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**Hungarian Migrants in the UK Labour Market: A Pilot Study on the  
Former Education of Hungarian Migrants and on Underutilisation of  
their Skills in the UK**

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## **Editor's Foreword**

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## ABSTRACT

Migration is a hugely contested area and the widely differing views, statistics, and attitudes to migrants are infused with politics. EU migration is a special case because EU citizens have free movement rights, may live and work in any other EU country, and have almost the same rights as locals. During the past 10 years there have been two waves of EU accession: in 2004 eight East European countries received the right to take up employment in the UK freely, and in 2007 when the UK introduced restrictions on Bulgarian and Romanian citizens to work in the UK, which were lifted on 1 January 2014.

In 2004 a much larger than expected number of A8 citizens moved to work in the UK, which raised the alarm in particular among the wider public. Questions were raised concerning the impact of the A8<sup>1</sup> migrants on social and welfare benefits, on youth unemployment, on the labour market, on wages, and whether or not the A8 migrants contribute to the UK economy and generate financial benefits for the country.

This study investigated the views and experiences of 10 Hungarian migrants living in the south-east of England. The data suggest that the UK offers better opportunities for Hungarian migrants to find employment than Hungary, and that there are better chances for them in the UK to establish financial security. Many of the interviewees have already worked excessive hours in Hungary, and some also engaged in low-skilled and low-paid work before coming to the UK. All interviewees were well educated at levels 3, 4 and 5 and often had two to three qualifications. In spite of this most interviewees found employment in the UK in low-skilled and low-paid work. English language skills, unknown Hungarian qualifications, lack of UK work experience, lack of time, and lack of financial resources were the main reasons for not being able to negotiate better jobs and starting higher on the job ladder.

Most interviewees felt uncomfortable in their low-skilled jobs and often felt that they would be able to offer so much more. They also felt they brought their positive attitude, flexibility, high standards, and, in particular, intelligence to their jobs. Career progression was very slow, and often they had one low-skilled job after the other, making horizontal moves rather than vertical. However, all were engaged in learning and professional development and education was considered as the means to success. All interviewees felt they had established financial security for themselves by 2014, they had permanent posts and their wages had increased over time. However, progressing in their chosen career or working according to their highest qualifications was a distant future for many.

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<sup>1</sup> The East European countries that joined the European Union in 2004 are: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Restrictions were lifted for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens to take up any employment in the UK labour market from 1 January 2014. This is now the second wave of East European accession to the EU and the second phase for Bulgaria and Romania. Yet again, Eastern Europe's real and potential migrants hit the newspapers' headlines.

This is a fiercely contested area and the widely differing views, statistics, and attitudes to migrants are infused by politics. There is no reliable statistical database of East European migrants already living in the UK, and there are only estimates of future new arrivals. However, not only politicians but many others from the wider society engage with the debate, given the intensity and often negativity of coverage in the popular media. Media coverage from January 2014 echoes that of May 2004 when the A8 (recent literature refers to these as EU8) accession countries joined the EU.

For the UK there is a fundamental difference between the EU accession in 2004 and the opening up of the labour market to Bulgarians and Romanians who joined the EU in 2007. The 2004 A8 countries faced transitional arrangements, that is, employment restrictions in most Western European countries until 2011, except in the UK, Ireland, and Sweden. Inevitably, these three countries that enabled unlimited access to their labour markets were to share the full migration flow from the A8 countries. As a result of the size of the post-2004 labour migration in the UK, Bulgaria and Romania were not granted free access and strict labour market restrictions were put into operation to avoid a similar experience. However, from 1 January 2014 Bulgarians and Romanians are able to choose employment in a number of Western European countries simultaneously, such as Spain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, which should ease the pressure on the UK labour market. There is also at least one similarity in the way the UK reacted towards the new EU accession countries in 2004 and 2014 and that is to make last-minute arrangements to protect its welfare system.

### **The scale and composition of UK migrants**

The UK has been a popular destination for labour migrants in the past. Migrants to the UK include a wide range of groups of foreign-born people (or second/third

generation) who settled temporarily or permanently for a variety of reasons. The classification of migrant groups is endless and so is the definition of migrants. There are, for example, asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants. They all arrive for various reasons, such as for safety and protection, for taking up employment or joining a family member. Collett argues that ‘those [from within the EU] who take advantage of their free movement rights are not considered migrants, but mobile citizens, and have a set of near-equivalent rights to those of native residents in each EU country’ (2013, 1). In this report the more widely used term ‘migrant’ will be used for those EU citizens who move countries in order to take up employment.

There are a number of databases through which monitoring foreign nationals’ movements and activities is possible. However, each data source has its limitations (Gillingham 2010; Ker, Zumpe, and Blake 2009). There is, for example, the National Insurance Allocation to Adult Overseas Nationals (Department for Work and Pensions) database, the International Passenger Survey (random sample of passengers entering and leaving the UK by the Office of National Statistics), and the Labour Force Survey. The Worker Registration Scheme, which operated between the spring of 2004 and 30 April 2011, was specifically set up to monitor the A8 countries and to regulate access to the labour market. Despite the many databases it is difficult to state an accurate figure, not only for people entering the UK but also for those who decide to return to their country of origin. The number of migrants who are returning (and the net migration figures) is equally important when we discuss the scale and impact of migrants, for example, on the labour market or the local community. According to the Office for National Statistics (May 2013), net migration figures demonstrate a peak of 253,000 in 2004–05 as a result of the EU enlargement but then show an overall decline to 182,000 in the year ending June 2013 (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Migration>).

Since the late 1990s labour immigration was encouraged and, as a result, the annual number of work permits issued to non-European Economic Area nationals increased from fewer than 30,000 in the mid-1990s to an annual average of over 80,000 in the early 2000s. Immigration has become highly significant to the UK economy: immigrants comprise 12% of the total workforce. The distribution of migrants is unbalanced in the UK and a much higher proportion lives in London. However, there are contradictory arguments and evidence whether or not net immigration generates significant economic benefits for the UK. The House of Lords

reports no significant economic benefit of labour migrants to the local population, but adds: ‘Of course, many immigrants make a valuable contribution to the UK’ (2008, 6).

### **Focus on labour migrants from the East European accession countries**

European integration and membership of the European Union enable free movement of labour and provide an increased choice of where people can work. As a result, the increasing flow of people creates new challenges for governments and national economies. Employers look for specific skills and competencies, while migrants arrive with qualifications that are not described in terms that are used, recognised, and understood in the receiving country (Laczik and Lasonen 2010). The A8 migrants temporarily or permanently relocate their place of residence in order to take up employment.

Based on Labour Force Survey data, those born in A8 countries made up less than 1% of the working-age population – just over 7% of the total immigrant population of working age. However, A8 immigrants account for one in three new immigrants since 2004 (House of Lords 2008, 12). At the end of 2012, 658,000 A8 citizens were in employment in the UK (Vargas-Silva 2013).

As already mentioned, in the spring of 2004 the UK decided to monitor immigration flows from Eastern Europe by setting up the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) in order for new migrants to register their employment. Initially registration cost £50 but was then raised to £90. Through the WRS A8 migrants had restricted access to benefits and welfare services. The WRS accumulated data about the newly arrived EU migrants. Between 1 May 2004 and 30 April 2011, a total of 1,133,950 A8 nationals registered for employment in the UK (McCollum 2013). The much larger than expected immigration of A8 workers since May 2004 is a good example of the difficulties in predicting and measuring migration flows and migrant stocks in the UK. The decision to grant A8 countries free access to the UK’s labour market received substantial attention, even though numbers suggest that: ‘In 2008, the recent European migrants made up less than 1.5 per cent of the working-age population after five years of migration’ (Sumption and Somerville 2010, 38). In 2006 the majority of A8 migrants were Poles (58%), Lithuanians (14%), and Slovaks

(11%). Ninety nine per cent of National Insurance numbers (NINO) allocated were for work and not for claiming benefits.

A8 migrants are younger and better educated than the UK workforce (Wadsworth 2012). Statistics also show that 70% of A8 migrants are between the ages of 18 and 34, and 45% of the most recent migrants left full-time education at the age of 21, compared to 17% of UK-born. Despite their high-level qualifications, A8 immigrants are more concentrated in low-skilled jobs, with 38% in elementary occupations and only 13% in higher-skilled occupations (House of Lords 2008). Measuring immigrants' skills and educational qualifications is difficult because few qualifications obtained abroad are directly comparable to English qualifications. For recent A8 immigrants there seems to be a significant mismatch between their education and skills, and their employment in the UK.

In 2012 the employment rate of A8 immigrants was high (88%) in comparison with immigrants born in Bangladesh (77%) (Rienzo 2013). In line with their low-skilled jobs, the average earnings of A8 workers have been particularly low, with recently arrived Poles earning an average of £6 per hour between 2003–06; also, the vast majority of recent A8 immigrants have been employed in low-paying jobs at around the minimum wage (House of Lords 2008, 136). More recent data suggests an increased average hourly rate for A8 workers in 2012: for men £9.34 per hour, and for women £8.55 per hour. Nevertheless, A8 workers still receive lower wages than any other migrant group in the UK (Rienzo 2013). Drinkwater and Anderson (House of Lords, 2008) suggest that immigrants' earnings in the UK depend on, for example, proficiency in English language skills, work experience, education, ethnicity, work through recruitment agency, and length of time spent in the UK.

