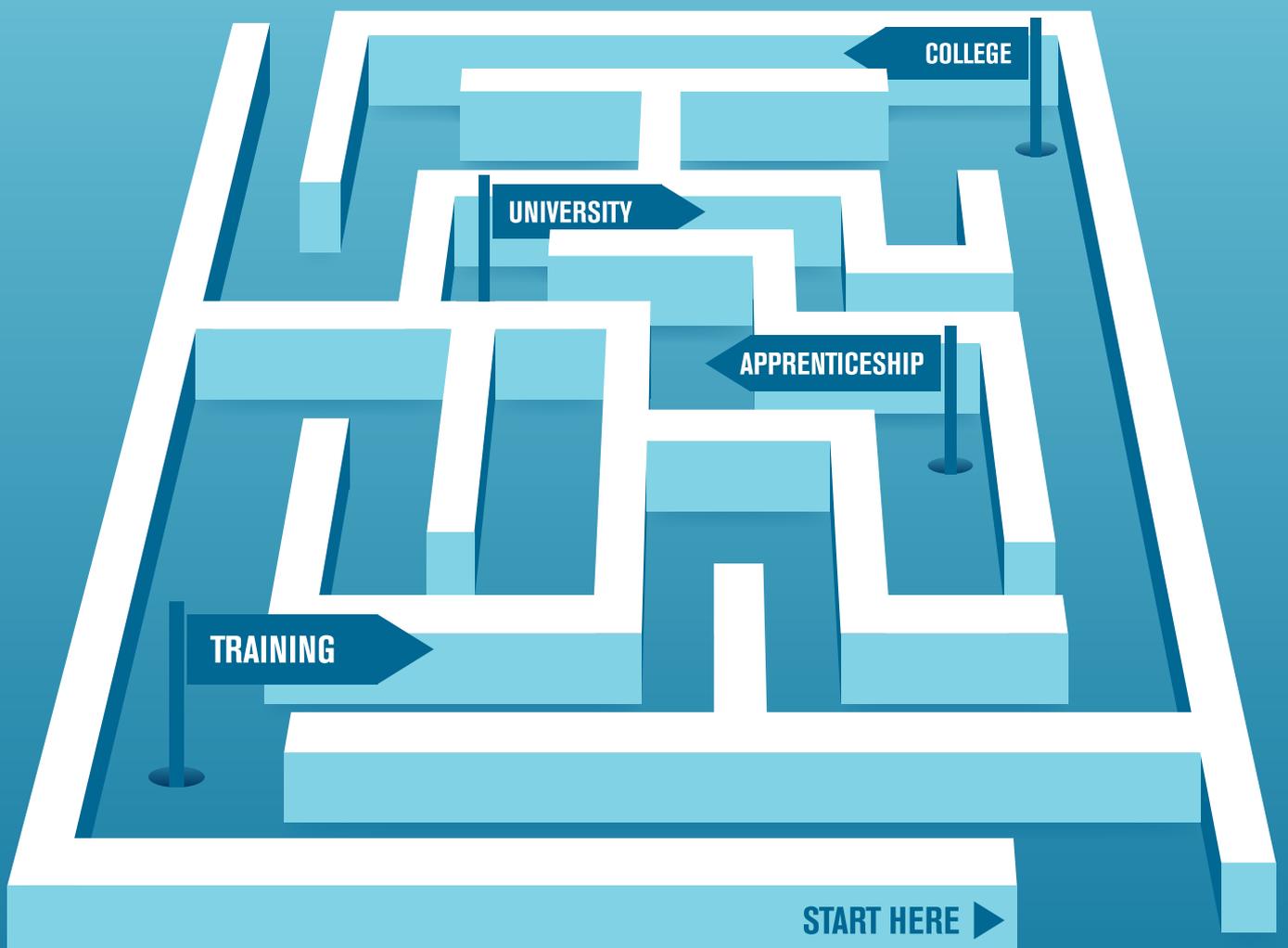


TRANSITION TO AMBITION

NAVIGATING THE CAREERS MAZE



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Co-chairs' foreword

We began this inquiry in summer 2020, by which time the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing first lockdown had had an unprecedented effect on the UK's economy. It was clear then that the pandemic would strike different sectors of the economy and the labour market in very divergent ways. Many office workers were able to continue their work from home, and politics and policymaking went online; meanwhile, workers in the hospitality, retail and entertainment sectors were furloughed in the hundreds of thousands.

