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# ReStart: Refugee Integration, Employer Engagement Opportunities

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## ReStart: Refugee Integration, Employer Engagement Opportunities

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## **Glossary**

Acronym/Key word	Definition
AAT	Association of Accounting Technicians
ACE	Achieving Change through Employment
ALW	Adult Learning Wales
AMIF	Asylum Migration Integration Fund
BAME	Black Asian and Minority Ethnic
CfW	Communities for Work
COVID	COrona Vlrus Disease
CQFW	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales
CSCS	Construction Skills Certificate Scheme
CV	Curriculum Vitae
CVC	County Voluntary Council
DfE	Department for Education
DPIA	Displaced People in Action
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
EWC	Education Workforce Council
EYST	Ethnic Youth Support Team
FAN	Friends and Neighbours Group
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEIW	Health Education and Improvement Wales
HR	Human Resources
IAG	Information Advice and Guidance
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IOM	International Organisation of Migration
IT	Information Technology
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation

LA	Local Authority
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NARIC	National Recognition Information Centre
NHS	National Health Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OET	Occupational English Test
PaCE	Parents Childcare and Employment [project]
PLAB	Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PSB	Public Service Board
REACH	Regional ESOL Assessment Central Hub
RSP	Regional Skills Partnership
SIA	Security Industry Authority
SPOC	Single Point of Contact
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
SVPRS	Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VPRS	Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme
WARD	Wales Asylum Seeking and Refugee Doctors' Group
WBL	Work Based Learning
WEST	Wales Essential Skills Test
WG	Welsh Government
WRC	Wales Refugee Council
WSMP	Wales Strategic Migration Partnership



## **1. Summary**

### **Introduction and study aims**

- 1.1 Those given refugee status can work in the United Kingdom (UK) and many want to work, but employment rates for refugees lag far behind those people born in the UK (WG, 2020a, Kone et al., 2019). This research aims to understand the local/regional labour market skill gaps and opportunities, to increase the employment prospects for refugees within the four main dispersal areas of Wales (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham). The intention is to develop a practical report which identifies feasible activities that could be delivered within the ReStart: Refugee Integration Project and other forms of skills, employability and enterprise support.

### **Approach and methods**

- 1.2 This was a mixed methods study, drawing upon data collected through:
- scoping reviews of recent research into refugee populations in the UK, research into best practice in developing the employment prospects of refugees, analysis of labour market trends and forecasts; and
  - semi-structured interviews, with a purposive sample of 32 stakeholders representing the ReStart project, employment support services, public, private and voluntary sector employers, employer bodies and trade unions, and the voluntary sector.
- 1.3 Data collected from these sources was triangulated and emerging findings presented for discussion and validation by stakeholders, in two online workshops.

### **Labour market opportunities in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham**

- 1.4 Many refugees want to continue working in the sector or profession they were in before fleeing persecution. However, given barriers to employment, such as weak English language skills and employer practices that can discriminate against refugees, it is often very difficult, and sometimes impossible, for refugees to continue working in the same sector, at the same level, in Wales. Therefore, their willingness to consider alternatives, typically entry level jobs, where barriers to entry are lower and employer demand is high, can determine whether they enter work or

not (WG, 2020a). This means that an analysis of skill gaps and labour market opportunities for refugees needs to have a dual focus, upon access to entry level jobs in the short term, and identifying progression opportunities for those refugees who want to, and are able to, progress, to help them realise their employment aspirations over the longer term.

1.5 The analysis of employment opportunities focused upon three broad categories of jobs, in sectors where there is forecast to be strong demand from employers:

- “entry level” jobs, where barriers to entry, such as expectations around language skills and qualifications, are low but where pay, conditions and progression opportunities are also often poor (meaning refugees can often get stuck and struggle to progress);
- “mid-level” jobs that offer progression opportunities, where barriers to entry, such as expectations around language skills and qualifications, are moderate but where pay, conditions and progression opportunities are also higher; and
- “higher level” jobs that offer progression opportunities, where barriers to entry, such as expectations around language skills and qualifications, are high but where pay, conditions and progression opportunities are also high.

1.6 The qualitative research for this study identified that key entry level positions include retail, hospitality, food and drink, cleaning, construction, security, manufacturing, warehouse and driving / delivery. Most of these positions would require refugees to have English language skills at around Entry Level 2<sup>1</sup> and, as one employer put it, the right “approach and attitude”. Some sectors, such as construction, security and driving also require certificates or licences to practise, even at entry level.

1.7 The qualitative research for this study also identified that, other than health and social care and skilled construction and manufacturing roles, it is more difficult to

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<sup>1</sup> Weak or limited Welsh language skills were very rarely mentioned as a barrier to employment. This is likely to reflect the focus upon the four dispersal areas, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham, where Welsh is less widely spoken than some other part of Wales. In contrast, the Refugee Employment Skills Support Study (WG, 2020a), which covered all of Wales, found more, albeit still limited, evidence of the need for Welsh language skills in order to access and progress in work, particularly in north Wales.

identify mid-level opportunities where barriers to employment are moderate, and demand from employers is high. Most of these positions would require refugees to have Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) Level 2 or 3 qualifications and to have passed the Wales Essential Skills Test (WEST). The limited range of mid-level opportunities reflects the “hollowing out” of the UK labour market (with an increase in higher level and, to a lesser degree, entry level jobs, but a reduction in mid-level jobs) (Luchinskaya and Green, 2016).

- 1.8 The strongest employment growth is forecast for positions at Level 4 and above, and there are higher level progression opportunities in, for example, science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) sectors, where demand is forecast to be high, such as the life sciences (including pharmaceuticals), semi-conductor and fintech (financial services technology) sectors in south east Wales in particular (WG, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). However, these sectors also have higher barriers to entry, including demand for higher level qualifications (e.g. a higher apprenticeship (Level 4 or 5), degree apprenticeship (Level 6 or 7), Honours (Level 6) or Master’s degree (Level 7), fluency in English and higher expectations about employees’ cultural skills and knowledge.
- 1.9 Both the qualitative research for this study and literature included in the scoping review (e.g. WG, 2020a) identifies that self-employment, including commercial and social enterprises, is an option for some refugees, particularly for those with experience of having run their own businesses. Opting for self-employment may reduce some barriers to employment, as it may not require such strong language skills, but it also creates new barriers, such as access to finance, and refugees can get trapped in economically marginal work (see e.g. Kone et al., 2019).
- 1.10 There is considerable uncertainty about future employment (and self-employment) opportunities. COVID-19 and social distancing requirements have had a significant effect on a number of entry level sectors such as retail, hospitality, food and drink and construction, and the effects upon sectors such as hospitality may persist even as lockdown is eased. However, sectors such as delivery and driving have been boosted by these restrictions (Dias et al., 2020). The impact of exiting the European

Union (EU) will depend upon the exit arrangements negotiated with the EU. Research by the Welsh Government has stated that a so called “hard” Brexit at the end of the transition period, if there is no trade deal agreed by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, may hit export sectors, such as automotive and aerospace industries (and therefore limit some higher level opportunities), already adversely affected by COVID-19 (WG, 2019c). If, as forecast, unemployment rises and demand for labour is weak (given the economic impact of COVID-19 and in “hard” Brexit scenarios), it is likely to be harder to engage employers in recruiting those, such as refugees, seen as riskier and potentially costlier to recruit and employ than other groups. Conversely, restrictions on European economic migrants (as a result of the UK’s exit from the EU) may reduce the labour supply, and therefore competition, particularly for entry level jobs (Walsh and McNeil, 2020).

### **Increasing the employment opportunities for refugees**

- 1.11 The research reviewed for this study is clear that action to increase employment opportunities for refugees needs to focus on both employers and support services for refugees. It also identifies that action should be founded upon a genuine partnership between employers and support services, to ensure that support services fully understand employers’ needs and expectations, and ensure that they are effective in informing and advising employers, who often lack experience and expertise in recruiting and employing refugees (Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019).
- 1.12 Both the qualitative research for this study (i.e. interviews with stakeholders) and the literature included in the scoping review (e.g. Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019) also identify that action to improve refugees’ employment prospects and experiences needs to focus upon:
  - **preparing for employment**, given the barriers to entry that refugees face. Pre-employment support for refugees should focus upon work-readiness and matching refugees with employment opportunities, and also working with employers to remove unnecessary barriers linked to recruitment and selection;
  - **sustaining employment**, given the risks that a non-inclusive workplace culture may lead to refugees leaving their employment (due, for example, to feeling they

do not “fit in”). Post-employment support for both refugees and employers can help sustain employment; and

- **supporting progression in employment**, given the danger of refugees getting stuck in entry level jobs (which limits their lives and their potential contribution to Wales). This can be helped by supporting progression with an existing employer or with a new employer and/or sector and also by improving the quality of work, through national action to promote fair and ethical employment, and to increase equality and diversity in the workforce.

1.13 The qualitative research for this study also highlights some key challenges and structural constraints upon action to increase employment opportunities for refugees, including:

- the volume and type of employment opportunities in each dispersal area, and concerns that COVID-19 and/or the UK’s exit from the EU may reduce opportunities for refugees;
- the need for action by employers (e.g. to change recruitment practices and workplace cultures), and the challenges inherent in engaging employers; and
- the time it can take (often years) before refugees are “work ready”.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

### *Employment opportunities for refugees*

1.14 Most refugees face significant barriers to finding work, most notably insufficient English language skills, and also limited cultural competence and understanding of Welsh workplaces, and/or an under-valuing or lack of recognition (by employers) of qualifications, skills and/or experience gained overseas (WG, 2020a). They can therefore be perceived by employers as a potentially risky, and potentially costlier, group to recruit and manage (Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019). Therefore, in the short-term, in order to find work many refugees have to focus upon low skilled “entry level” jobs in areas such as warehousing, hospitality and food processing, where demand for labour is high and entry barriers to employment are low.

- 1.15 Entry level jobs, together with further education (FE), including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and work-based learning (WBL), should provide a stepping stone to progressing to more highly skilled work in sectors such as health and social care, where demand for labour outstrips supply. However, currently too many refugees appear to get stuck in entry level jobs, so they become “dead ends” (Kone et al., 2019; WG, 2020a). Therefore, both the qualitative research for this study and literature included in the scoping review (e.g. Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019) identifies that a focus upon pre-employment support needs to be complemented by a strong focus upon supporting progression in employment.

*Best practice in developing the employment prospects of refugees*

- 1.16 The qualitative research for this study and literature included in the scoping review (e.g. Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek 2019; UNHCR, 2019) identifies that work with refugees should focus upon pre-employment preparation, job search (including when they should start and how they should look for work) and also sustaining and supporting progression for refugees through post-employment support. This should be matched by work with employers to improve their understanding of the issues refugees may face; to promote equality and diversity in employee recruitment, retention and progression and to improve the quality of work.
- 1.17 Many of the elements of effective practice in supporting refugees and employers are not unique to work with refugees; they feature in interventions to support other groups with complex barriers to employment, including those who are long-term unemployed or economically inactive; people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and/or disabled people (Luchinskaya and Green, 2016; Weekes-Bernard, 2017; Bayer et al., 2020).
- 1.18 Although the elements of effective practice are reasonably well understood, the qualitative research for this study identifies that implementation can be challenging. The relatively small size of refugee populations means mainstream services and employers often struggle to develop the experience and expertise required to support refugees effectively and also reduces incentives for employers to target this group. The small size of refugee populations means that there is both a need for

specialist support services like ReStart to support refugees and, conversely, a need to mainstream employer engagement into the wider work focused upon promoting equality and diversity in the Welsh workforce and increasing the quality of employment opportunities in Wales.

- 1.19 Although there is a case for specialist services, ReStart does not have the capacity to support all those refugees who may need or benefit from support to find and progress in employment. Moreover, ReStart does not have the expertise and resources in areas like self-employment or childcare that mainstream provision, such as Business Wales and Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE), can offer. It is therefore important that refugees can access these services where appropriate. Although some advisors within Business Wales have experience in working with refugees, the qualitative research for this study and the Refugee Employment, Skills and Support Study (WG, 2020a) suggest that there is less experience and expertise in other national or regional employment support provision, such as Communities for Work (CfW). Although ReStart and voluntary sector organisations have the expertise needed to help build capacity within mainstream services, they are not resourced to do this as well as directly supporting refugees.
- 1.20 The qualitative research for this study also identifies that there is no “silver bullet” and, as table 1.1. illustrates, co-ordinated action is required across a range of services and partners. This raises questions about how action in this sector should be led and co-ordinated at local, regional and national levels. It also highlights how the time it can take for refugees to be “work ready” for either entry or progression level opportunities demands great patience and perseverance on the part of refugees, and requires a long term commitment from support services like ReStart.

**Table 1.1. Summary of key recommendations**

<b>Refugee engagement and support: preparing for employment</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Active outreach working; for example, with faith and community leaders, groups and networks used to reaching out to groups of refugees who may otherwise be under-represented, including those “stuck” in “poor” work.</li> <li>2. Work-focused assessments and action planning to determine what skills refugees need to realise their short term employment aspirations and to ensure that their short term goals and aspirations are aligned with realistic employment opportunities.</li> <li>3. Access to work placements or, where this is not possible, volunteering that enables refugees to acquire the workplace cultural competence and capital required and which also provides UK work experience.</li> <li>4. Access to training which is directly relevant to employers’ needs in the local labour market (e.g. food hygiene for those looking to work in food manufacturing).</li> <li>5. Access to services such as the National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) which can support the recognition of overseas qualifications (through, for example, the Restart project).</li> <li>6. Practical support to enhance job search and applications and, where possible, actively matching refugees and suitable employment opportunities.</li> </ol>	<p>ReStart and also Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and national and regional employment support programmes like Working Wales, CfW, Journey2Work, Opus and Workways.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Review how effectively the actions and good practice identified in the current ESOL policy for Wales (WG,</li> </ol>	<p>The Welsh Government Post-16 Planning and</p>



2018d) in relation to access to formal ESOL provision (including in particular ESOL+ and ESOL for specific purposes, such as passing the driving test), and support to access other opportunities to develop language skills in informal and social settings, such as Friends and Neighbours (FAN) who run groups to develop conversational English), have been implemented.	Policy Team (which funds ESOL); Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP), ReStart and REACH+ and ESOL providers (e.g. FE colleges, Adult Learning Wales (ALW) and the voluntary sector), and employers.
<b>Sustaining employment and supporting progression</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
8. Keeping in touch with refugees and employers to provide post-employment support (including advice and support to assist refugees' integration into workplace cultures).	ReStart, Careers Wales, Trade Unions (including e.g. the Union Learning Fund); and Welsh
9. Supporting progression in work (e.g. access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) about job opportunities and progression opportunities and routes linked to FE, WBL (such as apprenticeships) and higher education (HE), and access to support and training to build "career adaptability".	Government employability and skills support, such as the <a href="#">Flexible Skills Programme</a> ; the Better Jobs, Better Futures project (in Swansea); FE and WBL providers.
10. Using labour market intelligence (such as that outlined in this report) in order to identify entry level and progression employment opportunities and sectors/employers on which to focus engagement activity to underpin IAG and ensure that refugees' aspirations are well aligned with employment opportunities.	ReStart regional employer engagement officers; Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and local authority (LA) employment engagement officers/teams; and the Welsh Government

<p>11. Work with employers to improve their understanding of refugees' circumstances and the challenges they may face.</p> <p>12. Work with employers to promote equality and diversity in workforce recruitment and selection processes, retention and progression (including pre- and post-employment support).</p> <p>13. Improving the quality of work through, for example, national action to promote fair and ethical employment..</p>	<p>equalities team, linking with, for example, the Fair Work Commission, the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales and the voluntary sector (e.g. Bawso, Chwarae Teg and Tai Pawb) and County Voluntary Councils (CVCs), Public Service Boards (PSBs) and City Deals.</p>
<p>14. Exploring the scope for new initiatives, such as: match funding or employer provided ESOL and refugee employment development grants; developing equivalents to the <a href="#">Wales Asylum Seekers and Refugee Doctors group (WARD)</a> for other groups of professionals; and/or developing initiatives to support ReStart and voluntary sector organisations to share and build confidence and expertise in mainstream employment support services, in supporting and working with refugees.</p>	<p>Welsh Government Equalities, Post-16 Planning and Policy and Skills and Employability teams and the voluntary sector (e.g. Displaced People in Action (DPIA), the Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) the Wales Refugee Council (WRC) and City of Sanctuary).</p>
<p>15. National and regional planning and co-ordination of action to enhance refugees' employment and progression opportunities.</p>	<p>The Welsh Government Equalities Team, WSMP, ReStart and the voluntary sector (e.g. WRC, DPIA, City of Sanctuary).</p>

## 2. Introduction

### Introduction

2.1 Under the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 2010), a refugee is a person who:

... is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to, avail himself of the protection of that country.

2.2 Those granted refugee status<sup>2</sup> can work in the United Kingdom (UK) and many want to work, but employment rates lag far behind those born in the UK and they face what has been described as a “canvas ceiling” (Lee et al., 2020). This reflects the complex interplay of a range of barriers which must be overcome if they are to realise their employment aspirations; for some refugees (as not all will face these barriers) these include:

- low levels of English language skills<sup>3</sup>; weak understanding of Welsh labour markets and culture<sup>4</sup>; qualifications and experience gained overseas not being recognised and valued in the UK, and the trauma and lost time linked to fleeing persecution<sup>5</sup>, which can contribute to de-skilling and poor mental and physical health, and

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<sup>2</sup> In line with the Welsh Government Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan (WG, 2019a) “the term “refugee” also includes individuals not recognised as refugees, but who have been granted indefinite leave to remain, offered humanitarian protection, or provided with discretionary leave following their asylum claim” (WG, 2019a, p.5).