Due to the size and composition of A8 migrants, questions have been raised concerning their impact on the UK labour market and local communities, their contribution to the UK economy, and their use of the benefit and welfare system. These questions address the concerns of both politicians and the general public. An analysis by the Department of Work and Pensions found 'no discernible statistical evidence which supports the view that the inflow of A8 migrants is contributing to a rise in claimant [unemployment] in the UK' since May 2004 (Home Office and Department of Work and Pensions 2007, 16). This finding is reiterated and elaborated by Wadsworth (2010, 2012) and Dustmann, Frattini, and Halls (2010), who claim that A8 migrants are less likely to receive benefits and/or live in social housing. The

debate is, of course, not only about receiving benefits but also about contributing to the tax and welfare system. Dustmann, Frattini, and Halls conclude: ‘... a very positive picture of A8 immigration to the UK, one of highly educated, young people, entering into the UK predominantly to work with subsequent positive contributions to the tax system’ (2010, 18). They also suggest that migrants’ labour market situation significantly improve over time in terms of salary and labour force attachment.

However, the ITEM Club Special Report (December 2007) points to the potential negative impact of immigration on youth unemployment in the UK. The report notes that youth unemployment increased by about 100,000 since early 2004, and the participation rate in employment has dropped from 69.4% to 67.4%. ‘Given the age and skill profile of many of the new immigrants, it is possible that “native” youngsters may have been losing out in the battle for entry-level jobs’ (9). Blanchflower, Saleheen, and Shadforth remark: ‘The empirical literature from around the world suggests little or no evidence that immigrants have had a major impact on native labour market outcomes such as wages and unemployment. Recent work by a number of other authors for the UK is also consistent with this view’ (2007, 3). Sumption and Somerville (2010) also claim that migrants generate some economic benefit, such as improving labour market efficiency and increasing higher average wages in areas where migrants live.

### **Integration into society, integration into economic life**

In comparison to the dominant population, immigrants are disadvantaged in education and in the labour market, as Heath and Cheung (2007) concluded in their large-scale comparative study about second-generation immigrants in Western Europe, North America and Australia. Immigrants form a new layer of disadvantaged people in the stratification of Western societies. EU countries are concerned with this phenomenon that tells about both direct and indirect discrimination (Gundara 2000).

Employment is a way of self-fulfilment, and it is decisive not only concerning individual prosperity and economic growth but also when finding a way into society. This is especially true for migrants who decide to make a living in a country other than where they were born, educated, and were an integral part of society. Brown (2009) claims that language proficiency, or initial language knowledge, is a precondition of long-term structural and social integration, and is also part of the



formal entry requirement. Spencer et al. (2007) point to the relationship between language knowledge and satisfaction with the information migrants received when entering the UK. Further, their study also suggests that language proficiency determines the level of integration into local society. Sumption and Somerville (2010) also warn that recent UK migrants' language barriers are greater than for earlier migrant groups, and that this reduces their opportunities for integration. With limited or no knowledge of the language of the country of residency, migrants' opportunities in the labour market are also limited. In the UK in certain sectors such as agriculture, language knowledge is not necessary to take up employment. Many migrants in the UK with limited or no language knowledge are employed for seasonal agricultural work. With this type of unskilled, low-paid work other challenges come into play, such as living isolated with other migrants in the countryside, losing accommodation when jobs are lost, lack of contact with natives, and no opportunity for developing language skills.

There are a relatively large number of overeducated A8 migrants working in unskilled, low-skilled and low-wage jobs. These migrants are not only employed in jobs that require a lower qualification than what they originally obtained in their country of origin, but they do not need any qualification in order to do the job. This difference in the entry level into the labour market may be explained by the different plans migrants have when they enter the country of destination. Post-2004 EU migrants often come with short-term plans or do not know how long their stay would last. This suggests that new UK migrants are willing to put up with less-favourable employment conditions because they do not see their jobs as long-term arrangements.

As a result they often have precarious employment and housing arrangements, they are more vulnerable to exploitation, they have limited or no access to information, and their language barriers are greater than for other immigration groups (Sumption and Somerville 2010, Spencer et al. 2007, Anderson et al. 2006). Their unemployment rate reaches the UK's level only after two years of residency. New A8 migrants are often favoured by employers for their flexibility, work ethic, and willingness to work anti-social hours. A8 migrants' strong work ethic, reliability and positive attitudes to work are acknowledged in the literature (Office for National

Statistics 2011, Stenning and Dawley 2009, Ruhs 2006). According to Anderson:

[G]ood attitude and work ethic are “highly subjective and potentially simplistic. ... In practice, “work ethic” often refers to a range of attributes and qualities including, for example: willingness to accept low wages and poor working conditions; effort and reliability; flexibility; willingness to train and acquire new skills; and ease of retention (House of Lords 2008, 35).

This, however, raises the question whether East European migrants are attractive to employers because of their high work ethic or because of their willingness to accept lower wages. ‘Work ethic’ is an umbrella phrase that is often used. However, its exact meaning depends on the person using it and on the context. There are both differences and overlaps between these meanings, as the House of Lords report above clearly demonstrates.

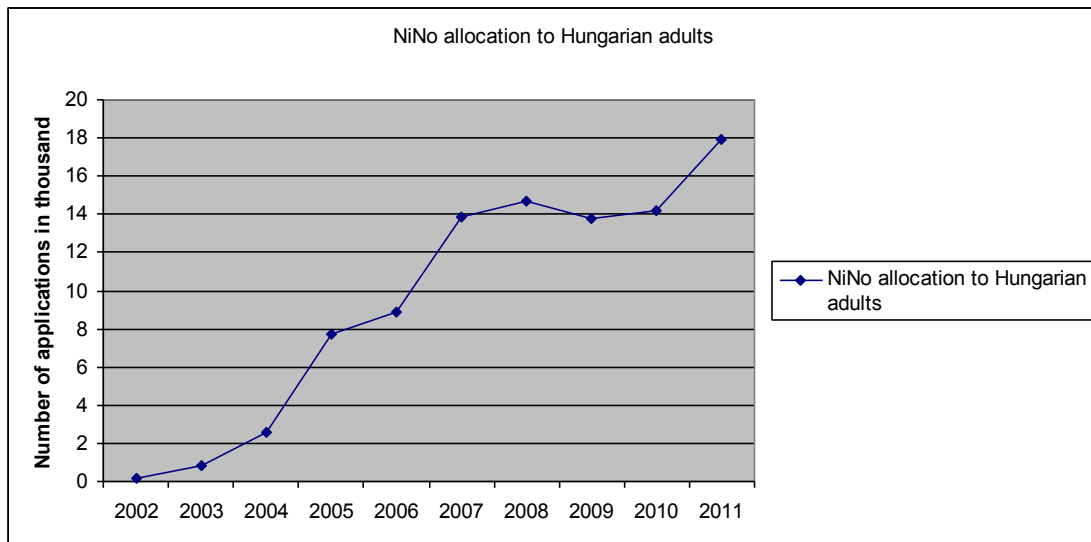
### **Economic migrants from Hungary**

Following the economic recession that began in 2008 and the 2012 economic setback, the most recent general election in Hungary, in 2010, triggered reasons for young adults to contemplate working or studying abroad. The recession in Hungary, the growing unemployment rate, insecurity, the lack of perspectives (168 óra 2012), and decreasing living standards (Hárs 2008) may make emigration for many a viable option.

In 2011–12 Hungary was listed for the first time in the top 10 for registering for NINOs in the UK (Department for Work and Pensions 2012). In 2011, 17,900 NINOs were allocated to Hungarian nationals, and 12.5% of all NINO allocations went to the new EU accession countries. Although the number of Hungarian allocations are small, there is a clear tendency of growth and there are three points in time when the numbers have significantly grown: in 2004–05, 2006–07 and in 2010–2011. The NINO dataset has its limitations (<http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/data-and-resources/data-sources-and-limitations/national-insurance-numbers>), such as not accounting for length of stay in the country and in employment. NINO does not expire and therefore relocation of migrants is not captured. This offers some insight into the number of Hungarian adults who have been planning to take up

employment in the UK and potentially can offer a basis of an estimated number of Hungarians accumulated over time.

**Figure 1: NiNo allocations to adult overseas nationals entering the UK: registrations to March 2012: tables (2012)**



Estimates for the number of Hungarians emigrating are available through the Hungarian Central Statistical Office through databases about personal data and registration of permanent addresses, and a number of research projects that address the number, age, gender, and characteristics of emigrants' employment. In addition, in Hungary 'mirror statistics' are used for estimating emigration. In 2011 official statistics account for over 200,000 Hungarians living in another EU country (Gödri 2012). According to the UK Annual Population Survey, about 47,000 Hungarians were living in the UK in 2011. However, it is accepted that the figures are compiled using a number of resources and emigration is difficult to measure.

Information about the emigration plans of the Hungarian population (the survey was restricted to taking up employment or settling abroad) is more readily available and suggests an increase in potential emigration (Hajdu and Tóth 2012, 6). According to the latest figures, one in five Hungarian adults plans to take up short-term employment (13%) or long-term employment (16%) abroad or permanently (7%) move abroad (Sik 2012). One in two adults under 30 is contemplating moving abroad. Clearly, the number of those who also act on their plans is smaller; nevertheless, a high percentage of Hungarian adults do not exclude the possibility of working and/or living abroad. A similarly increasing tendency is claimed by Hajdu

and Tóth, who researched Hungarians' searching for employment abroad through the Internet. Their assumption is that most migrants use the Internet to gather information in relation to taking up employment abroad. Their research of monitoring employment-related words and phrases between 2007–12 shows a considerable increase of interest in Austria, Germany, and the UK in 2011, with a peak in January 2012 (2012, 9–11). It is evidenced that Austria, Germany, and the UK are the main target countries for Hungarians when looking abroad.