As time went on we heard more about the consequences of the pandemic for young people trying to access education and training, for adults who had been furloughed or made redundant, and for those who had seen their industries potentially permanently damaged. The support we provide to help people understand their talents and interests, choose the right qualifications, and move into work, has become increasingly important.

The pandemic offered an opportunity to stand back and consider England's approach to careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG), and how well it supports young people and adults to successfully transition into long-term employment. We looked at the experiences and challenges of CIAG provision in further education and higher education, as well as the provision for adults not in education or training. We also identified some important themes which cut across those settings: the government's careers strategy, digital poverty, and information about the labour market.

A strong conclusion from our evidence was the need for a longer-term perspective by government. The importance of the CIAG system at this pivotal time of economic upheaval, as we recover from the pandemic and move to a net-zero economy and society, warrants an enduring strategy and associated action plan. Government must harness the expertise of employers alongside education and careers professionals to advise on the most effective interventions to support appropriate education, employment, training, and CIAG. Similarly, the nominal end of the pandemic will not end the need to tackle digital poverty – a long-term strategy is necessary to ensure that no one is excluded from the digital world, which is an increasingly fundamental part of our lives in the twenty-first century.

We heard great examples of how careers advisers in further and higher education have adapted to the pandemic, organising online careers fairs, virtual work experience, and tailored advice on video interviews. However, further education and independent training providers are tackling serious funding and time constraints which can make it difficult to offer personalised, one to one careers information, advice and guidance to all students; CIAG must be properly funded so that everyone can get the support they need. Additionally, graduates will play an important role in the UK's economic recovery from Covid-19, so we must ensure that they are not forgotten about in funding and schemes aiming to help people into employment. Support for small businesses to hire graduates could provide a real boost to the economy and to productivity levels.

We also heard about the fantastic services offered by the National Careers Service, which was hampered from supporting as many people as possible during the pandemic by a mixture of factors, including because many careers advisers themselves were furloughed. As England's economy changes in response to the fourth industrial revolution, Brexit, and the shift to a zero-carbon and green economy, more adults will need advice and support to upskill and retrain. Increased promotion of the service and more flexible funding could enable the National Careers Service to reach more people as we move out of the pandemic, and could lead to a more effective, all-age service in the future.

At this point in mid-2021, we are beginning to see encouraging signs that the economy might be bouncing back from the pandemic, such as increasing job vacancies in some of the particularly impacted sectors. However, the impending end of the furlough scheme is likely to reveal the real state of the labour market, with a potential increase in unemployment the scale of which is difficult to predict. In addition, the setbacks for people in education, particularly those already dealing with poverty and marginalisation, may well impact on the economy for years to come.

Looking to the future, there is a strong consensus that the CIAG system in England needs to become a truly all-age national service, where all the constituent parts work together coherently and without gaps or unhelpful overlap. This means careers information, advice and guidance which is well-informed by the local labour market; well-advertised and easy to access; delivered by professionally qualified practitioners and provided through a blend of digital and in-person modes, to suit people with a range of needs and preferences. We hope that the evidence we have gathered and the recommendations we have made will provide the basis for a comprehensive plan to strengthen the CIAG system, and in turn the education, skills and employment systems.

We are very grateful to the wide range of individuals and organisations who contributed evidence to this inquiry. We must pay tribute to our committed group of commissioners, whose knowledge and expertise was indispensable in the development of our findings and recommendations. Thanks also to Policy Connect for inviting us to co-chair this inquiry, and delivering this report. Finally, great thanks go to ACCA, Edge Foundation, Jisc, the University of Sussex, the University of Derby, and the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board, whose generous sponsorship allowed this inquiry to take place.



Lord Jim Knight
(of Weymouth, co-chair)



Nicola Richards MP
(co-chair)



Dr Siobhan Neary
(co-chair)



Executive summary

Careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) and how it can support transitions into sustainable employment has always been a complex and challenging endeavour, affecting young people and adults at all stages in their education and employment. It is, however, a critical tool in driving the economy and tackling skills gaps in all sectors. The various activities and tasks which can comprise CIAG have been best summarised as culminating in:

a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/ or used¹.

