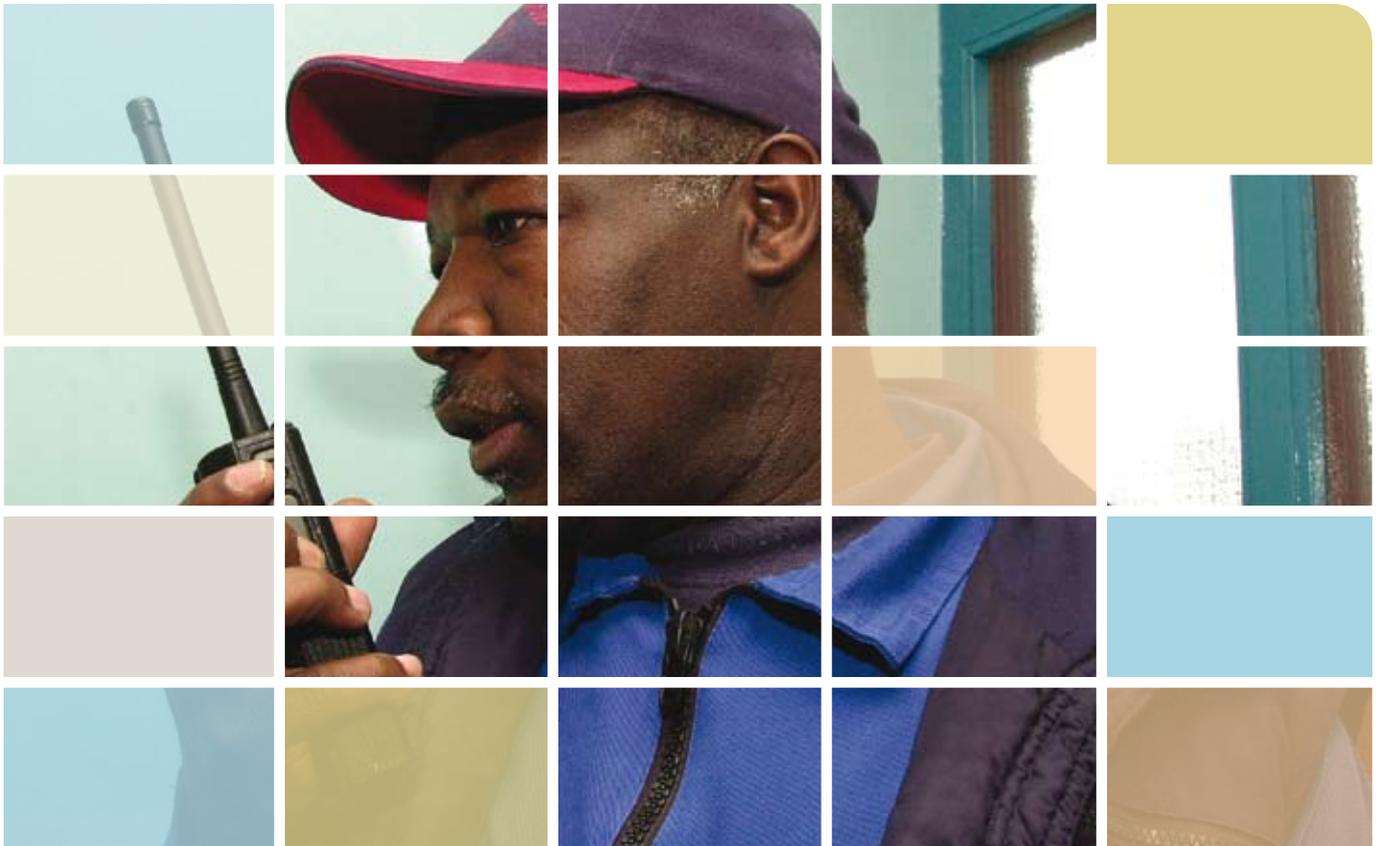


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Migrant workers in the labour market

the role of unions in the recognition of skills and qualifications

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This research paper was commissioned by the Trades Union Congress to inform its policy development on migrant workers. As such, it is not a statement of TUC policy. The paper is being disseminated through the TUC's unionlearn High Road project, which is part of a community programme called Equal – a European Social Fund initiative that tests and promotes new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market. The GB Equal Support Unit is managed by ECOTEC.

Unionlearn is the TUC organisation that supports union-led strategies on learning and skills. It helps unions to open up learning and skills opportunities for their members and also to develop trade union education for their representatives and officers.

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Foreword

Migrant workers can make a huge contribution to our economy and to society in general. A major problem, however, is that the skills and qualifications of many of these workers are not recognised by employers. They thus find themselves trapped in low-skill, low-pay jobs with poor conditions that do not fully utilise their former training and experience. Too often they are placed on the first rung of the labour market when they should be higher up. A lack of English language skills and low awareness of their employment rights and the role of trade unions also marginalises them and makes them vulnerable in the relatively unregulated UK labour market.

The TUC has established a high-level Commission on Vulnerable Employment to develop a strategy to organise, represent and support vulnerable workers. The Commission is looking at how unions can work with, support, organise and represent vulnerable workers such as migrants and the communities in which they live and work. It will make recommendations on how to enforce key employment rights for such workers and how unions working with community organisations can ensure that vulnerable workers have fair access to public services, decent housing and education and skills training, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

As this research report notes, unions are providing migrant workers with information and support services, often in union learning centres, on a range of issues, including access to ESOL and employment rights. Much of this work is being supported by union-led projects funded through the national Union Learning Fund as well as TUC unionlearn regional funds (see appendix 2).

The report rightly raises concerns about the possible effect of the changes to ESOL funding on migrant workers. The TUC and its unions have been active in pressing the Government to ensure that low paid workers continue to have access to free provision.

The research report reveals a disturbing lack of awareness among employer bodies of the issue of recognition of the skills and qualifications of migrant labour. There seems to be a lack of employer engagement with the national agency charged with giving advice on comparability with international qualifications, with the notable exception of the construction sector.

Finally, the report makes helpful proposals on how there could be a better co-ordination and mechanisms to improve the recognition of skills and qualifications of migrant workers and enhance their labour mobility. Trade unions can play an important role in this and the TUC in general and unionlearn in particular will carefully consider the report's recommendations on how this can best be done.



Liz Smith
Director, unionlearn

Abstract

This report highlights a series of issues related to the question of qualifications and the recognition of skills. The experience of migrants in the United Kingdom varies in relation to their different communities, histories, and ethnic and cultural dimensions and this report is but a snapshot of some the issues and initiatives emerging in relation to skills-related issues. The report focuses on migrants who have recently arrived and who have not moved to the United Kingdom with a permanent job contract or professional position. The argument presented is that migrants are confronted with a context of social exclusion and poorly regulated labour markets that creates a serious gap in terms of what they are doing within the labour market and what they are actually capable of doing, with most working below their qualifications and skill thresholds. The report identifies that one of the major problems is a lack of consistent 'joined up' thinking between regulatory actors and agents who deal with such issues. This leads to an inability to create a more inclusive and supportive approach in terms of allowing migrants to reference and build on their skills and qualifications. The report points to the way the new learning agenda has engaged with such issues within the labour movement and provided a new template for trade union strategy.

Executive summary

Migrants in the UK face a myriad of problems. They are, to varying degrees, subject to social stigmatising and racism. In their early years as migrants many are vulnerable in the labour market and are often excluded from good-quality jobs or enhanced working conditions. They are rarely employed in ways that allow their skills to be effectively utilised or developed.

What is emerging is a systematic failure to understand migrants in terms of the richness of their experiences, their knowledge and their skills and qualifications. This has become a major issue as migrants face poor employment that does not allow them to develop or enhance their situation.

The report points to four challenges for migrants, in terms of regulatory and economic factors, that contribute to the marginalisation of migrants within the labour market. How to respond to these challenges has emerged as a vital issue for society and government. Trade unions have started, and are increasingly, playing an active role in various ways. One role in particular is the development of learning and training strategies, and the recognition of qualifications.

The recognition of qualifications and skills now presents itself as a new challenge for trade unions and other bodies. Many migrants would have the potential to build a more systematic labour market career and enhance their employability if employers could build on their existing qualifications and recognise the range of transferable skills they already possess.

The report identifies the problem of failure to create consistent social dialogue and structures related to training and qualifications. Employers' organisations and various sector skills councils appear to be approaching such matters in an uncoordinated and uneven manner. The report makes a series of recommendations based on research and discussions with key institutions and migrants. These are outlined in detail later in this report. Overall, we propose the following policy actions:

Raising consciousness about migrant skills

That greater attention be paid to the developmental needs of migrants: that much of the current interest in vocational education and portfolio approaches to skills should begin to address migrants more explicitly: that the recent governmental changes to the funding of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision be reversed. In addition, further investment in this area is supported and expanded given its significance to migrants.

Mapping the regulation of qualifications

That employer and labour organisations begin to address the fact that the increasing engagement with skills and learning (inputs) means a more concerted approach to qualifications and their recognition in a global context (outputs). There is need for a more systematic institutional 'mapping' of the relevant organisations in the field of learning and qualifications relating to employment.

Linking into the new skills agenda

That sector skills councils (involving trade unions) develop a more strategic, systematic and collaborative approach regarding collaborative on migration, ESOL and inclusion issues.

Underpinning the development of union-led learning

That the TUC's unionlearn develops materials for inclusion in union learning representative training courses to highlight the position of migrant workers and raise awareness about the services offered by organisations such as the UK National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC), the National Centre for Languages (CiLT) and its forthcoming UK National Occupational Standards for 'Working Effectively with People from Different Countries or Cultures', and also the New ESOL for Work Qualifications.

Introduction

The UK has a diverse and rich history of migration, and current levels of migration remain high. It is important to consider how migration has, and will, continue to shape the country's future.

The position of migrants within the British context is a subject of extensive discussion. It is increasingly recognised that migrants play a fundamental role in the economy and in the development of services as employees, entrepreneurs and citizens.

Migrants' employment rights, workplace training and developmental needs as employees within the UK labour market are rarely addressed. The extent of vulnerability to exploitation as a producer and consumer means that they are subject to highly disorganised and discriminatory dimensions of British society. Issues of social exclusion are now prevalent in the study of the labour market. The nature of the jobs in which large numbers of migrants are deployed, the lack of respect they are afforded within the workplace, and the manner in which they are subject to short-term employment contracts is increasingly apparent. In fact, the very health and livelihood of migrants has come to the fore in recent years due to the manslaughter of Chinese migrants working at Morecambe Bay in February 2004.

