



Interim Report 1: Employability Workshops

Introduction

As part of the social connections research element of the ABM AMIF3 funded project 'New Scots: Pathways to Economic and Social Inclusion' project, we held a connections mapping workshop online in November 2021. Eight AMIF beneficiaries – four men and four women - attended. All had been invited by the SRC Employability Officer, having been identified as people who had engaged with the employability team and subsequently obtained paid employment.

The session was facilitated by three QMU researchers, who used participative mapping methods to discuss the people and organisations that had been helpful to participants on their path to employment. The session comprised additional questions around the role of the SRC Employability Service, and participants were invited to complete the social connections mapping survey to explore their wider connections in Scotland.

Role of the Integration Service

Participants identified Scottish Refugee Council, and specifically the Employability Service, as a key connection for their pathway to employment and integration more generally. Several mentioned interventions led by the SRC Employability Team, including information sessions with employers, working on interview skills and CV preparation, that they felt had been instrumental in their successfully obtaining employment.

I tried to find a job, I applied for hundreds of vacancies but only Scottish Refugee Council, especially Anita, help to get a job in a very good company [...] she was really, really helpful with my CV, with getting a job and I really appreciate for that. (P6)

Scottish Refugee Council's partnerships with employers emerged as positive, and something that participants felt had enabled their journeys to employment.

"the programmes that Anita run with workplace, was really good [...] how I can interact with the interview, doing the interviews. And how should I approach with my questions, answers and so on. It was really helpful." (P8)

"I had applied for several jobs in the past two years and took part in several job interviews. But I didn't get the job because I was competing with the other Scottish people. But when refugees go through SRC, and because of the diversity and inclusion policy of the companies – so when the refugees would be recommended to the companies, they will be competing with the other refugees. So, this is a great chance and therefore very helpful for them" (P10)

Above and beyond this ‘functional’ assistance, Anita was widely praised for the manner in which she provided advice and the resulting positive impact upon people’s confidence:

“the best thing I can describe Anita is she’s encouraging and also kind of worked on my self-esteem because when you’re in a different country, you kind of be more hesitant, I guess. So that was like a brilliant experience. And I think all I’m doing right now is just, in effect... like a, resulted from all Anita’s hard work.” (P7)

Advice from the wider team at Scottish Refugee Council was recognised too, as regards people finding out about their housing rights, and assisting with the transition after being recognised as refugees and being granted leave to remain. While participants were all fluent speakers of English and so unlikely to have been referred to Workers’ Educational Association, several spoke warmly too of Bridges Programmes as a key connection that had helped with their employability.

Figure One: Connections deemed important to life in Scotland





Wider connections

As figure one illustrates, outside the integration service, a mix of personal and organisational connections played a role in people's integration journeys. In terms of organisations, except for those involved in the homelessness and housing processes (Hamish Allen Centre and Housing Association), most were specialist refugee providers such as Migrant Help, Refugee Action and British Red Cross. Support provided by these organisations was often focused on practical support and assisting people to understand their rights and navigate systems. Figure two shows though that few participants had had recent contact with any of these agencies, possibly illustrating that their support had been most important during the asylum process. Similarly, while college too was cited as being an important source of information and assistance, and remained a trusted connection, recent contact was limited.

Beyond formal organisational support, friendships played both a practical and emotional role as in the example given by one of the women participants:

"We went to the church near us and we started to like, to meet people and make friendship [...] they really helped me during, emotionally during this, during my journey to here [...] some of my Iranian friends and some of my Scottish friends, that I have here. So, I'm really thankful." (P9)

Despite this, no group of friends from the wider map at figure two emerged as being entirely trusted. This, the research team observed, might be due to the question around trust being interpreted to mean 'trust to provide correct information' which, particularly if friends and family lived overseas, was not necessarily the case.