<sup>3</sup> Weak or limited Welsh language skills were very rarely mentioned as a barrier to employment. This is likely to reflect the focus of this study upon the four dispersal areas, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham, where Welsh is less widely spoken than some other part of Wales; in contrast, the Refugee Employment Skills Support Study (WG, 2020a), which covered all of Wales, found more, albeit still limited, evidence of the need for Welsh language skills in order to access and progress in work, particularly in north Wales.

<sup>4</sup> For example, refugees may have been used to relying upon their social capital and more informal processes, rather than formal application processes involving online tests, application forms and curricula vitae (CVs).

<sup>5</sup> As the Refugee Employment Skills and Support Study (WG, 2020a) outlines, some refugees have spent years fleeing persecution and then waiting for their claim for asylum to be decided. This period of waiting can erode people’s confidence, mental health, and work readiness and the study found the longer it took people to reach the UK, the lower their levels of confidence in gaining employment in the same field they worked in previously. Those resettled under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) have a right to work and should receive “intensive support” on arrival, which may reduce de-skilling, although the VPRS is intended for those in the greatest need, and those resettled may therefore have experienced greater trauma than those coming via other routes.

problems such as homelessness and not having a fixed address; issues explored through the Refugee Employment Skills and Support Study (WG, 2020a); and

- often limited labour market opportunities and employer recruitment and selection processes (including recruiters' attitudes, and conscious and unconscious biases) that can create additional barriers to accessing and progressing in employment, which are the focus of this study.

2.3 In contrast, asylum seekers (i.e. those fleeing persecution from their home country, who have arrived in the UK and exercised their legal right to apply for asylum, and are awaiting an outcome) do not have generally have a legal right to work<sup>6</sup>.

### **Employment rates for refugees**

2.4 A recent analysis of the UK Labour Force Survey<sup>7</sup> (LFS) identified that:

- the employment rate for those who came to the UK seeking asylum was 51 per cent, over twenty percentage points lower than that of those born in the UK (73 per cent);
- the employment rate for women who came to the UK seeking asylum, was 35 per cent), over thirty percentage points lower than the employment rate of women born in the UK (69 per cent). This gap in employment rates between women who came to the UK seeking asylum and those born in the UK, is much larger than the gap in employment rates for men who came to the UK seeking asylum (with a 64 per cent employment rate) compared to men born in the UK (with a 77 per cent employment rate); and
- those who came to the UK seeking asylum earn, on average, 55 per cent less per week than those born in the UK (reflecting lower rates of pay and also fewer hours worked a week) (Kone et al., 2019).

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<sup>6</sup> Those who have “waited over 12 months for an initial decision on their asylum claim or for a response to a further submission for asylum”, and “who are not considered responsible for the delay in decision-making” are allowed to apply for permission to take up jobs on the UK’s Shortage Occupation List (Gower, 2020, p.3).

<sup>7</sup> Refugees are not identified as a separate group in most official datasets. This makes it very difficult to identify economic outcomes and experiences of refugees. One notable exception is the UK LFS which, since 2010, has included a question asking about main reason for initial migration to the country (Kone et al., 2019). The report uses 2010-2017 data from the UK LFS, which is intended to be representative of the UK population, and is based upon a sample of around 37,000 households in every quarter. The analysis of outcomes for refugees is based upon around 800 observations of adults who migrated for asylum.

2.5 The report (ibid.) also highlights differences in the type of occupation and employment roles (in the UK) that those who came to the UK seeking asylum have, compared with people born in the UK; for example:

- only 10 per cent of those who came to the UK seeking asylum have professional or managerial positions in the UK, compared to around 27 per cent of people born in the UK;
- 69 per cent of those who came to the UK seeking asylum are in routine or elementary roles in the UK, compared to around 45 per cent of people born in the UK; and
- those who came to the UK seeking asylum are eight percentage points more likely to be in self-employment in the UK, than those born in the UK.

*Employment experiences of different groups of refugees: gender and age*

2.6 Refugees form a diverse group and both their aspirations and the barriers they face to finding and progressing in employment vary, according to factors such as their ethnicity, language skills<sup>8</sup> (and confidence using those skills), gender<sup>9</sup>, age, education levels<sup>10</sup>, previous work experience, soft skills and their understanding of the culture of Welsh workplaces and employers' expectations of employees' behaviour, attitudes and appearance<sup>11</sup>, which we describe as workplace cultural competence<sup>12</sup> (WG, 2020a).

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<sup>8</sup> The Refugee Employment Skills and Support Study (WG, 2020a) identified that only around a fifth of refugees felt they were fluent in English, and data from the ReStart project indicated that around 40 per cent of participants were below Entry Level 2, the minimum level required for most entry level jobs.

<sup>9</sup> Refugee women are seen as facing an additional burden in overcoming employer bias in order to gain access to employment (Lee et al., 2020). In most cases, refugee women were less likely than men to be employed, and to experience longer lags in learning the local language due to a range of factors, including the unavailability of adequate childcare support facilities and reluctance to attend mixed-sex classes. There is international evidence that the gendered dimension of employment support has not been adequately addressed by either employers or support services (IOM, 2018; Tweed et al., 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Levels of education and work/vocational skills and experience, with around 20-25 per cent having a high level of education and 30-40 per cent low or no education (Kone et al., 2019; WG, 2020a).

<sup>11</sup> This would include what are sometimes described as "employability skills"; having a positive attitude; good work ethic; personal presentation (e.g. in terms of dress), good timekeeping, and the ability to work with others.

<sup>12</sup> This is difficult to directly measure, but likely to be correlated with levels of education and previous work experience. Small numbers of refugees have worked in international organisations, whose culture and work practices are likely to be similar to those of international organisations in the UK. However, many come from countries whose customs and traditions are very different to the UK, and they can struggle to fit in.

## **The size of refugee populations in Wales**

- 2.7 The total number of refugees in Wales is not known. It was estimated to be 10,000 (Robinson, 2006), and although this remains the most widely quoted figure, it is not thought to be accurate, given both uncertainty about the original estimate and the likelihood that the number will have grown since it was collated, as more asylum seekers and refugees have been resettled in Wales<sup>13</sup> (WG, 2020a).

## **Policy Context**

- 2.8 While asylum and immigration policy and aspects of work and welfare policy (such as Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and work-related benefits) are not devolved, the Welsh Government is responsible for many of the services that support refugees' integration. Key policies that underpin and support this include the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) \(WBFGA\) Employability Plan](#) (WG, 2018a); and [Nation of Sanctuary: Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan](#) (WG, 2019a). Nation of Sanctuary includes support for the ReStart project, ensuring that "employability programmes promote their services directly to refugees" and work with partners, such as the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) "to remove barriers to refugee employment" (WG, 2019a, p.11). Welsh Government actions to support refugees into employment also fall within its vision for Wales to be a world leader for gender equality (WG, 2019b) and within the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, as they affect refugees with protected characteristics.

## **The ReStart: Refugee Integration Project**

- 2.9 The ReStart: Refugee Integration Project (hereafter referred to as "ReStart") is European funded through the [Asylum Migration Integration Fund \(AMIF\)](#) and is delivered by a consortium of further education (FE) colleges led by Cardiff and Vale College, through four regional integration hubs. The project aims to work with at least 520 refugees. Holistic assessments are used to identify barriers to integration

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<sup>13</sup> The total number of refugees in Wales is increasing each year, and around 40-50 per cent of the approximately 3,000 asylum seekers currently in Wales (Home Office, 2019) can be expected to gain status in the coming years. In addition, by the end of the second quarter in 2020, 1,411 people had been resettled in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham under the VPRS (Home Office, 2020).

and refugees' support needs in areas such as health and wellbeing, finance, employment and education, housing, language and local cultural knowledge.

2.10 The project includes demand and supply side measures (to align employer demand with refugee "supply") such as:

- **language support:** building upon REACH<sup>14</sup>, with the development of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) hubs to better place refugees on ESOL courses, expand ESOL provision and address barriers to accessing ESOL;
- **employment support:** offering assessment of needs and targeted support (most notably ESOL and support such as employability training, help with job search and applications, work placements, recognition of overseas qualifications through the UK National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC), and referrals to other programmes, such as Communities for Work (CfW); and
- **employer engagement:** with three regional employment engagement officers (one in north Wales, two in south Wales) employed by and working with the Welsh Government, ReStart and enterprises in dispersal areas, to: (i) identify job opportunities, work placements and tasters, volunteering opportunities and workplace English language training; and (ii) promote the benefits of employing refugees and address employer concerns in areas such as refugees' rights to work, work experience, and equivalence of overseas experience and qualifications.

2.11 The qualitative research for this study highlighted how, like many new projects, it has taken time to establish the programme and to form links with other partners. The deployment of regional employer engagement officers took longer than planned and their work, like that of other strands of the project, has been severely disrupted by COVID-19; for example, as one interviewee from ReStart commented: "it has been exceptionally difficult in the last three months" with a sharp drop in referrals from the voluntary sector and JCP, the need to move operations online, difficulties

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<sup>14</sup> REACH+ centres in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham provide one central point of contact for anyone wishing to access ESOL in these areas. Interviewees from ReStart, employment support services and the voluntary sector all consistently reported that there was now much better co-ordination of ESOL, and as one interviewee from an employment support service put it: "they knew who to refer to" now and that waiting lists have been reduced and access improved, although it was acknowledged that there were still challenges in Cardiff.

supporting those with limited digital literacy skills, limited or no access to Wi-Fi and/or devices<sup>15</sup>, and who may have stepped back from seeking employment, as JCP has “not been on their backs<sup>16</sup>” to look for work (as one interviewee from an employment support service put it).

- 2.12 Nevertheless, pre-COVID-19, stakeholders from the project and also other public (e.g. DWP) and voluntary sector organisations, who contributed to the qualitative research for this study, reported that integration of the project with other partners was improving. The ReStart project will conclude in December 2021 and an evaluation of the service is intended to inform inclusive practices in mainstream employment and ESOL services, providing a legacy for the project. Beyond these observations, it is important to note that an evaluation of ReStart is beyond the scope of this study.

### **Aims and objectives of the study**

- 2.13 This research has one main objective; to understand the local/regional labour market skill gaps and opportunities for partnership working, in relation to increasing the employment opportunities for refugees within the four main dispersal areas in Wales (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham). It is intended to develop a practical report which identifies feasible activities that could be delivered within the ReStart project, and other forms of skills, employability and enterprise support.
- 2.14 The key objectives of the research are to:
- investigate local/regional labour market skill gaps and opportunities to employ refugees within the four main dispersal areas;
  - understand gaps and opportunities in the labour market that refugees could fill in Wales;
  - collect examples of best practice in developing the employment prospects of refugees from Wales and elsewhere; and
  - identify ways in which support could be developed or improved through the ReStart project and other avenues; this should include:

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<sup>15</sup> As one interviewee from the project observed, there are “very high expectations on learners to use the technology” and engage and study online.

<sup>16</sup> During lockdown, claimant commitments were suspended.



- identifying actions that could be taken over specified timescales, lead responsibilities, partners and estimates on costs; and
- identifying local organisations across the private, public and third sectors that could be active partners in the activities delivered.

### **Structure and content of the report**

2.15 Following this introductory section, section 3 outlines the study's approach and methodology; section 4 discusses labour market opportunities in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham; section 5 discusses best practice in supporting entry into work and sustaining, and progressing in, employment for refugees and outlines the proposed action plan; and section 6 outlines the study conclusions. The annexes provide additional information on the desk-based literature review of good practice (Annex A) and an analysis of labour market opportunities and skill gaps in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham (Annex B).

### 3. Methodology

#### Approach, methods and sampling

3.1 This was a mixed methods study, drawing upon data collected through:

- a desk-based review of data; and
- qualitative research with stakeholders.

##### *The desk-based review*

3.2 The desk-based review included:

- A purposive review of recent research into refugee populations in the UK, most notably Kone et al. (2019), and Wales, most notably WG (2020a) (which included a review of recent research in the UK and Wales)<sup>17</sup>;
- a scoping review of research and evaluations to identify best practice in developing the employment prospects of refugees from Wales and selected Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries<sup>18</sup> (Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019) discussed in Annex A; and
- a purposive analysis of research to identify labour market trends and make forecasts, most notably, those made by Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) (WG, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d), and more recent analysis and forecasts of the impact of COVID-19 and Brexit, made by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (Dias et al., 2020; Joyce and Xu, 2020) and the Welsh Government (WG, 2019c) discussed in Annex B.

##### *The scoping review of research and evaluations to identify best practice in developing the employment prospects of refugees*

3.3 It was anticipated that relevant literature would include project reports and evaluations as well as academic research, and Google and Google Scholar were searched, using the strings of search terms outlined in table 3.1. This search strategy was constrained by the (limited) time and resources available for the study

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<sup>17</sup> No other new research in Wales, other than Mike Chick and Iona Hannagan-Lewis's research into the SVPRS was identified and the focus was therefore upon the primary and secondary research included in the RESS study (WG, 2020a).

<sup>18</sup> I.e. European countries and the Anglophone countries of USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

and was intended not to duplicate the review of literature undertaken for the Refugee Employment Skills and Support Study (WG, 2020a), which included searches for good practice in this area, and covered both academic (such as peer reviewed journals) and non-academic material (such as project reports and evaluations).

**Table 3.1. Searches for the scoping review**

<b>Search terms</b>	<b>Sources searched</b>	<b>Number of items</b>
Refugee AND Wales AND Employ* OR Engage* OR Recruit*	Google and Google Scholar	6,260,000
Refugee AND Wales AND Employ* AND Engage*	Google and Google Scholar	6,860,000
Refugee AND Scotland AND Employ* OR Engage* OR Recruit*	Google and Google Scholar	5,280,000
Refugee AND Europe AND Employ* OR Engage* OR Recruit*	Google and Google Scholar	32,600,000
Refugee AND England AND Employ* OR Engage* OR Recruit*	Google and Google Scholar	8,550,000
Refugee AND employment AND support OR evaluation	Google and Google Scholar	38,500,000
Refugee AND employment AND support OR research	Google and Google Scholar	139,000,000
ESOL AND Refugee AND Evaluation	Google and Google Scholar	565,000
ESOL AND Refugee AND Research	Google and Google Scholar	560,000

- 3.4 A broad search strategy which increased sensitivity (the capacity to identify relevant material) at the expense of specificity (the proportion of material that was relevant) was taken, in order to try to identify any material missed by the Refugee Employment Skills and Support Study (WG, 2020a) and as outlined in table 3.1. the volume of material identified through searches was very large. The initial sift of material identified through each search was therefore halted once relevant material was no longer appearing in lists of search-generated results.
- 3.5 Items identified through the searches were sifted for relevance (to ensure they described and/or evaluated initiatives to develop the employment prospects of refugees in the selected OECD countries) and quality. Quality criteria focused upon assessing (i) the appropriateness of the methodology to address the research questions in the item, and (ii) the extent to which claims and conclusions were supported by the evidence presented. Items that did not present an adequate description of the intervention and/or sufficient evidence to support their conclusions and/or whose findings and conclusions do not appear to be supported by the evidence presented, were excluded. 47 items were identified as potentially of interest, based upon a review of the abstract or summary, and of these, 15 were judged to have met the inclusion criteria following a review of the full text, and were included in the literature review. A snowball sampling approach was also taken and a further 17 articles were identified from citations in the items included in the review.
- 3.6 Although in total 32 items were included, the literature review draws heavily upon three key sources: Gibb (2018), Szkudlarek (2019) and Lee et al. (2020). This reflects the relative thinness of the evidential base research on employer engagement, and even these key studies have weaknesses. The Gibbs study is based on a narrow evidence base, involving ten employers who completed a survey and seven who engaged in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Because it is not clear which countries in the UK the employers operate in, there is a need to test the findings in a Welsh context. The Szkudlarek (2019) paper has a larger sample, including 118 responses from employers to an online survey and 15 in-depth interviews with employers. However, although it also draws upon an international

literature review<sup>19</sup>, it focuses upon the Australian experience. Lee et al. (2020) is a systematic literature review<sup>20</sup> taking in papers from across the world.

### *Qualitative research*

- 3.7 Semi-structured interviews, described in the report as “qualitative research”, were conducted by phone or video call with a purposive sample of 32 stakeholders, representing:
- the ReStart project and its four regional hubs (n=6)
  - employer engagement officers, including ReStart regional employer engagement officers (n=3) and local authority (LA) and DWP employer engagement officers (n=3);
  - RSPs (n=3);
  - public, private and voluntary sector employers (n=7);
  - employer bodies and trade unions (n=4);
  - JCP/DWP (n=3)
  - Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) and the voluntary sector (n=3).
- 3.8 The stakeholders were agreed with the Welsh Government and represented the ReStart project; a cross section of organisations focused upon employment engagement and employment support in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham; a cross section of employers from the public, private and voluntary sector in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham, willing to be interviewed for the study (and as noted below, engagement of employers proved challenging); and Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs), given their role assessing local and regional skill needs and gaps. Interviews with refugees themselves were out of the scope of the study, given the earlier research commissioned by the Welsh Government (The Refugee

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<sup>19</sup> This is described as an “extensive interdisciplinary literature review undertaken by the University of Sydney Business School” (Szkudlarek, 2019) but no other information about the search protocol or results of searches is provided.

<sup>20</sup> Described as a “Multidisciplinary Literature Review of Refugee Employment and Workforce Integration”, covering disciplines such as ethnic and migration studies, management, political science, social work, and sociology, it systematically searched the Web of Science and Scopus using keywords like refugee employ\* (AND integration). This yielded 58 articles of relevance. Snowball sampling was then used to identify a further 171 sources including journal articles, working papers and chapters in books (Lee et al., 2020).