## **THE STUDY**

There are national datasets, for example, for the number of migrants, their country of origin, level of education and their contribution to the tax and welfare system. There is, however, little known about the skills and knowledge these migrants bring into the UK, about their job trajectories and their progress over time. The number of Hungarian migrants, although relatively low, has significantly increased since 2004. In order to gain detailed knowledge of these aspects and to explore the views and experiences of the Hungarian economic migrants in the UK labour market, this qualitative study was conducted during the summer of 2011. Convenience and snowball sampling were used to invite research participants who had at least the *Matura* qualification and were not working according to their qualifications. Ten Hungarians, five men and five women between the ages of 23 and 37 and living in the south-east of England, were interviewed. Hungarians still have a relatively small community in the UK; therefore, to maximise anonymity a wider geographical area was covered when inviting them to participate in the study. In the report pseudonyms are used for easy following of lifelines. Individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (Appendix 1) were conducted that lasted between 45 and 80 minutes. All interviews were done in Hungarian and were transcribed verbatim. Content analysis was used to develop themes and sub-themes, and these were used as categories in the reporting. All interviewees were approached again between December 2013 and January 2014 and asked to outline the changes they experienced over the preceding two years. They answered questions (Appendix 2) about their jobs, responsibilities, courses and professional development, and financial situation. Some participants responded in writing through e-mail; others preferred a brief telephone conversation. These short interviews lasted 10 to 15 minutes and detailed notes were taken.

## **Background to education in Hungary**

All interviewees completed their highest qualification in Hungary before the country engaged with the Bologna process. The Bologna system would have affected only those who started their university education in or after September 2006. The pre-Bologna system meant that young people could obtain a degree after three years of studying in higher education institution like a polytechnic in the UK or *Hochschule* in Germany, or a degree after five years of studying at a university. In addition to the length of the study period, the former was more vocationally oriented while the latter more academic.

Similar to the higher education division there were two different types of secondary schools after which young people could take the *Matura* examination (similar to the British A-levels or the German *Abitur*). One was the upper-secondary vocational school, the other the highly academic *Gimnázium* (similar to grammar schools). The upper-secondary vocational school offers broad sector-related vocational education together with academic subject preparation. Young people from this type of school had to take both the vocationally related and the academic *Matura* examination. The *Matura* was necessary for young people to apply for a place in both types of higher education institution. The *Matura* is taken in five subjects: Hungarian literature and grammar, history, mathematics, one modern foreign language and one chosen subject.

All interviewees successfully completed at least their *Matura* examination with or without the vocationally related *Matura*, such as in economics, ICT, or nursing. Four of the interviewed Hungarians completed a five-year university degree; two had degrees from the polytechnic-type of higher education; one studied in a *Gimnázium*, then went on for a L4 state-accredited qualification; and one completed a L4 state-accredited qualification after upper-secondary vocational school and two finished the upper-secondary vocational school.

The following questions guided the research: What are the levels of qualification the interviewed migrants obtained? How do those compare to the level of employment they have in the UK? How is the (mis)match between the skills they developed in education or work and the skills they use in their current employment experienced? To what extent do they consider their employment history in the UK satisfactory? In what ways do migrants see themselves developing? What are their plans and ambitions? What do they do to achieve them?

This small-scale qualitative study does not allow us to generalise the study's findings to other Hungarians living in the UK, but it offers insights into some Hungarian migrants' experiences of working in the UK and their reflections on it. It also raises questions worth further investigation.

In the next section the findings from the interview data will be outlined using the themes that emerged during the analysis. While there are many similarities in the education and work trajectories and experiences of the interviewees, at the same time they all present unique examples in their specific situations.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

This section will discuss the findings focusing on four main themes: 1) Decision making: why they left Hungary and why they moved to the UK, 2) Education and work experiences in Hungary, 3) Working and progressing (or not) in the UK, 4) Plans and ambitions in 2011 and achievements in 2013–14.

### **Decision-making: why they left Hungary and why they moved to the UK**

#### ***Reasons for leaving Hungary***

Regardless of the level of education of the research participants, eight of the 10 Hungarians thought about leaving Hungary because they were unhappy with their work situation, earned low salaries and experienced financial insecurity. Three who graduated from a five-year teacher training university felt: 'We have no future at home.' One interviewee who worked in a school for many years added some details:

When you are 30 and the bank says: "I am not giving you a loan [because you only have] contract work." Then what do you do? There is your professional career, you love it, but you cannot start your own personal life.  
(*Kati*)

Another qualified teacher who had not been successful in finding employment according to his qualification in Hungary made a generic comment before exemplifying his own past:

Because in 2004 we were accepted into the [European] Union everybody from my age group, lots of us, thought we have to go because we saw that there are no opportunities in Hungary. Then there was an advert in the newspaper or at the rail station –, they were recruiting security guards and bus drivers. ... Then I thought I would apply because I don't have any other choice. (*Ádám*)

Two people moved to the UK straight after graduation without experiencing the Hungarian labour market, finding a job, or trying to make a living from the salary they may have earned there.

Even if initially some of the interviewed Hungarians were planning to go back to Hungary after a couple of years, at the time of the first interview in 2011 none of them were planning this any longer. All the interviewed Hungarians kept in close contact with family members and friends in Hungary and tried to keep themselves informed about recent changes. The information they gathered mainly came through personal contacts and Internet news. None of them had noticed much positive change in Hungary in comparison with what they had left behind, and many commented on the political, economic, and financial situation as reasons for not going back. One interviewee summarised this by reflecting on his experience in the UK, saying:

Here you have great opportunities. And they [the government] leave you alone, and you can work, they [the government] let you work. Even if you are a simple worker you pay your taxes and you may work. (*Attila*)

### ***Reasons for choosing the UK***

Moving to the UK was clearly a conscious decision for the interviewees. Regardless of the level of qualification, all interviewees had some English by the time they moved to the UK; four had a very basic level of English and three had very good command of the language. They all talked about the importance of being fluent in English, whether they had stayed in Hungary or worked in the UK. As one reflected: 'I will go abroad, I learn, my English will be good, then I will go home and will find a super-duper job' (*Judit*). From among the English-speaking countries some found the USA, Australia, and New Zealand too far away, and the UK seemed an excellent place to develop their language skills.

Not all interviewed Hungarians had acquaintances in the UK before they arrived in the country. Half of them followed a friend or family member while the other half

arrived in the UK not having had any prior personal local contact. While developing excellent language skills was one of the primary aims of many, this often coincided with the aim to experience and learn English culture and ‘seeing the world’.

All interviewed Hungarians moved to the UK after the 2004 EU accession: three in 2005–06 and seven between 2008 and 2010. However, only one referred to the open access to the UK labour market as a decisive reason for choosing the UK. Another person looked into migration to the UK and decided that it was a good ‘receiving’ country. He also investigated the UK economy, living standards, and salaries. He remembered:

Many years ago, in 2005 and 2006, the earning was the highest here. We paid much attention to this. At that time there were 400 forints to the pound or thereabouts, and here [in the UK] living standards were sky-high. [When I arrived in 2008] problems started ... and ever since the pound is getting weaker. (*Tamás*)

The UK was considered a country where the wages were higher even if doing low-skilled work. As one interviewee remarked: ‘I can work as a dustbin man, even they earn more [in the UK] than an office worker at home’ (*Géza*). For many leading a better life seemed more realistic in the UK.

Having decided to move to the UK, interviewees inevitably took the knowledge and experiences they had gained in Hungary with them. The next section will outline the knowledge, skills, and experiences the interviewed Hungarians had developed in Hungary and offered in the UK labour market.

## **Education and work experiences in Hungary**

### ***The interviewed Hungarians have a range of qualifications at a range of levels***

All interviewees were well educated; all had their *Matura* examination and half of them had higher education degrees. The educational trajectories of the interviewed Hungarians show, on the one hand, the usual natural progress that means obtaining an L4 qualification after the L3, and obtaining an L5 qualification after an L3 or L4; on the other hand, some of the interviewed Hungarians demonstrated progression in the opposite direction and decided to take an L2 qualification after they already gained a



higher-level, L3, L4 or L5 qualification. This could be explained by trying to adjust to labour market demand and to work as a qualified worker even if at a lower level.

Those who had completed the upper-secondary vocational schools considered their academic *Matura* useful but the additional sector-related preparation inadequate and/or non-relevant already in Hungary. The reasons behind completing a lower-level qualification were explained as having made the wrong choice, vocational aspect not linking to labour market demand, or simply having no interest in the subject previously studied. The person who had attended the ICT specialist upper-secondary vocational school considered his subject knowledge not more advanced after completion than what young people nowadays naturally develop by using computers and the Internet, and did not consider his specialist qualification to be an advantage in the labour market. Two of the qualified teachers, for example, did not want to teach after finishing their university degrees and were looking elsewhere, and two other Hungarians thought their L3 vocationally related *Matura* qualification would not lead to a job – the job for which they were trained did not exist in the Hungarian labour market.

Only one out of 10 had not applied for a university place. Some interviewees noted that it was a family expectation to obtain a higher-education degree. This put some pressure on the interviewees if they came from an intellectual family.