Good CIAG doesn't just give people information or suggest to them what to do, it empowers people to feel knowledgeable and in control of their careers, able to make informed decisions about their learning and employment. It also supports the labour market to function effectively and efficiently.

We began this inquiry in summer 2020, early on in the Covid-19 pandemic, but at a point when it was already clear that the pandemic would have profound and potentially very long-term consequences for England's economy and workforce. The pandemic offered an opportunity to stand back and consider England's approach to careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG), and how well it supports young people and adults to successfully transition into long-term employment. We set out to find out the answers to three key research questions:

- What do people (of all ages, inside or outside of education or work) need from careers information, advice and guidance to help them transition within or into work in the current circumstances?
- What lessons can we learn from this about changes that need to be made to the careers information, advice and guidance system in England to ensure it works as best as it can?
- What should key stakeholders be doing to support people into work in the current circumstances?

Because the CIAG system in England currently operates on the premise that young people and adults who are in education should primarily receive CIAG from their education or training provider, we have organised the report to address educational settings and the situation for those not in education or training. However, we also identified some cross-cutting themes from our evidence, which have relevance across three areas: careers strategy, digital poverty, and labour market information.

Cross-cutting themes

Contributors to our inquiry told us that schools and colleges need more stability in the system, and to avoid the churn of policy announcements and strategy changes around CIAG. It is very difficult to create effective change in such a complex system in the space of only three or four years, particularly when the final year was taken up with adapting and responding to the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic. A strong conclusion from our evidence was the need for a longer-term perspective by government. The government's careers strategy was originally described as running from 2017 to 2020, but since the end of that period there has not been a new strategy, and there have been no clear pronouncements around whether schools and colleges should be continuing to work towards its principles.

¹ Professor Tristram Hooley. 'The evidence base on lifelong guidance', 2014.

The importance of the CIAG system at this pivotal time of economic upheaval, as we recover from the pandemic and move to a net-zero economy and society, warrants an enduring strategy and associated action plan. Government must also harness the expertise of employers alongside education and careers leaders to advise on the most effective interventions to support appropriate education, employment, training, and CIAG. All stakeholders have told us that there is insufficient funding for schools and colleges to pay for the CIAG work they are required to provide, let alone any of the improvements required to achieve better outcomes. Our inquiry found that, given the vital role CIAG plays in helping individuals move successfully into the right education, training and employment, as well as its role in supporting social mobility, the system must be properly funded.

It is vital to ensure that government schemes aiming to tackle increasing unemployment and persistent national skills gaps are correctly targeted and put to best use. Written submissions told us about potential problems arising from the fact that CIAG is not automatically given to people who are put on to Plan for Jobs schemes. This can lead to people bouncing from one scheme to another and not receiving the work opportunities or training that are right for the individual, which prevents them from successfully transitioning into sustainable work as quickly as possible. There is also duplication between offerings, with mismatch in the payments to suppliers for similar services. A coherent long-term strategy would help resolve these problems. The level of funding for this important service, vital for employment and economy, also needs to be a core feature of this year's Spending Review.

Digital poverty was a strong and clear theme arising from all of our evidence sessions, written evidence, and informal interviews with key stakeholders. Significant numbers of people lack sufficient access to broadband, appropriate computer equipment or other technology, and/or the digital literacy they need to access the online world. Some people have been excluded from the education or training they need in order to move into employment, or have been less able to access advice that would help them to make an informed decision about jobs to apply for or training to undertake. As we move towards a possible 'end' to the pandemic, when there will be a wider-scale return to learning and working in-person, many organisations are planning a blended delivery of online and in-person teaching, work, and CIAG provision. As such, the nominal end of the pandemic will not end the need to tackle digital poverty – a long-term strategy is necessary to ensure that no one is excluded from the digital world, which is an increasingly fundamental part of our lives in the twenty-first century.