Employment and Skills Support Study (WG, 2020a)) which this study was intended to complement.

- 3.9 Data collected from the interviews and desk-based review was analysed and emerging findings presented for discussion and validation by stakeholders in two online workshops.

### **Analysis of data**

- 3.10 Content analysis was used to describe and structure qualitative data by developing codes and coding data, identifying themes, patterns and relationships in and between the qualitative data from the scoping reviews and interviews. Data from different sources (e.g. interviews with different stakeholders and the scoping reviews) was triangulated to help test validity of findings and provide a more rounded understanding of the issues studied.
- 3.11 Quantitative data was primarily related to the profile of refugee populations in Wales and labour market demand and used to describe each. No statistical analysis was required to describe and structure the data, as secondary sources, in which data had already been analysed, were used.

### **Strengths and weakness**

- 3.12 Triangulation (and broad consistency) of findings from primary and secondary sources, coupled with discussions and validation by stakeholders (during online workshops) provided reassurance in the validity of findings.
- 3.13 However, there were challenges. Although a good cross section of stakeholders was engaged, recruiting employers proved particularly difficult and delayed (although ultimately did not hinder) completion of the fieldwork. The final sample of employers included was diverse, but small, creating a risk of bias in the sample. This risk was partially offset by triangulating employers' responses with findings from the literature review and interviews with those involved in employer engagement or in identifying employers' skills needs (i.e. RSPs). In addition, the initial approach, which involved a local labour market assessment, focused on identifying the characteristics of labour supply, the composition of labour market demand, and then undertaking analysis of gaps between demand and supply and

identification of actions to align them, proved inappropriate. As outlined in section 3, it became clear that simply comparing labour market demand and supply did not fully account for the impact of barriers which limited refugees' ability to use their skills to exploit employment opportunities.

- 3.14 Finally, although a number of earlier literature reviews, such as Szkudlarek (2019), Lee et al. (2020) and WG (2020a), were included, given the limitations of the search, this paper cannot therefore be considered a comprehensive review of literature or evidential base, and further searching of academic sources, such as the Journal of Refugee Studies and the Journal of International Migration and Integration might yield additional material, particularly qualitative insights into refugees' experiences of employment.

## **4. Labour market opportunities in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham**

### **Introduction**

4.1 Recent employment projections, made before COVID-19 emerged, forecast a fairly buoyant labour market, with the strongest growth forecast in south east, followed by mid and south west and north Wales (WG, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). Data on projected employment growth in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham is outlined in Annex B and, in summary, across the three areas:

- the key employment sectors include: public administration, defence, education and health (171,100 jobs); and wholesale, retail, transport, hotels and food (123,600 jobs) in 2018 (StatsWales, 2019);
- growth industries include: advanced manufacturing, life sciences, creative, digital, construction and the human foundational economy, with the biggest increases in terms of numbers of jobs forecast in the wholesale and retail trade, followed by health and social care; and
- areas of skill/staff shortages include: “work readiness”, digital skills and recruitment and retention issues in hospitality and health and social care (WG, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d).

### **Matching refugees with employment opportunities**

4.2 Many refugees want to continue working (or studying) in the sector or profession they worked (or studied) in before fleeing persecution. However, for some, and particularly women, being granted refugee status can lead them to reassess their opportunities and aspirations (WG, 2020a).

4.3 However, it is often difficult, and sometimes impossible, for refugees to continue their work or education at the same level and in the same sector in Wales, given the barriers they face. Refugees’ willingness to consider alternatives, so that their aspirations are aligned with employment opportunities, is therefore critical to finding employment in the short term (WG, 2020a)<sup>21</sup>. This can often mean accepting

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<sup>21</sup> Many refugees are willing to lower and change their aspirations, albeit sometimes after they have tried and failed to continue their work or education at the same level and in the same sector, in Wales, or after they have spent years fleeing persecution and trying to reach the UK, sometimes losing their skills and confidence and/or being forced to take whatever work they could (WG, 2020a).



difficult, poorly paid, sometimes insecure or “fragile employment”<sup>22</sup>, in sectors where employer demand is high and barriers to entry are relatively low.

- 4.4 Interviewees from the ReStart project, DWP and the voluntary sector all described the importance of having “realistic” aspirations (or similar). Therefore, as one member of the ReStart project put it (at the start of the process of supporting a refugee) “we never say you’re not going to get there, [but we might say] let’s look at this first, focus upon what is available and what do you fancy?” This was described as a “short-term” strategy that was complemented by a longer term focus upon supporting refugees to realise their aspirations, by helping them develop, for example, their skills, experience and qualifications. Similarly, as one interviewee from an employment support service put it: “[social] care is always recruiting, always looking to take people on. [We get] people coming with skills that don’t match the vacancies. Then you have to have a conversation with them. It might be difficult, but it could be the difference between employment or not”.

### **Entry level and progression opportunities**

- 4.5 Refugees typically face a range of often complex barriers to employment (WG, 2020a). This means rather than simply focusing upon employment opportunities and skill gaps, and comparing this to the aspirations and skills of refugees (i.e. the supply of labour), analysis of labour market gaps and opportunities for refugees should focus upon:
- entry level opportunities in sectors where demand for labour is greater than supply, typically because the work is difficult, poorly paid and/or insecure, and barriers to entry are low, because the work is un- or semi-skilled, and the difficulties recruiting and/or retaining staff mean employers cannot be too selective about who they recruit and what they require; and
  - progression opportunities, in sectors where demand of labour is greater than supply, but where the work is better paid, more highly skilled and there are opportunities to progress within the sector.

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<sup>22</sup> Fragile employment describes situations where adult individuals move repeatedly in and out of work, meaning periods of work are interspersed with periods of worklessness (Luchinskaya and Green, 2016).

- 4.6 Ideally entry level jobs should provide a platform, or “stepping stone”, that enables those refugees who want to and are able to<sup>23</sup>, to progress as they gain work experience in the UK and develop their skills, most notably language skills, but also their cultural competence (and, for example, their understanding of Welsh employers’ expectations of employees’ attitudes and behaviours). However, unlike European economic migrants it appears many refugees appear to get stuck in entry level jobs<sup>24</sup> (WG, 2020a). This may be because refugees are over-represented in sectors with fewer progression opportunities, more limited access to education and training, they find it harder to access information about progression opportunities within the organisation<sup>25</sup> and/or because they face additional barriers or progression linked to, for example, low levels of English language skills (for some refugees), prejudice, stereotyping and/or a lack of recognition of their skills (see e.g. Wood and Wybron, 2015). An employment engagement officer described the problem with warehousing work as being that it is hard for people to progress: “people do not see the work as their future, [they] think they will just do it for a year but they get stuck... you can work in your own language and the job does not require communication at all”, limiting opportunities to develop their language skills through work.
- 4.7 There are also structural constraints to progression, linked to an increasingly “hour-glass shaped” labour market, with growth in low-skilled and also high-skilled jobs, but a hollowing out of the middle, leaving fewer opportunities for progression for those in low skilled jobs (Luchinskaya and Green, 2016).
- 4.8 Therefore, as section 5 outlines, the action plan proposed by this study needs a dual focus upon access to entry level jobs and supporting progression in work, an approach some interviewees from the ReStart project and the voluntary sector characterised as developing both a short and long term plan for refugees.

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<sup>23</sup> Not all refugees aspire to mid or high level jobs and some, for example those with very low levels of formal education, may struggle to progress.

<sup>24</sup> Further research, such as longitudinal studies, would be required to explore this issue further.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Wood and Wybron (2015) identify that “information and advice on an organisation’s procedures for advancement are often delivered internally rather than via an external agency, and some ethnic minority groups may have less straightforward access to this information than other employees”.

### *Entry level jobs*

- 4.9 As table 4.1 illustrates, interviews with employer engagement staff from the ReStart project, DWP and LAs indicate commonalities but also some differences in the main entry level employment opportunities in each area.

**Table 4.1: Most commonly cited entry level employment opportunities in each area**

Sector	Cardiff	Newport	Swansea	Wrexham
Retail	*	*	*	*
Hospitality, food and drink	*	*	*	
Cleaning	*	*	*	
Construction	*	*		*
Security	*	*	*	
Manufacturing		*	*	*
Food Production	*	*		*
Warehouse		*	*	*
Driving / delivery		*	*	

*Source: Interviews with RSPs and employment engagement officers*

- 4.10 Opinion was divided about the value of some types of entry level jobs, such as warehouse work. Some interviewees (from employment support services, the ReStart project and the voluntary sector) highlighted the relatively low barriers to entry for refugees (given the use of multi-lingual signage, and minibus transport to some warehouses) and better pay some companies offered (compared to other comparable sectors). However, others interviewees (from employment support services and the voluntary sector) were concerned about reportedly poor working conditions and limited opportunities to either develop language skills in work and/or to progress within the sector.

- 4.11 Entry requirements differ somewhat from sector to sector, but have commonalities. As one employer put it, the main requirements for entry level jobs are “approach and attitude” (so, for example, a cleaner must be able to get on with other people and often be flexible with working hours) and entry level English language skills. It was reported by interviewees (i.e. employers, employer engagement officers and ReStart staff) that most employers would require refugees to have reached Entry Level 2 in their English language, with higher levels and “conversational” English required for customer facing roles, and somewhat lower levels, perhaps Entry Level 1, required for a smaller range of roles such as cleaning jobs. Holding qualifications in areas like food hygiene or customer service was also reported to be desirable for some sectors such as hospitality, while other sectors such as construction, delivery (driving) and security, require refugees to have demonstrated specific skills by holding a Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) card, a driver’s licence or a Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence.

### **Progression opportunities**

- 4.12 Health and social care are the key sectors where strong growth in demand is forecast (given growth in the sector and because the sectors have historically struggled to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of staff) and there are progression opportunities within the sector. Although health care can be an attractive sector for some refugees, few refugees have experience of working in the social care sector, and few aspire to work in this sector (WG, 2020a). Another potential sector with both strong demand forecast and progression opportunities is education, particularly for teaching posts. However, in Wales the supply of teachers has typically outstripped demand (meaning it is unlikely to be good option) (EWC, 2017). There are also forecast to be mid-level progression opportunities for skilled trades in the construction industry, where demand is expected to increase, and in manufacturing, where there are skills gaps. However, overall, the hollowing out of the labour market has stripped out many mid-level jobs, narrowing mid-level progression opportunities, and much of the forecast increase in employment opportunities will be at Level 4 and above (WG, 2020b).
- 4.13 Entry requirements for mid-level progression opportunities differ from sector to sector. They would typically include basic skills and passing the Wales Essential

Skills Test (WEST), and Level 2 or 3 qualifications in the relevant sector (e.g. health, social care or early years).

### **Higher level opportunities**

- 4.14 For those willing and able to undertake work-based learning (WBL) (most notably apprenticeships) and/or further education (FE) and higher education (HE), there are job opportunities and skill shortages in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) sectors, such as the life sciences (including pharmaceuticals), semi-conductor and fintech (financial services technology) sectors in south east Wales in particular (WG, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). As noted above, much of the forecast increase in employment opportunities is at Level 4 and above, including, for example, progression routes based upon higher (Level 4 or 5) or degree apprenticeships (Level 6 or 7) and Honours (Level 6) or Master's degrees (Level 7). Given the time necessary to develop the English language skills (see e.g. Schellekens, 2001), and meet the professional requirements necessary for study and work at this level<sup>26</sup> (see e.g. Lee et al., 2020), a challenge discussed further in section 5, for many refugees these will only be viable as long term options.
- 4.15 As outlined in the introduction, analysis of the LFS indicates that in the UK only around 10 per cent of refugees work in professional or managerial roles (Kone et al., 2020). This is much lower than the rate for those born in the UK (27 per cent) and the proportion of refugees with higher level education (around 20-25 per cent) (Kone et al., 2019; WG, 2020a) and illustrates the challenges that refugees face in securing higher level opportunities. Equally, it emphasises the importance of not unduly lowering expectations of what refugees can achieve. As outlined above, there are sectors where there are skill gaps and strong demand forecast, particularly in STEM sectors. Models such as the Wales Asylum Seeking and Refugee Doctors' Group (WARD) (see boxed text 1 on the WARD scheme) illustrate how, given determination and access to opportunities and language support, refugees can use qualifications, skills and expertise gained overseas to

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<sup>26</sup> For example, Freidson (1999, cited in Lee et al., 2020) describes the role that "labour market shelters" (created by, for example, national accreditation bodies and professional associations) play in creating barriers to entry to higher status jobs; shelters which benefit those already in the sector and create additional barriers for refugees who have, for example trained, qualified and registered overseas and who may not easily meet national requirements (Krahn et al., 2000).

secure professional roles in Wales. The Refugee Employment and Skills Support Study (WG, 2020a) also identified examples of refugees with strong language skills, skills and qualifications that are recognised in the UK in sectors where demand is greater than supply, such as parts of the information technology (IT) industry, and the cultural competence and capital required to enter highly skilled professional jobs. However, these were the exception rather than the rule, as the barriers to entry (e.g. in terms of language proficiency, qualifications, skills and experience) and expectations of employers (e.g. in term of workplace cultural competence) for these higher levels jobs were substantial.

**Boxed text 1. The Wales Asylum Seeking and Refugee Doctors' Group**

It can be very difficult, costly and frustrating for refugees to integrate into the UK medical system and, in 2002, Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) established WARD. Working in partnership with Displaced People in Action (DPIA) the programme works with groups of around 12 medics at a time, and offers medically-contextualised language classes, re-validation courses, training positions, and resources such as medical journals and equipment. It aims to help participants meet the standards required to enter the labour market, including helping them pass (and cover the costs of) the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or the Occupational English Test (OET) and the Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB1 and PLAB2), examinations required to work in the National Health Service (NHS) and become fully registered members of the General Medical Council and dental and nursing equivalents.

The project has now supported over 200 medics, and while viewed as an exemplar programme (by interviewees for this study from employment support services and the voluntary sector), even with this level of support, it can take years for refugees to pass the IELTS or OET and PLAB examinations and much depends upon individuals' skills, commitment, motivation and preparedness.

*Adapted from HEIW (2018) and interviews*

### **The UK's exit from the European Union and COVID-19**

- 4.16 Government and societal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as restrictions on work and travel, fear and the economic uncertainty associated with the pandemic, hit a number of economic sectors, such as retail, sports and creative industries, hospitality and travel, and groups in society, such as young people and low earners, who are over-represented as employees in these sectors (Joyce and Xu, 2020). It is likely that refugees will also have been disproportionately affected by this, although new job opportunities have also been created in sectors such as supermarkets, warehousing and delivery services and the NHS (Dias et al., 2020). Interviewees from RSPs reported that the impact upon the aerospace industry and, in particular, Airbus and its supply chain as a result of COVID-19, and also uncertainties about the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), were significant at regional level.
- 4.17 The impact of the UK's exit from the EU upon employment, when the transition period ends on 31st December 2020, is uncertain but is predicted to hit Wales harder than other parts of the UK and, in particular, export sectors like aerospace (discussed above), automotive and farming (WG, 2019c). The impact will depend on the nature of a deal on the UK's exit from the EU and, in particular, the degree of access retained to the EU single market and also changes to the immigration policy (ibid.). It was, for example, observed by interviewees for this study that restriction on migration of European economic migrants may reduce labour market supply (which could benefit refugees).

### **Employer attitudes and behaviours**

- 4.18 Employers determine access to employment and progression opportunities through their "recruitment practices, management culture, and the way work is organised" (Luchinskaya and Green, 2016). Therefore, even in sectors where demand is greater than the supply of labour, there can be barriers to entry for refugees.
- 4.19 Around a third of Welsh businesses have tried to recruit non-UK nationals to "overcome hard to fill vacancies", indicating employers' willingness to recruit staff who were not born in the UK in order to help meet skills gaps (DfE, 2017). There is also extensive experience within some sectors of employing European economic

migrants, who, like refugees, may have low levels of English language skills (like refugees', European economic migrants' English language skills vary) and limited UK work experience (at least initially). However, European economic migrants are a much larger group than refugees<sup>27</sup>, and interviews (with employer engagement officers, ReStart staff and the voluntary sector) suggested they are perceived as more straightforward to employ than refugees. Therefore, it is not clear if employers' experience with this group will translate into a greater openness on the part of employers to employing refugees. This is supported by the qualitative research with other stakeholders for this study (i.e. interviews with employers, employer engagement officers and the voluntary sector) which suggests that employers' experience of employing European economic migrants is not directly transferable.

4.20 The data from the qualitative research, together with the literature reviewed for this study (such as Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019 and Lee et al., 2020), discussed in Annex A), highlighted:

- the fears of many employers about the potential risks of employing refugees, given negative media coverage (particularly against asylum seekers and other migrants), uncertainty about the legality of employing refugees, concerns over their language skills and in particular whether they could understand health and safety requirements<sup>28</sup>, uncertainty about the value of qualifications, skills and experience gained overseas, and about refugees' skills (such as communication and team work skills) and concerns that refugees might therefore be less productive than those born in the UK (Lundborg and Skedinger, 2016);
- the relatively small size of the refugee population and employers' lack of understanding and experience of the barriers refugees might face in applying for employment and sustaining and progressing in employment. None of the (very small sample of) employers interviewed for this study had had any support or advice about recruiting refugees and, as one large employer put it, they had a "gaping hole" in their knowledge of refugees and their needs, which meant that,

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<sup>27</sup> There are around 80,000 people from EU member states in Wales (WG, 2018c).