Most interviewees had a number of different qualifications (not necessarily obtained in an incremental fashion), not only in terms of levels but also in terms of subject areas.<sup>2</sup> Only three out of 10 had been developing themselves in the same subject area as their highest qualification and they were all qualified teachers. Five of the interviewed Hungarians obtained different-level qualifications in very different subject areas. For example, one person had specialist qualifications in ICT, as a croupier and as a security guard, and another had qualifications as a teacher, travel agent and security guard. There was also someone who had developed himself within the same area and completed a qualification as a security guard, then obtained a gun licence and a security operator/organiser certificate. In Hungary interviewees engaged with courses that led to certification. They did so in order to improve their chances in the labour market.

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<sup>2</sup> Until 2005 young people under the age of 23 could obtain two vocational qualifications free of charge. Then, until 2012, only the first vocational qualification was free for young people. From 2013 the age restriction for free vocational qualification is 21 years.

All the interviewed Hungarians had worked hard to complete their chosen qualifications, whether or not they had future plans with them. There are many examples of combining work and study: one person has been working from the age of 16, completing school at evening classes and sitting the *Matura* examinations, and a couple of the interviewees were engaged in distance learning to complete their university degrees. The interviewees' level of engagement with studying and developing themselves suggests that they saw education as the mean to progress and success.

### ***Work experiences of the Hungarian migrants in Hungary***

Six of the interviewed Hungarians never used their highest qualification in employment in Hungary. However, they have all engaged in skills and professional development over time to improve their potential. However, as argued before, many of them completed a lower level of qualification in order to find employment sooner. The interview data reveals a wide range of different jobs that the research participants took on in order to make a living while they were simultaneously considering other options. They worked, for example, as shop assistant, casino dealer, security guard, receptionist, packing assistant, trained mechanical engineer, marketing assistant and office assistant. Finding a job according to qualification and skills was considered a 'vicious circle'. As one person remarked:

Having the qualification is not enough, you need work experience. But how can you have work experience if no one employs you? (*Ágnes*)

This was mentioned as a major obstacle to get into employment, in particular if the work experience was not an integral part of the taught course. Three of the 10 interviewees chose to complete a tourism-related L4 qualification. However, none of them were able to get employment with their new qualifications either. Already in Hungary many interviewees had struggled to find employment, especially at their highest qualification level. Six people secured lower-level jobs to cover living expenses.

Only three out of the 10 were engaged in employment relevant to their highest degree and to the area they studied. Two of the qualified teachers were able to engage with teaching and working in schools. However, both were employed on a one-year

contractual basis. Another graduate was able to work in her subject area but her job was not a graduate job.

Also, most of the interviewees had already worked excessive hours in Hungary. Some did so to earn more money, others wanted to progress in their career, and others flourished in their jobs and did not spare any time or energy investing in it. Again, some spent their free time on further professional development including language learning. However, all volunteered for the extra work and most reflected on this as a worthwhile effort.

For some of the interviewees it was essential to be able to take on additional work and do overtime that was additionally paid. One man who was working as a self-employed security guard in Hungary spoke about sometimes working up to 300–350 hours a month. As he remembered:

With my work I never had a problem, that there was a 24-hour shift, then the next day a 12-hour shift. ... [Our company] did all the sport events in [town name] as well. Ten years ago in [town name] the football, ice hockey, water polo, netball, handball were at a high level and we arranged the security for all those games. So when we were not doing shifts we could go to football matches [to work]... (*Géza*)

Another interviewee who was working as a physical education teacher in a school outlined her workload:

I also worked as a coach. I did that as a second job in an athletics club. I also taught netball and did physiotherapy. In the morning I did my teaching job, in the afternoon there were the school's PE activities, [like] netball and physiotherapy. After 15h00 hours I started in the athletics field. At the weekends we went to competitions with the children. It was good because it gave me feedback at a certain level, and the work I invested bore fruit. (*Kati*)

Although there were examples for trying to find study-related jobs, very often the interviewed Hungarians talked about committing themselves on the spur of the moment to jobs that had the best potential in a given situation. The interview data suggests that, due to the lack of available ideal jobs, interviewees made pragmatic choices.

### *Skills and knowledge and theory and practice*

Each interviewee elaborated and reflected on the skills and knowledge they developed at school, at university, and in the workplace. The interview data also reveals some of the shortcomings of education in Hungary, in particular the less learner-centred approach to teaching and the limited practical elements of taught courses. Some interviewees recalled the learning process: ‘The lecturer stood up, and told us. We took notes and had examinations’ (*Ágnes*). Another interviewee remembered:

There were quite a lot of lectures, then seminars. But not small groups; we were about 20 and the teacher usually talked. We had very few seminars where there was real dialogue between the teacher and the student. Most of the teachers preferred to give a small presentation. (*Judit*)

The courses the interviewed Hungarians attended, whether in upper-secondary or higher education institutions, were referred to as theory-heavy and lacked practical elements and the development of practical skills. According to the interview data there was a clear distinction between where one developed practical skills and where the focus was on underpinning theory. In Hungary, schools mainly offered theoretical preparation and it was the workplace/training site where interviewees tried and tested what they had learnt at school. Theoretical and practical learning were not interwoven but experienced as two separate entities. One interviewee remembered:

We had it – communication [as a subject] existed. But I don’t think that I learnt any of my communication skills at the polytechnic. ... I couldn’t even tell now what it was all about. But that we never ever practised anything – that’s for sure. (*Judit*)

There are also examples where work experience and practical learning were integral to the course. Four of the 10 interviewees were qualified teachers and one attended but did not complete the course. Their teacher-training courses included classroom teaching. They highly praised the university preparation that they received as they reflected:

Professionally I received a lot, and I am very, very satisfied with the teacher-training section up until now. I received such knowledge [from the teacher-training section of the English faculty], which remains with me till today. I use it and I will be using it in the future. (*Juli*)

or

[Children in the school] were very sweet, they are small and lovely. I learnt with them. I learnt about myself, I learnt pedagogy, psychology, because the theoretical knowledge that you gain from the polytechnic gives you a good base. But how to implement it in life – you can only learn that from experience. (*Kati*)

The division between theory and practice seemed to exist at every level of education. One of the interviewees completed a three-month-long ‘security guard’ course in Hungary and participated in a week-long ‘security guard’ training that was delivered by an English agency. He compared the content and delivery of the two types of training:

At home they will point you in the direction of several law books, such as the Penal Code, and we needed to memorise these. Here (UK) during the one week we learnt kind of practical things, what and how to do things, and what tiny signs we need to pay attention to. How to behave with people and with customers, that’s to say, with our clients. So here we had mainly practical things and they trained security guards. (*Tamás*)

Interviewees noted the importance of linking theoretical knowledge and practical skills. One interviewee who worked and simultaneously attended evening classes to complete the upper-secondary vocational school in economics described the advantage of his situation:

When we started accountancy [in my evening class], I already knew that I am a tax-paying citizen, and I work with companies. I worked in insurance and saw how it worked in reality. That was roughly the area which I had studied so I could combine my work with my area of study. This helped me to decide what I wanted to do. (*Attila*)

The interviewed Hungarians noted a range of different skills and abilities that they developed through working in their various jobs in Hungary and in the UK. They reflected mainly on those soft skills that supported them to adapt to new work environments and colleagues, and to complete their tasks to a high standard. The most often mentioned soft skills include, for example, problem solving, team work, self-discipline, communication skills, organisational skills, flexibility, conflict resolution, and working with internal and external colleagues. Although the interviewees talked

about theoretical knowledge and practical skills, they did not suggest a hierarchy between the two. Many considered both as essential to doing a good job.

Having outlined the educational and work experiences of the respondents, the UK experiences of the interviewed Hungarian migrants will be outlined next.

## **Working and progressing (or not) in the UK**

### ***Finding work in the UK***

Eight out of the 10 migrants made work arrangements before moving to the UK to ensure a smooth transfer, securing work and accommodation. The other two had previous experience of working abroad and they only pre-arranged accommodation through a friend. One of them remembered:

It was an easier start [here] because we already had some experience. We also came with more money, and we coped better mentally. We knew we had to go to the job centre. We had the minimum language skills; if we needed to talk in an interview, we could. This part was easier. (*Kati*)

Three came to work as nannies and three underwent a job-selection process in Hungary before coming to work in the UK as security guards. The other four people started working as housekeepers (cleaners), receptionist and kitchen porter. Those who came to work as nannies did so in order to develop their language skills and get to know the culture. All three found other types of employment in the UK after finishing their contracts with their respective families. Finding continuous employment was difficult and hard work, but nevertheless necessary to earn a living. The interviewed Hungarians talked about perseverance and the will to work when they had to find a job. Frequent visits to recruitment agencies, personally handing in CVs to potential employers, and responding directly to job advertisements secured jobs successfully most of the time. Sometimes jobs were secured through personal contacts. However, compared to the number of jobs the interviewed migrants had since they arrived in the UK, getting jobs through friends and acquaintances was rare. Yet, friends offered help and encouragement, and also kept their eyes open for suitable opportunities. Nevertheless, the interviewed Hungarians favoured different approaches when looking for a job and were largely self-sufficient in finding new positions.

### ***The value of Hungarian qualifications and work experience in the UK***

According to the interview data the qualifications interviewees had were considered largely irrelevant in the UK context. This is partly because the interviewees were not applying for jobs relevant to their qualifications due to the lack of time available to secure a job, and because interviewees often felt they were not given a job because they had a particular qualification anyway. The interviewees mainly applied and secured work in lower-level jobs than their highest qualifications. Therefore, both the level and content of their qualifications were irrelevant. Even those interviewees who had a security guard qualification from Hungary and came to work as security guards in the UK had to undergo training before they were offered a job.