This report focuses on a specific dimension of migrant work and experiences, which raises issues for both migrant and established communities. The labour market is contingent on the skills and knowledge of workers, and formally recognised qualifications play a vital part in relaying these skills and communicating them to prospective employers. Qualifications also play a part in the profile and identity of workers as they progress through the labour market. Increasingly, we see the argument being deployed that a modern economy and the 'knowledge society' need a more rigorous and developmental view of skills and understandings. However, some crucial questions arise as to how, in a globalised world with increasing levels of migration, employers and institutions should acknowledge, recognise, effectively utilise and even develop the skills and formal qualifications of a migrant workforce. Given the challenge of

social exclusion generally, and language and communication gaps in particular, and the exposed nature of migrant workers, how do the broad skills and experience of a worker from abroad become recognised? Moreover, what are the reasons for the lack of recognition?

The report argues that many factors contribute to the reality that neither the migrants nor the country is benefiting from the new skills that are being offered. The report focuses, in the first instance, on how migrants feel their qualifications, or experiences and skills, are not put to good use and acknowledged. In fact, there is a suggestion that migrant workers may have to hide skills and qualifications because of the nature of their work and the employers they initially encounter in many industrial sectors. The report discusses this challenge in terms of trade unions and how they can act as a link between migrants and the labour market. It points to four major regulatory and economic challenges that undermine the ability of new migrants to draw on their background and skills.

Having explored these issues, the report then focuses on the mechanisms that exist for employers and other organisations to 'map' and understand the skills and qualifications of a migrant worker. It focuses on the experience of various bodies that deliver information in order that employers and employees may understand their mutual interests through recognising skills in an effective manner. It also considers the way in which newly emerging regulatory bodies, such as sectors skills councils, find a challenge in addressing this question in a systematic and focused manner. The problem of joining together the new rhetoric of learning and qualifications with the experience of a new workforce, with a diversity of capacities and needs, seems to be low on the agenda of many of these bodies. However, some cases of good practice are emerging in such sectors as the construction industry and these are highlighted in the report as potential benchmarks for future consideration.

The report concludes that the recognition of qualifications and the development of skills within a migrant workforce raise deep and challenging

issues for the UK system of employment regulation. It exposes the limitations of our under-regulated system, which has only recently begun to take the issue of regulation seriously. It discusses four dimensions of skill recognition in terms of qualifications and the employment experience of the individual, the nature of employer behaviour, the role of public bodies, and the pivotal role of trade unions. Recognising what an individual has to offer, and how this can be developed to enhance their role to the benefit of the community and themselves, requires an element of joined-up thinking and institutional awareness that is currently absent, even if the mechanisms for recognising skills are increasingly available. Qualifications can contribute to greater hierarchy and filtering within society, so in themselves they are not the basis for social inclusion; however, the fact that many groups are unable to use their qualifications – with the result that their abilities and knowledge are under-utilised – is a challenge trade unions and other bodies need to address.

Research methods

The research objectives were to identify the work experiences of migrant workers and whether their formal and informal skills and qualifications were being recognised, and rewarded, by employers and other labour market agents. The research sought to generate data to assist in the in-depth understanding of whether migrant skills were being recognised and, if not, how they could go about converting their foreign qualifications to UK equivalents. Many individuals and institutions may be involved at various stages of the process, from the migrant's home country through to employment, training and recognition of qualifications in the UK. Furthermore, complex relationships will develop that influence the lives of migrant workers. As such, a qualitative approach was adopted for this study to address questions concerning how causal processes develop in a specific number of cases.

The research techniques used for the largest proportion of this study were semi-structured interviews and these are detailed below. However, when interviewing migrant workers less structure was imposed and the technique used was closer to that described as a 'life history' or biographical approach. Interviewees were allowed to 'expand' on any aspect of their lives that they deemed relevant to their motives and decisions to pursue employment in the UK, or how they acquired or pursued recognition of their qualifications. Miller (2000, 74) contends that the biographical perspective is "located soundly within the 'qualitative paradigm' of social science research" but that it also retains its own distinct characteristics including:

"...a holistic concern with placement in time narrative, the interplay between the individual actor and social structure and how this interplay and its perception alters with the passage of time."

The focus of interest in biographical research is upon the complete, or a significant proportion, of individual lives; as such people's experiences of the past take a more central and significant role than usual. Thompson (1988, 265) believes that such a research approach

gives "history back to the people in their own words. And in giving a past, it helps towards a future of their own making." Similarly, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) claim that the biography is vitally important in the "understanding of social identity". This method is currently widely used by community organisations and museums as a way of capturing the experiences (often unrecorded elsewhere) of 'community elders' from many established migrant groups.

Ten short biographies of migrant workers from a range of industries were undertaken. Various shorter interviews were undertaken with a wider variety of migrants within communities. It became apparent early in the research that a number of institutions were ideally located to play a vital role in providing support and assistance to migrant workers in a range of areas including skills and qualifications; these included trade unions, employer associations and public bodies such as the Learning and Skills Council and the sector skills councils. Because of the qualitative nature of the research, four sectors particularly significant to migrant labour were selected for further investigation: food and beverage manufacture and processing; cleaning services; health; and construction. Detailed interviews were conducted with the training official and organisers from Unite – Amicus Section with regard to migrants in the food manufacture and processing sectors; the education officer for Unite – T&G Section was interviewed in respect of cleaning services; the head of Health, Safety and Environment and the learning and development officer for Unison were interviewed with regard to the health sector; and a variety of senior training officials were interviewed from UCATT in respect of the construction industry. There were also interviews and visits to community initiatives, community centres and learning centres in Bradford and London. These form the basis of the **Trade Unions and the Learning Agenda section** of this report, which also draws from a range of interviews from recent projects within the TUC by the authors.

The following sections are concerned with the institutional engagement on migrant qualifications

by public bodies and employer organisations. Additional interviews were conducted with a range of other actors, including the managing director and the head of research and development for the UK National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC), a senior civil servant for the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), the director of an organisation that provides unions with regional or city-wide guidance documents for migrant workers, a national CBI official from its education and skills group, a CBI research manager, and an NVQ assessor.

It is apparent that employers are a further stakeholder and, moreover, will benefit from foreign skills, not only in terms of the benefits foreign workers bring to the workplace but also in terms of reduced recruitment and training costs if foreign skills are identified and formally recognised at early stages. As such, short interviews were conducted with representatives from the 12 main regional offices of the chambers of commerce to identify how they would advise their members (employers) on how to recognise foreign qualifications, or how to convert them to UK equivalents. Subsequently, detailed semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with national qualifications/education officials for the relevant sector skills councils. These included: Improve Ltd (food and beverage manufacture and processing); Assetskills (cleaning services); Skills for Health (health); and ConstructionSkills (construction).

The failure to acknowledge migrant worker skills

Migration and qualifications

The use of the term 'migrant' is broad and is sometimes misused (see Warwick Institute for Employment Research 83, 2006, for a discussion). There exists a tendency to view migrants in simplistic terms: a uniform and undifferentiated mass. However, skill levels, labour market experiences and aspirations vary tremendously. There is a similar problem with the way in which social exclusion is viewed. For example, exclusion is understood in terms of the nature of the work that migrants of a non-professional nature do, and how this constitutes them as being vulnerable workers. They fill gaps that are, in the main, left by the 'indigenous' workforce and hence they enter through a peripheral dimension of the labour market. They form part of a workforce that is employed through a range of unstable posts that can be temporary, seasonal, fixed period and task based: they can also be subject to casual work and agency employment (TUC 2006). This in turn means that migrants, in many cases due to their low wages, are exposed to a range of poor social conditions in terms of housing and access to social and educational facilities. Moreover, the nature of the work may not draw on, or require, the broader skills and capabilities of an individual.

The culture associated with an organisation involved in employing migrants is such that it may be task specific and less concerned with a developmental view of the person employed. The irony is that research shows that various ethnic groups may actually be highly educated and not rewarded and that, for the most part, foreign qualifications are rewarded less in the UK than in their countries of origin (Battu and Sloane 2002). Research by Currie (2007) suggests that the failure to register migrants in the UK, in terms of their skills and qualifications, means that migrants tend to suffer a de-skilling when working in this country. The 'brain drain' of qualified workers from the eight new EU member states are effectively being de-skilled in the UK (*ibid.*). Women in particular are seen to be suffering.

The problem may be the failure to develop a clear typology of competence within the EU (Delamare-Le

Deist and Winterton 2005), let alone beyond it. There are also problems with employers and the way in which they view migrant workers through racial and ethnic stereotypes, or a misunderstanding or lack of interest in skills and qualifications. What is more, while employers do employ migrants to fill a perceived gap within the local context (Evans *et al.* 2006), the failure to systematically map skills and capacities is an endemic problem. Hence, in various cases, there is a mismatch in terms of the employer and the employee, often leading to the potential human assets of the employee not being effectively utilised or developed. This is a problem in terms of recognising skills that dovetails with debates about the educational barriers that exist within specific second and third generation black and minority ethnic (BME) groups in the UK (Clark and Drinkwater 2007). Platt (2007) has argued that Black Africans, for example, have quite high rates of higher education but suffer poor occupational outcomes and high unemployment rates.

It could be argued that to assume employers and public bodies would provide a supportive framework for migrants – of whatever type – in terms of their skills would be misguided, given the failings of the training regime and skill formation in the UK generally (Stuart 2008). However, in the case of newly arrived workers, the issues are pressing due to the potential knock-on effects that the lack of recognition may give rise to in terms of their social exclusion. Employment discrimination and failure to progress individuals within employment is a key factor in the development of poverty among ethnic groups (Platt 2007). Consequently, the costs to the individual and to society of 'not getting it right' are very high. In addition, the economic costs of systematically failing to acknowledge the capabilities and capacities of individuals are also high, if less immediately obvious.

What we see, therefore, is a myriad of practices that exclude individuals and fail to recognise their worth or the contribution they can make to organisations, their communities and the economy in general. Many of these practices (and indeed barriers) are direct and pernicious. There are also, however, indirect

practices that emerge from a failure to recognise the person beyond the task that they are executing. Increasingly, equality legislation is concerned with indirect discrimination in terms of recruitment practices and conditions of work. However, the failure to acknowledge an individual's potential contribution and 'social worth' is an emergent theme in the politics of equal opportunities. Indeed, according to the unionlearn website: "Public Value is an emerging conceptual framework which, applied to the learning and skills sector, attempts to encapsulate a broader recognition of the value of adult learning." Public Value theory was first formulated by the scholar Mark Moore, who was concerned that all too often services were "hitting the target but missing the point". In the UK, Public Value is currently being explored by people working in a number of public policy fields, including health, policing, culture and sustainable communities, as well as learning and skills. This raises the issue of who is responsible for developing a climate and culture which assures that the qualifications and skills of an individual are developed. Moreover, and as this report suggests, mechanisms do exist that can facilitate the recognition and acknowledgement of skills within migrant communities. This raises the question of co-ordination and organisation as a facet of the issue of skills and knowledge recognition.