<sup>28</sup> For example, as one interviewee from the voluntary sector put it: "a focus upon health and safety is important to employers" and there is "fear they [refugees] won't understand instruction in the workplace, so [employers are] not confident employing them".



even when employers were open to recruiting refugees, they were unsure what they needed to do and, as the case study below illustrates, could find the process challenging. It was also noted that employers may not know if an employee is a refugee<sup>29</sup>; and

- racism, discrimination<sup>30</sup>, and fears about whether refugees would fit in and the tendency for employers to “recruit in their own image” as one interviewee from the voluntary sector put it.

4.21 These concerns can overlap; for example, as one employer engagement officer put it, some employers “just see a [foreign] name and look no further” (given racism and/or fears about whether they would have the skills and cultural competence required) and an interviewee from the ReStart project said that he used to deal with an employer in the construction industry who told him: “I’m not racist, I’m not sexist, but I prefer to employ a straight white man, as I’m afraid what I might say or do might offend someone”.

#### **One employer’s experience**

One of the employers interviewed for this study described their experience of employing a refugee as an apprentice. Avni (not their real name) had been in the UK for a year and volunteered with the organisation in their café. Avni lived close by and had seen something on Facebook and volunteered in the café as a way to contribute to the community. They knew that Avni had settled status but had not worked in the UK at all. It was clear that Avni was very bright and had experience in admin and finance work. They had been talking for a while about the need for a finance worker and felt they could benefit from Avni’s skills.

They offered Avni an apprenticeship working 30 hours a week. However, getting Avni enrolled on the apprenticeship at their local college proved very difficult, and it took over three months and a lot of work from the college before they were able to confirm the place. The college were happy to accept Avni but the Welsh

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<sup>29</sup> For example, those with British citizenship would not be identifiable, and Biometric Residency Permits would not necessarily identify someone as a refugee to employers.

<sup>30</sup> This is seen as particularly pronounced for more “visible” minorities such as Muslim women (Northcote et al., 2006).

Government were reported to be unwilling to accept the qualifications from Avni's home country. The employer described how, if they had had an urgent need for the finance job to start, they would have given up and taken someone else on instead. They reported that it was only because they were committed to helping Avni that they stuck with the process, and they felt few employers would have done this; as they put it: "if we had not been bowled over by Avni's skills we would have taken someone else. We were desperate for the role and our patience, and the fact that there was not a great urgency to start, allowed us to go with it".

In contrast, the employer reported that the employment side was relatively easy and straightforward. Avni provided evidence of the right to take up employment. The induction process took slightly longer because of Avni's lack of local knowledge and there was a small level of language barrier (given that the role included some reception work). However, as Avni's English was pretty good it was not a major challenge. There have been no cultural issues; they discussed with Avni whether there were any specific facilities needed, as they would with any staff member, but none were wanted.

- 4.22 Given the barriers, as one voluntary sector interviewee observed (making a broader point about recruitment of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people rather than refugees *per se*): "if you are not getting BAME applicants you're not trying hard enough" and "it's not going to happen by accident". There were examples given by interviewees from the voluntary sector and employment support services of employers who were pro-actively reaching out to recruit from BAME groups, most notably the police, and examples of employers in England actively working to promote refugee employment, but there were reported to be few examples of this in Wales.

#### **Recruitment agencies and agency workers**

- 4.23 Interviews with employer engagement officers and employers also highlighted how many employers outsource their recruitment and, in some cases employment, to external recruitment services and agencies (so the agency's practices, rather than the employer's, determined access and terms and conditions). Views of agencies

were generally, although not uniformly, negative; for example, as one interviewee (an employer engagement officer) put it, agencies “treat people like dirt” and “drop them at the drop of a hat, [and] won’t rehire them”. This was most commonly reported in relation to entry level jobs, although one employer also reported that they used specialist recruitment agencies for higher levels jobs. The small number of refugees also means that incentives for recruitment agencies to develop links to refugee populations, including staff fluent in other languages, as they have, for example, with Polish European economic migrants, is limited.

### **Employer engagement**

- 4.24 The case for promoting the employment and progression of refugees can be made on business and ethical grounds. Increasing the diversity of workforces:
- can create economic and social value created by, for example, increasing skills and experience and the ability to serve and reflect the diverse language and cultural needs and expectations of customers (Szkudlarek, 2019); and
  - addresses corporate social responsibility<sup>31</sup> in the private sector (which research suggests is the prime motivation for business); duties under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act for the public sector; and the mission and values of many voluntary sector organisations.
- 4.25 ReStart regional employer engagement officers described how initially they were writing materials for employers that focused upon making the ethical case for employing refugees (“please help these people” as one summed it up). However, this changed after training showed that it would be more effective to use employers’ language and thinking, and the approach shifted (as one put it) to “we have something to sell you”. As they described it: “we went back and re-wrote a whole load of documents making it more of a sales pitch focusing on what they are buying into”.

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<sup>31</sup> This has been defined as “companies integrat[ing] social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” and “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” (European Commission, 2011, p.1).

- 4.26 ReStart regional employer engagement officers emphasised the importance of a “bespoke approach” to employer engagement, that emphasises corporate social responsibility and also the opportunities to exploit global markets after the UK’s withdrawal from the EU and highlights the rare skills in the UK labour market which refugees can bring.
- 4.27 As noted above, the findings from the literature review (discussed in Annex A) suggest that for the private sector, corporate social responsibility is the prime motivation for employer engagement (Gibb, 2018), which validates the ReStart approach. Although it appears likely that this finding relates primarily to large businesses, and for many small enterprises the motivations may be thought of as more personal, rather than corporate.
- 4.28 The literature review also identifies that the key to successful employer engagement is not a sales pitch as such, but learning about employer perspectives, such as motivation for hiring refugees and the commercial pressures business face. This is seen as providing the basis for building a genuine partnership with employers which enables support services to assist employers to understand the situation of refugees, the barriers they face and best practice in overcoming these (Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019; Lee et al., 2020). It is therefore important that ReStart’s sales pitch and bespoke approach provides the basis for employer engagement officers to build a genuine partnership with employers in order to better understand their motivations and the pressures they face.
- 4.29 Moreover, as outlined above, while refugees have a great deal to offer, interviews with stakeholders and the literature reviewed for this study (such as Gibb, 2018 and Szkudlarek, 2019; Lee et al., 2020) identified that refugees can be perceived as a potentially risky and challenging, and thus more costly group to recruit and employ; for example, employers in Australia who were surveyed or interviewed for Szkudlarek’s (2019) study anticipated additional costs linked to:
- recruiting refugees, such as changing recruitment practices, using specialist services and employing additional staff to manage the process, costs and difficulties linked to assessing skills and qualifications gained overseas;

- training (including both English language and technical skills) and inducting refugees (which it was felt could take longer); and
- supporting and managing refugees, including supporting their integration, mentoring and coaching.

4.30 However, the research also identified that employers with experience of employing refugees found that the additional costs were more modest than they had anticipated (and sometimes no greater than employing non-refugees). Support from projects like ReStart can also help reduce costs associated with, for example, recruitment, through effective job matching and training, and by providing access to training required by employers, such as food hygiene and/or customer service.

*The challenge employer engagement poses*

4.31 The qualitative research with employer engagement officers, and also with employers, highlights the challenges associated with engaging employers around this specific agenda, or indeed wider work focused upon employer engagement to support the long term employed and/or economically inactive. The qualitative research for this study suggests that promoting refugee employment is rarely seen as a priority for employers and that the challenges have been accentuated by COVID-19 (which has increased the pressures employers face, and therefore focused attention upon other more pressing priorities). More broadly, as outlined in the next section, if as forecast, unemployment rises and demand for labour is weak, it is likely to be harder to engage employers to support those seen as riskier and potentially more costly to employ. Nevertheless, as one employer engagement officer put it, although “it’s difficult to get into employers”, “some companies get it, they understand who we are and what we are trying to achieve [and what we offer], they see the benefits”.

### **Employer engagement**

Interviews with employer engagement staff who were not part of ReStart and were not focused specifically upon refugees, highlighted the importance of:

- maintaining trust with employers; as one interviewee put it: “the relationship I have got with employers is very important”, which meant, for example, they had to be very careful about matching employers with suitable potential candidates; and;
- the difficulty of identifying in advance which employers might be receptive or open to working with them, which led to broadly targeted approaches, including networking, attending conferences and events and cold calling, and also drawing upon local intelligence (in LAs and the DWP) about, for example, new employers coming to an area, while focusing upon those sectors where there were employment opportunities that could match their clients’ skills and aspirations, in order to create a “bank” of employers so they could develop a variety of jobs to offer clients.

4.32 It is possible to identify some broad parameters for employer engagement in order to maximise its effectiveness; for example, the analysis of labour market opportunities outlined above should be important here, to identify sectors like social care, where labour demand is high and employers are likely to be more receptive, rather than sectors that have fewer problems recruiting staff, such as education. Given the time many refugees will need to develop the English language skills necessary to work and study at higher levels, it may also be appropriate to defer work with employers offering higher level opportunities until a sufficient number of refugees have reached this level. The research reviewed for this study (see Annex A) also suggests that small enterprises may be particularly challenging to engage, because the perceived costs and risks of employing refugees are magnified when the workforce is very small (Szkudlarek, 2019). However, within these broad parameters, the breadth and size of private, public and voluntary sectors offering entry level jobs and progression opportunities in each region, and the time it might

take to identify employers who might be receptive or open to working with them, was a concern for some interviewees.

### **Self-employment**

- 4.33 As outlined in the introduction, a relatively high proportion of refugees are self-employed<sup>32</sup> (Kone et al., 2019). For some refugees, this is a positive choice reflecting, for example, their skills and experience in running their own businesses in their country of origin, but others turn to self-employment because they feel excluded from employment opportunities and self-employment may mean language barriers are lower. Business Wales was widely, although not uniformly, praised for its work with refugees and, in particular, its use of its participation fund to enable translation of materials and training, by interviewees for this study and the Refugee Employment Skill and Support Study (WG, 2020a). However, despite support from organisations like Business Wales, refugees can often still face barriers, such as difficulties accessing finance and understanding rules and regulations (WG, 2020a). Interviewees from the voluntary sector also voiced concerns that refugees could get stuck in marginal economic activity, like hand car washes. As well as commercial self-employment, some interviewees from the voluntary sector suggested there could be opportunities for refugees to start social enterprises.

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<sup>32</sup> Refugees are eight percentage points more likely to be in self-employment than people born in the UK (Kone et al., 2019).

## **5. Improving support for and working with refugees and employers**

### **Overview**

5.1 Both the qualitative research and the literature reviewed for the study (see e.g. Gibb, 2018; UNHCR, 2019; Lee et al., 2020) suggest that action to improve refugees' employment prospects and experiences needs to focus upon:

- preparing for employment, given the barriers to entry to employment that refugees face, with pre-employment support for refugees focusing upon:
  - actively reaching out to engage refugees who may, for example, have become discouraged and feel overwhelmed by the barriers they face;
  - ensuring refugees are “work-ready” (see boxed text 2: when are refugees work ready?) including providing access to formal and informal ESOL provision, services such as NARIC which can support the recognition of overseas qualifications (but which are very costly for individuals to access themselves), and work placements, volunteering and training directly relevant to employers' needs in the local labour market (e.g. food hygiene for those looking to work in food manufacturing);
  - job search and applications, including practical support on both how to search and apply, information, advice and guidance (IAG) to ensure that refugees' aspirations are aligned with employment opportunities and, where possible, actively matching refugees with appropriate employment opportunities; and
  - work with employers to remove barriers linked to recruitment and selection and to promote equality and diversity in recruitment;
- sustaining employment through, for example, keeping in touch and providing post-employment support for refugees and employers to help overcome continuing or new barriers to employment, such as difficulties integrating into the workplace and/or culture clashes; and
- supporting progression in work, given the risk of refugees (who want to and have the potential to progress) getting stuck in “poor work”, by supporting progression with an existing employer or by moving to a new employer and/or sector by, for



example, providing IAG and access to training and support for refugees, and supporting changes in employers' practice.

**Boxed text 2. When are refugees work ready?**

Identifying when refugees are “work ready” is a difficult and also contentious question. There was agreement amongst interviewees from the ReStart project, DWP and the voluntary sector that, in order to be “work ready” refugees needed:

- English language skills;
- work experience and cultural competence (most notably the skills, attitudes and behaviours required by employers); and
- an understanding of, and ideally some IAG to help them better understand, their options and be able to successfully identify and apply for jobs.

However, opinion divided in particular over the level of English language skills required and therefore how long refugees with weaker language skills had to wait before they could and should begin applying for work. As outlined in section 3, most entry level jobs require Entry Level 1 or 2 English language skills, which can delay entry into the labour market for several years for those starting with low or no English language skills. Equally there was frustration that sometimes refugees who had reached this level were not being encouraged to apply for, or be put forward for, employment entry level opportunities which, particularly if combined with part time ESOL provision, could accelerate the further development of their English language skills, which would increase the range of employment opportunities open to them.

- 5.2 The research reviewed for this study and discussed in Annex A (see e.g. Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019) is also clear that the focus of a refugee employment strategy needs to be upon support services for both refugees and employers, with effective action founded upon a genuine partnership between the two. This should provide refugee support services with an understanding of employers' needs, motivations and constraints, and employers with an understanding of the issues and barriers refugees may face, and advice and support on how to tackle them (Gibb, 2018). This should draw upon labour market intelligence (such as that discussed in

section 3) and support matching of refugees (and their skills) with appropriate employment opportunities.

### **Challenges and issues, and potential actions to underpin engagement and support of refugees and employers**

- 5.3 Tables 5.1-5.3. outline in detail the key challenges and issues at each of the key stages (pre-employment, sustaining and progressing in employment), and actions to address these, by working with and supporting refugees and employers. As the tables illustrate, although refugees face some distinctive barriers (e.g. around language, the recognition of skills and qualifications gained overseas and workplace cultural competence) the actions to support employment and progression have many similarities to work with other groups with complex barriers to employment; for example, the overall approach to working with refugees is similar to that developed for supporting the long term unemployed or economically inactive, through programmes like CfW (Luchinskaya and Green, 2016; WG, 2018e). While the approach to working with employers is similar to approaches recommended to promote increasing equality and diversity in the workforce and increase the employment of people from ethnic minorities (see e.g. Wood and Wybron, 2015; Weekes-Bernard, 2017) or who are disabled (see e.g. Bayer et al., 2020). Therefore, the proposed actions in tables 5.1-5.3 draw upon the qualitative research for this study, the literature reviewed for this study that is specifically focused upon refugee employment and employer engagement, and which is discussed in Annex A, and the wider literature focused upon reducing barriers to employment and progression linked to ethnicity and disability (highlighted above).

**Table 5.1: The challenges and issues for preparing for employment and suggested actions.**

<b>Challenges and issues</b>	<b>Refugee engagement and support actions, responsible organisations and potential partners, timescales and estimated costs</b>	<b>Employer engagement and support actions, responsible organisations and potential partners, timescales and estimated costs</b>
<p><b>Engagement:</b> Refugees tend to have narrower job search strategies and to be more reliant upon JCP than other groups, despite often facing complex barriers to employment (Kone et al., 2019; WG, 2020a).</p> <p>In addition, qualitative research for the Refugee Employment and Skills Support Study (WG, 2020a) suggested that some groups of refugees have given up trying to</p>	<p>Active outreach by employment support organisations such as ReStart and national employment support programmes like Working Wales, CfW and Achieving Change through Employment (ACE) and regional employment programmes supporting those aged 25 and over who have complex barriers to employment and are economically inactive or long term unemployed, such as Journey2Work (in Cardiff and Newport) Opus (in Wrexham) and Workways+ (in Swansea)<sup>33</sup> working with, for example, refugee support</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>

<sup>33</sup> Further details about these national and regional programmes can be found in [The Welsh Government Funding and Support Guide](#) pages 14-17.

find work, given the barriers they face. This can include those who have been in the UK for many years.	<p>services (such as voluntary sector organisations like DPIA, the Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST), Oasis (in Cardiff), the Red Cross and the Wales Refugee Council (WRC), faith and community leaders, groups and networks, to encourage them to signpost refugees who would benefit from help, towards support services.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now and falls within employment support services' existing remits, so costs in terms of staff time (e.g. networking) and publicity materials, should come from existing budgets.</p>	
<p><b>Preparedness and language barriers:</b> Not all refugees are “work ready”, or ready for education and training (such as WBL), given the low levels of English language skills of some refugees. Despite REACH and improvements in</p>	<p>Over the next eighteen months, the Welsh Government Post-16 Planning and Policy Team is considering commissioning another review of ESOL provision in Wales, to assess, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how effectively the actions and good practice identified in the current ESOL</li> </ul>	Not applicable (work-based ESOL provision is discussed in table 5.3)

<p>access to ESOL in parts of Wales, there are still reported (by interviewees for this study from ReStart and employment support services) to be gaps between demand for and the supply of ESOL provision in Cardiff. Interviewees from some employment support services and the voluntary sector also reported concerns about a lack of flexibility in ESOL provision, although this was rebutted by interviewees from ReStart.</p> <p>The last review of ESOL provision in Wales was in 2010 (WG, 2010) and a review of ESOL provision</p>	<p>policy for Wales (WG, 2018d), in relation to access to formal<sup>34</sup> (including in particular ESOL+ and ESOL for specific purposes, such as passing a driving test) and informal provision<sup>35</sup> (such as friends and neighbours (FAN) groups to develop conversational English), have been implemented.</p>	
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<sup>34</sup> This study suggests that key actions (in the policy) include: “work with partners to ensure all ESOL learners have adequate access to provision at the level appropriate to their needs, regardless of their entry route into Wales” ; “improve the opportunities for learners to enrol at appropriate times by introducing more flexible enrolment procedures”; “ offer provision in a variety of locations, including in community and neighbourhood settings; and work with employers to provide in-work ESOL where possible” (WG, 2018d, p.16)