Most employers were not interested in the qualifications Hungarians had from Hungary; however, having the *Matura* (A-levels) proved to be useful in some cases. This is likely to be true as none of the interviewees worked according to their sector-specific qualifications, and the *Matura* is a general examination not designed to lead to specific types of employment; rather, it signals ability and general intelligence. Although there is little evidence, some interviewees with higher education degrees also suggested that perhaps their level of education was a better signal to the employers at the application stage rather than the specific qualifications they had. However, this is difficult to prove because employers' views were not sought in this research.

There was only one person who was successfully recruited in a graduate job. In this one example, the employer wanted to employ for a engineering/technical job a Hungarian with a degree from the humanities or the social sciences. Here again the level of qualification was important and the employer purposely wanted to recruit someone with no prior content knowledge but with an interest in engineering and technical matters.

Some interviewees also noted that their Hungarian work experience was similarly ignored by UK employers and they therefore felt disadvantaged. As one interviewee put it: 'I was not competitive with my CV' (*Ágnes*). Nevertheless, the submitted job applications and CVs contained all information about the schooling, qualifications, and work experiences of the Hungarian migrants but their follow-up job interviews often focused only on their work experience in the UK. The following

quotation exemplifies the significance of the level of education and any local work experience one may have:

... then I started to work here at reception, and the only criterion was to have some experience in that area. There was nothing about qualifications and they only wanted this kind of experience and A-levels or equivalent. I already had experience working at reception, I helped once or twice at [a recruitment agency] where I needed to ask for references about Hungarians and to call Hungary. Eventually they offered me a post at reception, it's *Matura* level. (Éva)

The significance of any UK work experience was evident, which may explain why so many of the interviewees accepted jobs at a lower level so securing entry to the UK labour market.

### ***English language skills***

Another 'watershed' for finding a 'good' job was the English language skill. According to the interviewees' own evaluation, four out of ten people had almost no or very little English, three spoke English at a basic to intermediate level, and three had upper intermediate to proficiency level of English skills. All interviewees had English at school at least for three to four years, but that was rarely sufficient for communication.

Those who had no or very little English clearly felt that they did not have much choice but to take jobs that did not involve communication with customers, as one remembers: 'we had to survive somehow, we had to do everything in order [to survive]' (*Kati*). Another interviewee was told to 'go home for a while and practise' (*Géza*) because his English was so poor. The interview data clearly suggest that the lack of English language skills can be the first obstacle when choosing jobs to apply for. Similarly, good English skills may open doors as one interviewee experienced:

... the better your language skills the more chance you of getting a good job. I was also told at the interview that my English was very good and carried great weight in their decision. (*Ádám*)

Regardless of the level of English language skills, interviewees actively and purposefully engaged in learning English. For example, all three who worked as nannies requested the inclusion of English language school attendance as an integral part of their contract. Another person was offered one-to-one tuition by his employer and he was



eager to engage. Not all interviewees could allow themselves to attend a language school and taught themselves English, as one noted:

I set myself a task of reading books specifically written for foreigners. There were 75 [in the library] and I read them all. And now I read thicker books.  
(*Dániel*)

Another person plans to learn perfect English in the future:

Definitely I need a one-year English [course], at least three hours a day and I am saving up for this now, because it is about £1,500. You get nine months for this money. (*Attila*)

The interview data reveals considerable determination by the interviewees to improve their English skills. Interviewees were talking about developing their language skills as a continuous effort during working and socialising; talking to friends and colleagues, learning words and expressions through their jobs in catering, retail or construction or in their free time activities.

### ***Employment and progression in the UK***

Despite some of the discussed obstacles, such as lack of time to find a ‘good’ job, the mainly irrelevant Hungarian qualifications and work experiences, lack of local references, and various levels of language skills, most interviewees secured almost constant employment since arriving in the UK. Since their arrival in the UK until January 2014, the interviewees have claimed a total of six months’ working tax credit and four weeks’ unemployment benefit. One person lived on her savings while being unemployed and another returned to Hungary between jobs.

The employment histories of the interviewees varied significantly. What was similar was the aim to progress, to achieve progress through ‘giving it 100%’, and many worked long and antisocial hours. Progress has meant a range of very different things for the interviewees; for example, taking on more responsibilities in work, getting formal and informal recognition for excellent work, working in a ‘better’ working environment, taking on a job where progress is possible, working for a company where continuing professional development is offered and support is given to progress, and ‘using their brain’ when working. For many interviewees their current job was meant to

be a starting point, and finding a job in the future in the areas of their interests and/or professions would have been considered progress. Similarly, gaining more job security, such as working on open-ended contracts, was also mentioned as a positive step. Most of the interviewees have been working in low-paid jobs, so inevitably earning more and achieving better living standards were referred to as progress. Nevertheless, financial insecurity and earning little were rarely discussed and only referred to when an interviewee was not in employment. As long as the interviewees had income, they took the hourly rate they received for granted. Clearly their income impacted on their possibilities, such as travel to Hungary, the quality of their accommodation, and attending a good English course. Low-level jobs, low salary and low level of English skills were considered as a vicious circle from which all interviewees tried to escape. They all had some work experience, so they envisaged this escape through paying for a language course, developing English skills, and a step up the job ladder. Only for a very small minority was financial advancement the primary aim, with the plan to invest in further education, language courses, and potentially starting up their own business.

Only a couple of the interviewees secured work through a recruitment agency and that was only for a limited period of time. Working through an agency clearly had the advantage of receiving work opportunities if clients were satisfied with the quality of the work, and it also provided indirect local references. However, agency workers also experienced several disadvantages, such as low wages, not being able to participate in continuous professional development but only in compulsory training, not receiving parking permits on site, and not getting holiday pay. Employers were also reluctant to take over agency workers and employ them directly because there would be a fine to pay.

All interviewees considered their career progress slow and full of challenges. Six interviewees had been working in the same sector since their arrival but in different working environments. As one who had been working in the catering sector throughout said: 'I know half of Oxford through their kitchens' (*Géza*). Three interviewees changed jobs in order to progress and some other interviewees were hoping to progress within the job of their initial choice through excelling. Some interviewees were actively searching for new opportunities while working. However, it was difficult to change job types without having relevant work experience. For example, it took one person with catering and retail work experience several years to find work in an administrative/office-related position. Two of the teachers had been applying for

teaching and teaching-assistant posts while working without being able to secure a single interview. One of them even arranged for the Hungarian Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check and volunteered in a primary school. However, when a vacancy arose in the school he was not interviewed. The data suggest that the first jobs interviewees secured very much influenced their later potential for career change. Interviewees regularly discussed horizontal and vertical progression or even certain jobs that were considered a step backwards. Many were consciously observing their own progress, whether or not they could sufficiently interfere with it or influence it.

There are examples of visible progress. For instance, one person started as a part-time receptionist and gradually moved to a full-time, permanent library assistant post. However, her responsibilities increased well before her actual work was formally recognised. She remembered:

[I do everything] that is not in my job description, but I do it all because there is no one else. ... It was obvious when the girl left in January (who was on Grade 3) and eventually I had to do everything for four months. So [the employer] really had to come up with a new position in order for me to continue. ... The problem is that I am the only full-timer and so the only one who knows what is happening on a daily basis, I hand over the info, need to follow it up ... (*Éva*)

In most cases, however, formal recognition appears slowly or not at all. Most interviewees reported being saddled with extra responsibilities, which they all welcomed. These were signals to them that they were able and capable of doing much more and interviewees were willing to take on responsibilities. Even if these were considered informal acknowledgments, the interviewees achieved that through their conscientious and high-quality work and they appreciated the opportunities to engage at a different level. As interviewees reflected on their work:

If the manager is not there, I am second in command. ... There is no deputy manager at the moment, ..., but they can trust me with the business; if the manager is not there, I do her job. If necessary I open the shop, I handle the bank, close the till at the end of the day. I send off the daily report and financial information. I don't do the shifts but I take responsibility for everything. I sort out the orders so they happen on time, work out the lunch duties. (*Kati*)

Or, as another person remembers, automatically stepping in when needed:

Here you are in front of people, the teachers, strangers, children. You have to pay attention to anything they ask. We have morning, afternoon and weekend supervisors and if they are away I step in. But I don't work like the others. I pay attention to what is going on in general, so I don't only do what I am told but I help with the supervisors' work. ... The others wait to be told what they have to do. (*Géza*)

While this is considered positive, he also expressed a wish:

For the time being I love this job, and it suits me. ... But it would be really nice to get a tiny little more money, if they acknowledged it more – if they acknowledged my contribution in monetary terms as well. (*Géza*)

The two security guards discussed changes rather than progress in terms of working on different sites, being able to work more hours, doing various shifts, and salary. One expressed his pleasant surprise about his latest job:

This place and this company where I moved to now completely changed my life because the tasks have been swapped. They said they would give me a raise and I will have to work less. This means you actually earn the same as before but you work less. Two days, two nights and four days off and this is a good deal. In all the other companies normally you work 50–60 hours a week or more, but not here. (*Tamás*)

The interviewees did not consider their jobs challenging, once they were in employment, and did not think they learnt much. They referred to picking up some limited job-specific knowledge, such as how to use an electric till, CCTV or how to make coffee. Another interviewee worked with children and she recalled learning about communicating with children, working with children, and the psychology of children. However, it was difficult for the interviewees to formulate what they had learnt in the different low-skilled jobs. As one asked: 'But, honestly, what can you learn from being a kitchen porter?'

