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Impact Report:
The ReConnect PGCE
Programme 2005-2021

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March 2023

RECONNECT TO TEACHING

An Impact Survey Report of PGCE Programme for Refugees

What does ReConnect do?

Reconnect is a small London-based charity supporting refugees to gain skills and mainstream qualifications, particularly in teaching. It initiates collaboration, and partners with academic institutions to enable the provision of structured educational programmes, one-to-one guidance, and support to unemployed and underemployed refugees.

For nearly two decades ReConnect has worked with reputable academic and training institutions, helping hundreds of people with a refugee background realize their potential, reconnecting them to higher education and professional employment.

What is the PGCE Programme?

In partnership with Birkbeck University of London and University College London (UCL) Institute of Education, ReConnect supported 59 refugees who undertook a teacher training programme – Post-Compulsory Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) between 2005 and 2021.

Completing the Post-Compulsory PGCE enables refugees to teach in Further Education (FE), Adult and Community Colleges. It can also be beneficial for those who intend to teach in other countries because it is an internationally recognised academic qualification.

ReConnect's support for the Post-Compulsory PGCE students includes fees for the 2-year training course with guidance, payment of Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS), and Occupational Health Checks fees, and cost of travel. In total, an expenditure of approximately £11,000 is needed to support a trainee teacher for the 2-year part-time PGCE programme. From 2005-2011, the programme received financial support from the UK Government. Unfortunately, this funding was discontinued in 2011 by the then incoming government. In 2018 and 2019, ReConnect was able to support 5 students on the PGCE Programme through funds from Sarah Hayward Legacy Fund and the Equator Fund.

Why are we doing this survey report?

In the UK, a significant number of refugees who are highly qualified and have professional backgrounds are underemployed or unemployed. Access to advice leading to higher education and professional training courses is an important way for them to gain qualifications and seek opportunities for appropriate employment.

The report investigates participants' employment situations, challenges they face in seeking employment and discusses further support that could be provided. It focused on how the programme supported participants to find appropriate employment and contributed to their professional development. The objective of the report is to demonstrate the impact and value of the programme.

How was the report conducted?

This is an independent impact report undertaken by Zhen Yang, a PhD candidate at the University of Warwick. The researcher has been working with ReConnect as a part of PhD project, which enables her to familiarize herself with ReConnect's work while retaining research independency to evaluate the programme's impact.

Three major steps were followed to produce the impact report. First, the researcher consulted relevant literature and ReConnect's Director to gain both theoretical and practical background information. Based on this information, a questionnaire was designed to collect up-to-date information on participants, barriers they faced in accessing teaching jobs, support they would like to have had, and further comments to the programme. Then the questionnaires were distributed via email, to PGCE graduates whom ReConnect is still in touch with.

For those who have not responded or whose email address are out of date, the researcher has tried to contact them individually by mobile phone or social media. However, it was not easy to contact all participants, especially for those who participated in the early years of the programme. They are out of reach for various reasons such as moving to other places, changing email addresses and phone numbers. The Director has also tried to contact this group via social networks. As a result, a total of 12 participants have completed the questionnaire. As to other participants, although their current employment situations are not clear, most of them were in employment according to a job outcome survey conducted by ReConnect in 2016 (and more recent updates). The current survey

includes the latest job status of refugees supported by ReConnect on Post-Compulsory PGCE programmes.

In conclusion, the employment rate of the programme is quite high according to the questionnaire result and previous survey.

Who were the participants of the programme?

In this section, profiles of the students enrolled in the programme are provided to understand the demographic makeup of the programme. The data are drawn from a paper prepared by Theodoros Abraham, the Director of ReConnect, entitled ‘*An overview of ReConnect and its Teacher Training Programmes for Refugee Teachers*’ updated in February 2023.