Trade unions and learning

In terms of trade unions, we have seen a major shift in the way in which learning and skill formation has been approached during the past decade. Since the late 1990s it appears that trade unions have placed an increasing emphasis upon their learning agendas, predominantly within the workplace but also through community projects and learning centres (Stuart 2007). The election of the Labour government in 1997 represented a greater commitment to the lifelong learning agenda; furthermore, the government sought to involve trade unions in skill formation and learning policies. The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was established in 1998, funded by the then Department for Education and Employment, which made funds

available to trade unions, through the TUC, to develop innovative learning activities through a partnership framework. Subsequently, the 2002 Employment Act conferred statutory rights to union learning representatives (ULRs).

It is clear that unions have embraced learning and are continuing to expand and develop their programmes. The TUC (see unionlearn strategic plan 2006 - 2009) claims that most of its 65 member unions have run projects through the ULF – almost 500 projects in total covering more than 3,000 workplaces. More than 18,000 ULRs have been trained and a target of a total of 22,000 has been set for 2010. A target of 100,000 learners and 250,000 learners a year going through the union route has been set for 2006/7 and 2010 respectively.

Unionlearn supports a national network of learndirect learning centres. These union learning centres offer a wide variety of courses usually held either in the workplace, local colleges or union offices. Most participants undertake ICT and 'Skills for Life' courses; the centres increasingly also provide information, advice and guidance (IAG) services. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses have also had good enrolment figures and can be seen as a positive way in which trade unions can engage with, and offer support to, new migrant workers.

So why have the opportunities conferred by the UK government's lifelong learning strategy been so positively embraced by the trade union movement? Structural changes within industry and the changing composition of the labour market have resulted in unions pursuing new approaches to membership – the learning agenda being an important one. Learning is perceived as a 'positive sum game' (all parties gain) and so receives government funding, making union learning partnerships an attractive and, to an extent, economically viable option for unions. Unions are often perceived solely as workplace institutions representing only the needs of employees in grievance and disciplinary proceedings Perrett and Martínez Lucio 2006). The learning agenda has the potential to

alter this 'traditional' image of trade unions and show that they can, and do, improve the working conditions of employees in other ways. For Forrester (2004), union learning initiatives offer unions the opportunity for fresh partnerships and alliances with external agencies around a common agenda – for example, gender and ethnicity. He states (2004, 418) that “a learning perspective informed by ‘divisions and differences’, for example, provides a more imaginative and politically innovative basis for linking community and workplace audiences around, for example, the recent anti-racist campaigns by the TUC”. This has been shown to be the case through empirical research conducted by Martínez Lucio and Perrett (2007a and b).

Forrester (2004, 418) (*ibid.*) believes that such initiatives encourage the reformation of trade unions as “societal actors” rather than workplace partners. However, the workplace is still an important arena for unions to improve their image and their representation of migrant labour, for example: supporting workplace learning for minority groups and migrant workers; initiatives to combat racism in the workplace; learning around cultures and wider societal issues that can “strengthen the critical and political opportunities for trade unionists to deepen and broaden their existing antiracist educational and campaigning activities” (*ibid.*). Ultimately, unions have perceived the learning agenda as an opportunity to generate new forms of activism and contribute to increased influence and membership.

Munro and Rainbird (2004, 431) show that partnerships around learning based on an independent trade union agenda “do not undermine a union’s capacity to take industrial action and are compatible with the organising agenda”. They (*ibid.*) also suggest that there is evidence that participation in learning programmes can stimulate active membership, possibly lead to recruitment into traditional shop steward roles, of which there is seen to be a shortage from minority communities, and potentially revitalise workplace trade unionism (see also Payne 2006). In respect of ULRs, findings by Wallis *et al.* (2005, 300) suggest that they have

succeeded in stimulating interest in trade union membership among non-union members and that they have further extended their role in terms of “developing on-site learning facilities, monitoring the progression of learners, providing redundancy support, negotiating training policies with employers, and working in partnership with employers” (*ibid.*, 294). Finally, the workplace learning agenda creates obvious benefits for employees, particularly when they possess few qualifications. Formal, nationally recognised qualifications can be gained as well as other, hard-to-quantify benefits such as greater confidence, a sense of achievement, enlarged job roles and autonomy and a sense of empowerment (see Munro and Rainbird 2004).

The challenge with migrant communities is ensuring that their pre-existing qualifications are acknowledged, built on and developed. A study by Mackenzie and Forde (2007) points to the mismatch in terms of the work experience of migrants in relation to their countries of origin and the UK. They have systematically contrasted the way in which the experience of migrants in their home countries is so different in relation to what they do in the UK that one could talk of such workers being effectively de-skilled. Their study reveals deep levels of anxiety and concern due to the difficulty of having CVs and qualifications recognised and acknowledged. This may not always be the case but, given the paucity of skills in some key sectors, there appears to be a mismatch that means the institutions and employers in the UK are failing to effectively utilise and deploy migrant labour. This sets a whole new agenda in terms of learning and engagement strategies for the trade union movement, which this current report attempts to focus and address.

The dimensions of social exclusion in the labour market

Migrants play a vital role within the UK. They occupy a range of jobs and, in many cases, these are highly professional and strategic – as in the case in the medical profession. The growing consensus is that migrants fill major gaps in labour markets across the spectrum of jobs and skills.

This report focuses on those migrants who have come to work in the UK and who are working in difficult and vulnerable forms of employment. It pays attention to the way in which these types of employment do not consist of an organisational environment that facilitates, acknowledges or utilises the full repertoires of skills and qualifications of migrants. In many cases, migrant workers are found to be marginalised, particularly in the way in which they might be unable to articulate or find support for their background and portfolio of skills and qualifications due to language deficiencies and a lack of support networks.

There are various dimensions to the way in which migrant workers may find themselves within the most vulnerable parts of British society and also in a position where they cannot effectively deploy their skills, abilities and qualifications. Four of these issues are illustrated below.

- 1 Their experiences of the initial stages of entry into employment in Britain is highly chaotic, disorganised and the product of a relatively deregulated labour market.
- 2 The nature of the jobs the interviewees undertook meant that they were unable to provide a sufficient framework of inclusion and support sufficient to allow an individual to prepare a clear plan for self-development, or for using their skills and relevant qualifications. There is a failure within the labour market for skills and qualifications to be effectively recognised. This is a generic problem but it affects the newly arrived more directly as they do not have the access points and local knowledge to overcome this challenge.
- 3 The uneven nature of employment regulation in Britain means that getting a basic wage and good

working conditions is an all-consuming task for many migrants who work in some of the most vulnerable forms of employment. There is also the racism and stigmatising that many migrants experience – and this only reinforces the problem outlined above and creates a greater sense of detachment in terms of institutional roles.

- 4 This leads to a fourth challenge in terms of mapping social support and being able to use networks and services that can alleviate many of their economic conditions. Many migrants have to use their own ethnic communities in order to gain information, services and a sense of dignity. This has implications on how they are able to use their experiences and qualifications to map their way into an improved and dignified existence.

The first issue facing migrants is the entry into the labour market and the manner in which some specific vulnerable workers are marginalised means they find themselves mismatched in terms of jobs. The way they are introduced to the labour market and gain enough financial resources to survive in the first few months, or years, means that migrants may, in many cases, accept work that limits their potential. One Polish migrant interviewee, a graduate in economics who was hoping to find a foothold in the labour market, was clear that many were suffering the consequences of a disorganised labour market:

“I miss my family terribly but what I am doing is to help them... I can earn four times what I get at home... I think I am quite lucky really, though I don't really like my job (in the UK) and it gets really mundane. My employer is good to me. I can usually get overtime whenever I want it and I am living with friends. Others haven't been as lucky. I was talking to someone at my church just last week who was working in a really grotty factory pulling the skin off chickens... The Polish agency who got him the job also put him up in a rundown house that he shares with six others, and he still has to pay £60 a week for the luxury!”

This was not an uncommon experience. Many found themselves building up career profiles that were downplaying their strengths and locking them into a cycle of low-paid jobs and vulnerable employment. One interviewee stated that:

“I’ll be very overqualified for the job, I think, but you have to get your foot on the ladder at some point and unfortunately that rung is going to be right at the bottom... I do feel slightly aggrieved as I should be paid according to my skills, not where I come from, but I suppose I just have to accept that that’s the way it is.”

Second, the nature of the work being undertaken by many migrants directly affects their ability to create paths into better employment; those without degrees were more exposed to such difficulties. The work was described as being potentially menial and limited, repetitive and exhausting and there is normally very little possibility in the early years of developing their English.

In one case a Chilean migrant had a carpentry background and a series of qualifications (but had not completed an apprenticeship in Chile). He had not been able to gain references for these qualifications and there had been very little opportunity to talk to employers and explain the extent of his background qualifications. The nature of his employment constrained the possibility of planning and strategically thinking about the long term. This is a problem for migrant and non-migrant labour alike and, in the case of the UK, it is not uncommon for career profiles to be fragmented and for an individual’s strategy of learning and qualifications to be out of sync with their working experience. However, in the case of specific groups of migrants who enter the UK labour market through non-professional or low-skilled posts, there is a greater risk of finding their qualifications and networks limited and constrained by the nature of the work they enter.

In the case of another Polish migrant, with a marketing degree, there was a challenge in terms of having his work experience and qualifications acknowledged,

and the need to find a position of some sort to climb on to the first rungs of the employment ladder. After a period of uncertainty and reflection, he managed to gain employment as a painter and decorator through networks and agencies. Using his skills was very difficult and there was the prospect that he would steadily be perceived simply as a painter and decorator by employment agencies in the future. His applications were unsuccessful when he tried for posts in business-related employment; in part this could have been due to the nature of the recruitment of business students in the UK which is, in many cases, conducted directly from university.

The third issue related to the nature of employment regulation within the sectors typically occupied by migrant workers. Many were aware of the minimum wage although they had not always been paid this. In many cases, compliance to the legislation varied and it was not uncommon to use the figure more as a standard benchmark than a minimum. Many also worked long hours and felt that they were not working for employers who consistently complied with the legislation. Yet, because access to trade union organised workplaces and trade unions was rare, in general knowledge about employment rights depended on word of mouth and hearsay. There would be colleagues who would provide relevant information on working rights in relation to wages, health and safety and working hours, but the question of implementation was another matter. Hence the failure and inconsistency of employment regulation to enter the world of migrants is a stark reality. This meant that, never mind referencing one’s experience or qualifications, the lack of regulation within the workplace made it difficult to go beyond a very minimal remit in terms of rights and self-development. Despite past union efforts, the lack of union influence in the sectors that typically employ migrants exacerbates this problem.