<sup>35</sup> This study suggests that key actions (in the policy) include: “work with partners to support learners to develop social groups for social interaction and skills practice”. (WG, 2018d, p.16).

was beyond the scope of this study.		
<p><b>Minimising language barriers:</b></p> <p>The low levels of English language skills of some refugees constrain access to support services (e.g. employment, housing and health support services)<sup>36</sup>. However, even with access to ESOL provision, it can take years to develop English language skills (Schellekens, 2011).</p>	<p>The ReStart project to share its experience and expertise with other employer support services to help them identify adjustments and changes to their practice to improve access for those with lower level English language skills. This could include: simplification of and/or translation of training materials (as, for example, Business Wales has done), the use of translation services such as JCP's Big Word interpretation service, and peer support with language (where for example, one person with stronger language skills translates for others).</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within the project's existing remit, so costs, such as</p>	<p>ReStart regional employer engagement officers to work with employers to ensure that recruitment and selection processes do not require greater language skills than are necessary for the role; consider adjustments, such as translation of signage and guidance and the scope for peer support with language.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within regional employment engagement officers' existing remit, so costs in terms of staff time and publicity materials, should come from existing budgets.</p>

<sup>36</sup> It was also reported that some can use language "as a front", a reason "not to engage" with JCP which can be difficult for work coaches and advisors to challenge.

	staff time, should come from existing budgets.	
<p><b>Preparedness and cultural barriers to employment:</b> Not all refugees are “work ready”, given limited workplace cultural competence; and/or an under-valuing/lack of recognition (by employers) of qualifications, skills and/or experience gained overseas.</p>	<p>The ReStart project, JCP and national and regional employment support programmes like Working Wales, CfW, ACE, Journey2Work, Opus, and Workways+, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ensure effective matching of refugees with work placements and volunteering that enables them to acquire the workplace cultural competence required and which also provides UK work experience <sup>37</sup>;</li> <li>- provide access to training which is directly relevant to employers’ needs in the local labour market (e.g. food hygiene for those looking to work in food manufacturing); and</li> <li>- access to services such as NARIC which can support the recognition of overseas qualifications.</li> </ul>	<p>ReStart regional employer engagement officers and other employer engagement officers (e.g. employed by JCP or LAs) to work with employers to identify pre-employment training opportunities, such as work trials which can help refugees build (and also demonstrate to employers) their skills and cultural competence in the workplace.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services’ existing remit, so costs, such as staff time and publicity materials, should come from existing budgets.</p>

<sup>37</sup> The importance of experience in a relevant employment setting was stressed by interviewees from the voluntary sector, employment support services and employment engagement officers, meaning for example, that volunteering in a charity shop (a common volunteering opportunity) might have limited value, depending upon the type of work a refugee aspired to. As with Job Search, matching the person to the work experience was seen as important.

	<p>This should start (or continue) from now and falls within employment services' existing remit, so costs in terms of staff time and training should come from existing budgets.</p> <p>Over the next year the WG Post-16 Planning and Policy Team should work with FE and HE providers to explore the scope to develop or access bridging courses or other re-qualification opportunities for refugees.</p>	
<p><b>Preparedness for employment: personal and circumstantial barriers:</b> Not all refugees are “work ready”, given their mental or physical health (including for example, the trauma of persecution and fleeing their home and country) and/or circumstances (e.g. caring responsibilities, problems with housing or not being able to afford</p>	<p>ReStart and other national and regional employment support services should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- undertake holistic assessments to identify refugees' strengths and the challenges they face;</li> <li>- provide access to information, advice and signposting to specialist services, such as mental health, family information services and employment support programmes such as Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE); and</li> </ul>	<p>ReStart regional employer engagement officers and other employer engagement officers (e.g. those employed by JCP or LAs) should work with employers to improve their understanding of refugees' circumstances and the challenges they may face.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services existing remit, so costs, such as staff time and publicity</p>



<p>the clothing required for employment).</p> <p>The rapidity of the “move on” period after asylum seekers are granted status can exacerbate the difficulties refugees face (WG, 2020).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- access to support through, for example, employment support programmes’ “barriers funds” or JCP’s low value procurement to pay for the cost of items such as personal protective equipment (PPE) or CSCS cards that are needed to access construction jobs.</li> </ul> <p>This should start (or continue) from now and falls within services’ existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>	<p>materials, should come from existing budgets.</p>
<p><b>Aligning refugees’ aspirations with employment opportunities:</b></p> <p>Refugees will often need to adapt and look for different types of work to that they had experience of in their home country, given barriers to employment (WG, 2020a).</p>	<p>ReStart and other national and regional employment support services and Careers Wales should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- provide access to high quality IAG about employment opportunities and employer requirements and expectations<sup>40</sup>, sensitively working with refugees to ensure</li> </ul>	<p>ReStart regional employer engagement officers should work with employers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify and understand employers’ expectations and requirements, and ensure effective matching of refugees (and their skills) with appropriate employment opportunities; and</li> </ul>

<sup>40</sup> For example, refugees may be excluded from some types of entry level work, like security, if they cannot provide evidence of a criminal record check covering the time that they lived overseas or character references from someone, such as a refugee support worker, who can “provide character references for Applicants with refugee status for the period spent in the country from where the Applicant has sought refuge” (SIA, 2019, p.35).

<p>Like other groups, such as those who are disabled or from BAME groups (see e.g. Wood and Wybron, 2015; Bayer et al., 2020), refugees are not generally regarded by employers as a priority for recruitment and may be actively discriminated against (e.g. due to racism and/or the perceived costs and complexity of recruiting and employing them<sup>38</sup>) (Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019; Lee et al., 2020). Negative media coverage is reported by interviewees to fuel employer fears.</p>	<p>their short term goals and aspirations are aligned with realistic employment opportunities (drawing, for example, upon the analysis of labour market opportunities outlined in section 3);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- support action planning to develop short and long term plans, to help match refugees with appropriate initial employment opportunities and provide scope for them to progress and realise longer term goals and aspirations<sup>41</sup>; and</li> <li>- ensure access to work placements, work trials and tasters, to provide opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- facilitate refugees' access to work placements, work trials and tasters aiming for a sustainable job at the end of this.</li> </ul> <p>ReStart regional employer engagement officers and other (JCP or LA) employer engagement officers' work with employers should include "myth busting<sup>42</sup>" and strategies to promote equality and diversity, such as the use of "blind applications" (seen by one interviewee from the voluntary sector as the single most important action to tackle racism); reviewing recruitment</p>
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<sup>38</sup> Employing refugees can be perceived as costlier and more complex than employing other groups such as those born in the UK given, for example, uncertainty about the legality of employing refugees and difficulties in assessing skills, experience and qualifications gained overseas (Lee et al., 2020). As a voluntary sector interviewee put it: "some employers are sensitive [to the issues], but the majority need education and training about the issues faced by refugees, so they understand where they come from, why they came, and the difficulties they may face". This was confirmed by interviews with employers, although they represented a very small sample, and supported by evidence from the literature review (see Annex A).

<sup>41</sup> There is evidence from the United States that: "career ladders schemes can be effective where, for example, advice consists of a 'road map' describing jobs in different industries and demonstrating the 'connection between education and training programmes at a range of levels'" (Barnard, 2014, cited in Wood and Wybron, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Employers reluctant to employ refugees express concerns with regulatory difficulties. The UNHCR guidance (April 2019) identifies a number of actions for public authorities to overcome these concerns, including: providing up-to-date guidance and individually tailored support, training to Human Resources (HR), and legal information to employers through dedicated hotlines.

<p>There are reported by interviewees to be few employers in Wales who proactively recruit refugees. Fears about the cost and complexity of recruiting and employing refugees can be well-founded (ibid.), and interviewees for this study report that fears are likely to be exacerbated by economic pressures (e.g. due to a post COVID-19 downturn). Therefore, support and grants may be appropriate to ensure that recruiting refugees feels “safer” than open market recruitment (Bayer et al., 2020). However, international evidence (e.g. Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019) suggests that many employers who have</p>	<p>for refugees to assess employment opportunities.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services’ existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>	<p>and selection processes, including the use of recruitment agencies, to assess the extent to which they promote or hinder greater equality and diversity in the workforce (including monitoring the effectiveness of equality and diversity policies); and active outreach and support to under-represented groups<sup>43</sup>.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services’ existing remit, so costs, such as staff time and publicity materials, should come from existing budgets.</p> <p>Over the next year, consideration should be given by the Welsh Government Equality Branch to exploring the scope</p>
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<sup>43</sup> For example, it was reported that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority and police actively reach out to BAME communities and offer support during the application process, such as interview techniques workshops.

<p>employed refugees find the difficulties are less than they anticipated and are happy to do so again.</p> <p>Qualitative research for this study identifies that recruitment processes can intentionally or unintentionally discriminate against refugees (e.g. where those with “foreign” names are excluded or where application forms and processes require higher levels of English literacy and oracy than the job itself requires or recruitment is via networks and platforms refugees are not familiar with).</p> <p>Recruitment may be outsourced to recruitment agencies whose</p>		<p>for employer grants<sup>44</sup> for work trials and work placements to help reduce the perceived risks associated with recruiting refugees. Further scoping work would be required to assess the costs of this.</p> <p>Over the next year, the Equality Branch should ensure the work of ReStart regional employer engagement officers is integrated with wider community/social cohesion work to make refugees feel more welcome and employers more at ease employing them.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within the Equality Branch’s existing</p>
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<sup>44</sup> These would provide short term financial support to help employers to get to know to know a new employee and build relationships, reducing the financial risk and uncertainty in that recruitment decision (Bayer et al., 2020).

<p>practices may be considered unethical.</p> <p>The number of refugees in dispersal areas is relatively small and even large employers have little understanding or experience of recruiting and employing refugees. Incentives to proactively recruit refugees can therefore be minimal <sup>39</sup>.</p>		<p>remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>
<p><b>Improving refugees' job search strategies:</b> Refugees' understanding of the Welsh labour market and recruitment practices, and their job search strategies, are often weak (WG, 2020a).</p>	<p>ReStart and other national and regional employment support services should ensure they offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- access to support and IAG on how local labour markets work (e.g. application and selection processes and the role that social networks can play in providing information about job opportunities);</li> </ul>	<p>ReStart regional employer engagement officers should work with employers and other (JCP or LA) employment engagement officers to identify and understand employers' recruitment and selection processes (so they can better advise applicants).</p>

<sup>39</sup> For example, as one large employer put it: "we are not exactly gaining access to a huge amount of people {if we reach out to refugees} – therefore the gains might not be enough; for example, in comparisons there's been a lot of economic migrants and you also have access to the population within their country with the free market model in Europe where agencies can source people".

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- practical support to enhance job search and applications (e.g. help to translate and improve CVs and draft covering letters; registering with recruitment agencies and recruitment sites such as Indeed; completing online application forms and uploading photographs of right to work documentation (which can be challenging for those who are digitally excluded<sup>45</sup>); interview preparation and improving “personal presentation”.</li> </ul> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within employment services’ existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>	<p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services’ existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>
<p><b>Refugees’ needs can be complex and diverse:</b> Refugees can share some barriers, such as a minimal</p>	<p>ReStart should continue to work in a flexible person-centred way reflecting the diversity of refugee populations, aspirations and</p>	<p>ReStart regional employer engagement officers should work with other (JCP or LA) employer engagement staff and with</p>

<sup>45</sup> They may be digitally excluded by a lack of IT literacy and English language, limited (or no) access to smartphones or computers and/or WiFi, and therefore struggle with online recruitment and selection processes.

<p>understanding of labour markets and ineffective job search strategies, with other groups, such as the long term unemployed. However, their biographies are very different, and they are frequently scarred by experiencing persecution and fleeing home and country. They also face distinctive barriers, such as problems in having qualifications, skills and/or experience gained overseas recognised and, for some refugees, lower level English language skills, which mainstream support services have little experience of. Refugees are also a very diverse group, and the strengths, aspirations and</p>	<p>barriers<sup>48</sup>. This should be complemented by the development of specialism and expertise within mainstream employment support services through, for example, the work of refugee champions and JCP Single Points of Contacts (SPOCs).</p> <p>ReStart should continue to develop and strengthen links to and partnerships with mainstream and specialist services to support signposting and referrals between services and the sharing of expertise.</p> <p>ReStart and national and regional employment support services should minimise the impact of European Social Fund (ESF) eligibility rules (e.g. signing refugees up to an ESF employment support</p>	<p>employers to improve employers' understanding of refugees' circumstances and the challenges they may face.</p>
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<sup>48</sup> For example, a report by the EU Directorate-General for internal policies for the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) committee (2016) argues that policies must be sensitive to the differential needs of women including: information dissemination concerning services and accessing the labour market; training of cultural mediators who assist women in accessing services; training aimed at enhancing women's skills and education and addressing personal concerns such as family obligations, trauma and cultural difference.

<p>needs of, for example, a woman from Afghanistan with young children, no formal education and no work experience, will be very different to a young woman from Syria, who completed their secondary education in Wales and then continued to university in Wales<sup>46</sup>.</p> <p>Research suggests that refugees have a greater reliance upon the JCP than other groups (Kone et al., 2019; WG, 2020), but they may not trust government services like JCP if they have experience of persecution by the state and see</p>	<p>programme before they start ESOL<sup>49</sup>). The Welsh Government Prosperous Future Division should seek to influence the eligibility criteria for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (the proposed successor to the ESF) to ensure that this does not happen again.</p> <p>These actions should continue from now until the end of the ReStart project and fall within the project's existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>	
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<sup>46</sup> However, it was reported by interviewees for the ReStart project that many young people who had continued their education in Welsh schools still had weak English language skills and often needed intensive support to be able to reach the level of English required to continue in FE.

<sup>49</sup> It was reported by interviewees from employment services that refugees were not eligible for ESF employment support programmes like CfW if they were engaged in ESOL and therefore in education or training when referred to the programme.



<p>JCP's role as "policing" the welfare system<sup>47</sup> .</p> <p>Refugees may struggle to access employment support services due to language barriers, and ESF rules can block refugees' participation in CfW and PaCE if they have already started an ESOL course.</p>		
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<sup>47</sup> For example, as one interviewee from the DWP described it, there can be a lack of trust in "officialdom" and a belief that, in relation to the Job Centre: "saying nothing is better than saying the wrong thing", given fears that it could "stop their money".

**Table 5.2. The challenges and issues for sustaining employment with suggested actions.**

Challenges, issues	Refugee engagement and support actions, responsible organisations and potential partners, timescales and estimated costs	Employer engagement and support actions, responsible organisations and potential partners, timescales and estimated costs
<p><b>Refugees can struggle to sustain employment:</b> Qualitative research for this study and international evidence (e.g. Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019; Lee et al., 2020) and research into poverty and ethnicity in the UK (e.g. Wood and Wybron, 2015) identified that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- refugees can feel isolated (e.g. where they are the only person from an ethnic minority in an organisation; and/or they struggle with an unfamiliar work culture which they feel they do not fit in to or feel excluded from<sup>50</sup>);</li> </ul>	<p>ReStart should keep in touch with refugees entering work in order to ensure that potential problems and breakdowns in employment are identified early and support can be provided, for example, to address mental health issues, or to mediate between employer and employee, and address cultural issues, described by one employment engagement officer as “the main reason that people leave their jobs”, also highlighted in the literature reviewed for this study<sup>52</sup> (e.g.</p>	<p>ReStart should keep in touch with employers to ensure that potential problems and breakdowns in employment are identified early and advice and support can be provided (e.g. to increase employers’ understanding of refugees and the challenges they may face, to support action to promote equality and diversity in the workplace, and promote inclusion including, for example, the use of mentors and equality and diversity champions).</p> <p>ReStart regional employer engagement officers should work with employers to</p>

<sup>50</sup> For example, refugees can feel excluded from workplace networks, leaving them feeling isolated, devalued and ill at ease in the workplace (Lee et al., 2020).