During the rapid economic changes which have taken place throughout the pandemic, access to up-to-date **labour market information** (LMI) has become especially important. The destabilising effects of lockdown for particular sectors have meant that it's increasingly difficult for people to discern which roles and sectors they should be looking to for sustainable employment, as well as finding out the skills they need for these jobs. Existing LMI on job trends is not often very detailed at a local level and does not meet the demand from either individuals or organisations. In addition to the needs of individuals, this local information is also needed by employers and by institutions providing education and training in order to best advise people and help them into work, as well as to inform the courses which are offered. This requirement is unlikely to reduce post-pandemic, given the need to move to a green, net-zero economy and the shifts in the demand for particular skills and qualifications which will occur as a result.

These themes show how much progress still needs to be made on achieving the principles set out in the government's 2017 careers strategy paper. We therefore make a number of recommendations (detailed below) about long-term careers strategy, including adequate funding of the system; the embedding of CIAG into Plan for Jobs schemes; the zero rating of educational resources on mobile data to mitigate the effects of digital poverty; and improving access to aggregated job vacancies data for all.

Further education

Throughout the inquiry we heard about the challenges faced by further education and training providers, including colleges and independent training providers, in adapting their provision during the pandemic. Some FE colleges must contend with large and diverse cohorts of young people and adults, including many who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and experiencing digital poverty. Further education and independent training providers are tackling serious funding and time constraints which can make it difficult to offer personalised, one to one careers information, advice and guidance to all students. Many apprenticeships have been paused and apprentices have been furloughed, leaving them in limbo over whether they will be able to finish their qualification and return to employment, and fewer businesses are looking to hire apprentices given their financially precarious situation.

Aside from Covid-19 related issues, we also heard through written submissions that there is too much variation in the extent to which schools are complying with the Baker clause, which requires them to allow colleges and independent training providers to speak to students in years 8 to 13 about the vocational routes available to them. It's not therefore surprising that vocational routes are regarded as second best. The Skills for Jobs white paper stated the Department for Education's intentions to introduce further measures to enforce the Baker Clause, including "tougher formal action against non-compliance", and "government-funded careers support for schools to be made conditional on Baker Clause compliance". Further details on these measures would be welcome, but in the meantime better public clarity and transparency is needed about the quality of CIAG provision in all schools and colleges, including the implementation of the Baker clause. Ofsted inspectors should look to make CIAG assessment a constituent part of all of their evidence-gathering, assessment and reporting.

Higher education

During our evidence session focused on higher education, we heard about the financial constraints on careers services located in higher education institutions (HEIs), many of which have experienced budget cuts going back years despite increasing cohort sizes. Careers services have very successfully adapted to online and digital provision, and have seen higher levels of engagement with this than with face-to-face services pre-pandemic, but this can also put extra pressure on staff time and other resources. Written submissions noted that HEI leaders are understandably focused on the immediate needs of students to access teaching and learning online during the pandemic, but that leaders must also appreciate the ongoing importance of CIAG for students and graduates in order for them to make the most of higher education and successfully move into employment after graduation.

Students and graduates have been particularly affected by the consequences of the pandemic for the hospitality and retail sectors, losing the opportunity to gain work experience and support themselves through part-time work. Students and graduates from ethnic minority backgrounds are also more likely to become trapped in underemployment, precarious employment or gig economy work, a factor which is likely to be exacerbated by the pandemic. Much of our evidence highlights the important role that graduates will play in the UK's economic recovery from Covid-19, and the need to ensure that graduates are not forgotten about in funding and schemes aiming to help people into employment: currently none of the schemes in the government's Plan for Jobs are aimed at graduates. A number of contributors to our evidence suggested that a possible solution to the fall in graduate employment is for there to be increased support for SMEs to hire graduates, and so we recommend a national scheme of financial support to this end. This would benefit SMEs to bounce back from the pandemic, as graduates can provide a powerful boost to small businesses with their high-level skills and expertise in particular topics.

Adults outside of education

Ensuring that people have the right skills and qualifications for the work that would suit them best is crucial to creating the workforce that we need. Those who have been furloughed or made redundant may benefit from additional upskilling or training which they are not in a position to fund themselves. However, the government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee only offers fully funded level 3 qualifications for adults who do not already possess a full level 3 qualification. We found that lifelong learning loans must be made accessible to all those who need one in order to boost their employability. This will mean we can offer truly flexible learning and retraining opportunities throughout life to adults who may already have qualifications that are not suitable for their current role, or who need to retrain to move into a growth industry.