The fourth key issue highlighted by many of the interviewees, and not just those from non-EU backgrounds, was the very difficult task of identifying the support services available, e.g. careers and

learning services as well as other social advice, information and guidance. It was common for individuals to be uncertain as to where to access services and find advice. Many turned to their own communities and networks, but much depended on what 'community' they belonged to and whether there was a community of fellow nationals to turn to in the locality. One Columbian migrant who worked in low-paid and vulnerable positions felt unable to genuinely connect with other people as there were few Columbians in the area in which he lived in Leeds compared to the number in London. Hence, it would appear that the spatial dimension of migration is a key factor in being able to access resources. In terms of his own learning, this interviewee had been unable to establish a space initially where he could acquire relevant materials, but the central library of the city provided information and he felt that access to the internet would provide some support. The idea of making his education transparent and making reference to it when being employed never occurred to him because he was never asked by an employer. However, as the report will show later, the role of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes was one area where many of the interviewees felt they could really develop their language skills and gain broader information relevant to their status. ESOL provided a space where different services and social support mechanisms were available. (For further expansion on this point see *More than a language...*, Interim Report of the NIACE Committee of Inquiry on English for Speakers of Other Languages, May 2006.)

The lack of support for business and employment initiatives for migrant communities is telling. The experience of a migrant would appear to be, in great part, related to the extent of information, social support and resources they can gain and this appears to be contingent on the presence of social networks. In many cases, there was a sense of being disconnected unless they could turn to local business establishments, religious or political organisations, or social and community relations, if accessible. In one case, an individual had approached his bank and received relevant but minimal advice on how to

go about setting up a small business. To this extent, we see that migrants face four different kinds of employment:

- Entrance into the labour market;
- Nature of work and environment;
- Regulation at work and voice; and
- Networks and institutional access beyond work.

The deregulated and uncoordinated aspects of these dimensions can inhibit the ability of migrant workers to develop themselves and access and use their experiences and qualifications, assuming they have them, as part of a process of self-development and enhancing their well-being. The situation is worse for those who do not have any qualifications or background in terms of skills and employment as they are left to work with even fewer options and expectations. They do not have alternative reference points they can attempt to mobilise. In general, migrants faced problems across all five of the dimensions highlighted above. On the occasions where there was some support it was through informal and local community networks, and not formal institutional ones that were clearly mapped for them.

Trade unions and the learning agenda

So what are trade unions doing to fill this gap and to engage with migrant communities? This section will show that, while trade unions have been relatively ambivalent with aspects of migration during parts of their history, there is a greater commitment to focusing on social inclusion issues and strategies. This links in with a period of ten to fifteen years when trade unions have focused much of their energies on learning and training strategies. The extent of such intervention from trade unions on the learning agenda and migrant support is extensive, as our cases will show. These are illustrative of some of the work going on and some of the ways in which trade unions are engaging with migrant workers.

General issues on unions and migration

Trade unions have, at times, had an ambivalent history regarding their attitudes to migrant workers. However, there has been steady change and in recent decades trade unions have increasingly begun to realise the importance of a more inclusive approach to new cohorts of workers. In addition, the need for a renewed trade union approach that takes a broader view of social rights in terms of equality is increasingly apparent. More recently there has been the development of an approach to industrial relations premised on notions of rights, the increasing realities and concerns with racism and social inclusion, and the re-orientation of trade union concerns and priorities. This has meant that trade unions have begun to respond to such issues in a more supportive and strategic manner, though the perception of unions and their willingness to act has not always been so visible and transparent (Perrett and Martínez Lucio 2006; Martínez Lucio and Perrett 2007b).

Trade unions are beginning to embark upon a range of initiatives and strategies, beyond that of traditional trade union representation and support, which focus on the needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and recently arrived migrant groups. The trade union movement is engaged across various aspects of employment and work-related issues (Davis *et al.*

2006). In a report by Martínez Lucio and Perrett (2007b), various initiatives were outlined, e.g. the use of like-for-like recruitment and organising, union involvement in workplace-based black workers' representative committees and networks, community approaches that provide access to information and links with other institutions, and the development of a union learning agenda both inside and outside of the workplace, particularly in respect of new migrant workers.

The community and information response

Various trade unionists interviewed highlighted the need to develop a more systematic approach to information and support within migrant communities. In one case they commented that they used the services of 'Interskills', a Sheffield-based company.

Offering more than just employment advice: Interskills and the unions

Interskills provides a 70-page 'city specific' document and give details of "things you need to know in the UK", such as how to MOT your car, how to register with a dentist and a doctor, what would happen if you were put into administration or went bankrupt, and many other simple day-to-day issues. It's a full list of what resources are available in the area, and trade union versions have a section on what unions are, how they can help and contact details.

"I'm currently involved with some new leaflets that Unison are doing in Polish, Urdu and other languages, because of the migrant influx. We may have members and we may not be able to communicate with them or they may not know what Unison is about – so if they can get this information in their own language, they can know what we're all about. Also, there's no point in advertising English courses in English because people can't read it so sometimes we think, well no wonder we don't get high numbers of intake in ESOL, because it's advertised in English!" (Unison official)

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) in the Polish community

In Bradford, the link with Polish workers through community channels was advanced through alliances with local Polish groups. A ‘drop-in event’ was held within the community at a nearby union-run resource centre. Representatives from the union AMICUS (now Unite – Amicus Section) were present, as were Polish-speaking advisers and translators. Furthermore, a number of other organisations had been invited and had stalls at the event; these included the Citizens Advice Bureau, local housing trusts, Thompson’s solicitors, an insurance company and CV writing advisers (Martínez Lucio and Perrett 2007b).

According to the Amicus regional training official and local trade union activists, their initial attempt to ‘get into the community’ by handing out leaflets was “completely unsuccessful”. The tendency to distribute leaflets without having a follow-up strategy is a common problem in the trade union movement on such issues. This changed, however, as they developed a relationship with two English-speaking Polish colleagues, who advised them that many workers could be reached through local centres in the Polish Catholic church, of which there were three within the city.

The drop-in event was held within the community at a nearby union-run resource centre. Representatives from the union were present, as were Polish-speaking advisers and translators. Furthermore, a number of other organisations had been invited and had stalls at the event, which ran over 4 hours during the evening. The range of advice given was wide and included how to register children at school, how to register with a doctor, how to get an MOT for a car, how to open a bank account, access to housing, immigration forms and benefit issues, the minimum wage and workplace health and safety, advice and guidance on writing and structuring CVs, how to vote in locals elections and how to campaign against the

far right. Attempts were made to address all issues that were raised.

This event subsequently developed into a broader approach with open meetings and cultural evenings held around the Bradford Resources Centre, which have extended the link between unions, local bodies and migrant communities.

Individuals have stated how they could use this centre to find information and get access to social services and support. What is more, they can in turn inform people about some of the bad practices and gangmasters that exist in the local labour market. One group of Polish workers explained that they were able to find out more about the minimum wage through such contacts and felt more able to gather information about their rights on a more systematic basis. They pointed to how individual colleagues felt unable to raise issues in their workplaces, as they would probably not be employed further through certain agencies and small employer networks. There was always the fear, they argued, that asserting yourself would be seen as a negative feature of your character, making you unemployable. In these individual cases they had completed their school education and had a variety of secondary level certificates, which had proved worthless because of the way in which they had been employed. Following discussion with the local union officials who had helped them reframe their future applications, they felt that in future they would be better able to raise issues.

Many union officials acknowledged that there was much to be done with regards to labour market support and information. One Amicus official stated:

“I want to be quite clear... there are going to be some serious changes going on in the union. My firm belief is that we need to target in a different way. I think company targeting isn’t working for us; I think we probably need to get out on the streets and do it that way. My belief is that unions should still be at the centre of all communities and I still don’t believe that we’ve achieved that.”

Subsequently a fair wages campaign is being developed in Bradford, which has begun to build on these networks and events to find out how migrants were exploited.

The shift to learning, developmental approaches and qualifications

We see the increasing agenda of learning in terms of training, lifelong learning and basic skills/Skills for Life as a central feature of trade union initiatives regarding social inclusion and migration. Since the mid-1990s, the renewed learning agenda has represented one of the main features of the whole trade union agenda to connect with the needs and aspirations of the workforce. A Unison official commented that:

“With the learning project I’m doing, we are targeting non-traditional learners and they are usually domestic staff in hospitals – the porters, manual workers, the cleaners etc – work where they don’t have a lot of writing, a lot of reading, a lot of communication; they’re either packing boxes or cleaning something... So we find a lot of the migrant workers are working in low-paid jobs.”

The role of workplace learning centres: Pittards

Pittards, a leather mill and tannery in Leeds, started employing a variety of migrant workers: about 18 Iraqi workers were employed in 2004 and a second migration ‘influx’ in 2005 had added around eight Polish employees to the workforce. It became apparent to management and union officials alike that the lack of English skills possessed by these new workers had created real health and safety concerns as they had to use razor-sharp knives and could not understand English well.

Trade union intervention by Community (the union), with management support, led to the introduction of a 13-week English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course taught within the workplace. All migrant workers attended the course and, according to the senior shop steward and the training manager, accident levels immediately began to fall and morale and attendance rose, along with the level of communication on the shop floor. Furthermore, all joined the trade union. Subsequently a Dignity at Work course was introduced for all employees, designed to eradicate bullying in the workplace whereby management and the union identified “an unexpected desire for learning not only by the migrant workers but also by many of the white British workers, most of whom had very few academic qualifications”.

According to the union’s Deputy General Secretary, this opened the door to more adventurous workplace learning plans, namely a permanent workplace-based learning centre. Not only were the courses and facilities available but they were also promoted and attempts were made to remove barriers to participation. Learning reps were seen as the key link between the shop floor and the learning centre and were viewed as of seminal importance to its success. This was particularly the case in respect of migrant workers who, according to a learning representative, exhibited less understanding of union functions and benefits and required greater levels of support. By April 2005, around three-quarters of the workforce

had undertaken a course through the learning centre, the workplace was a safer place and accidents had decreased, attendance levels of migrant workers had improved, communication with migrant workers was better and union membership of migrant workers had increased.

One Iraqi migrant employee summarised how he felt about the union:

“Morale has definitely improved, particularly among the Iraqi workers... Originally I thought unions just helped when you got sacked, when you needed a cheap solicitor. I wasn’t really aware that they could help with learning... The view we have of the union has improved greatly; they are taking the initiative, doing something different – and that is encouraging people to join.”

