accreditation and commitment to the course
- Offer courses that have some focus on interpersonal skills to improve the confidence and consequent employability of refugee groups
- Aim where possible for a cohort with similar levels of English or build in mechanisms for dealing with different abilities
- Be realistic about timescales with students for whom English is a second language
- Provide trainees with help and guidance about how to recognise their skills and to sell themselves
- Make workplace orientation part of the main package of training
- Deliver all training at the same site wherever possible.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Educational attainment levels of trainees

Pathway	Country of Origin	UK
Coventry construction	Information not completed for majority Advance certificate of education Electrician qualifications English and maths Building	First aid City and Guilds ESOL
General Maintenance	GCSE equivalent (4) Welding and metalwork General skills A level or equivalent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bricklaying and plastering • General science • Textiles • Carpentry and Tiling • High school diploma (2) 	General qualifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fork lift driving • Computing • ESOL (19) • Building • Healthcare • Computing • Committee management • Basic carpentry • Football coaching
	Degree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphic art • History • General • Music 	
HACT Social research	A levels or equivalent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Languages • National diploma • Accounting • National certificate 	General Qualifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book keeping • Healthcare • Childcare • IELTS • Teaching assistant (2) • Food and hygiene • CLAIT
	Degrees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science of education • Mathematics • Teacher Training • Medicine • International relations • Pharmacology • Agricultural economics • Civil engineering • Marketing and business management • Material engineering • Social Policy and Business • Business • Business administration • Civil Engineering • English • Computing • Animal Science 	Degrees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human science
	Post-graduate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharmacy • Computing for Medicine and health 	Post-graduate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict resolution
JRF Social Research	Degree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horticulture • Rural Economics • Domestic electricity • Christian Education • Teaching • Marine science • Art • Commerce • BA? • Business and accounting 	General qualifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access course • ESOL (2) • Interpreting • Teaching diploma • Counselling • Mentoring • Business administration
	Post-graduate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of degree not stated • Community development • Poverty reduction • Development finance 	
Business administration	GCSEs High school diploma (2)	General qualifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESOL (3)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literacy Telephone skills
	Degree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office administration Modern Languages Degree interrupted 	
Health care	Degree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nursing (5) Medicine Paediatric nursing Midwifery Dentistry 	General qualifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESOL (2) Maths Customer service NVQ2 Care International English

Appendix 2: Employment of trainees

Pathway	Country of Origin	UK
Construction		
		Landscape worker
	Painter/plasterer	Picking and Packing
		Temp labouring
		Temp labouring
		Temp labouring
	Builder	Driving
	Metal work and woodwork	
		Crew member warehouse
	Painter and plasterer	
General maintenance	Timber cutting	Kitchen porter
	Carpenter	
		Picker
		Picking and cleaning
		Security
		Plumbing and carpentry
	Carpenter	Contract furniture construction
		Market trader
		Fork lift truck
		Care assistant
		Machinist
		Labourer
		Carpet fitter
		Warehouse
		Factory and cleaning
		Warehouse
		Waiter
		Packer and PT builder
		Packer and cleaner
Social research		Volunteer charity worker. Interpreter
		Asylum support worker
		U/E was finance officer
		PT Fundraiser
	Teacher	
	Teacher	PT language teacher
	Teacher	PT welfare worker
		Volunteer development officer
	Barrister	Employment advisor (u/e when started)
	Teacher	S/e interpreter
		Volunteer
		u/e community worker
	Teacher	s/e interpreter
	Teacher	
		Housing support worker
		Temp mail sorter
		PT language teacher
	Civil engineer	
		interpreter
		Factory work
		Refugee job support
		PT community worker
	UN	
	Engineer	Volunteer
		Refugee advisor
		Refugee advisor

		It tutor temp
	Minister of Culture	
		PT refugee advisor
		PT refugee advisor
		Refugee housing advisor
		Volunteer co-ordinator
	Teacher	Refugee advisor
		Trainee refugee advisor
Business administration	Journalist	Cleaner
		Restaurant work
	Office clerk. Political adviser	
	Clearing agent	
		Sales assistant
	Secretary	
Healthcare		Care assistant
		Doctor
	Midwife	Care assistant
	Paediatric nurse	
	Theatre nurse	Auxiliary nurse
	Senior nurse	
	Nurse	Factory
	Staff nurse	
	Nurse	
	Staff nurse	Care assistant



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