

Qualifications

The 2011 Census revealed that people born in N Ireland were nearly twice as likely to have no qualifications, 30%, as migrants from Central and Eastern European countries, for whom the figure was 17%.

www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2013/general/13813.pdf

Migrant workers, however, are often employed well below the level of their qualifications and in industries that are different from their area of expertise. It is not unusual to meet a physiotherapist working as a cleaner in a supermarket. The minimum wage here may well be more than a professional wage in some other countries and young people, here to improve their English or to earn money quickly before returning home, may be happy to work below their skills level.

‘... [D]iscussions with a Slovakian migrant worker revealed that he was unconcerned about improving his standard of employment, as, for him, success would be measured by an improvement in speaking and writing in English...’

Mary Hickman, Helen Crowley and Nick Mai, *Immigration and Social Cohesion in the UK*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008 www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/2230-deprivation-cohesion-immigration.pdf

Others, however, feel that they are meeting discrimination. When the Equality Commission NI was researching the role of agencies they found that

Many migrant workers who participated in this investigation indicated that they were prevented from registering for work with some recruitment agencies because they lacked English language skills; including agencies that were recruiting for the type of work that would require very little verbal communication.

... many workers encounter problems, find it difficult to obtain work that matches their qualifications and are confined to irregular and temporary work. ... For some the job was not as expected. For example, one man was told he would be working using his physiotherapy qualifications but on arrival there was no such job and he was actually distributing leaflets.

The Role of the Recruitment Sector in the Employment of Migrant Workers, 2010
www.migrationni.org/DataEditorUploads/ECMigrantfullrpt.pdf

Agencies say that checking foreign qualifications is time consuming and the report stresses that ‘The language barrier also creates difficulties in terms of the recognition of the equivalency of foreign qualifications.’ In some cases it is clear that difficulty with language would prevent migrant workers from working effectively at the level of their skills and qualifications. In other cases, however, it is employers that lack the language skill to allow them to understand and accept foreign qualifications. Negative attitudes may play a part. One group of researchers found that someone who had studied in South America was told that a qualification from a ‘jungle university’ was not acceptable. (D. Holder, C. Lanao, *Case Studies of discrimination and disadvantage for Portuguese Migrant Workers*. Dungannon: STEP, Animate, 2005.)

Research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation locally confirms that ‘underemployment’ contributes to poverty among minority-ethnic people. More seriously, there is the suggestion that official employability training schemes tend to push people into expected roles e.g. in health and social care, which seem helpful in the short term.

However the extent to which these are appropriate longer-term solutions is not clear, especially if such schemes segment different ethnic groups within certain sectors of the labour market and they do not provide opportunities for progression. This can result in a perception among the majority communities

that these are the types of jobs that ethnic minority communities are content to undertake.

Ruth McAreavy, Policy briefing, Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series
Seminar on Migration, January 2014
www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series3/mcareavey090114.pdf

Employers check qualification equivalencies through the **National Academic Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (UK NARIC)**. www.naric.org.uk/ This is the official agency to providing information and advice to employees and employers, but not all migrant workers will know about it. There is a cost involved and additional charges for the English language certification which most employers require.

The **Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)** is licensed by NARIC and if you are resident in N Ireland seven Jobs and Benefits Offices and the EURES (European Employment Service) can provide you with comparison information and advice on your qualifications. www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/finding-employment/are-your-countrys-qualifications-recognised-uk

Some people are able to progress from job to job as their English improves and there is a happy ending:

'My qualification [from Poland] was in food technology. I started working in a chip shop in the village, then my English got better and I saw lots of opportunities to use my qualifications. I got a job as a quality control manager, what I always wanted to do in Poland.'

Worker quoted in "... Easy Life, Great People, Bad Weather" A Report on the Experiences of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, by John Bell, Anne Caughey, Ulf Hansson, Agnieszka Martynowicz and Maura Scully PDF

The team researching into links between poverty and ethnicity in N Ireland (see above) stated that the scheme had been used 823 times since the 2012 pilot, with the largest number of users being from Poland (17.9%) but was not well known by employers.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) should make it easier to compare the level of qualifications from different national systems thereby assisting the mobility of migrant workers within Europe. **Ofqual** (England) and **the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)** (Northern Ireland) are the joint **EQF National Coordination point (NCP)** for England and Northern Ireland.