He pointed to the fact that he was able to approach the union and the learning centre and do various courses and plan his study: he was able to start thinking more broadly about how careers and labour markets operated in the UK. He was able to map out how he could use the skills he already had, and find relevant training for the future.

The closure of the company did not terminate the life of the learning centre. It moved to a sports centre and started operating a range of services and offering courses through the networks it had established and, in addition, its work with black and minority ethnic (BME) communities continued, though to a lesser degree (Martínez Lucio and Perrett 2007b). This is an important point and highlights for unions the value of making links and ‘exporting’ the concept of learning beyond the workplace and into the local community to engage with the families and friends of workers and those ‘harder-to-reach’ learners who are often isolated in the community context. In addition, opportunities to network and form strategic alliances with a range of multi-agency and community groups involved in the arena of learning and skills arise at local level as many of these organisations have agendas that are compatible with trade union activity on such issues.

ESOL: establishing a first step to inclusion within the labour market

A key feature of trade union involvement in the development of migrant skills and labour market inclusion is the growth of ESOL, of which trade unions have been firm advocates. At the heart of many migrant approaches to the labour market is the strategy of learning English. This is a vital first step to gaining meaningful and well-remunerated employment. Many migrants accept low-value-added and poorly paid jobs partly as a strategy to develop their language skills as a necessary step to developing a more systematic approach to future employment more on their terms.

The role of union learning representatives (ULRs) in organising ESOL courses, engaging with migrant workers in the workplace and community, and acting as advocates to promote the recognition of migrants’ qualifications and training and skills aspirations is of paramount importance. ULRs (and other union representatives) in this context can play a role as ‘inter-cultural advisers’ as they may engage with migrant workers and offer information, advice and guidance on a range of training- and employment-related issues. ULRs may also liaise with employers, training providers and community groups on behalf of migrant workers and offer support in connection with training, employment and other social inclusion issues.

ESOL was established by the government under the Skills for Life national strategy to improve adult literacy and numeracy skills. The provision of ESOL as a free training programme was primarily developed to support speakers of other languages to enable the improvement of their English language skills and to support employability and social integration among vulnerable groups. These adults fall into four different categories: settled communities (for example from the Asian sub-continent and Hong Kong); asylum seekers and refugees; migrant workers; and partners and spouses of learners from all around the world.

ESOL classes lead to examinations under the Skills for Life programme at five levels: E1, the entry level,

which is for beginners; E2; E3 (the benchmark for the citizenship test); and Levels 1 and 2, at which stage an individual may be able to undertake GCSEs. These qualifications were developed by the awarding bodies in collaboration with the Adult Basic Skills Service Unit (ABSSU) and the Learning Skills Council (LSC) and are within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (www.qca.org.uk). The approach has proved extremely successful, with enrolments rising from 159,000 in 2001 to 504,000 by October 2006 (www.lsc.gov.uk; www.dfes.gov.co.uk), and has received continuing support from those directly involved in matters related to employment issues in the UK, the TUC and the CBI. The TUC, CBI and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) have jointly published case studies around ESOL – *English Language at Work: Work-based English for speakers of other languages* (2007).

USDAW demonstrates the central role that ULRs play in delivering lifelong learning and ESOL courses, stating that more than 20,000 union members access a wide range of courses and hundreds of migrant workers have taken up places on free ESOL courses (www.usdaw.org.uk). One ULR claimed that, in one large company with a high percentage of migrant workers in the team, the introduction of ESOL classes dramatically reduced the turnover of new staff leaving (*ibid.*). The GMB has also worked in partnership with the TUC, local colleges, LSCs and employers to develop projects to provide ESOL and appropriate language skills to members of new communities in the Midlands (www.niace.org.uk/projects/esol-enquiry). Indeed, a large majority of unions tend to be using ESOL effectively to help with communication and language barriers, to help increase employability and provide excellent community cohesion and co-operation and to give new community members good quality opportunities to fulfil their potential.

It has also proved useful in enabling migrant workers to be aware of their individual employment rights including health and safety issues, tackling racism and challenging myths around migrant workers, and ensuring that they are aware of the roles and

uses of the trade unions through recruitment and organising. Moreover, this has proved beneficial to unions as they have been successful in recruiting members who have taken up ESOL training on union learning schemes. Clearly, not all migrant workers need to undertake an ESOL programme, but it has proved to be a very successful provision to many – indeed, so much so that this is one of the major reasons put forward by the government for the recent proposed reforms to ESOL provision.

In October 2006, Bill Rammell, the Minister of State for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning announced that the existing universal entitlement to free ESOL training up to Level 2 was to be removed from August 2007. Concerns with the cost of ESOL have mounted and the challenge to ESOL has become real throughout 2007. In meeting responsibilities under the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000), the DfES (now DIUS), working jointly with the LSC, committed to carrying out a full Race Equality Impact Assessment on the changes (see also www.cre.gov.uk/duty/reia/how).

Some evidence from focus groups involved in this assessment demonstrated a number of concerns relating to the impact of the changes, first among some ethnic groups, where it was suggested that women may be particularly disadvantaged by some of the changes. A further concern was raised in relation to the impact on the low paid, who may not be able to afford to pay for English lessons. Other issues included difficulties in proving eligibility and the impact on young people as children might have to face the increased burden of providing the link between their families and the local community (www.dfes.gov.uk). Indeed, many of these concerns are continuing to be pressed in a campaign, initially led by the University and College Union (UCU), which has now expanded to what is referred to as the ESOL Alliance. This alliance, with TUC support, has made calls on the Government to reinstate appropriate funding for ESOL learning.

“Research commissioned by the Home Office shows that a person’s chances of getting a job are enhanced by something over 20 per cent if they have a reasonable command of English – the standard we now require for citizenship” (ibid. 23 March, Col 1130).

Following the removal of the universal entitlement of free ESOL up to Level 2, the TUC and its unions have been active in pressing the Government to introduce safeguards to protect low paid workers with ESOL needs. Migrant workers in receipt of Working Tax Credits will continue to have access to free provision and there may be some flexibility in proof of low pay at local level. Where fees are charged in respect to other workers then the TUC believes that the employers who recruit them have a responsibility to pay the cost of the provision.

The benefits of ESOL in the community: Bradford

The role of ESOL can be illustrated by the following example from our research. In collaboration with trade unions and Bradford Information, Asylum and Support Network, an ESOL course run from the Bradford Resources Centre has formed the basis for a series of meetings and social gathering involving Russians, Afghans, Poles and other nationalities.

One Russian woman was hardly able to speak English when she first arrived. Over time she steadily improved her English, using the resources in such a way that she was able to deal with her work, raise issues and suggestions and assist others. As she developed she was supported by trade union activists and officials linked to the AMICUS branch on a range of issues.

In another case, a Polish migrant was able to utilise the legal links that the centre had to challenge her employer and to seek better pay. AMICUS was able to focus on individual cases and to link into local migrant communities. What is more, the migrant can access Polish support services on the internet, which is provided for free by the centre.

The networks between and within migrant communities steadily allow such centres to develop a broader supportive attitude. The centre offers learners facilities in the form of a homework club that can allow them to bring their children, to study without distractions and to socialise and practise their language. Many of the participants progressively build their levels of confidence and seek support across a range of issues. Social networks and friendships emerged across different ethnic boundaries.

A learning centre in the heart of the city: Canary Wharf

One sees a similar story in community-based learning centres such as the George Brumwell Canary Wharf-UCATT-Lewisham College Learning Centre at the heart of the new financial capital complex in East London. The tale of one particular cohort of eight students is illustrative of the impact of such initiatives.

The tutors started with a 10-week module on ESOL and basic health and safety at work. Over time they developed a tight-knit group that included Polish and Russian migrants. There was a strong social and supportive dimension within the group, and the facility became an important point of reference for them, as did the tutor. As time progressed, it was clear that the tutor could play a broader role in providing the group with advice on a range of matters such as National Insurance and support services.

The group began to develop in confidence and it moved on to more advanced modules on health and safety that required a new set of skills, at which time it was clearly identified that there was a paucity of IT skills among the cohort of learners. The module tutor took this on board and started teaching then basic IT and developing their ability to use various programmes and the internet. They subsequently resumed the advanced health and safety modules.

Such is their level of expertise and their qualifications in the area, the members of the cohort are now, effectively, health and safety managers. What is more, they have served as a link into various local communities and in turn show the potential for mentoring and teaching others. These links now extend to progressive employment agencies that have used the centre for training and who have as their objective the recognition and effective utilisation of migrant skills and qualifications. So a network based around learning centres, local colleges, trade unions and employment agencies has begun to coalesce this learning facility.

ESOL in these cases is not just about language training: it is about communities and having a point of reference that allows for a sense of belonging, personal improvement and well-being across cultures and ethnicities. It is a catalyst for other developments that empower migrants and facilitates social inclusion.

At the time of writing (November 2007), there are further developments in this area that may impact on both learning and skills and the work of trade unions and employers. First, the National Centre for Languages (CiLT) has embarked upon a consultation process on the new National Occupational Standards for Intercultural Working – *Working Effectively with People from Different Countries or Cultures*. At present, the new draft standards include units on:

- working with colleagues from countries or cultures other than your own
- employing new people who have just arrived in the country
- managing a team of people from different countries or cultures
- developing and maintaining relationships with organisations from a range of national or international cultures
- exploring new markets with different cultures.

Second, in October 2007 DIUS, working in partnership with the LSC, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) launched a new suite of ‘ESOL for Work’ qualifications. The qualifications aspire to offer a new solution specifically tailored to the needs of employers and will encourage them to contribute to the cost of training their staff. The qualifications will be available initially at E3 and Level 1 and are designed to increase flexibility and choice for employers, agencies and learners as they are shorter and more job focused (giving learners practical English skills in essential workplace matters, such as health and safety and customer service) and are intended to extend learner and employer choice.

Union renewal and migrant rights: a summary

We need to understand the diverse ways in which trade unions have engaged with the question of migration in terms of skills and qualification. There is a range of new interventions, which also include an active role in some cases within the sector skills councils. These new agendas around learning are therefore a vital point of engagement for institutions in supporting migrants and assisting economic development and social rights. However, what is emerging as a frontline issue is qualifications – the end point of education and learning. The recognition of qualifications and skills now stands as a new challenge for trade unions and other bodies. There is also the fact that the trade union movement is beginning to engage with the idea of a ‘climbing frame’ – a tool for recording qualifications and trade union education – that can allow ULRs to provide personal maps for individuals and assist them in their personal development and market profile.