Gender profile

33 men (55.9%); 26 women (44.1%)

Age profile

	Female	Male	Total	%
20-25				
26-30	1		1	1.7
30-35	4	3	7	11.8
35-40	6	8	14	23.7
40-45	5	7	12	20.4
45-50	7	7	14	23.7
50-55	3	4	7	11.8
55-60	0	1	1	1.7
61 and above		3	3	5.1
	26 (44.1%)	33 (55.9%)	59	

Countries of origin

	Female	Male	Total	%
Bosnia	1		1	1.7
Cameroun		1	1	1.7
Colombia		1	1	1.7
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)		2	2	3.4
Ecuador		1	1	1.7
Eritrea	1		1	1.7
Ethiopia	3	13	16	27
Iran	5	2	7	11.8
Iraq	4		4	7.4
Kosovo	3	1	4	7.4
Libya		1	1	1.7
Myanmar		1	1	1.7
Nepal		1	1	1.7
Russia	1		1	1.7
Sierra Leone		1	1	1.7
Somalia	1	6	7	11.8
Sudan	3		3	5.1
Turkey	2		2	3.4
Uganda		1	1	1.7
Zimbabwe	2	1	3	5
Total	26 44.1%	33 55.9%	59	

Highest Academic Qualifications before PGCE

Qualification	Number	Percentage %
First degree	34	57.6
Masters	23	38.9
MPhil	1	1.7
PhD	1	1.7
	59	

Subject of study-highest academic qualifications

Subject	First Degree	Postgraduate	MPhil	PhD	Total	%
Agriculture	2	1			3	5.1
Architecture, Building & Planning		1			1	1.7
Biological Science	2	1			3	5.1
Business and Administrative Studies	2	3			5	8.5
Computer Science	4	4			8	13.5
Creative Arts and Design	3	4			7	11.8
Development Studies		2			2	3.4
Education	3	1			4	6.7
Engineering and Technology	5				5	8.5
Languages	4	1			5	8.5
Librarianship and Information Science	1				1	1.7
Law				1	1	1.7
Management		1			1	1.7
Mathematical Sciences	2				2	3.4
Pharmacy	1				1	1.7
Physical Sciences	1				1	1.7
Social, Economic and Political Sciences	4	4	1		9	15.3
	34 57.6%	23 38.9%	1 1.7%	1 1.7%	59	

Although with a relatively even split between male and female, the data shows a diverse group of students in terms of gender, age, nationality, and subject of study. This diversity can contribute to a rich and varied learning environment and may help to prepare the students for the diverse student body they may encounter in the teaching profession.

The largest group of students has a first degree in engineering and technology, followed by computer science, and social, economic, and political sciences. The majority of students hold a first degree, and almost 40% hold a master's degree. This highlights the academic achievements of the students in the programme.

Overall, the profiles suggest that the PGCE Programme is successful in promoting diversity and providing opportunities for individuals from a variety of backgrounds to become teachers.

What has the programme achieved?

'The work of ReConnect has apparently helped me to go back to my PGCE training. Subsequently, I was able to gain confidence in the teaching profession which I always passionately loved to do. I believe there are many refugees who are crying for the type of opportunities I got, so that, they will be able to help the host community in return and also share their academic and life experiences.'

-a former student, Questionnaire, 25/11/2022

'I enjoy the programme. It's very well organized besides; tutors are so helpful and supportive. I had already studied teaching in my country so I am familiar with the content covered. Still, I have an opportunity to remember things I forgot. Most importantly I learn from classmates. Everyone has a different background and experience. It is exciting to hear about different perspectives.'

-a former student, Newsletter Issue 2, 2019

'The PGCE course helped me to get back on track. I met other people who experienced similar challenges who inspired me. On the other hand, academic writing was challenging but with the support and constructive feedback I improved. This course encouraged me to keep my own identity while integrating which showed me that it was possible to contribute to the society I lived in (my new home) without assimilating. The course definitely made me feel stronger. Moreover, I made wonderful friends. The PGCE course was very well designed. It covered both theory and practice. The classmates were great. The tutors were very experienced and supportive. During teaching practice I learned very practical tips. It was a great opportunity to implement what we had been learning in theory. Moreover, I got familiar with college environment.'

-a former student, Newsletter Issue 6, 2021

The quotes above are from former students who now work both as lecturers in Further Education Institutions. Their comments clearly illustrate what the programme has achieved. In addition to the quotes, an overview of the employment situation is provided to give a clear view of the programme's achievement.