Adults and young people over the age of 13 are entitled to receive careers advice and guidance from the National Careers Service, but at the moment many of those who have been affected by the pandemic (e.g. those who have been furloughed or recently made redundant) do not fall into the Service's priority groups, and so don't qualify for enhanced support in their local area. We heard frequently through our evidence that there is insufficient awareness of the existence and services of the National Careers Service, which means that many adults don't know where to go for careers advice and guidance. The Chancellor promised £32 million for the National Careers Service last summer, but this money is at risk of not being fully spent as the Service is not able to find enough clients. This is for a number of reasons, including some crossover between the programmes offered by the DWP and the work of the National Careers Service. The Service is also at risk of being undermined by DWP work coaches undertaking some similar or related work to National Careers Service advisers.

The Service made its funding more flexible from October 2020 to March 2021, in order to support the Service's prime contractors to deliver on their contracts with their reduced customer numbers. The inquiry found that this increased flexibility needs to be maintained throughout the rest of the 2021/22 financial year, during which time the furlough scheme ends but the effects of the pandemic on the economy will continue to be felt.

Looking to the future, there is a strong consensus that the CIAG system in England needs to become a truly all-age national service, where all the constituent parts work together coherently and without gaps or unhelpful overlap. This means careers information, advice and guidance which is well-informed by the local labour market; well-advertised and easy to access; and provided through a blend of digital and in-person modes, to suit people with a range of needs and preferences. This also means a key role for employers in collaborating with education and training providers, CIAG providers and careers professionals, supporting CIAG provision and committing to forward planning about the skills and workforce they need. Government must harness the expertise and passion of all these sectors to ensure that everyone in England has the support needed as we move out of the Covid-19 pandemic, and into a changed economy. Following consideration of our evidence and findings we have made the following nine recommendations, which we believe will help to achieve this goal.

Full list of recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Government should set the framework for a stable, longer-term careers strategy. This framework should have the following elements:

- a) The Department for Education must maintain its 2017-2020 careers strategy for a lifespan of at least five more years, to give some much-needed stability to the education system in its work on implementing the strategy.
- b) The creation of an employer-led careers strategy advisory board, to provide long-term leadership and strategic direction on national careers strategy and government policies regarding careers, skills, education, training and employment. This should have a right of access to the Secretaries of State for Education and of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, in recognition of the potential contribution to business and the economy.
- c) Adequate longer-term funding for the CIAG system should be made available in the Spending Review 2021, with a parallel review to ensure best value is achieved from ring-fenced funding for careers services in schools and colleges.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Careers advice and guidance should be a constituent part of all Plan for Jobs schemes, to ensure that these schemes are as useful as possible for those undertaking them. The DWP should also review its processes and take any action necessary to ensure that work coaches are consistently referring clients to the National Careers Service when it is evident that they need or would benefit from receiving careers information, advice and guidance.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Government must work with telecommunications companies to coordinate and enforce the zero rating of educational and careers resources on mobile data, so that the use of these resources does not count towards users' mobile data allocation. This could be paid for by a percentage of telecommunications companies' profits.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The Department for Education should ensure that the collection of job vacancy data piloted by LMI for All is implemented permanently as part of the portal, fully funded for the foreseeable future and actively promoted to all stakeholders who could make use of it, including the general public.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Ofsted inspectors must assess and report on schools' compliance with the Baker Clause as a mandatory part of the inspection process. The Department for Education should issue supporting guidance on compliance and good practice, such as a minimum number of interactions between pupils and representatives from further education colleges or training providers throughout a pupil's time at school, similar to those required with employers.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Government should create and fund a national scheme to help small businesses to hire a graduate for 6 to 12 months, boosting businesses' adaptation to and recovery from Covid-19, while boosting graduates' employability. This scheme could be delivered locally through business-facing organisations. This would align with Government's provision of management and digital skills training for SMEs as part of its Help to Grow scheme. In the future (2022 onwards), this could be funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and could be extended to non-graduates.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Lifelong learning loans must be made truly flexible, so that people can take out a loan to study a qualification at whatever level they need in order to boost their employability, even if they already have an equivalent qualification at that level.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