The relevance to migration of such developments is obvious. First, many migrants could, potentially, build a more systematic labour market career if they could have employers acknowledge and build on what they have already achieved.

Second, the EU is increasingly drawing attention to the need to create systems for recognising and evaluating qualifications that can facilitate ‘mobility and employability’ to the benefit of workers and employers. Questions of competencies and skill formation are at the heart of many new regulatory agendas within the EU, e.g. the European Qualifications Framework. On 24 October 2007, the European Parliament voted in favour of adopting the Recommendations on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for life long learning (EQF). At the national level, the EQF will, and is indeed already doing this, promote the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). Qualifications frameworks promote lifelong learning by, for example, making it easier for people

to move between different types of education and training institution, for example between higher education and vocational education and training. As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training, as well as higher education. It applies to all types of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. It is a meta-framework that forms a translation device between different qualification systems. Each national qualification system needs to articulate with the EQF levels if the translation is to be facilitated across all countries. A national qualification framework has already been developed in the UK. The EQF foresees that Member States relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010 and that their qualifications contain a reference to the EQF by 2012. It will therefore enable individuals and employers to use the EQF as a reference tool to compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems, for example vocational training and higher education.

Third, and ironically, the more recent responses of government to migration are increasingly linking qualifications and skills to entry requirements. Hence this issue is emerging as a major feature of the learning dimension and activity of new industrial relations and social policies. However, there are challenges when proceeding in this manner. The following sections show the barriers unions may face internally and externally in dealing with migrant experiences and qualifications and taking them more seriously.

Mechanisms for recognising and acknowledging skills and qualifications

Increasingly, especially within the EU, there is a growing interest in comparability in terms of skills and qualifications. Skills and labour mobility are an integral link for the further development of the Single European Market. In this respect, we are seeing extensive institutional developments to support mobility. While the qualifications (whether vocational or non-vocational) of many migrants are unacknowledged, mechanisms do exist for understanding and acknowledging them. The National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) is the UK agency that provides comparability standards for international qualifications, as part of a contract with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS).

NARIC serves individuals who need to have their qualifications validated but it also serves public organisations and potential employers. It covers the qualifications of 183 countries and is constantly updating its database. It is a member of a European and international network that brings together similar bodies with the aim of exchanging information and assisting in the establishment of appropriate and relevant standards for qualifications in different national contexts. There is also a co-ordinating arm through UNESCO. Hence, this is a significant body that provides a broad service through an international qualifications database, learning and identification tools, and a series of specialised services. Through the National Reference Point (NRP), it also offers a service related to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Even lifelong learning programmes and initiatives to develop social (soft) skills are coming under the umbrella of this organisation. NARIC is not solely a reactive body that responds to requests for information about recognised qualifications: it also builds up a list of demands and new needs and constantly updates its databases and research into hitherto unknown areas of qualifications and skill formation.

NARIC receives 50,000 enquiries per year and the organisation works closely with certain national bodies with a particular set of circumstances due to the trends in migration. CITB-ConstructionSkills is one organisation that has collaborated consistently with

NARIC. However, on many occasions, organisations such as temporary agencies prefer not to incur the charge for the service, even though those costs would not generally be considered prohibitive. It is felt, however, that the system of charges does discourage potential enquiries. Individuals interviewed by NARIC felt that part of the problem is the very few regulations regarding the recruitment of individuals, and this makes for a labour market culture that does not consistently seek validation and confirmation. Transparent and systematic approaches to pay and reward – which would mean using the services of NARIC more often – tend to raise fears among some employers, and even trade unions in some instances, regarding the way migrants may be paid in relation to other workers.

“Trade unions do not appear to be engaged with bodies such as NARIC at the present time. This may be due to a lack of awareness of the services offered by such organisations and a need for NARIC to adopt a more sophisticated marketing strategy to promote its services to potential users. Both organisations, the TUC and NARIC, may benefit from improved communication at an operational level to assist their exploring opportunities for partnership working.”

However, NARIC is interested in developing a more effective dialogue with all social partners and interested parties. They are aware that, in many parts of Europe, the social partners are integrated more closely into the fabric of decision-making and information exchange on such issues. Part of the problem is the need for more resources to market the services of NARIC and to sustain a systematic attempt at raising the profile of the organisation through chambers of commerce, employer federations and training bodies. The central problem appears to be the limited nature of peak bodies and the absence of strong co-ordinating structures among employers. NARIC is aware of the role of social partners in terms of qualification-related issues in many European countries: Germany, for instance, has a very detailed approach to skills and qualifications; in the UK there has been less concern with mapping qualifications

and skills systematically – and in many ways this history of a disorganised approach is shaping many of the cultural and organisational habits migrants and other workers have to deal with when entering the labour market.

Nevertheless, the role of unions and various organisations in developing the documentation of partial qualifications and the body of vocational training a person has is at the heart of the European political agenda (Stuart 2008). NARIC sees the future challenges in terms of the changing nature of skills and qualifications. This brings a need to view the individual more holistically in terms of knowledge-based, technical and social skills. There is also the challenge of extending the service in a more dynamic way by looking at migrants in terms of how they can build and reference a portfolio of qualifications and skills. The need to integrate different aspects of their education and background into an ongoing, developmental personal profile is a vital way of providing a more inclusive approach. Hence, NARIC is seeking new platforms for linking with employers and other bodies with the aim of providing a framework for developing migrant workers and acknowledging their background and contribution.

For trade unions, this represents a range of possibilities. In terms of the kinds of work being done by NARIC, trade unionists interviewed seemed very interested and supportive of such approaches, though awareness of NARIC varied. In one case a Unite – Amicus Section official acknowledged that they were interested but knew little about it:

“Yes, I have heard of them, but I don’t know anything about them... Where have I heard of that, I really can’t remember... I think it was at Bolton, at the North West TUC – minimum standards for migrant workers.”

In May 2007, trade unions were invited to participate in the pilot for the development of the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF). The aim is to recognise achievement and progress in terms of the award of credits for modules and qualifications tested by the

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). What one sees is a steady engagement not only in the process of learning but also with its outcomes and outputs. How this is supported and sustained will become a major challenge for the labour movement. However, there are organisations beginning to form common agendas and views, which may start to see the qualifications and experiences of migrants taken more seriously.

The role of regulatory agencies and employer-related bodies

Having identified the fact that migrant workers feel that employers are not adequately recognising their qualifications and skills, and that a service is available to all institutions, the research sought to identify the extent to which public bodies and representatives of employers used such services or recommended that their members used these services. This section deals with the role and understanding of sector skills councils (SSCs) as emerging bodies and players involving employers and others in the regulation of skills. These are an important space for trade union and social intervention with regard to the questions of skills, qualifications and the social composition of the workforce. (In Appendix 1 we draw attention to chambers of commerce as an example of employer attitudes to the subject).

Within the UK, the SSCs have been developed with a view to enhancing the skills profiles and improving the general body of ability within industrial and service sectors. These are bodies that have been established by the government to work with employers and trade unions. According to the Skills for Business website, the four key goals of SSCs are to:

- reduce skills gaps and shortages
- improve productivity, business and public service performance
- increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce
- improve learning supply, including apprenticeships, higher education and National Occupational Standards (NOS).

The question of qualifications, in terms of standards, transparency and their development in a more global industrial context, is one of the main developments in terms of the remit of SSCs. As such, one would expect them to be at the forefront of developing ways to identify and convert foreign qualifications to UK equivalents, particularly within the sectors that have experienced an influx of migrant labour. Trade unions are involved in such bodies to varying degrees, and their representatives within them are now beginning

to form a network of individuals within and around the TUC to allow for a more co-ordinated approach to these emergent institutions.

Representatives from four SSCs representing sectors particularly affected by migration were interviewed. The four were: Improve Ltd, representing food and drink manufacturing and processing; Asset Skills, representing cleaning services and facilities management; Skills for Health, representing the health sector across the UK; and CITB-ConstructionSkills, representing the construction industry. Responses for the food manufacture and processing, cleaning services and health sectors were similar and so we shall present these findings together and subsequently analyse, what appear to be, more informed and proactive initiatives with the construction industry.

While acknowledging that they should be familiar with this knowledge, interviewees from the SSCs for food, cleaning and health were all unsure how they might advise an organisation from their sector on how to convert foreign qualifications into UK equivalents. All mentioned that, depending upon the level of qualification, they might start by searching the internet, though none could highlight any specific web pages they might use. There appeared to be a lack of strategic direction and thinking; on the one hand, all acknowledged that this was a growing issue within their respective sectors, but on the other they had not developed, and appeared to be in no urgency to develop a strategic response.

Two out of the three SSCs stated that they had been approached by an employer regarding foreign qualifications and their respective UK equivalents. The number and type of enquiries varied by sector. For the cleaning SSC most enquiries related to apprenticeships and lower-level academic equivalents (GCSE, for example). For health, we were informed by the Support Services Qualifications Awards Section of the SSC that employers would be directed to the awarding body or the standards setting body.

It was explained that:

“We don’t set standards of qualifications; they are set by the standard setting body. We cannot advocate what happens with a foreign qualification but can advise if we know. For NVQs, which are the most relevant to support services in health, it is the ‘competencies’ that matter. An awarding body would look at the competencies of a worker’s qualification, then use these competencies to put an award together. We produce the competencies and the awarding body then puts it together through the National Qualifications Framework. So there are several hoops to go through before it is a qualification. So when you say a migrant worker, say it’s a worker from Europe, a lot of work has been done to see whether it will APL (accredited prior learning) across to ours to see if it will be recognised in the UK. I would go this route with an employer query.”

The largest demand for such services appeared to come from the food and beverage sector, which had witnessed a large number of new migrant employees within not only less skilled employment but also supervisory and lower-level management roles. According to a qualifications manager for the SSC:

“It is a really big issue at the moment. It is an absolute issue for us. Clearly a lot of foreign workers come into food and drink manufacture. I’m not sure how you’d get round issues of health and safety but employers are looking at qualifications from Portugal, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, from all over and it would be something that would be extremely useful.”

None of the three SSCs had heard of the National Reference Point (NRP) and only one of them had heard about NARIC, though this was not through her role within the SSC; she had used NARIC when enrolling students in her previous employment at a university. According to this interviewee, it was common practice for universities to use NARIC when accepting foreign students to ensure that their qualifications were at

an acceptable standard for university entry. However, she admitted that in her current role she had not thought about using the service and was unaware that a vocational service (NRP) was also available. The manager for the SSC for the cleaning services sector stated that he had believed he had “bumped into” NARIC’s web page when searching the internet for street cleaners’ past qualifications but that he knew little about their services.