The interviewees gained perhaps little knowledge in their respective jobs but they all had to adjust to new working environments. In addition, these jobs offered them the platform to develop their transferable skills further. These were well acknowledged during the interviews and included, for example, team working, communication skills, self-confidence, working with management, learning about multiculturalism, customer services, and people management in some cases. The jobs interviewees were engaged

in, however, did not help them get closer to their original qualifications or the area of their interest.

Most of the interviewed Hungarian migrants received job-specific in-house training in each of their jobs to be able to fulfil their job specification. In some of the cases training was restricted to be competent in their jobs only and some others received training that was broader and could open up potential progression in their jobs. Getting training on the job was practised widely, in particular as introductory training. The forms and length of the training varied in each job and included, for example, one-to-one training for a few days, or shadowing and practising tasks over two weeks. The interviewees also talked about a wide range of short training courses arranged by their employers that ranged between one and two hours to three to four days. These included, for example, health and safety, food and hygiene, how to train colleagues, customer service training, storing confidential documents, and shift-leader training. According to the data only limited numbers of courses were delivered by external training providers and led to qualifications, such as NVQ L2 in caring or operating CCTVs. Only one person self-financed a six-week online course with a three-day examination held in London that led to an accredited qualification. This was a considerable financial commitment on his side.

The interviewed Hungarians were engaged in constant learning. At the same time many consciously observed themselves in their jobs and reflected on such things as interest, motivational factors, and suitability for the job they were doing. They seemed to have been gathering information about what motivated them, what type of work they were suitable for, and what kind of work they liked or did not like. This information is very person-specific but guided the individuals when applying for a job. Some of the examples for what motivated interviewees were: money, engaging in varied work, working with people, working in tourism, or sport-related work. Also, some interviewees specifically wanted to work in an office job, in retail, in self-employment, and doing night shifts, and there were others who opposed these types of jobs. This type of information proved to be useful for the individuals when making decisions.

### ***What do Hungarian migrants bring to the workplace?***

The interview data reveals that all interviewees arrived in the UK with the will to work and to establish financial security for themselves. In order to achieve that the

interviewed Hungarians tried to deliver their tasks to employers' satisfaction. As one said: 'I just would like to work. I really would like to help' (*Dániel*).

All interviewees commented on the quality of work they aimed for in their jobs, regardless of what it was. One interviewee considered that doing a job well meant one was paying attention and one was interested in the work: 'If there is a will and one pays attention – this is not the question of knowledge – this is basic intelligence' (*Géza*). According to his thinking it was not the qualification but the level of education that led people to deliver quality and a positive attitude to work. Many of the interviewed Hungarians discussed quality and not cutting corners as an underlying principle of what they did. As one interviewee remarked:

I also felt that some of the management respected me because of my work, they knew I would not cheat, and I would not leave things undone. My work is completed always 100%. (*Kati*)

Very often interviewees compared their quality of work with that of their colleagues:

OK. Just an example. At the end of the shift one person is cleaning the service room, one the vending machine, and two the dining room. And someone rushes the job and everything sticks. For me it takes longer. I cannot claim that I finish in five minutes but then anybody can have a look, check inside and outside, anywhere, it does not stick, top-notch. So, my [shift] finishes at 8, why should I finish at 7.30 or 7.45 when I cannot go home anyway? You can tell who did the job on any particular day. (*Géza*)

Many of the interviewees showed considerable flexibility when taking up a job. Some of the examples demonstrated both flexibility and a desire to help. Gauging employers' needs and stepping in at short notice were not unusual, as one respondent remembers:

We went to the restaurant for 10am [for an interview] – at that point we already had a lot of work planned for the day. The chef was begging me to come back for 1pm to help as he had a great deal to do. I came home, got changed and went back for 1pm. I had already worked for two to three hours that day. (*Attila*)

Sometimes being helpful and flexible could be counterproductive. One interviewee felt that her employer relied too much on her goodwill and sometimes it prevented her from planning ahead:

All my colleagues have other things to do in their lives, but I don't. That's why I am always the one who steps in, that means I work in the evening, I work on Saturday, and I get to know this the day before. ... But like this every week falls apart for me. (*Éva*)

The other side of the coin could be that the Hungarian interviewees should be happy to be offered the jobs they had. However, there is data to suggest that employees often lack the qualities employers look for. Some examples from the interviews include:

A friend of mine and [name] the manager of a restaurant had been talking, and he mentioned that he would need someone [to work] in the kitchen. It is difficult to find a reliable person, he fires people each week, [someone] works slowly, is late, gives up, leaves... Then my friend says: "But here is [Attila], why don't you try him?" (*Attila*)

Another interviewee found some of his colleagues' attitude frustrating:

One is late, the other constantly ill, the third you always have to tell off. ... Many of them who have been working there for years still leave food on the heated serving hatch at night and forget. ... For example, the afternoon supervisor who comes on Mondays always leaves the storage door open. He goes promptly at 8pm and I am the last ... and I have to close it. (*Géza*)

Yet another interviewee pointed out the importance of physical fitness in order to do a housekeeper's job:

When I finished the night shift after 90 days, they tried [to recruit], but no one could do it. So they terminated the position. ... I trained an English chap, he did not do it well; I trained a chap from East Timor, he wasn't able [fit] to do it. Of course I started at 11pm and finished at 7am. Your body clock has to adjust. (*Dániel*)

The above examples demonstrated that sometimes it was easier for the interviewees to reflect on what their colleagues did or did not do and identify shortcomings rather than to talk about themselves. They observed others' attitude to work and behaviour that often impacted on the interviewees' daily routine. Consequently, they could consider themselves being flexible, reliable, considerate, and

good-quality workers. All interviewees talked about the qualities they naturally offered as the basis of their work regardless of the level of jobs they did. It was the quality of their work they were proud of and they articulated this in a more direct way.

### ***Reflecting on working in low-paid and low-skilled jobs***

Working in a low-paid job was considered an issue for the interviewees but they all handled it in different ways. Naturally they wanted to earn more. The issue of earning low hourly rates was rarely referred to during the interviews. Most interviewees confirmed that they earned ‘OK’, ‘fine’ or even ‘well’, and ‘even in this job’ they earned better than what they would in Hungary. As was mentioned earlier, establishing financial security was one of the reasons they left Hungary to settle in the UK. Most of the interviewees did not calculate the hourly rate they were hired at but the total income they generated at the end of the month. The question was not the hourly pay but the number of hours they were able to work. Many interviewees took jobs where they could work additional hours, perhaps at a higher hourly rate. Those who could not work additional hours in their jobs often took on another part-time job. Therefore, by working 50–70 (or more) hours each week they earned enough money to feel financially secure. This was the way many interviewees compensated for working in low-paid jobs.

Interviewees did not think of their jobs as low-skilled and used other negative qualifying remarks such as ‘emotional killer’, often ‘below standard’, ‘dull’ or ‘weak’ work. One respondent noted that he ‘does not use 98% of [his] brain in the UK in his job’. Nevertheless, many thought that they learnt something in each job and that it would support their development and help them to achieve their goals eventually. One could observe very optimistic thinking among most interviewees about their future.

Each interviewee reflected on working in jobs that did not require almost any qualification and certainly not the level of qualifications they had. Some of the interviewees found it easier than others to accept the fact that they worked in low-skilled jobs. Even if their articulation was vague, they clearly felt uncomfortable in their jobs and the same question cropped up in most interviewees’ minds: ‘What am I doing here?’ As one person remembered:

When we started working as cleaners and were grateful to have found a job, well, this was emotionally difficult for me to accept. (*Kati*)



Unfortunately most interviewees had more than one low-skilled job over time, and facing these was a recurring problem. It was the norm for them not feeling comfortable in their jobs and reminding themselves of it. This was particularly evident for those who had not engaged in low-skilled work before and had even practised their profession or achieved success in Hungary:

Whenever I cleaned or worked in [shop's name] I always thought, but I am a teacher, I always remembered that I am a [teacher]. (*Kati*)

Another respondent remembered his professional past in Hungary:

It was hard in the beginning, when you have been wearing a suit for three years [to work]. Your colleagues look up to you, you excel in your job, you are headhunted each week and offered a fixed salary. I feel like a broken king. (*Attila*)

However, regardless of previous work experiences, a couple of interviewees considered their current jobs 'fundamentally degrading and far away from my profession and qualification' (*Ádám*), and 'clearly I found both jobs beneath my abilities' (*Ágnes*).

For many interviewees it was mentally and emotionally difficult to accept working in low-skilled jobs. They learnt to live with it but at the same time they were working hard to explain their own situation to themselves and to find their way out of this situation. Although some considered themselves optimistic, it begs the question to what extent one can overcome one's own assumptions:

Here even the lower work is paid OK. Then why should I be ashamed when I earn three to four times as much as my mother, who is a chief accountant [in Hungary]? (*Géza*)

I had to psyche myself up. I had to be able to let it go and convince myself. ... It is only my own stupid assumption that because of this work I am looked down on. (*Kati*)

Another interviewee thought that it was a question of upbringing, attitude, and having aims that motivated people. He described his way of thinking while working as a housekeeper:

I was brought up to survive in all conditions. ... Upbringing. This is the basis. This is what I received at home. Working is not shameful. ... Many [others] don't have clear aims and perseverance. ... This is a mental attitude. Because I knew why I was doing it. If I didn't know that, I couldn't have done it. (*Dániel*)

It was not only the job and the tasks that made the interviewees uneasy about their jobs. Several of the interviewees reflected on the atmosphere at work and the management under which they worked. One interviewee remembered:

They asked me why wouldn't I like to be a supervisor, why did I want to leave the job so much, because they are looking for a supervisor right now. It was pathetic; there was the director who never even greeted me. (*Kati*)

Another person compared working as a housekeeper with working as a shop assistant. Although the former was more difficult to accept in terms of tasks, the latter was more unpleasant in terms of the atmosphere and the working environment. Interviewees talked about being numbered 'like in the prison', working in an impersonal environment. One interviewee compared two catering jobs she used to do:

In [shopname] it was already more human, although it was a sideways move, not a career move, but 'thank you' and 'please' existed. Here they let me be. But there was no human element, just work. (*Ágnes*)

Some interviewees felt that being an intellectual with a degree was taken into account and helped them secure jobs, even if not openly. However, this is difficult to prove in the current research but raises further questions of the interviewees' uneasy feelings about taking up yet another low-skilled job. One interviewee remembered a job interview:

I felt good about the interview and thought that in addition to my education, qualification, background, and degree, I was considered as an intellect. (*Ádám*)

Some interviewees regularly reiterated their intellectual status. Others did not articulate it clearly but their comments suggested the same: it was difficult to accept the level of their jobs and, often, the working environment.