Employment prospects

In this section, the current employment situation of questionnaire participants will be first shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Employment situations of other students who participated in the PGCE programme are shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

	Number	% of total
Full-time employment	4	33
Part-time employment	6	50
Self-employment	1	8
Unemployed	1	8
Total	12	100

The figures show that almost all participants are in employment currently. The only participant who is unemployed is studying for a professional qualification while doing voluntary work in charities. While the overall employment rate is satisfying, it should be noticed that 50% of respondents are in part-time jobs. Part-time jobs are usually not sufficient to meet daily living needs especially for those who have dependents. This problem is also pointed out by the participants, which will be discussed in later section.

	Number	% of total
Universities/ colleges	7	64
Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)	2	18
private sector	1	9
Others	1	9
Total	11	100

Table 2 shows the different sectors within which the participants have found employment. The majority of participants found work in universities or colleges, either as educational or administrative staff. It should be noted that jobs in other sectors are also often teaching jobs.

As the questionnaire results only include a selection of participants of the PGCE programme, the following tables combine previous surveys to provide as complete a picture of the employment situation as possible. Note that the employment status of these individuals was collected from 2016

to 2022, and this may have changed by now. However, these data are still informative and offer some insights to evaluate the programme's impact.

	Number	% of total
Employment	34	58
Unemployed	1	2
Self-employed	5	8
Deceased	1	2
Untraced	18	30
Total	59	100

In spite of the fact that 30% participants are not traceable; the figures show that fully 58% of participants did find jobs after they completed the PGCE programme. Including those who were self-employed, the figures show that most of the participants have held some kind of work since completing. This offers strong evidence that the programme is of great significance in increasing employment prospects.

	Number	% of subtotal
Universities/ colleges	17	44
Schools	4	10
Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)	4	10
Private sector	7	18
Government	2	5
Others	5	13
Subtotal	39	100

Within the traceable participants, the largest group are in teaching jobs. In addition to those working in universities, colleges and schools, some also teach in non-profit organizations, including community organisations, or in private training and the educational sector. Those who pursue other kinds of jobs also confirmed that their knowledge and skills gained on the course are transferable and of great value. Overall, the PGCE programme has successfully supported refugees to find appropriate employment and rebuild their careers.

Increase of self-confidence and esteem

Through the programme, many students found that what they gained from the programme was more than a qualification, teaching expertise and experiences. Some participants stated that being

able to complete the programme provided a huge lift to their self-confidence and self-esteem. They feel that they became more confident in not only seeking employment but also taking on new challenges and taking control of their own lives.

Contribution to the host community and help to other refugees in need

Refugees' skills and knowledge are valuable. Being unemployed or underemployed is a great loss for both them and the host community. Many students have expressed their commitment to give back to the host community, and through the programme they gained opportunities to use their skills and knowledge to benefit the wider community. In addition, they are also able to share their experiences with others who seek teaching careers, assisting them with practical advice and mental support.

Barriers to teaching jobs

The researcher examined barriers and needs based on students' voices to better facilitate their entry into employment. The following are major barriers that students stated. Note that this report only includes a small number of barriers facing refugees, and other problems also exist and need to be addressed.

Lack of experience of teaching in the UK

A lack of teaching experience in the UK is one major barrier for many refugees accessing teaching jobs after completing the training programme. Although some have had teaching experiences in their countries of origin, their prior work experiences are often perceived as less equal or disregarded compared to work experiences in the UK.

Participants pointed out that the work placement embedded in the PGCE programme is of great importance to gain valuable experience in the UK education system. However, they also noted that the placement is not enough for them to compensate for the lack of teaching experience in the UK.

Accordingly, participants who have work experiences in addition to the placement tend to be more competitive in securing teaching jobs. One participant stated that:

'I am one of the students, who had the opportunity to start teaching on part-time basis whilst attending the second year of my part-time PGCE course. I had continued teaching in the same college for another year, which gave me the sought-after work experience in addition to the work placement that I had as part of the PGCE programme. Ever since, I am working in the FE sector with varied roles and responsibilities by being proactive in my subject specific and other aspects of professional developments.'

-a former student, Questionnaire, 14/11/2022

Lack of information and advice

Lack of information and advice is another problem stated by participants. Some said that they have trouble in searching effectively for suitable teaching jobs, and they are not well aware of the sources of information about teaching vacancies. Participants also reported that a lack of information about the UK education system and employers' requirements has affected the ability to find employment.