The researchers explained to interviewees the kind of services provided by NRP and NARIC and subsequently asked whether such a service would be useful and whether they would look into this in the near future. To varying degrees all interviewees expressed an interest in the services outlined, while some also expressed concerns relating to costs. The interviewee for the cleaning SSC stated that he would definitely be interested in learning more, though as he currently received few enquiries from employers in respect of converting qualifications it was not a top priority. He claimed that most of the workers within the sector were “English anyway”, particularly street cleaners, though he acknowledged that the sector had witnessed a recent influx of migrants within cleaning services. The health sector respondent browsed NARIC’s website as the interviewer described its functions; the respondent claimed that it looked “very interesting” but perhaps the investment would be worthwhile only for higher-level posts rather than for use with lower-skilled workers.

The interviewees for the SSC for the food and beverage sector appeared genuinely excited and enthusiastic at the potential usefulness for the sector and the SSC. She also believed that a two-tier system should be established that distinguished between high-skills equivalents on an individual basis and a more general, lower-skilled catalogue of equivalent qualifications for a fixed number of countries to use for a larger number of less-skilled workers. She believed that such services could be cost effective for employers as they could identify skills early on rather than retraining workers who already possessed skills acquired abroad.

The qualifications manager stated that:

“My initial reaction is that this is something that I am really interested in and, whilst it might not be me, I’d like to flag up with colleagues to investigate further because I think that the feedback that we’re getting is that our employers would be very interested in that... The problem is, the service that I have in mind is quite expensive; per search it’s quite a lot of money for employers, particularly if you’ve got fifty workers coming in. It’s not cost effective... although this would depend on the level of the skill.”

As highlighted above, the qualifications manager suggested that such ‘qualification searches’ would be very useful for higher-skilled employment, whereas for the majority of lower-skilled workers employers might be interested in purchasing a specific list or catalogue of qualifications from specific countries. She gave the following example:

“Certain nationalities are attracted to specific industries. In foods we have had a recent increase in Polish and Portuguese workers... other sectors might have four or five nationalities that are critical to the industry so, as I say, that would be really interesting. It’s something that we’ve been aware of but never tackled. I mean we are a relatively new organisation. I’m not too worried about that but if there is some sort of tool we’d be really interested in looking into it.”

All interviewees believed that such services should be better promoted by government bodies, though they also acknowledged that the machinery of government and its agencies was large and complex, and that such information could take time to disseminate to interested parties.

It is apparent from the above that, despite the growing importance of the topic, some SSCs are unsure as to how to advise employers on how best to convert foreign qualifications to UK equivalents. Furthermore, there appears to be little strategic thinking on how this difficulty could be addressed, though this varied by sector. However, one SSC that

does not appear to fall into this category and which is acting proactively to address such issues is the SSC for construction – CITB-ConstructionSkills. The head of Health, Safety and Environment for the SSC stated that he has had enquiries in respect of converting foreign qualifications into UK equivalents, though he acknowledged that these were usually from recruitment agencies supplying the construction industry. When asked what he would do if an agency or other employer came to him and asked how it could convert a workers’ qualifications to a UK equivalent, he promptly explained that:

“What we would do, first of all our response would be to have a look at the website (www.constructionmigrantworkers.co.uk), because what that would also be able to do is to link you into Home Office advice to make sure that the person you are employing is here legally and has the right to work here. Assuming that that is not an issue, it’s then looking, at the moment, to UKNARIC and the method by which you would map overseas qualification to what we have here.”

The interviewee had heard of both NARIC and the NRP and used the services they provided, and had also been proactive in engaging with migrant workers, looking at issues of social inclusion, health and safety for migrants and looking at issues relating to recognising vocational skills since the development of card schemes within the construction industry. As the head of Health, Safety and Environment highlighted above, the SSC had recently developed a new web page/virtual resource centre specifically for migrant workers in the construction industry. The website contains resources on health and safety best practice, routes to qualification and relevant products and services to help ensure that employers are keeping their migrant workforce safe, qualified and productive. Links and information have been pulled together centrally from a variety of sources into a central hub; the resource provides support on a range of areas that affect employers, including: planning site inductions for migrant workers; awareness of employment laws; training and qualifying migrant workers; and support

to help keep workers safe on site. This resource and the SSC's detailed knowledge of the resources available in respect of migrant workers would suggest that they are considerably ahead of many of their counterparts, no less affected by migrant employment, in other sectors of the UK economy.

Finally the interviewee was asked whether they would appreciate more guidance from government bodies on such issues, to which the head of Health, Safety and Environment explained why additional government support was required, outlined research they had conducted and highlighted some of the difficulties facing them in their task:

“An unequivocal yes! Absolutely! I mean additional information? What we did was, we actually carried out a project – we commissioned NARIC to look at a number of different countries and a number of different construction trades to come up with a small matrix, to really see whether it was possible to come up with a mapping exercise, where, if it was successful we could propose this for the whole of the industry... The CSCS cards and similar are based upon the NVQ... But there is no overseas equivalent to the NVQ... At the moment, what we would suggest is that if the migrant worker does have underpinning knowledge or qualifications we would need to see that mapped to the equivalent UK Construction Award and then there would need to be an on-site assessment to assess whether they had the equivalent of an NVQ before we could take it to the next step.”

This section has highlighted a lack of knowledge or expertise in respect of converting foreign qualifications to UK equivalents by three SSCs. There appeared to be a lack of foresight or strategic responses to a growing difficulty and their enthusiasm to pursue such strategies when made aware of them varied. The exception to the rule is CITB-ConstructionSkills, which appears to have responded in a proactive manner and offered support and expertise far more than others. It is curious that construction is now steadily emerging as a benchmark for good practice. The SSC not only

references NARIC and similar bodies more readily, it is also beginning a range of initiatives around learning in terms of migrants. In this case, it is the role of the trade union that may be one of the critical factors in developing this agenda.

The necessity for co-ordination and strategy

The report highlights a series of issues related to the question of qualifications and the recognition of formal skills. The experience of migrants in the UK varies in relation to their different communities, histories, and ethnic and cultural dimensions and this report is but a snapshot of some of the issues and initiatives emerging. The report has tried to focus on recently arrived migrants who have not moved to the UK with a permanent job contract or professional position.

In relation to such migrants, the report detects serious institutional failures in terms of how the experiences, biographies and skills of migrants are addressed by established institutions. In terms of the recognition and acknowledgement of a person's skills and qualifications, we can conclude that, beyond specific professional or craft-related work, this is not a consistent priority in the employment of migrant labour. The roles migrants play and the jobs they occupy appear to be determined by the particular job tasks and the short-term aspects of their employment. The prospects for personal development, building a portfolio of skills, and using any derived skills and qualifications are not an option in many cases. The report has mentioned that, in part, the problem is not one that can be identified in relation to the employment experience only of migrants. There is, in the UK, a relatively weak record of training and an unevenly regulated approach to recruitment and personal development. In recent years, there have been attempts to change this but many problems persist. Hence, part of the experience of migrants may be due to the unregulated nature of many aspects of employment and work relations generally, and this is likely to impact more strongly on migrants due to their more vulnerable social and organisational status.

The report outlined mechanisms that do exist that facilitate the recognition of skills and qualifications of various types. The organisations in question are financed by the state and they are part of a broad network of bodies internationally that systematically share information and materials. These offer detailed services and support to employers, public bodies and individuals. It appears from our research that

employers rarely use such bodies and that employer bodies such as chambers of commerce (see Appendix 1 for more detail) have virtually no demand for information on such types of issues. Contact with individuals at the CBI confirmed a lack of a strategic concern with such bodies and questions of migrant qualifications. In addition, many sector skills councils (SSCs) had very little knowledge of such processes, though they appear, however, to be more proactive on the question of migration and qualifications. The construction sector brought forth a more positive and detailed array of findings; in part this may be due to the increasing concern with labour skills shortages and a more co-ordinated effort around organisations such as CITB-ConstructionSkills.

In an interview with individuals at the National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC), it was clear to them that, unlike many of their European counterparts, British employers have fewer duties that are derived from the regulatory framework in terms of work and employment-related issues and that this is reflected in their general attitude to qualifications and their recognition. Securing change on such issues is a tall order. Any dialogue on skills requires a clear and consistent approach to the services provided and the mapping for employers and trade unions of the work being done by the Citizens Advice Bureau, Job Centre Plus, NARIC etc.

For example, while acknowledging the high quality of the service provided by NARIC, a representative for the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) admitted that such services may need to be better advertised, which could potentially be done through the SSCs, learning and skills councils and employer associations. He stated that:

"I believe that all three would be appropriate. Whilst this should form part of NARIC's marketing and promotional activities, the Department would work closely with NARIC to facilitate any promotion through its own channels as well."

Overall, the report indicates that there is a lack of co-ordination and organisation among employers

and public bodies. The absence of a systematic national, regional and sectoral tripartite dialogue (employers, government and unions) on skills, learning and qualifications is a challenge. There are highly innovative developments through NARIC and NRP, along with parallel initiatives at the sector level and through public service to young and migrant workers such as Connexions. These positive aspects are to some extent undermined by the fact that these organisations are not widely known.

In terms of trade unions, the focus has been on providing basic skills and language training as part of the attempt to assist migrants into the labour market and improved working conditions. The learning dimension of trade union work is a key feature of their activities. Awareness of how to assist migrants to use their qualifications and skills appears to be less developed, though there are instances when trade unions have provided information and support services on a range of issues and needs. The emphasis has been on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and the development of learning centres, and this has become a major first step for allowing migrants to communicate their concerns and needs. However, the problem with the financing of ESOL and learning strategies does raise a potential challenge to trade unions in their attempt to reach out to migrants. Some regions and cities, including London, appear to have staved off some of the more negative aspects of funding cuts but this is due to the nature of political coalitions and the presence of a local political dimension, as can be exemplified by the Mayor of London, which facilitated a greater dialogue on such questions.

The failure of institutional maps and guides regarding service delivery points is one important conclusion of this report. In addition, any mapping exercise also needs a dialogue based on the nature of employment, the behaviour of employers, and the way we view work. The fact that one in five workers in Britain can be considered vulnerable is an indication of how employment is inadequately regulated and of the fact that many bodies fail to take a strategic view.

Finally, as the government sees skills and qualifications as a basis for migrant selection from non-EU countries – probably as part of a wider and more polemical political agenda – then organisations will need to acknowledge that recognition of skills and qualifications is going to move further up the agenda in terms of employment. The question becomes how this is done and whether it is done in the interests of the migrant worker or not.

So, whose responsibility is it anyway?