Few of the interviewees were in a position to reflect quickly and dismissively on a time when they did a job that they fundamentally disagreed with. They were the lucky

few who could progress relatively quickly and found a niche in the company that supported them to step up. One interviewee was noticed in the catering department of his current job and was given opportunities to excel and develop. In addition to his core tasks he was invited to help at special events and gradually took on more responsibilities. His employer even arranged English tuition for him. In his early jobs in the UK as kitchen porter he did not see much opportunities but his current employer made him realise the potential in the catering business. Another person who started working in reception and managed to progress into a library assistant post also felt satisfied with her situation. Both planned to progress further within their jobs and clearly felt much more positive than some of their peers for whom progress was a distant future.

Some interviewees worked in one low-skilled job after another without making any career progress. There were also a couple of the interviewees who worked in a library environment that resembled their higher education studies. One, who was not in a low-skilled but a lower-skilled job, remembered: 'I loved the library from the first moment. I have studied literature; I spent six years only in the library.' Interviewees tried to see the positive instead of the negative side of their jobs. Many considered themselves naturally positive and optimistic.

They considered themselves intellectuals who are well educated, well read, well informed and cultured. They had plans and ambitions and clearly it was hard to accept working at the low end of the job scale.

So, why did these interviewees do these jobs? Many considered these jobs as temporary solutions, even though they lasted several years. Working and earning money was essential for all. Often they had no other choice but to take up available jobs, even if the jobs were not in line with their interests, abilities, and personalities. One interviewee remarked:

[Moving into this new job] was a step back. My general well-being was not good, but I had to cope with the task because yet again I couldn't do anything else and I had to keep going in the hope that I would find something else. (*Agnes*)

Many interviewees talked about job satisfaction in terms of receiving positive feedback on their work from management and/or clients. They also recognised the trust many enjoyed at work, which manifested itself in the form of increased responsibilities.

The interview data suggests that working in a low(er)-skilled job raises similar feelings: it requires mental training and emotional readjustment to be able to cope with what may be considered a humiliating situation.

### **Plans and ambitions in 2011 and achievements in 2013–14**

As has been argued, having plans and ambitions often helped interviewees to overlook the negative side to working in a low-skilled job. All interviewees had a plan to progress over time, and those who had been in the UK for many years knew from experience that developing a professional career would be a slow process.

#### ***Plans and ambitions in 2011***

All interviewees showed ambition and had short- and long-term plans that reflected their specific circumstances. The most commonly mentioned aim of the interviewees was to establish financial security for themselves. In addition, three interviewees thought that their future plans very much depended on their financial advancement: one wanted to develop his own business, while the other two potentially wanted to do research linked to their former studies. Further studies and learning were integral to the plans of the interviewees. These included language learning, engaging with undergraduate studies, starting a postgraduate course, and taking courses of higher labour market relevance. Studying and learning were considered the means to achieve their ultimate goal.

It was recognised that progress is a gradual and non-linear process; for some it is a ‘bumpy ride’. Some of the objectives interviewees mentioned were broader and less concrete, such as working with adults, working in care, and working in sport. This allowed interviewees to think about their plans and ambitions in a more flexible way and opened up a range of potential ways to succeed.

Although plans were considered motivational, sometimes it was impossible to think ahead because of the pressure some interviewees felt subjected to:

At the moment I don't have the strength to brush up my profession. I am on a treadmill and cannot see the way out. (*Kati*)

One interviewee summarised that those who do not progress ‘don’t have an aim and perseverance’, and those who do not succeed ‘are not self-confident and likely they don’t speak English’ (*Daniel*). Although this view and explanation are an oversimplification of success and failure, it could nevertheless help the interviewee to stay focused.

There were four interviewees who showed interest and felt the potential to progress within the company they worked for in 2011, while others had ‘to keep [their] eyes open and use the available opportunities’ (*Ágnes*). There was one interviewee who did not have a concrete plan but knew that ‘I have to break out of this [job] because I consider the work below standard. I work, I do it – properly – but there is no visible outcome. ... I am thinking about my plans day and night’ (*Tamás*). Only one interviewee was hopeful for an imminent change and another was getting positive signals from her company that they had long-term plans for her.

#### ***Achievements in 2013–14***

Each interviewee felt to have established financial security for themselves by 2014. The salaries and hourly rates of the interviewees had increased over time but to various degrees. Three interviewees had a specified annual income, and two out of these earned over £20,000 per year. Some examples of the hourly rates include:

£6.18 per hour in 2006–07	to £7.60 per hour	in 2014
£6 per hour in 2008	to £10.50 per hour	in 2014
£5 per hour in 2008 (agency work)	to £10.50 per hour	in 2014
£6 per hour in 2008	to £12 per hour	in 2014
£6 per hour in 2009	to £6.40 per hour	in 2014

One hourly rate for self-employment varied between £10 and £15, depending on the job, and the one interviewee who had secured the graduate job shortly after arrival in the UK earned a graduate salary not comparable with the rest of the group. Overall interviewees felt relaxed about their earnings. The lowest earner commented: ‘It is not a solution in the long-run’ (*Daniel*). In a small number of cases interviewees still worked excessive hours. One explained: ‘Now I earn £7.60 per hour but because of the high

working hours I get a good salary' (*Ádám*). Another person had a 42-hour-per-week contract and, in addition to that, he could do overtime that was paid at an increased rate. Consequently, he felt satisfied with his situation.

In four of the cases the salary increase was the result of changing employers and six of the interviewees had been working for the same employer since the initial interviews in 2011. Also, eight out of 10 interviewees received permanent contracts between 2011 and 2014. So, financial and existential security was achieved by the majority of interviewees. This, however, did not necessarily mean professional advancement. Three interviewees felt they had not made any career progress despite the increased hourly rate they received.

Seven interviewees reported to have changed either their job title or their job description and were working at a higher level than in 2011. Three of them were working in supervisory positions. For example, one moved from a library assistant to a senior library assistant job, another from a day housekeeper to an academic porter job, and another to a senior duty reception manager post. Another interviewee's job title had not changed but her roles and responsibilities had increased substantially. She now works not only with her local management team but with the company's European headquarters. She considered this 'definitely a step forward', and pointed out that while there had been redundancies across the company she ended up with more interesting and challenging work.

Five of the interviewees noted the supportive working environment within which they were able to progress. There were many examples of interviewees receiving training, such as training in customer service or supervisory training. There are also examples of sending the interviewee to external training, such as lifeguard training or 'barista maestro' training. One interviewee completed an L3 management and team-leading qualification, which, to his surprise, took place 'during working hours and in the workplace' (*Géza*). He is now responsible for between 10–15 people, depending on the shift. Despite the appreciation interviewees expressed for receiving training, most interviewees had plans not related to their current sector and job. As one said: 'I would be on course if this was what I wanted to do' (*Ágnes*).

Over the past two years many interviewees also engaged in education and training initiated and financed by themselves, including attending a full-time English language course for six months, obtaining a CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) qualification, doing an online teacher-training course,

starting a Master's degree, and learning to drive. These courses indicate the directions interviewees would like to take.

It is very clear that none of the interviewees consider their current job and situation as final, and they all have further plans. Four of the interviewees talked about returning to Hungary within the next five years, and one interviewee is looking elsewhere. Three interviewees have settled in the UK and two are keeping their options open. During the 2011 interviews interviewees had no plans to move back to Hungary. The reasons for leaving Hungary in the first place were primarily the lack of opportunities and disappointment with the economic and political situation, but this situation may soon change. However, it remains to be seen whether interviewees will recognise sufficient change after the April 2014 general election in Hungary to decide to move home.

In general interviewees were satisfied with their progress in the UK, even though many considered it slow.

## **CONCLUSION**

The enlargement of the EU was followed by an increase in labour mobility across Europe. This is especially visible in the UK where free labour market access was granted to all A8 countries in 2004, immediately after accession. The impact of opening up the UK labour market to Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2014 is yet to be seen. The number of Hungarian economic migrants, although insignificant in comparison with other migrant groups in the UK, has increased almost tenfold between 2004 and 2011.

In the current exploratory study the views and experiences of 10 Hungarian migrants from the south-east of England are discussed. The study is not generalisable to other Hungarians in the UK but raises some issues for further consideration.