<sup>52</sup> This highlights the importance of intermediaries who can advocate on behalf of refugees, help facilitate communication between an employer and refugee and improve employers’ and refugees’ understanding of each other’s needs and expectations (Lee et al., 2020).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- refugees' mental or physical health (including for example, the trauma of persecution and fleeing their home and country) and/or circumstances (e.g. caring responsibilities) which can change, and can make sustaining employment difficult;</li> <li>- time spent out of employment (e.g. while fleeing persecution) can lead to de-skilling (WG, 2020a) and unfamiliarity with UK workplace cultures and practices can mean that refugees struggle (Bloch, 2004, 2008);</li> <li>- refugees can live and work in small "ethnic enclaves", with people of the same or similar ethnicity<sup>51</sup> and/or</li> </ul>	<p>Matikainen, 2003; Garkisch et al., 2017; UNHCR, 2019; Szkudlarek, 2019).</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services' existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>	<p>provide advice and support to assist refugees with cultural competence, such as clear statements of employers' expectations and employees' rights, accommodation for religious holidays or customs (including the provision of prayer rooms, as some large companies in Cardiff have done), delivering unconscious bias training for all staff and training in supporting refugees. The post-employment training and support discussed above would also assist with workplace integration.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services' existing remit, so</p>
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<sup>51</sup> There is evidence of this phenomenon in the research into the employment experiences of ethnic minority groups (e.g. Wood and Wybron, 2015) including self-employment (see e.g. Gold, 1992) and in research examining segregation at a geographical level, where ethnic minorities can become clustered or concentrated in particular areas (see e.g. Garner and Bhattacharyya, 2011). In the qualitative research for this study, interviewees described factories with a "Polish" and "Bulgarian" production line, led by Polish or Bulgarian speakers. Although the small size of refugee populations in Wales reduces the likelihood of this type of clustering within large employers (as with European economic migrants) but examples were given during qualitative research for the Refugee Employment Skills and Support Study of this happening within smaller businesses, and sometimes within the "informal economy" (see also Gold, 1992). This clustering of people of the same ethnicity can bring benefits, such as mutual aid and support and can

work in sectors where English language requirements are low, which limits integration (and the acquisition of stronger English language skills).		costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.
<p><b>Improving the quality of refugees' employment:</b> Sustained employment is more likely where there is a good fit between the job and an individual's circumstances (e.g. in terms of skills, hours of work, location of work). However, this can be very difficult to achieve if the main job opportunities are low-paid, low-skill, insecure entry level jobs (Luchinskaya and Green, 2016). Refugees may have little choice about the "entry level" jobs they take, and may be vulnerable to exploitation or unfair working practices.</p>	<p>ReStart should work with partners such as trade unions to ensure that refugees understand their rights (see e.g. the Know your Rights campaign). It should also include work by ReStart and other national and regional employment support programmes to signpost refugees to trade unions and active out-reach by unions.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services' existing remit, so</p>	<p>Over the next year, the Welsh Government Equality and Diversity Team should identify opportunities to link to actions at a national level to promote fair work, including the Welsh Government Fair Work Commission and ethical employment from businesses supplying the public services (WG, 2017), the Fair Work Commission, the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales, the voluntary sector, Public Service Boards (PSBs) and City Deals.</p>

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reduce barriers to entry to employment by strengthening links to employers and reducing language barriers, but can also narrow people's options and limit integration (see e.g. Edin et al., 2003).

<p>Although refugees may have skills (and qualifications), in sectors where there are skills shortages, they may not have the English language skills or cultural knowledge or links to employers necessary to exploit their skills.</p> <p>People from some BAME backgrounds are under-represented in unions, which can help improve pay, support progression, and provide advocacy in challenging discrimination (Wood and Wybron, 2015) and it is likely that refugees are also under-represented because, for example, they have a limited awareness or understanding of the role of unions in the UK, they may not see unions as “for them” and/or there are low levels of unionisation in the sectors they work in.</p>	<p>costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p> <p>The Welsh Government Equality Branch should consider commissioning scoping work to assess the feasibility and potential cost-effectiveness of establishing equivalents of WARD for other groups of professionals.</p> <p>Over the next six months, the Welsh Government should review the scope within existing national and regional employment support programmes to support employment advisors to help clients to progress once in work (given e.g. eligibility requirements, targets and budgets). This may identify the need to provide access to training and support for advisors, whose roles tend to focus more on getting unemployed individuals into work, rather than considering its</p>	
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	<p>quality or sustainability (<a href="#">Weekes-Bernard, 2017</a>).</p> <p>As outlined above, ReStart and national and regional employment support services should ensure that action planning focuses upon developing short and long term plans to help match refugees with appropriate initial employment opportunities and provide scope for them to progress and realise their long term aspirations.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services' existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>	
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**Table 5.3. The challenges and issues for supporting progression in employment and suggested actions.**

Challenges, issues	Refugee engagement and support actions, responsible organisations and potential partners, timescales and estimated costs	Employer engagement and support actions, responsible organisations and potential partners, timescales and estimated costs
<p><b>Supporting progression: developing language skills.</b> Too many refugees get stuck in entry level roles which became dead ends, rather than stepping stones to better work (Kone et al., 2019; WG, 2020a) and as outlined above, there is a risk that refugees can end up working in economic sectors where English language requirements are low, which can limit their integration and development of their language skills.</p> <p>Qualitative research for this study and other research (e.g. WG, 2020a) identifies that some refugees may prioritise work over ESOL provision, meaning their acquisition of the English language slows or stalls. Equally,</p>	<p>ReStart should work with partners such as trade unions and FE institutions to provide access to and signpost to IAG about job opportunities within and beyond their current employer, that offer better pay and progression opportunities and also progression opportunities and routes linked to FE, WBL (such as apprenticeships) and HE.</p> <p>ReStart should focus upon building “career adaptability” (the ability to cope with change and exploit new employment opportunities) by, for example, encouraging flexibility, developing a portfolio of transferable skills (e.g. by facilitating access to FE, including WBL and work placements)</p>	<p>ReStart regional employer engagement officers to work with ESOL providers such as FE colleges (e.g. CAVC, Colleg Gwent, Gower College Swansea and Coleg Cambria, which are all partners in ReStart) and employers to identify opportunities to encourage employers to take responsibility to contribute towards ESOL provision where it is applicable for their staff.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project. It falls within regional employer engagement officers’ and FE colleges’ existing remit, so costs in terms of staff time should come from existing budgets.</p>

immersion in English speaking contexts (such as the workplace) can accelerate learning and much depends upon how much opportunity and support refugees get to use English.	<p>and networks (to increase access to information about employment opportunities). This should support progression in work and help refugees work toward realising their employment aspirations over the medium to long term.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services' existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p> <p>As outlined above, the Welsh Government Post-16 Planning and Policy team should work with partners to ensure access to flexible ESOL provision (e.g. evenings, weekends, online) for those who want/need it.</p>	<p>Over the next year, the Welsh Government Post-16 Planning and Policy and Equality and Prosperity Teams should explore options for funding, match funding or incentivising employers to deliver workplace-based ESOL, including both classes and more informal language lunch clubs (UNHCR, 2019). This should include exploring the potential to draw upon the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund.</p> <p>This falls within Welsh Government Post-16 Planning and Policy and Equality and Prosperity Teams' existing remit, so costs in terms of staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>
<b>Supporting progression: knowhow and skills</b> Progression routes can be	ReStart should keep in touch with refugees entering work, for example,	ReStart should work with employers and trade unions to provide access to in-



<p>opaque and/or difficult to access (e.g. reliant upon informal “knowhow” and social networks).</p>	<p>periodically review their progress and provide advice and signpost to training opportunities (e.g. in FE and WBL).</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services’ existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>	<p>work education/ training and skills provision and, for example, workplace mentors and signposting to training opportunities, such as the Union Learning Fund, and Welsh Government Employability and Skills support, such as the <a href="#">Flexible Skills Programme</a>. This should build upon plans to work with other Welsh Government skills and employability teams to help employers upskill staff after employing them.</p> <p>ReStart should work with partners such as trade unions and employers to develop equality and diversity policies focused upon supporting progression. This could include identifying senior staff with responsibilities for monitoring progression of under-represented groups and providing advice and support, and making progression routes more transparent and accessible</p>
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		(including being clear to all employees about what is required for job progression and promotion) ( Wood and Wybron, 2015); Weekes-Bernard, 2019)
<p><b>Progression: new employers and sectors:</b> Some employers operate on a low costs and low margins model, meaning that there may be little incentive for them to promote progression (Luchinskaya and Green, 2016).</p>	<p>ReStart should keep in touch with refugees entering work, for example, periodically review their progress and provide access to IAG about job opportunities beyond their current employer, and support adaptability and mobility through, for example, access to advice and training.</p> <p>This should start (or continue) from now until the end of the ReStart project and falls within services' existing remit, so costs, such as staff time, should come from existing budgets.</p>	<p>Over the next year, the Welsh Government Post-16 Planning and Policy and Equality and Prosperity Teams should explore opportunities to link to action at a national level to promote fair work, including the Welsh Government Fair Work Commission and ethical employment from businesses supplying the public services (WG, 2017), advocacy for the Real Living Wage and, for example, the Fair Work Commission, the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales and the voluntary sector and County Voluntary Councils (CVCs,) PSBs and City Deals.</p>

### **Key challenges and structural constraints on action**

- 5.4 Refugee and employer support strategies are inevitably constrained by the volume and type of employment opportunities in each area. As outlined in section 4, there are fears of a “perfect storm”, created by the UK leaving the EU and by COVID-19, reducing opportunities and pushing those, such as refugees perceived to be riskier and potentially challenging and therefore costlier to employ, further back in the “queue” for jobs (Bayer et al., 2020). As one employer engagement officer put it: “anyone with greater challenges is going to find it more difficult” and it is also more likely to be harder to engage employers facing other economic pressures and with a larger pool of labour to draw upon (if, as forecast, unemployment rises).
- 5.5 Employer engagement is crucial. As Wood and Wybron (2015) observe, many of the proposed actions for the employment of refugees require the active participation of stakeholders such as employers, but: “the government cannot mandate employers to run ethnic minority mentoring schemes” and: “change may require a broader shift in the policy and political narrative” with, for example, a greater focus upon reducing in-work poverty, and: “a greater recognition of the business case for maximising the untapped talent and boosting the productivity of ethnic minority groups”.
- 5.6 Capacity to work with refugees and employers is another key constraint. The ReStart project was widely praised (by interviewees for this study). The approach it has taken is in line with the actions proposed in the action plan (outlined above) and the extension of the project to December 2021 has been welcomed. However, the number of refugees it can work with (720) is only a small fraction of the estimated size of the refugee population in Wales. Although obviously not all refugees will need the support of the programme, as outlined in the introduction, currently in the UK only about half of the refugees enter employment, and many of these are under-employed (Kone et al., 2019). Similarly, the numbers of employers that regional employer engagement officers can work with will be limited. As outlined in tables 5.1-5.3 it is therefore important to work with other employment support and engagement services and national leadership and co-ordination is needed, along with planning for a successor to ReStart when the project ends (in December 2021).

- 5.7 The qualitative research for this study and earlier research (WG, 2020a) suggests that the lack of expertise, and sometimes the lack of confidence, in mainstream employment support services about working with refugees who may, for example, have lower level English language skills, is a key challenge to meeting refugees' employment support needs. ReStart and a number of voluntary sector organisations have a potential role to play here, but their capacity to engage with and develop the expertise of other national and regional employment support services while also working directly with refugees is likely to be constrained. Without funding, the capacity of the voluntary sector to take on this role is also likely to be limited. The lack of reliable data on the number of refugees in Wales or the numbers supported by mainstream employment support services makes it difficult to assess the size of any gaps in capacity relative to need. This question should be considered as part of the planned evaluation of ReStart.
- 5.8 Finally, refugee and employer support strategies are also constrained by the time it can take (often years) before refugees are "work ready" and there are limits on how much this can be accelerated; for example, Schellekens (2011) calculated that it would take an average of 1,765 guided learning hours for learners with no English language skills to progress to the level where they could undertake study of another subject or take on a job with routine communication requirements<sup>53</sup>.
- 5.9 Figure 5.1 presents model pathways. The concern, as one interviewee from the voluntary sector put it, is that: "if we wait until they learn English [first] we could wait five years until they get to that level", the risk is they: "get isolated, can't contribute, lose skills, depression" as they are not able to start looking for work or finding work. Interviewees from the voluntary sector also expressed concerns that this language first approach meant that JCPs' expectations were too low. While it might be appropriate in the first year, it was felt that over time, expectations, and therefore also support and challenge from the JCP, ought to increase. The time needed has also constrained the work of regional employer engagement officers, as fewer

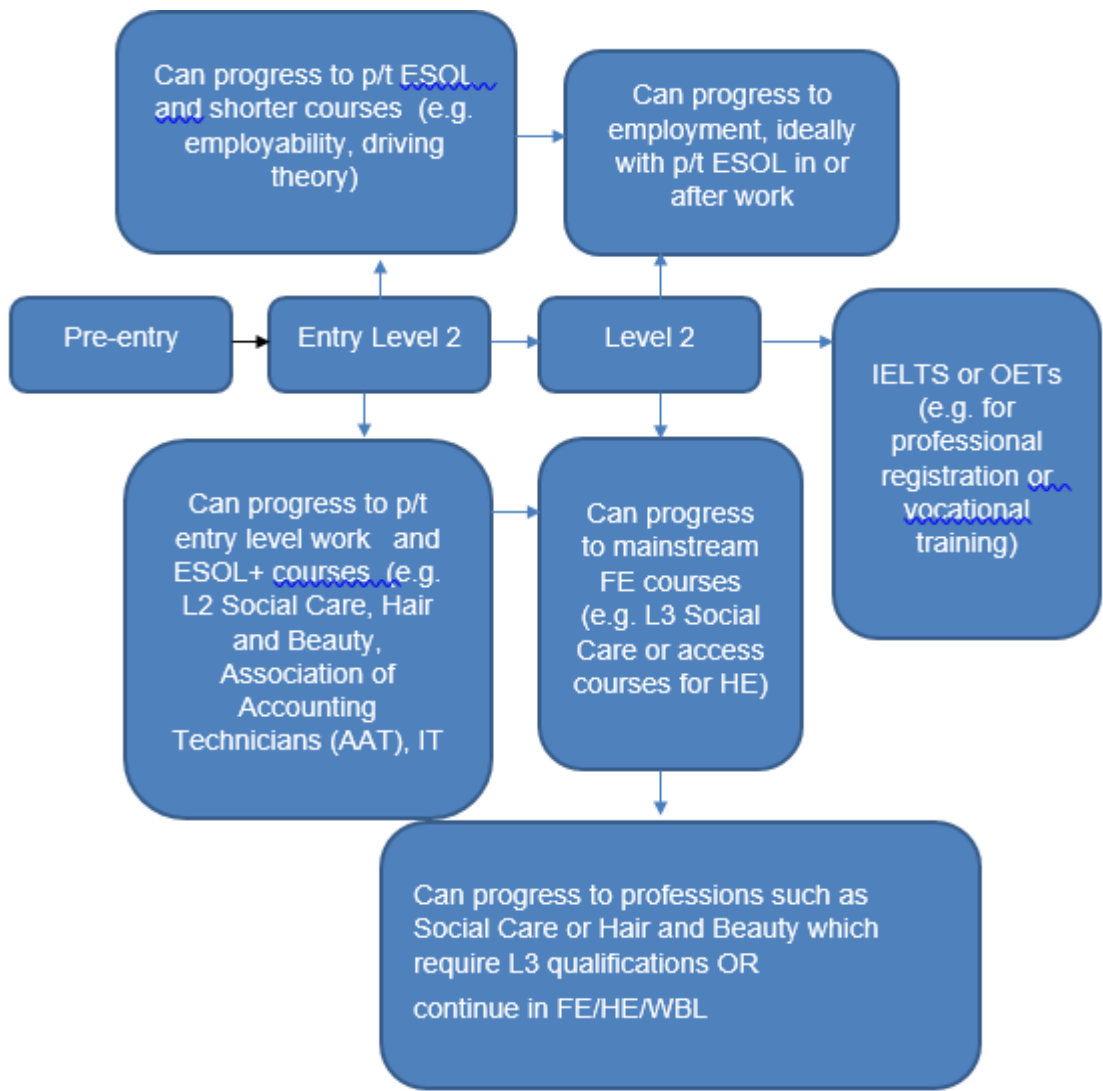
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<sup>53</sup> Therefore as the Welsh Government ESOL Policy Statement identifies: to reach Level 1, "full-time FE students (450 guided learning hours per year) would need almost four years of study"; "adult students who learn English ten hours a week over 30 weeks a year would need five years and seven months of study" and "adult students who learn English for four hours a week over 30 weeks a year would need 14 and a half years of study" (WG, 2018d, p.2).

refugees were “work ready” (so the officer could work with them) than initially anticipated. In addition to the time needed to develop and refine English language skills, the IELTS can be costly unless, for example, a refugee can access financial support via schemes such as WARD.

**Figure 5.1: English language progression (abbreviated, omits some levels/stages) and timescales**

Approx. 3 years from pre-entry to Entry Level 2 (if studying full time – 16/hrs week)	Approx. 3-4 years from Entry Level 2 to Level 2 (if studying full time – 16/hrs week)	Approx. 1 year from Level 2 to IELTS minimum band score for the NHS
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Source: interviews with *ReStart* staff

## 6. Conclusions

### **Labour market skill gaps and opportunities to employ refugees within the four main dispersal areas**

- 6.1 Pre-COVID 19, reasonably strong employment growth was forecast across the four dispersal areas, with an expansion of higher level employment opportunities (jobs requiring qualifications at Level 4 and above) and, to a lesser degree, entry level positions. In addition, specific skill gaps were reported in sectors like manufacturing, and more broadly, across all sectors, in relation to “soft skills” such as the ability to manage one’s own time and team working (WG, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d).
- 6.2 However, COVID-19 has reduced employment opportunities in sectors such as accommodation and tourism (Dias et al., 2020), and there are fears that a “hard Brexit” when the UK leaves the EU at the end of the transition period, will reduce employment opportunities in other sectors such as automotive and aerospace industries, already affected by COVID-19 (WG, 2019c).
- 6.3 Moreover, a key conclusion of this study (drawing upon the qualitative research and literature reviewed for the study, such as WG (2020a) and Luchinskaya and Green (2016), is that an analysis of skill gaps and employment forecasts is of limited value unless combined with an analysis:
- of the skills, qualifications and experience refugees have and the barriers they face;
  - of refugees’ aspirations and their willingness to consider alternatives and/or engage in education and training to develop their skills, qualifications and experience; and
  - employers’ attitudes and recruitment and employment practices (the focus of this study), which can possibly discourage or discriminate against refugees.
- 6.4. This is vital, as each of these factors can impact upon refugees’ ability to access employment opportunities (and fill skill gaps) and action to improve refugees’ employment needs to focus upon each of these.