The ESFA must widen the National Careers Service's priority groups for the rest of 2021/22, temporarily broadening them out to include people furloughed or at risk of redundancy regardless of their age, and those unemployed regardless of how long they have been unemployed. This will ensure that the large numbers of people affected by the pandemic can get back into work as quickly as possible, boosting the economic recovery from Covid-19.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

There must be much better communication of the existence and services of the National Careers Service, to ensure take-up of its services by all those who need careers advice and guidance. This should take the form of an ongoing national campaign but with a strong focus on communications activity at the local level as well.

Introduction

Careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) and how it can support transitions into sustainable employment has always been a challenging policy issue, interconnected with social justice issues and skills gaps in the economy. Our last Skills Commission report, *England's Skills Puzzle*², examined the functioning of the further education and skills system in England, including how well the system incorporates the needs of employers and local areas. CIAG is a key factor in ensuring that the FE and skills system works seamlessly with employers and other stakeholders to support the labour market. *England's Skills Puzzle* gathered some evidence from local authorities, training providers and students themselves which highlighted their concerns about the quality and consistency of CIAG. As a result, one of that report's recommendations identified the need for CIAG to be deeply informed by local needs and supported by collaboration between a range of groups, including employers.

We began this inquiry in summer 2020, early on in the Covid-19 pandemic, but at a point when it was already clear that the pandemic would have profound consequences for England's economy and workforce. At the time, there were pre-existing challenges for the labour market arising from factors such as the UK's departure from the EU, and the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'³. A reduction in the EU migrant workforce will mean that young people and adults in the UK increasingly need to move into jobs in sectors which are traditionally supported by a strong cohort of migrant workers, such as agriculture and health and social care. Sectors such as construction and engineering have persistent, long-term skills and workforce gaps which still need to be comprehensively addressed. Automation is set to impact on the global economy in ways which will affect millions of people, possibly causing them to need to change jobs or gain new skills⁴.

In addition to these issues, this November the UK will host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, a fact which has spurred the green agenda and climate change-related policy issues to the top of the priority list across broad swathes of society. Climate change presents the greatest challenge ever seen to our established ways of living, including our ideas about how society, the economy, and the labour market should work. An adequate global response will require billions of pounds in funding⁵ and significant changes to our education, skills and training system, so that people have the skills needed to help us adapt. Some stakeholders have raised concerns about the fact that there is currently no widely accepted definition of 'green skills', despite these being a key consideration in planning possible changes to the education, skills and training system.

Throughout 2020, particular sectors of the labour market experienced a severe downswing in employment levels and recruitment. This was concentrated in those sectors which primarily rely on in-person interaction, such as hospitality, entertainment, and retail⁶. The pandemic has had a particular effect on SMEs, which are often less able to weather significant drops in demand or general economic instability⁷. The Covid-19 pandemic offered an opportunity to consider England's approach to careers information, advice and guidance, and how well it supports young people and adults to successfully transition into long-term employment. This includes addressing how the CIAG system supports the labour market to function effectively and efficiently. We set out to find out the answers to three key research questions:

- What do people (of all ages, inside or outside of education or work) need from careers information, advice and guidance to help them transition within or into work in the current circumstances?
- What lessons can we learn from this about changes that need to be made to the careers information, advice and guidance system in England to ensure it works as best as it can?
- What should key stakeholders be doing to support people into work in the current circumstances?

² Simon Kelleher, Policy Connect. 'England's Skills Puzzle', February 2020.

³ <https://www.weforum.org/about/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-by-klaus-schwab/> [accessed 02.06.21].

⁴ McKinsey Global Institute. 'Jobs lost, jobs gained: What the future of work will mean for jobs, skills and wages', November 2017.

⁵ <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/step-climate-change-adaptation-or-face-serious-human-and-economic> [accessed 01.06.21]

⁶ Office for National Statistics. 'The impact of the coronavirus so far: the industries that struggled or recovered', December 2020.

⁷ Federation of Small Businesses. 'New Horizons: how small firms are navigating the Covid-19 crisis', May 2020.