All interviewees were well educated and had at least the *Matura* examination in five subjects, and six Hungarians had higher degrees. Despite this, only one person could secure a graduate job in the UK. The majority of the interviewees worked in jobs that did not require any specific qualification. That means that almost all interviewees took up low-skilled and low-paid employment in the UK. Interviewees considered this as temporary arrangements.

Interviewees reflected on the learning they experienced back in Hungary and they talked about the knowledge-centred education they received. While their education was considered of high quality and valuable, it often lacked practical skills development. Many interviewees expressed their appreciation for skills that they developed through work experience and employment in Hungary and in the UK.

Many interviewees had between two and four qualifications above Level 3, but some also obtained an L2 qualification while still in Hungary in the hope of securing employment. Most interviewees did not work according to their level of qualification in Hungary, and they were not new to doing low(er)-skilled jobs when they arrived in the UK.

The data offers a number of explanations why interviewees engaged in low-skilled jobs. Despite interviewees having qualifications and work experience from Hungary, employers largely ignored these. In the UK the Hungarian migrants' former qualifications are either not valued or not understood, and migrants, therefore, had to engage in low(er)-skilled jobs. In some cases, however, migrants assumed that their former qualifications measured purely intellectual ability. They also had little time in the UK to find a more suitable job for themselves, as they had to make a living.

It was also argued that migrants' chances to enter the labour market and to make career progress are strongly linked to their level of knowledge of English. However, there are jobs in which knowledge of the local language is not necessary, for example, in some of the low-skilled and low-paid jobs in the catering sector.

It is also evident that UK work experience is vital to obtain a job. Interviewees therefore had to accept any available jobs if they lacked UK work experience. Interviewees demonstrated that over time it is increasingly difficult to move into a different type of job, for example, from catering into an office job, because of lack of work experience.

All interviewees were overqualified for the jobs they did in the UK. However, this phenomenon not only exists in the UK context but in Hungary as well. What is different is the level of income interviewees could generate by working in low-skilled jobs in the two countries. Although incomes in Hungary and the UK are not comparable directly, interviewees felt that there were better opportunities and chances in the UK to establish financial security and achieve career progression. There is evidence that many interviewees engaged in work that required excessive working hours while they still worked in Hungary. Consequently, working long hours in the UK was not new to them.



Education has been an integral part of most interviewees' lives and they considered it as the means to progress. All interviewees engaged in training offered by employers, and they also initiated other professional and language education themselves.

It is evident that interviewees are ambitious, and all aimed to progress in their jobs and become successful. While formal recognition for good work has been slow, many interviewees have received opportunities to increase their roles and responsibilities in their jobs. This study also suggests that ambition, perseverance and doing a good job are not enough to progress. Unless employers recognise well-educated migrants' potential, give them opportunities to excel, and actively support their career progress through professional development, many well-educated East European migrants will continue working in low-skilled and low-paid jobs.

Most interviewed Hungarians felt uncomfortable working in low-skilled jobs. It is clearly a necessity for them rather than a choice. Many considered their jobs humiliating, lowly and dull, but felt they did not have a choice. The interviewees had very little influence over their career progress, and accepted the best of the available jobs. There is evidence that professional advancement is very slow and interviewees need to show determination and perseverance. Over time the interviewees managed to secure permanent positions with an increased salary, but only a few could talk about professional satisfaction. Most work in similar jobs with some increased responsibilities as when they arrived in the UK. The 2014 data suggest that most interviewees used the possibilities available to them over time, and most were optimistic that their progress would get them out of the vicious circle of working in low-skilled and low-paid jobs.

While this qualitative study outlines examples of the views and experiences of the Hungarian interviewees, it also points to areas worth further investigation. There seems to be a lack of understanding of the qualifications and work experiences migrants gained in their home country, in this particular case in Hungary, and the skills and knowledge they bring to their jobs in the UK.

1. Research into recruitment agencies' practices may provide information on how foreign qualifications and work experiences are understood, valued, and used. Details investigated may include the agencies' understanding of East European qualifications, their referral system, and the pros and cons of migrants engaging in agency work. For example, agency work mentioned in the current study paid the

lowest hourly rate, and at the same time demanded almost the highest working hours per week.

2. One of the conclusions of the current study, in line with some of the literature, is that employers do not recognise and/or understand East European qualifications. Therefore, further investigation would be necessary to shed light on what employers understand about East European education and qualifications, on what basis they offer low-skilled jobs to highly qualified applicants, and why they prefer employees from Eastern Europe. On the basis of the experiences employers have with East European migrants, the understanding of good work ethics could also be further clarified.
3. This study focused on well-educated Hungarians working in low-skilled and low-paid jobs. However, there are also East European high-flyers working in the UK who clearly have had different experiences. An investigation into the success factors of this group of migrants could explore and describe successful study and work trajectories that led them to personal and professional satisfaction. While much of the existing literature focuses on migrants in low-skilled and low-paid jobs, the competitiveness of migrants working in skilled and well-paid jobs would offer an interesting comparison.
4. East European migrants are often praised for their work ethic and there is a clear positive attitude of the new A8 migrants to work. However, further research would be necessary to clarify how employers interpret a good work ethic, and what East European migrants bring to the workplace that positively impacts on their work performance. What tips the balance to East European migrants: their work ethic or their acceptance of low wages?

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## Appendix 1

### Interview questions for Summer 2011

#### I. Hungary

##### *Study*

What did you study? When? Why did you choose to study ...? What were you hoping to do after your studies?

##### *Previous experience of compulsory education*

- Age you left school and age now. Did you stay in school until the full school leaving age or did you leave earlier?
- Did you get any qualifications at school? *Explore* which ones and grades. *Probe:* Were you happy with these qualifications/grades? Why/why not?
- Did you like school? Why/why not?
- What did you plan or hope to do when you left school? *Probe* for any ideas they had about college, work, training.
- Did you receive any advice and guidance: (*specify*)

##### *Experiences since leaving school (post-16 /higher education)*

- What did you do after you left school?

*Use the following prompts to explore their post-16 experiences to capture a chronological pathway. Each section may be needed more than once:*

- Education and training – *for each course explore:*
  - What were these and where did you study e.g. at school, at college, or university? How long was the course/training meant to last e.g. one or two years?
  - Did you enjoy doing this course/training? Why/why not?
  - Did you finish your course/training? *If not*, what happened? *If yes*, did you get any qualifications?

##### *Previous experiences with work*

What did you do after you finished your studies? Did you use the knowledge and skills you developed? Did you have a job related to your studies? If not, why not?

- Jobs - for each job explore:
  - What sort of work did you get e.g. retail, construction etc.? Was it full or part-time, temporary (e.g. Christmas/summer season), or casual?
  - How did you find your job?

- How many hours a week did you work? Were you paid the minimum wage, a training wage or more than this?
- Did you like doing this type of work? Why/why not?
- Were you offered any training as part of this job?
- How long did the job last? Why did the job end?

## II. UK

### *Confirming current circumstances*

- When did you move to the UK? Have you worked in another country before coming to the UK? Do you speak other languages?
- Why did you choose to come to the UK?
- How long are you planning to stay?

Confirming current activities – work, study, training or something else? *Has this activity been covered by the previous discussion? If not, use prompts above to explore.*

- How did you find your job? (Is this your first job in the UK?)
- Are you doing some training? If so, how long have you been doing it?

### Knowledge/Skills/Competencies (KSC)

- Were you sufficiently prepared to do your first job? Could you describe to me what your work was about?
- While working did you have any CPD? Can you give me an example/Can you describe what training you received while working? Was the CPD useful?
- Have you studied for any qualification since you obtained your initial qualification/finished your degree? Why did you enrol on the course? What did you learn there?
- How did your initial qualification/university course prepare you for work? Please give me an example of what your studies prepared you well for, and what was less good in terms of preparation.
- Can you describe those KSCs which you had to develop and learn after arriving to the UK?
- Are there any aspects of your work that you find difficult? Prompt: Why??
- Do you use the knowledge that you accumulated during your studies or previous work experience (outside of UK)? Please give me an example.
- Do you use the skills that you developed during your studies or previous work experience (outside of UK)? Please describe the most important skill you developed.

### Job/Work

- How were you recruited?
- Why do you think your employer chose you for the job?
- Why did you choose to work as a ....?
- How satisfied are you with the job you are doing?
- How prepared/qualified do you think you are for the job you are doing? Why do you think so?
- Is there an opportunity to progress in your job?
- How do you feel about working in this job? What do you think about working in this job?
- How do you feel about not being able to find a job according to your qualification?
- What is your career aspiration?
- How are you planning to achieve it?
- Do you have to undertake further training/qualifications in order to do that job?
- What do you do that still relates to your initial/previous qualifications (or interest)? Please tell me about it (charity, hobby, family etc.).
- How do you keep your previously developed knowledge and skills alive/up-to-date?

Would you like to add anything else?



## Appendix 2

### Interview questions for December 2013 – January 2014

1. What does your work involve at the moment? What is your job title now?  
  
In what ways does working in the job mean advancement for you in comparison with 2011?  
  
In what way did you progress in the past two years- English language, career, salary?  
  
What helped you to progress?
2. Do you work full-time or part-time? Are you paid an hourly rate? What type of contract do you have? How many hours do you work a week? Can you do overtime in your job? How have these changed since you arrived to the UK?  
  
Will you be able to progress in this job? What would be the next step?
3. Have you taken part in any professional training, language course and obtained any new qualifications since 2011? What are these? Are (were) they useful? Did they help you to advance?
4. Since you came to the UK could you tell me what kind of social benefits did you claim and for how long?
5. What is your plan for the future?
6. Is there anything you would like to add?