*Refugees aspirations, skills, qualifications, experience and the barriers they can face*

- 6.4 Refugees are a very diverse group; for example, they include those with low or no formal education and/or low level English language skills and also those with high level qualifications and employment experience and/or strong English language skills. The barriers to employment individual refugees face (such as insufficient English language skills and a lack of experience and/or understanding of the culture in Welsh workplaces and the expectations of Welsh employers of their employees) are also therefore diverse. However, the barriers that individuals face also depend upon their employment aspirations, as barriers to entry are typically higher, for higher level jobs. Refugees' willingness to change and often lower their aspirations, at least initially, and accept work at a level that is not commensurate with their skills and experience, and/or engage in education and training to develop and also demonstrate their skills to employers, can therefore be crucial in finding employment in the short term (WG, 2020a).

*Employers' attitudes and recruitment and employment practices*

- 6.5 Employers determine access to employment and progression opportunities through their recruitment and management culture and practices and the ways they organise and structure work (Luchinskaya and Green, 2016). Employers often under-value qualifications, skills and/or experience gained overseas and can perceive refugees as a potentially risky and/or challenging and therefore costlier group to recruit and manage (Lundborg et al., 2016; Gibbs, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019).
- 6.6 Employers' fears may be exaggerated or ill-founded. The literature reviewed (Lundborg et al., 2016; (Szkudlarek, 2019) identifies that employers who have employed refugees often found that the risks and costs were lower than they feared or anticipated. Although ReStart regional employer engagement officers may therefore be able to address and allay some employers' fears, this does not mean that employing refugees is necessarily cost free (and it is likely to be counterproductive to claim that it is cost free). It can take longer to recruit, induct and train and support refugees (which has a cost) (ibid.) and employers may still

need to make adjustments, as they might with other groups facing barriers to employment (see e.g. Luchinskaya and Green (2016) for a discussion of adjustments by employers to tackle worklessness and Bayer et al. (2020) for a discussion of adjustments in relation to people with neurodevelopmental disabilities). Moreover, without proactive action, refugees may struggle to integrate and may struggle to sustain jobs or progress in work. Equally, the additional costs may be outweighed by the benefits created by a more diverse workforce.

- 6.7 Looking beyond ReStart regional employer engagement officers' work with employers, actions such as employer grants to reduce cost and risk, and a change in the public narrative around employment of refugees, may be required. Without this, in the short term, many refugees will still need to focus upon low skilled "entry level" jobs in areas such as warehouse work, hospitality and food processing, where demand for labour is high and barriers to entry into employment are low.

*Supporting progression in employment*

- 6.8 Although refugee employment rates increase over time, as refugees develop their skills and experience, many struggle to progress in employment and work below their qualification levels (Kone et al., 2019; WG, 2020a). A focus upon progression, as well as enabling access to employment is therefore vital.
- 6.9 Entry level jobs, together with FE (including ESOL and WBL) should provide a stepping stone for those refugees who want and are able to do so (e.g. having developed their skills, including English language skills), to progress to more highly skilled work (with, for example, qualifications at Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) Level 3) in sectors like health and social care, where demand for labour outstrips supply. However, for reasons that are partly, but not fully, understood, currently too many refugees appear to get stuck in entry level jobs, so they become "dead ends", which limits their lives and their potential contribution to Wales (WG, 2020a); for example, as one interviewee put it: "a lot of qualified refugees are washing up in restaurants and they get stuck there, they don't know how to get out". Therefore, a focus upon pre-employment support needs to be complemented by a strong focus upon supporting progression in employment. This creates further challenges as there are comparatively few services focused



upon supporting progression for those in employment (as distinct from services focused upon helping people into employment).

*Supporting access and progression to higher level employment opportunities*

- 6.10 There is strong growth forecast in employment opportunities at CQFW Level 4 and above (WG, 2020b). There are opportunities here for those refugees with recognised overseas qualifications, or who have trained (or retrained) in the UK, with strong English language skills and workplace cultural competence. The WARD scheme demonstrates how, by developing links to employers and professional bodies, providing support with language (and passing IELTS or OET exams) and the recognition of overseas qualifications and access to work placements, refugees can access high level professional employment opportunities. However, there are currently no equivalents to WARD for other professions, and it will take many years for some refugees to develop the language skills required, and while there are higher level skill gaps in, for example, STEM sectors, the small size of refugee populations and therefore of refugee engineers or IT technicians in any one area is likely to make the development of equivalent schemes to WARD challenging. This may mean that employer engagement with these sectors should only be a priority for regional employer engagement officers when they are matching individuals with the skills and qualifications required for work in these sectors, rather than, for example, undertaking more general awareness-raising work with employers in these sectors.
- 6.11 Although direct equivalents to WARD may not be viable, there may be opportunities to develop virtual online projects, so that support for different groups of professionals dispersed across Wales can be delivered to other groups beyond the health care professionals WARD supports. It may also be possible to develop generic elements of support, such as language support, to enable IELTS to be passed, and more bespoke elements, such as links to specific sectors and sector bodies, to provide access to relevant work experience and advice on entry requirements. However, this would require more scoping work as, for example, the relatively small overall size and diversity of refugee populations poses challenges in identifying which professions/sectors to focus upon. Moreover, even with projects

like WARD, it can still take years before refugees are able to take up professional jobs. This reinforces the case for employment support services working with refugees to develop short term plans for entry into employment or education and training, and longer term plans focused upon enabling progression in employment or education and training, by helping refugees build their skills and experience.

### **Best practice in developing the employment prospects of refugees from Wales**

- 6.12 The literature reviewed (e.g. Gibb 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019; UNHCR, 2019) discussed in Annex A, and the qualitative research for this study highlights the importance of work with both refugees and with employers (who determine access to employment and progression opportunities). This should focus upon pre-employment preparation, job search (including when they should start and how they should look), recruitment, sustaining employment and supporting progression.
- 6.13 Many of the elements of effective practice in supporting refugees, such as providing effective IAG and access to training and support before and during employment, are not unique to work with refugees; they feature in interventions to support other groups with complex barriers to employment, such as programmes to support those who are long term unemployed or economically inactive (see e.g. Luchinskaya and Green, 2016; WG, 2018b) or who are from BAME groups (see e.g. Weekes-Bernard, 2017). Similarly, many of the elements of effective practice with employers, such as in-work mentoring, feature in interventions to support other groups, like disabled people and people from BAME groups, who can be excluded from employment and/or struggle to progress, without changes in employer practice (Weekes-Bernard, 2017; Bayer et al., 2020).

#### *The challenge of scale*

- 6.14 The small size of refugee populations means that most employers lack experience and without, for example, the personal interest of senior leaders<sup>54</sup>, recruiting refugees is rarely a priority for employers (or recruitment agencies), and engaging

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<sup>54</sup> Gibb (2018) and Szkudlarek (2019) identify that the primary motivation for employers to engage with refugee employment is corporate social responsibility, with this being driven at CEO, directorate or senior leadership level.

employers is challenging (Gibb, 2018; Szkudlarek, 2019). Identifying which employers ReStart regional employer engagement officers should target and work with is likely to remain challenging, and may become even more challenging if there is a sustained economic downturn (e.g. as a result of COVID-19 and/or the UK's exit from the EU).

- 6.15 The qualitative research for this study (most notably interviews with regional employer engagement officers from ReStart and also employer engagement staff from the DWP and LAs) and literature reviewed for the study (most notably Gibb, 2018) suggests the need for a dual focus upon:
- building a “bank” of employers offering entry and mid-level employment opportunities, and who are open to employing refugees; and
  - a very tailored approach, focused upon matching individual refugees with appropriate employment opportunities and employers, underpinned by support from ReStart and other employment support services to ensure that refugees' aspirations are aligned with employment opportunities and potential barriers to employment are addressed.
- 6.16. This should help address the challenge that employment initiatives in other parts of the UK have faced in creating a sufficient “pipeline” of refugees able to take up employment opportunities offered by employers (Gibb, 2018).
- 6.16 The small size of refugee populations, and the constraints on the capacity of the small team of ReStart regional employer engagement officers to engage employers, also means that there is a strong case for embedding an awareness of refugees' support needs into any other employer engagement activity focused upon promoting equality and diversity in the Welsh workforce and increasing the quality of employment opportunities in Wales. In relation to employer engagement and recruitment work, there is a case for increased partnership working between ReStart regional employer engagement officers and DWP and LA employer

engagement officers to, for example, share information, identify employment opportunities and make introductions to employers<sup>55</sup>.

- 6.17 Mainstreaming awareness of refugees into employer engagement focused upon promoting equality and diversity and promoting fair and ethical work is likely to require action at a local, regional and national level with the public, private and voluntary sectors (e.g. through leadership by PSBs, CVCs, City and Growth Deals<sup>56</sup> and the Welsh Government). This is likely to include leveraging the public sector's economic power, for example, through procurement policy and the promotion of fair work, such as with Prosperity for All (WG, 2017) and, in relation to the public sector as a major employer in its own right, pushing duties under the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015).
- 6.18 However, even if action to promote refugee employment is integrated into wider strategies to promote equality and diversity, there is also still likely to be a need for bespoke advice and support from ReStart regional employer engagement officers for individual employers who are looking to change their practice. They can play a key role in both making the case for change and making it as easy as possible for employers to change their practice. This may be particularly important for small and medium sized enterprises, who are less likely to have access to HR departments and expertise, although they may also be a more challenging group of employers to work with, as they may perceive the costs and risks of employing refugees to be greater.

#### *Developing expertise in services*

- 6.19 While the elements of effective practice are reasonably well understood, implementation can be challenging. The qualitative research for this study identifies that the relatively small size of refugee populations means mainstream employment support services often struggle to develop the expertise and partnerships required

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<sup>55</sup> DWP sometimes take on the recruitment process (up to the point of interview) for entire companies (e.g. Range in Wrexham) and, because of this, the company leaves them to select a proportion of people that may not be qualified or face barriers. This needs to be tapped into by ReStart.

<sup>56</sup> City Deals and Growth Deals in south east and south west Wales and by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and the Growing mid Wales Partnership.

to support refugees effectively. Therefore, there is a case for specialist services like ReStart.

- 6.20 However, although specialist services like ReStart are needed, they cannot meet the scale and complexity of the challenge of working with and supporting refugee employment on their own; for example, they can undertake holistic assessments, but lack the specialist expertise in areas like mental health, housing and welfare benefits some refugees will need, and therefore (quite appropriately) the project works with partners who have this expertise. Moreover, the numbers of refugees ReStart can work with directly is only a small fraction of those likely to benefit from support. Therefore, ReStart should continue to work with mainstream employment support services who have the expertise, resources and links that ReStart may not have.
- 6.21 There is also a case for those with expertise, such as ReStart and the voluntary sector, to share and help build expertise in mainstream services. However, this is likely to pose challenges to these organisations which are not funded or resourced to do this and which may limit their work supporting refugees directly. Further scoping work to explore the potential for building awareness and capacity in mainstream services may therefore be appropriate.
- 6.22 This need for integration and partnership working poses challenges in terms of co-ordination and leadership. It is reported (by interviewees for this study from ReStart and other employment support services) that ReStart has a collaborative ethos and local arrangements between support services have developed, and REACH+ is reported to have improved co-ordination of ESOL provision. However, the sheer number of support services poses challenges<sup>57</sup> and local co-ordination arrangements, often centred upon the work of hubs, are reported not to have been replicated at a national level (where there is a lack of equivalent co-ordination structures). Interviewees for this study also highlighted the lack of specialist support for refugees outside the dispersal areas (which is beyond this study's scope). More

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<sup>57</sup> For example, as one interviewee from ReStart described it, you can: "only signpost if you know the area" and they have "huge" lists of potential partners/support services just in one area and staff can therefore "feel overwhelmed".

positively, it was felt by interviewees for this study that the acceleration of moves to video calls as a result of COVID-19 made national co-ordination more viable.

### *Accelerating the acquisition of skills*

- 6.23 A further challenge is the time it can take for refugees to be “work ready” for entry and later progression opportunities. It can take years to develop English language skills (Schellekens, 2011), which demands great patience and perseverance on the part of refugees, and requires a long term commitment from support services like ReStart. Support from day one to ensure that asylum seekers can make the best use of their time waiting for a decision on their application to develop the skills they will need to find work (if granted status) and finding ways to accelerate the acquisition of English language skills through, for example, ESOL+ courses and learning outside the classroom (e.g. in the workplace and through FAN groups) are also key elements of effective practice (WG, 2020a). Without action here, many refugees will struggle to progress to mid- and higher level employment opportunities, even if other aspects of employment support and employer engagement are enhanced.

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## **Annex A. Desk-based review of best practice in developing the employment prospects of refugees from Wales and elsewhere**

### **Introduction**

The desk-based literature review aimed to identify examples of best practice in developing the employment prospects of refugees from Wales and elsewhere. By focusing upon employer engagement, it complements the desk-based review undertaken for the Refugee Employment and Skills Support Study (WG, 2020a), which focused upon:

- identifying the ambitions, aspirations and skills of refugee populations;
- exploring what refugees need in order to achieve their ambitions and aspirations;
- investigating how effectively current support enables refugees to meet their ambitions and aspirations; and
- identifying areas in which support could be improved or developed.

A description of the methodology of the desk-based literature review is outlined in section 3.

### **The evidential base**

The scoping study suggests that while there is a great deal of research on challenges faced by refugees in seeking employment and documented in, for example, the RESS study (*ibid.*), there is little research into industry/employers' experiences of hiring refugees. Key gaps in the evidential base include:

- employer motivations;
- the effectiveness of different incentives or support measures in influencing the behaviours and choices of employers;
- the effectiveness of different workplace initiatives, including cross-cultural training, up-skilling training, diversity and inclusion policies (Szkudlarek, 2019; Lee et al., 2020).

These gaps mean that this report draws heavily upon Gibb (2018), Szkudlarek (2019) and Lee et al. (2020), due to the limited availability of research on employer

engagement. Gibb's paper is based upon research in the UK, but has a narrow evidence base, involving ten employers who completed a survey and seven who engaged in in-depth semi-structured interviews. It is not clear in which countries in the UK the employers operated, therefore there is a need to test the findings in a Welsh context. The Szkudlarek (2019) paper is an Australian study, although the literature review does take in research from across the world. Lee et al.'s (2020) paper is a literature review which also considers research from across the world.

### **Employers' motivations to hire refugees**

Gibb (2018) and Szkudlarek (2019) identify that the primary motivation for employers to engage with refugee employment is corporate social responsibility, with this being driven at CEO, directorate or senior leadership level. Secondary motivations include reputational benefits, responding to skills shortages, increasing diversity within the workforce (Gibb, 2018), the work ethic of refugees, increasing experience and diversity of the workforce, and the ability to serve the diverse language and cultural needs of customers (Szkudlarek, 2019).

However, research also suggests that refugee support organisations typically focus on making a business case for employing refugees, when seeking to engage employers. This suggests that there is a need for support organisations to understand that employers do not see corporate social responsibility and the business case as mutually exclusive (Gibb, 2018).

Employers who have successfully employed refugees are likely to hire refugees again and to recommend refugee job seekers to other employers (Lundborg et al., 2016; Szkudlarek, 2019, cited in Lee et al., 2020). Although there is also evidence of firms (in Sweden) with negative experiences becoming "discouraged" (Lundborg et al., 2016), Szkudlarek's (2019) primary research in Australia found that employers who had hired or actively sought to hire refugees perceived most potential barriers as less challenging than those who had not sought to hire refugees. Moreover, employers that successfully hired refugees were likely to recruit from this group of migrants again and recommended refugee jobseekers to peers in the industry. However, some employer feedback suggested that the success of first contact with

refugees could determine whether an employer would or would not want to continue hiring refugees (Lundborg et al., 2016; Szkudlarek, 2019, cited in Lee et al., 2020).

Despite the positive experiences reported in the literature, it is important to note that barriers to hiring employees remain complex, and addressing them can be costly for employers. “Successful hiring and retention of refugees requires a long-term, holistic approach, involving all levels of management, the support of influential staff members and businesses and the engagement of peers and supervisors” (Szkudlarek, 2019). Employers therefore need to invest time and attention to developing strategies. The literature also suggests that small businesses in particular, are less likely to consider hiring refugees due to perceived barriers, such as the need for upskilling refugee jobseekers, which is more difficult for them to deliver (Szkudlarek, 2019). Equally, a narrow focus upon the costs of recruitment and retention can mean the potential economic benefits of employing refugees and increasing the diversity of the workforce, are missed.

### **Employer attitudes and practices**

Research with UK organisations working to support refugees into employment identified the following key challenges: low levels of English language skills amongst some refugees; skills and experience; personal circumstances; public and employers’ perceptions; organisational and systematic barriers and practical barriers (Tweed et al., 2018). The most significant of these - skills and experience (including language skills) - are discussed below.

#### *English language skills*

The need for industry-specific English language skills was identified as important to employers and to enabling refugees to progress within the workplace (Szkudlarek, 2019; UNHCR, 2019). Gibb (2018) finds that: “those employers who struggle least with English language are those that had realistic expectations and have put other support in place”. Suggestions for employers to support refugees included providing access to English language training or arranging for tutors to attend the workplace, and language lunch clubs (UNHCR, 2019). Ideas for support agencies include working with employers to develop sector-based English language courses (Gibb, 2018; UNHCR, 2019).