The Post-Compulsory PGCE does not automatically lead to QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) - a legal requirement for teachers working in public sector schools but is not mandatory in the Further Education (FE) sector. This should be made clear to future students of the programme in case they want to work in the school sector.

Problems after securing teaching jobs

Full-time jobs are hard to find

Most participants who are in teaching emphasized the difficulties of finding a full-time job. This problem does not only occur in applying for the first job, but even after a few years of work, respondents can still face the problem of not being able to find a full-time job. As a result, they have to take on several part-time jobs, whether teaching or not, to make a living.

One reason for this is that funding for the Higher Education and Further Education sectors has been reducing for many years. This means that publicly funded FE institutions face stiff competition to secure funding. To reduce costs, FE institutions prefer to provide part-time jobs such as Hourly Paid Lecturer (HPL). Thus, with less work experience, refugees are more likely to receive part-time job offers rather than full-time.

Poor physical health and home responsibilities

A few respondents have had to stop working or change jobs due to medical reasons or responsibility to take care of their family. Although these seem to be individual cases, many studies and reports have shown that health issues and home responsibilities can seriously affect refugees' employment prospects.

Recommendations

The PGCE Programme supported by ReConnect has achieved a remarkable success. If combined with further services, it will significantly increase the employment prospects of refugees in the teaching profession. The following recommendations are made based on the research.

Fundraising

Fundraising is crucial to restart the PGCE programme and support more students to become qualified teachers. ReConnect staff and Trustees are actively considering how to take this forward.

It might be useful to organize fundraising events raise funds and awareness for the cause. A possible solution may be embedding a section of fundraising in the Refugee Week event. Another way is crowdfunding through online fundraising platforms to reach a larger audience and gather donations from individuals. In addition, all fundraising efforts should be advertised through social media, email, and even local media.

Information, advice, and counselling services

Several methods could be taken to address the lack of information about employment opportunities.

1. a platform that shares job opportunities, strategies to be adopted in job seeking, and other relevant information

This could be achieved by creating an online space through ReConnect's website, mail-list or via social media. This could make the best use of the existing networks of relevant individuals, organizations and communities. The platform could share not only information related to employment, but also create an online community where people could connect to each other and find peer-support. This would provide a space for students

to connect with potential employers and mentors, as well as opportunities for professional development and growth.

2. individual counselling and advice service

ReConnect currently provides one-to-one assessment, guidance to individuals with a refugee background who are seeking advice on higher education and career progression, including those who have completed the PGCE in the Post Compulsory sector (ReConnect, 2021). PGCE graduates can also seek advice from the careers department of Institute of Education, UCL. In addition to the current service, specific guidance including possible job vacancies, CV writing advice, interview techniques could be provided to help navigate their career. ReConnect can also partner with relevant organizations to expand the range of services provided and utilize the expertise of external partners to provide more comprehensive support to individuals with a refugee background. Indeed, ReConnect implemented two job brokerage projects between 2008 and 2010. These projects entailed the employment of two mentors responsible for conducting workshops aimed at assisting participants. The support provided encompassed tailored employment guidance and individual assessments, comprising vacancy searches, formulation of personal statements, CV preparation, fostering familiarity with Further Education (FE) experiences, as well as refining interview techniques and practices (ReConnect 2008, 2010). As a result of these job brokerage projects, more than 70 participants were able to effectively articulate their qualifications and skills in a manner that employers comprehend and value. Consequently, I strongly recommend the reinstatement of the job brokerage services as a means to facilitate our participants' access to the employment market, thereby opening doors of opportunity for them.

3. enhance personal skills and increase teaching experience

It was suggested that gaining QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) or QTLS (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skill Status) alongside PGCE would widen the opportunities for teaching employment. In addition, increasing teaching experience is also of great importance in seeking employment, for this group to trainees. Providing students with more work placement opportunities will contribute to the transition from course completion to employment.

In conclusion, ReConnect's PGCE programmes offer an invaluable opportunity for refugees who aspire to return to teaching; however, currently only a few can access it. ReConnect needs the support of various partners to provide PGCE programmes and support services to help refugees reconnect with their prior professional work, re-certify themselves, and utilize their broad knowledge and experience to benefit students in the UK Education sector.

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