- First, it is the responsibility of all institutions and organisations to be aware of services that are offered on the issues discussed in this report.
- Second, it is the responsibility of government bodies to market their services and facilitation mechanisms to organisations in a more systematic and coherent manner.
- Third, the question of migration and skills needs ‘joined-up’ thinking. This raises two specific issues. The first is the failure to create consistent social dialogue and structures related to training and qualifications. Interviewees within organisations appeared to be approaching such matters with few synergies with parallel bodies in other sectors or regions. The second is that skills and qualifications are not merely a matter of recognition or acknowledgement. What emerges from this project is the need to appreciate that using the human resources of an individual and developing them systematically requires a more systematic view of employment. Referencing and using organisations such as NARIC is one major step forward but, on its own, it is not enough. The intention to recognise and use the potential of an individual and to acknowledge their qualifications as part of that process raises issues beyond those of a social dialogue and information exchange on relevant services.
- Fourth, there are many barriers individual migrant workers face when entering employment and a broader, more co-ordinated approach to such employment issues is needed. The legal status of

a migrant worker, the reliance on local networks and informal mechanisms to gain employment, the language skills one has, and the nature of the employment contract all determine the ability of migrant workers to gain from employment in a satisfactory manner. Once in employment, there is then the nature of their work, the level of support and dignity within the workplace environment, general attitudes to development and personal progress, and the nature of the learning environment. To isolate the question of qualifications is ill advised. Many supportive features of employment are absent from much of the work migrants do, and this makes them vulnerable.

Recommendations and proposed actions

Raising consciousness about migrant workers' skills

- That greater attention be paid to the developmental needs of migrants.
- That the current interest in vocational education and portfolio approaches to skills begins to address migrants more explicitly.
- That migrant workers on low pay continue to have access to free ESOL provision. Where fees are charged in respect to other workers then the employers who recruit them have a responsibility to pay the cost of the provision. There is a need to recognise the value of ESOL at a variety of levels and its contribution to:
 - assisting migrant workers' social integration at workplace and community level
 - improving health, safety and welfare at work through improved communication
 - improved migrant worker mobility and employability
 - providing migrant workers with a key tool with which to improve their access to learning, training and skills opportunities
 - identifying ESOL as the first 'rung on the ladder' and essential entry point to assist migrant workers' orientation and independence at the workplace and in the community.

Mapping the regulation of qualifications

- That employer and labour organisations begin to address the fact that the increasing engagement with skills and learning (inputs) means a more concerted approach to qualifications and their recognition in a global context (outputs).
- That employer associations and trade unions hold a series of seminars where these issues are raised and discussed.

- That there is a more systematic institutional 'mapping' of organisations in the field of learning and qualifications with relations to employment.
- That organisations such as NARIC, which are public funded, have their profile raised within trade unions and employer organisations.
- That a more 'joined-up' approach between trade unions and such bodies as NARIC be considered.
- That the TUC/unionlearn works with DIUS, BERR (the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform) and the CBI to promote 'joined-up' thinking between organisations working across the training, skills and education sectors, thereby ensuring a culture of synergy in the context of qualification and skills recognition.

Linking into the new skills agenda

- That SSCs are engaged with as a basis for a more systematic approach involving unions regarding working together on migration and inclusion issues.
- That benchmarks such as the construction industry's SSC and learning initiatives be understood more clearly and disseminated more widely, especially as they systematically involve the union UCATT.
- That the Government's recently launched 'Skills Pledge', and actions in connection with the publication of *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch review of skills in England* be analysed to ensure the position and issues faced by migrant workers are properly represented in the context of the findings of this report.

Underpinning the development of union-led learning

- That unionlearn develops materials for inclusion in ULR training courses to highlight the position of migrant workers and raise awareness about the services offered by such organisations as NARIC.

- That the TUC/unionlearn establishes a protocol with NARIC (similar to its arrangements with the Open University and the LSC) to help unions and particularly ULRs represent the learning and skills aspirations of migrant workers.
- That 'trade union action agendas' on the respective SSCs accommodate a 'common denominator' approach across all sectors to the issue of migrant workers' qualifications and skills.
- That full-time officials and ULRs receive training in how best to support migrant workers on the issues addressed in this research.
- That the TUC considers developing a strategy of communication on such matters that is targeted at chambers of commerce and employer bodies.
- That government proposals for skills as a criteria for residency be addressed within trade union circles and discussed.

Appendix 1 Recognising qualifications and the chambers of commerce

The following subsection highlights responses from the 12 main UK regional chambers of commerce and a national CBI official when questioned about the following five themes:

- 1 Advising employers on how to convert foreign qualifications to UK equivalents.
- 2 The extent to which employers raise such issues.
- 3 NARIC or the National Reference Point.
- 4 Future plans to use such services.
- 5 Guidance or lack of guidance from government bodies.

As a first point of contact when pursuing advice, employers generally use their networks and alliances with employers' associations to gather information. Therefore, the research sought to identify the extent to which such organisations were able to advise their members.

The first area of enquiry was the conversion of foreign qualifications to UK equivalents. When asked how it would advise its members to undertake such a task, the CBI respondent claimed it they had not yet conducted a great deal of work in this area, stating:

“Sorry we’ve been unable to be of more help – there are only two of us working on the entire education and skills system... We have, I am afraid, apparently not done much work on this.”

In a similar vein, the 12 main UK regional offices for the chambers of commerce indicated a comparable lack of knowledge with respect to this topic. One question asked how they would respond to a request from an employer with regard to converting foreign qualifications to a UK equivalent. They were also asked whether any employers had approached them on such a matter. The respondents were also questioned as to their knowledge of NARIC and the National Reference Point and whether they use, or would use, these services. Finally, the respondents were asked whether they would appreciate more guidance from government bodies on dealing with such issues.

The vast majority of chambers of commerce were unsure as to how they should advise their members with regard to converting foreign qualifications to UK equivalents. Most of the respondents claimed that they would search for alternative sources of help with this matter. For example, one regional officer stated that:

“I’d have to ask around my contacts in the LEA, LSC and search the internet for answers.”

Another regional officer stated that:

“I would examine the precise qualification then seek professional guidance, say at Bournemouth & Poole College or Bournemouth University.”

Others directed the researcher to different regional offices they claimed were “more operational”, or that such enquiries may be directed to a variety of agencies within the chamber. For instance, one respondent stated:

“If the call was received by the Business Training Department we would try to assist by directing them to Work Solutions (which is a separate but a related company within the chamber) or Manchester Enterprise, which offers assistance to business in the area.”

Another chamber suggested that they would refer an employer to a regional European Union Information Centre and suggested that the researcher also contact this centre in order to gather further information.

Finally, one of the regional chambers referred our enquiry to the Department of Employment and Learning.

It would appear, therefore, that there is a distinct lack of knowledge concerning the conversion of foreign qualifications to UK equivalents within regional chambers of commerce. One explanation for this could be that, despite the growing level of migrant workers in the UK, employers are simply not raising the issue of foreign qualification with their chambers. Not one of the interviewees claimed that an employer had approached them for advice in respect of the

conversion of foreign qualifications, though one respondent did state that:

“I have not been approached directly but I am aware that other colleagues have dealt with enquiries from employers about securing migrant workers with particular skills and qualifications. The situation was that they couldn’t find suitable welders and they had to go abroad to find workers with the relevant skills or qualifications.”

This is an interesting point as it demonstrates that some chambers are being contacted by employers about qualifications, though not for conversions but rather to find employees with relevant skills and qualifications in other countries to employ in the UK. Another example was put forward by an officer in a different region:

“They had a shortage of bus drivers with the right skills or qualifications because they couldn’t recruit from the local area. I think they had to get drivers from Poland or the Czech Republic. I can’t remember whether they had the basic qualifications when they brought them over or whether they had to train them. I think they were qualified drivers and First Group may have had to train them in language skills and, you know, driving in the UK.”

These findings suggest that there is a need for a reference point to compare vocational qualifications and equivalents, which NARIC provides. Yet, none of the 12 regions claimed that they had heard of NARIC or the National Reference Point. Each interviewer gave a brief description of NARIC and asked the respondents whether they believed that it would be of use to their organisation. Overwhelmingly, the reaction was very positive, with responses including:

“Yes, definitely. It’s always useful to have such a reference point to refer to and have somebody to speak to on something like that kind of thing.”

Eleven of the regional chambers positively stated that they would now look into the services provided by NARIC, though one claimed that:

“This is not one of our mainstream areas and the whole topic of migrant workers isn’t yet (anecdotally) a major issue in this area.”

Only one topic created unanimous agreement from all 12 chambers – that the government should do more to offer advice on such issues and provide guidance to a variety of institutions on how to convert foreign qualifications.

Appendix 2 Examples of union-led learning projects on migrant workers

Learning for Organising Migrant Workers:

Unite-T&G Section

Unionising migrant workers at Canary Wharf, Tube and City cleaners and creating partnerships with the employers to deliver learning opportunities to them.

Union Learning Fund project 2007-10.

Migrant Workers in Passenger Transport Sector:

Unite-T&G Section

Providing a mobile learning facility to meet the Skills for Life and ICT needs of Go North East employees as well as the ESOL needs of those who are migrant workers.

Northern TUC Learning for All Fund project 2007.

Weidza: BFAWU

Engaging Polish workers employees in the baking industry to undertake Skills for Life courses, initially ESOL, and to train 10 ULRs from the Polish community to support them.

NW TUC Learning and Skills for All Fund project 2007-08.

Migrant Workers' Learning Centre in Southampton:

GMB

Set up learning centre for mainly Polish workers formed by Migrant Workers Branch which provides ESOL, ICT online and facilities for the learners' children.

GMB Project

Bournemouth Partner in Skills: GMB

Working with the partnership between unions, Bournemouth Borough Council and Bournemouth Adult Learning to help migrant workers and low paid women in the tourist industry access training and development opportunities.

South West TUC Learning Works for All Fund project 2007-08.

ESOL for Migrant Workers in Yeovil: Community

Increasing access and take up of learning by the migrant worker community in Yeovil, focussing primarily on Polish workers.

South West TUC Learning Works for All Fund project 2007-08.

Action for Equality: GMB

Engaging migrant workers in the food and drink sector in Wiltshire with ESOL learning

South West TUC Learning Works for All Fund project 2007-08.

Access for All: Unite-T&G Section

Providing ESOL and Citizenship courses for migrant workers predominantly working in the meat processing industry across North Wales.

Wales Union Learning Fund project 2004-06.

Access Across Wales: Unite-T&G Section

Support for centres across Wales that provide advice and guidance to migrant workers to raise awareness of their employment rights and to develop a network of teaching and learning champions to disseminate information to those who require ESOL.

Wales Union Learning Fund project 2006-08.

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