In terms of recruitment, it is recommended that employers can consider how essential language skills are for vacancies and be sure that job descriptions do not require higher levels of language skills than are needed for the role (UNHCR, 2019). Depending on the job role, employers can give consideration to assessment processes which test the ability to undertake the work, rather than assessment by spoken interview, or allow a translator to attend the interview (UNHCR, 2019). Szkudlarek (2019) also recommends that guidance is provided for employers on how to think laterally about the qualifications and skills that are needed for a particular role.

### *Refugees' skills and experience*

For refugees, a low level of education can have adverse effects, and it is negatively correlated with employment outcomes (Cheng et al. (Australia), 2019, cited in Lee et al., 2020) or taking longer to find suitable employment (Shiferaw et al. (UK), 2002, cited in Lee et al., 2020). Gibb (2018) reports that 31 per cent of refugees are highly educated (which is somewhat higher than other studies), and that the majority of refugees were in employment, self-employment or study before coming to the UK: “suggesting a focus on experience rather than skill level may be appropriate”. Szkudlarek (2019) states that there is a need to provide industry specific skills for refugees in areas where there is a high demand for labour.

In recruitment, good job matching is seen as essential, and support agencies have a key role to play in this (Szkudlarek, 2019). Employers may benefit from support in skills assessment, both occupational skills and prior work experience (UNHCR, 2019)<sup>58</sup>; for example, the German public employment service has developed computer-based skills identification tests (MYSKILLS), to establish which skills can be transferred to the practical working environment. The tests use videos showing people performing standard tasks in the respective occupation. Candidates must then identify errors or put tasks into the right order. The assessment was developed with employers' associations and will cover 30 professions<sup>59</sup> (UNHCR, 2019).

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<sup>58</sup> The EU has an online tool, the [EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals](#).

<sup>59</sup> See [MYSKILLS – Berufliche Kompetenzen erkennen](#)

Apprenticeships and internships are valuable in helping refugees secure employment, giving them relevant skills and work experience in their adopted country (Szkudlarek 2019; UNHCR, 2019). Szkudlarek (2019) argues that employers and industry associations should be empowered to take ownership of the task of increasing refugee employment through mentoring programmes, workplace-funded internships or “more holistic approaches”, such as community sponsorship of refugees. UNHCR (2019) states that employers can provide inductions or buddy systems to help participants, and ensure they are given “sellable” experience, rather than shadowing, with participants needing support to create a post-placement employment action plan.

### *Supporting workplace progression and retention*

The barriers facing refugees can make it difficult for them to progress in the workplace, or even to remain in employment. As Szkudarek (2019) reports: “without post-employment training and development opportunities, refugees find sustaining employment especially difficult” (Aycan et al., 1996; Miletic, 2014). Another Australian study found perceived organisational support from employers was positively associated with the psychological well-being of refugee employees (Newman et al., 2018).

Despite its importance, cultural and, to a lesser extent, occupational training is only offered by support organisations immediately post-migration, and not by employers at workplaces (Nawyn, 2010). More broadly, the literature suggests that employers seldom invest in job-related up-skilling and on-the-job training designed specifically for refugees. In a UK study, the employers of refugees in menial and low-paid jobs did not identify a need for workplace training for these employees (Bloch, 2008). Yet, particularly for highly-skilled refugees, periods of unemployment induce skills deterioration, making post-employment training or retraining essential (Stewart, 2003; Bloch, 2008). Without such training, refugees’ upward mobility is impeded by a lack of workplace skill development (Bloch, 2008).

Research also finds that refugees can be assisted through mentoring and continuous training and upskilling linked to clear career pathways (UNHCR, 2019). Public sector support for employers can include providing dedicated case workers to support

companies during the first few months following recruitment of refugees (UNHCR, 2019).

### *Cultural bias*

Research identifies that human resource (HR) staff and senior management can be disconnected from the reality of daily interactions and workplace integration challenges faced by refugees (Szkudlarek, 2019). Both the UNHCR (2019) and Szkudlarek (2019) highlight the cultural differences refugees face on entering the workforce. Advice to assist refugees with cultural acclimatisation includes clear statements of employers' expectations and employees' rights, accommodation for religious holidays or customs, delivering unconscious bias training for all staff, and training in supporting refugees. The post-employment training and support discussed above would also assist with workplace integration.

### *The role of refugee support services*

Support providers who work with refugees to help them into employment play a significant and positive role. However, support organisations are not necessarily aligned with the needs or realities of employers. Gibb (2018) finds that employers want support organisations to have a greater commercial awareness, including understanding corporate culture and performance, and the issues that businesses face in employing people. Employers also reported that the fragmented nature of the support sector makes it harder to engage with, and is driving a competitive culture which is damaging employer engagement. Employers, particularly large employers, described support organisations as "slow" "fragmented" and "in flux". There was also a logistical challenge for large UK-wide employers who needed to engage with different support organisations with different objectives.

Given the difficulties, the UNHCR (2019) recommends that public authorities map the activity of stakeholders and ensure there is neither an under- nor an over-supply of support providers, whilst facilitating the exchange of experiences and best practice. However, this approach does not address the challenges identified by Gibb (2018), where employers want a unified, cohesive support system which well understands their context. Employers stated that effective employer engagement came not from a compelling business case but from an understanding of businesses'



needs: “an ability to listen to the concerns of the business and to develop a programme that is manageable seems to have been a key factor in establishing successful partnerships”. A genuine partnership based on sound mutual understanding and mutual benefit seems to be what businesses seek.

Employers who are reluctant to employ refugees, express concerns with regulatory difficulties. The UNHCR guidance (2019) identified a number of actions for public authorities to overcome these concerns, including providing up-to-date guidance and individually tailored support, training for HR staff, and legal information for employers through dedicated hotlines. Information could also be provided about the most populous refugee groups, about the socio-economic characteristics of the refugees, their country of origin’s education system and the security clearance that refugees went through.

#### *Employer support and buy-in*

Both Gibb (2018) and Szkudlarek (2019) identify the importance of organisational buy-in with regard to hiring refugees, including at all levels of management and HR, engagement of peers and supervisors, and the need for a long-term holistic approach. The UNHCR (2019) recommends involving staff, for example through mentoring or buddying schemes, offering training to staff on how to support refugees, and having effective workplace discrimination and harassment policies.

Gibb (2018) also identifies a mismatch between the organisations which were most willing to engage with employment support; those in finance, legal and retail, and those skillsets which support organisations most commonly said refugees had, such as hospitality, food and drink and retail (though the numbers actually gaining employment with these employers was very small, partly due to problems with the “pipeline”). Gibb concludes that it seems that those employers most willing to engage are not those with the most accessible jobs.

#### *Partnerships with employers*

Based on her research, Gibb (2018) argues that employers need to be regarded as major stakeholders and as partners in the development of a co-ordinated national approach to refugee employment. To develop this partnership, Gibb recommends

learning about employer perspectives, such as motivations for hiring refugees and the commercial pressures businesses face, and to use this to better hone joint working as well as involving employers throughout the employment journey, from early stage work-readiness though to offering and sustaining employment.

Gibb (2018) also argues for staff to be given training on employer engagement. As well as building partnerships through better understanding of the business sector, Gibb (2018) and Szkudlarek (2019) also argue that the role of refugee employment organisations is to assist employers to understand the situation of refugees, the barriers they face and best practice in overcoming these, and that this should include peer learning.

Gibb (2018) and Szkudlarek (2019) conclude that there is a need to work with employers to create a positive narrative supporting refugee employment, with Szkudlarek (2019) further arguing for the need for industry-specific positive examples.

### **Government Actions**

In addition to the actions for government outlined above, Gibb (2018) argues for referral of refugees between programmes to maximise the range of employment options. She argues for a national system to co-ordinate this. She further argues for an audit of the skills and experiences of refugees, and to use this to establish employer partnerships that are most likely to lead to job opportunities. Szkudlarek (2019) recommends the development of a jobs portal for employers seeking to recruit refugees, including listings of job opportunities and useful resources, such as how to meet social procurement targets.

In terms of ensuring long-term investment, Gibb (2018) recommends piloting to understand the resource requirements of employers when employing refugees before agreeing to scale up, finding ways to reduce costs for employers and ensuring refugee employment is embedded within the business by securing senior buy-in and engaging the HR team. Szkudlarek (2019) argues for the use of social procurement frameworks to identify refugees as a desired employee/ contractor category and to expand social procurement to more industries. In terms of reducing costs for employers, suggestions include match-funding programmes, lowering fees

in exchange for medium- or long-term commitment (Gibb, 2018) and using grants to encourage employer programmes and/or partnerships between employers and specialist service providers, with minimal red tape to encourage engagement of small and mid-sized employers (Szkudlarek, 2019).

The target, monitoring and funding regimes for support services can also be used to ensure alignment with government objectives. These can, for example, be structured to incentivise either immediate employment or career planning and professional advancement. (Finnan, 1982, cited in Lee et al., 2020). Staff training can also be important and, for example, Tweed et al. (2018) recommend increasing specialist support for refugees at Jobcentre Plus (JCP) with staff trained to have a good understanding of refugee issues. They state that, in addition, a more diverse workforce at JCP, more translators and multiple language speakers and/or leaflets in multiple languages in Job Centres could also support refugees on their employment journeys.

## **Conclusions**

There is a limited evidence base on effective engagement with employers. The research that does exist suggests that there can be a mismatch between the motivations of employers and the case that refugee support services make to employers, and that there is a need to:

- develop more effective and genuine partnerships between employers and support services, based on a thorough understanding of the needs and perspectives of employers;
- develop more co-ordinated support services for refugees and work with employers to help them (i) understand the barriers refugees face (ii) review their recruitment practices, and (iii) take action on barriers, such as weakness in language skills and a lack of UK work experience;
- ensure a match between the sectors where refugees aspire to work and where they have realistic chances of securing employment, and the sectors that employment engagement activity focuses upon; and
- ensure a focus upon supporting refugee recruitment and also retention and progression in work.

The evidence also suggests that there are examples of good practice that can inform practice in Wales. This is a complex challenge, and as Szkudlarek (2019) concludes: “successful hiring and retention of refugees requires a long-term, holistic approach, involving all levels of management, the support of influential staff members and businesses and the engagement of peers and supervisors”.

However, it is important to note that this was a small scale scoping study (and cannot therefore be considered comprehensive) drawing upon international sources (whose findings may not necessarily be transferable to a Welsh context).

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## **Annex B. Labour market skill gaps and opportunities in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham**

### **Introduction**

The analysis of labour market skill gaps and opportunities in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham draws upon data from the 2015 and 2017 Employer Skill Surveys (UKCES, 2016; DfE, 2017) and regional market intelligence reports (Welsh Government, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). It is important to bear in mind that the data on labour market skill gaps and opportunities discussed in the first part of this section was collected three to four years ago and, as outlined later, has been affected by COVID-19 and is expected to be further affected by the UK leaving the EU.

### **Skills shortages and gaps**

There were skills shortages and gaps within all reported sectors in all three Welsh regions (where data was available):

- “specialist skills and knowledge” and “ability to manage own time and prioritise own tasks” were the most commonly reported skill shortage vacancies<sup>60</sup>, while “ability to manage own time and prioritise own tasks” and “team work” were amongst the most common skill gaps within the current workforce; and
- manufacturing had the highest incidence of skills shortage vacancies<sup>61</sup> and skills gaps density<sup>62</sup>; skilled trades had the highest density of skill shortage vacancies, and machine operatives had the highest skills gaps density.

### **Labour market projections**

As table B.1. illustrates, an increase in the number of new jobs is forecast and also large increases in “replacement demand” (where the jobs of those leaving the labour market when they, for example, retire, need to be filled) in Wales up until 2024 (when the forecast ends).

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<sup>60</sup> These are defined as: “vacancies which are reported to be hard to-fill because applicants lack relevant skills, qualifications or experience” (DfE, 2017, p.6).

<sup>61</sup> The incidence of skill shortage vacancies is a measure of the proportion of establishments reporting at least one skill shortage vacancy.

<sup>62</sup> Skills gaps density is a measure of skill-shortage vacancies as a proportion of all vacancies.

**Table B.1: Labour market projections 2014-2024**

Region	New jobs (% increase)	New Jobs (#)	Replacement jobs (#)
South east Wales	4.4	29,300	263,400
South west & mid Wales	4	12,500	122,400
North Wales	3	9,900	128,200

*Source: Welsh Government, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c*

In all three regions, wholesale and retail trades, followed by health and social care, has the largest projected increase in employment demand (new jobs and replacements) (see table B.2 for details).

**Table B.2: The number of new, replacement and total jobs in the wholesale and retail trade and health and social care sectors (2014-2024)**

Region	Sector	New jobs (#)	Replacement jobs (#)	Total jobs (#)
South east Wales	Wholesale and retail	10,000	40,300	<b>50,300</b>
West & mid Wales		6,000	24,000	<b>30,000</b>
North Wales		3,700	18,400	<b>22,100</b>
South east Wales	Health and social care	3,600	40,900	<b>44,500</b>
West & mid Wales		2,000	25,000	<b>27,000</b>
North Wales		1,500	19,700	<b>21,200</b>

*Source: regional market intelligence reports*

Table B.3. shows the occupations with the highest projected increase in demand (i.e. new jobs and replacement demand), highlighting a similar pattern in all regions, with caring and personal service occupations showing the largest increase.



**Table B.3: Occupations with the highest projected increase in employment demand (new jobs and replacement) in the three regions 2014-2024**

	South east		Mid and south west		North	
	#	Rank	#	Rank	#	Rank
Caring and personal service occupations	32,900	(1 <sup>st</sup> )	20,200	(1 <sup>st</sup> )	15,300	(1 <sup>st</sup> )
Teaching and educational professionals	24,300	(2 <sup>nd</sup> )	15,500	(2 <sup>nd</sup> )	11,100	(3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Administrative occupations	24,100	(3 <sup>rd</sup> )	13,300	(4 <sup>th</sup> )	10,100	(5 <sup>th</sup> )
Elementary administration and service occupations	22,400	(4 <sup>th</sup> )	13,900	(3 <sup>rd</sup> )	11,500	(2 <sup>nd</sup> )
Health professionals	21,800	(5 <sup>th</sup> )	13,200	(5 <sup>th</sup> )	10,100	(4 <sup>th</sup> )
Business and public service associate professionals	19,600	(6 <sup>th</sup> )	10,900	(6 <sup>th</sup> )	8,600	(5 <sup>th</sup> )
Corporate managers and directors	18,100	(7 <sup>th</sup> )	10,300	(7 <sup>th</sup> )	8,300	(7 <sup>th</sup> )

*Source: regional market intelligence reports*

Other sectors with large projected increases in new jobs (i.e. excluding replacement demand) include:

- professional services (increase of 4,900 jobs) and support services (increase of 4,500 jobs) in south east Wales;
- accommodation and food (increase of 3,200 jobs), and construction (increase of 2,800 jobs) in mid and south west Wales;
- finance and insurance (3,800 jobs in south east, 1,000 jobs in south west and mid, and 500 jobs in north Wales);
- accommodation and food (increase of 2,600 jobs) in north Wales; and
- water and sewerage (1,000 jobs in south east, 500 jobs in south west and mid and 400 jobs in north Wales) (ibid.).

In all three regions the forecasts show that: “increases in employment are projected for those holding qualifications at Level 4 and above, whilst large declines are projected for those with low or no qualifications”. Nevertheless: “there will still be

opportunities for people with low or no qualifications due to replacement demand” (Welsh Government, 2020a, p.75).

### **Demand and supply of labour**

As well as the total number of jobs created or needing to be replaced (demand), it is important to consider the supply of labour and consequently the numbers of hard to fill vacancies in different sectors; for example, as outlined above, while large increases in teaching and educational professions are forecast, there has been a longstanding oversupply of teachers in Wales, albeit with some gaps in areas like head teachers, those with the ability to teach through the medium of Welsh and STEM subject teachers. The picture as regards support staff is also different (with greater demand relative to supply) (EWC, 2017).

### **Unemployment rates**

Pre COVID-19, the unemployment rate in Wales was at a historical low of 3.7 per cent. Table B.4 below shows the rate was particularly low in Cardiff and Newport, both lower than the national average, with Swansea and Wrexham higher than the national average (ONS, 2020a).

**Table B.4: Unemployment rates in Cardiff, Newport, Wrexham, Swansea and Wales on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020**

<b>Local authority</b>	<b>Unemployment rate</b>
Cardiff	3.2
Newport	3.0
Swansea	4.7
Wrexham	4.4
Wales	3.7

*Source: StatsWales, 2020*

At a UK level the short term impact of COVID-19 upon different sectors has been uneven, with sectors such as accommodation and food services, arts, entertainment, recreation and construction particularly badly hit. Longer term forecasts for unemployment suggest that the UK level could rise to around 8 per cent in 2020 before declining to around 6.5 per cent in 2021 (HM Treasury, 2020).

Table B.5 details the sectors with the largest workforce and those, such as accommodation and food service activities, construction and manufacturing, worst hit by COVID-19 (in terms of the percentage of employees furloughed), which are highlighted in amber.

**Table B.5: The percentage of the workforce that worked in the seven largest industries in Wales (June 2020)**

<b>EWC standard industrial classification.</b>	<b>% of workforce</b>
Human health & social work activities	15
Wholesale & retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	12
Manufacturing	10
Education	10
Accommodation & food service activities	8
Administrative & support service activities	7
Construction	7

*Source: ONS Workforce Jobs by region and industry June 2020 (n=1,489,000)*

The medium term impact as lockdown is eased, is uncertain. It appears reasonable to assume that some sectors, such as accommodation and food service activities and travel will be slower to recover than others, and changes in the way work is organised may change the numbers of jobs in different sectors (Joyce and Xu, 2020).

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