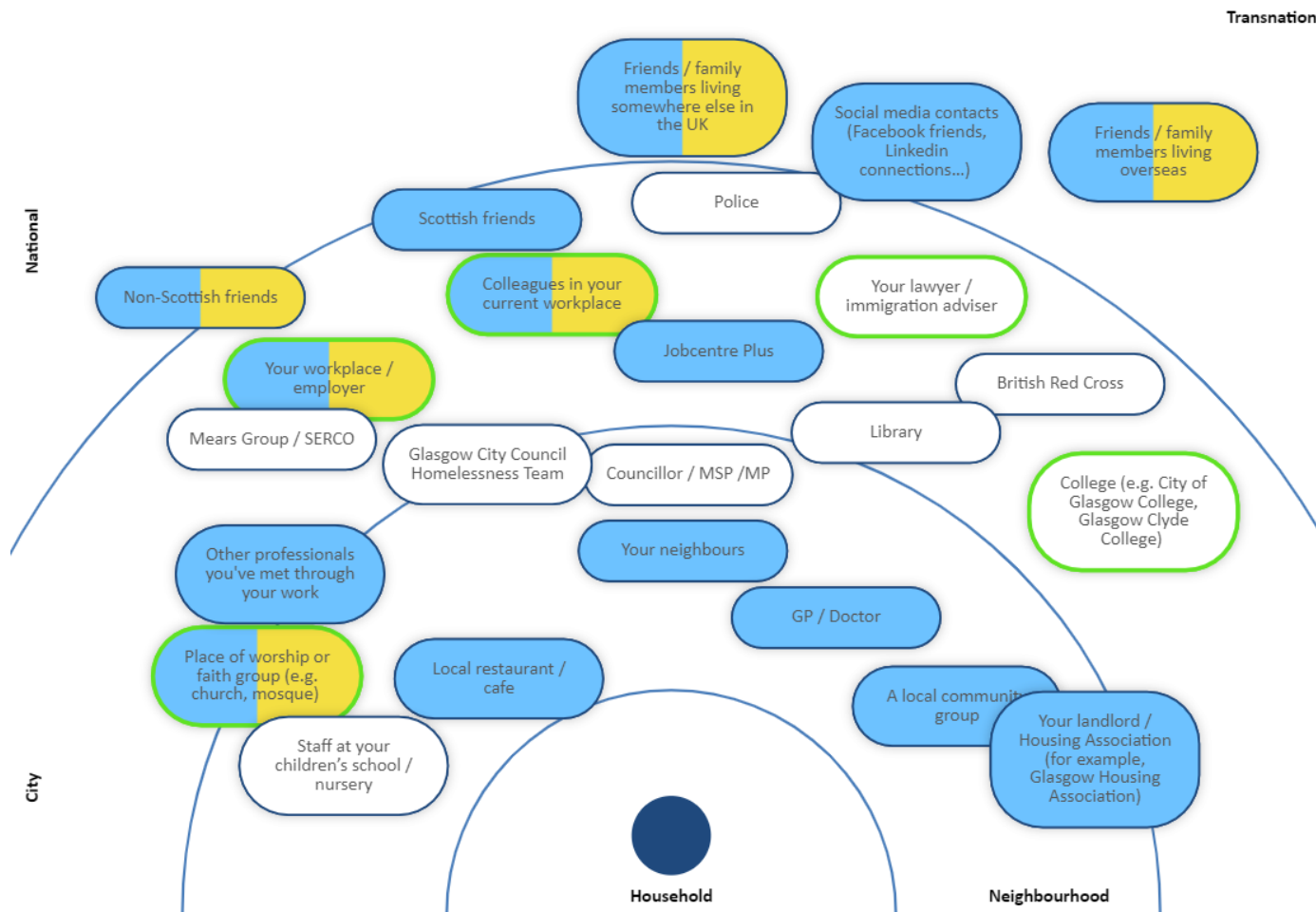
The Church too, in some instances regardless of people's own faith, was another connection that enabled people to make friends, feel settled and access practical advice and support.

"even if I'm not Christian, I can say the church family was one of the most influential groups in my life. They just helped me emotionally a lot, they supported me to have my private house in Glasgow" (P10)

Faith groups more generally, taken to include faith organisations across denominations, appeared, in figure two, to offer trusted support as well as opportunities for participants to offer reciprocal help or support.



Figure two: group map from connections survey. Blue = contact within last six months, green outline = trust a lot, yellow = reciprocity.





Working Life

This workshop offered an opportunity to discuss people's experiences of working life. As noted above, participants felt that a number of people and places, with SRC prime amongst them, had helped them on their path to employment. While most were positive about their experiences in work thus far and placed their colleagues and employers as trusted connections in the survey (see figure two), several made observations about some of the cultural and linguistic subtleties that they were still having to navigate in the workplace.

they are friendly. But the major problem is in the language barrier and sometimes there is a cultural difference. The things that they are telling comes to them funny but you don't understand and you don't really have time and that happens. So this is something that somehow makes me, sometimes uncomfortable. (P8)

Some were unsure of how to approach certain milestones in the workplace, for example, whether to email their manager to ask about what happened at the end of a probationary period. For others, while colleagues were friendly, these relationships remained work-focused and could not yet be counted as friendships. One participant recounted that customers sometimes discriminated against her because, in her view, they felt she did not understand or speak good enough English. She felt that many refugees would have had similar experiences. The same woman raised concerns that refugees who did not know their rights could be exploited by employers who would underpay or fail to pay them.

These and other examples given – for example, one participant who hoped one day to buy a house but was unsure of how to proceed – led the group to broadly support one man's view that in future, it would be useful to build some longer-term, post-employment support into future services or work with others to do so:

"we know the majority of the organisations working on the refugees' problems, they are concentrating on their problems before they're employed [...] So I think they need to a section or department for post-employment for refugees because when we've got a job, we think about other plans [...] but we don't have any knowledge and any information about that. So, yeah, I think a post-employment activity in SRC, in Bridges or in other organisations that are working with refugees can be very helpful." (P10)

Continuing this conversation would be a good starting point for further research with people who have been successful in attaining employment.

Suggested citation

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