In order to answer these questions, we first had to examine how the CIAG system works. CIAG is a devolved matter, and we focused on how the system works in England (although comparisons to the devolved nations such as Scotland and Wales can be very instructive in highlighting the benefits of alternative systems, particularly those which are comprehensively integrated into society and receive more funding⁸). Between 2001 and 2012, the government funded Connexions in England, a CIAG service for young people aged 13 to 19 and young people with learning difficulties up to the age of 24. Connexions was shut down in 2012, and the responsibility for providing CIAG to 13-19 year olds in education or training was handed to schools, colleges, and independent training providers.

However, experts raised concerns at the time that the statutory guidance for education providers was not clear, and that staff did not have the time or expertise to provide high-quality, independent and impartial CIAG; education providers were also not given extra funding in order to carry out this new responsibility⁹. The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) was established in 2015 as a government-funded national strategic body which invests in and supports CIAG in English schools and colleges, to help drive up quality and ensure positive outcomes.

The National Careers Service was also established in 2012 as a service providing free CIAG to all adults and young people over the age of 13. The Service maintains a website, web chat, and telephone provision which are accessible for all adults and young people over the age of 13; adults in particular priority groups are additionally entitled to face-to-face services in their local area. These face-to-face services are contracted out to nine prime contractors who each cover particular regions of England.

Because the CIAG system in England operates on the premise that young people and adults who are in education should primarily receive CIAG from their education or training provider, we have organised the report to address educational settings first and then the situation for those not in education or training. CIAG provision by schools, colleges, universities and the National Careers Service, as well as support provided by the Careers & Enterprise Company, are considered in more detail in the relevant chapters of the report. This includes examining how the CIAG system worked before the pandemic, but also how it responded to the unique challenges presented by the pandemic.

We have also tried to consider throughout the role played by employers in the system: the work of the CEC and the National Careers Service emphasises the important contribution which employers make, and the need to support their involvement in CIAG for people of all ages. We heard throughout our inquiry that education providers, CIAG providers and businesses aren't looking to return to 'business as usual' as we move out of the pandemic; instead, they are looking forwards with increased flexibility and adaptability, including changes to ways of working and the skills needed by workers. We hope that the evidence we have gathered and the recommendations we have made in this report will contribute to a strong, efficient CIAG system that provides support for all those who need it, preparing young people and adults for a changed world of work.

⁸ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-uk-scotland> [accessed 17.06.21].

⁹ Dr Konstantina Maragkou, Edge Foundation. 'The Connexions Service', February 2021.

Cross-cutting themes

The CIAG system in England operates on the premise that young people and adults who are in education should primarily receive careers advice and guidance from their education or training provider (although perspectives vary on the success of this as a model). Because of this, we organised our evidence-gathering, and thus the sections of this report, primarily around the areas of further education, higher education, and adults outside of education and training. However, we also identified some cross-cutting themes from our evidence, which have relevance across these three areas. These cross-cutting themes are careers strategy, digital poverty, and labour market information.

In addition, as part of our public call for written evidence, we asked education and training providers, CIAG providers and careers professionals to tell us about what they think good careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) is. In order to analyse and make recommendations around how CIAG can and should help people transition into work, we must first make sure we understand how CIAG can do this well. The answers we received emphasised that good CIAG doesn't just give people information or suggest to them what to do, it also empowers people to feel knowledgeable and in control of their careers, able to make informed decisions about their learning and employment. In order to do this, people need support from highly qualified, knowledgeable professionals, who are linked in with local employers and have access to good quality labour market information. Professor Tristram Hooley's 2014 paper examined the evidence base for CIAG and developed ten key elements of effective CIAG, which provides an excellent framework for considering how provision can be as holistic and high-quality as possible¹⁰.

Written submissions highlighted the fact that we don't only need CIAG while at school or college, or at the beginning of our journeys into the world of work: CIAG is a vital form of support which should be accessible to people at any time in their life.

“ Our careers take place across our lifetimes. They are not chosen when we leave school but are rather gradually enacted throughout our lives in dialogue with the labour market and the wider context. Individuals rarely spend their whole lives within a single job, occupation or sector, but even if they do, they will have numerous career decisions to make along the way. Such decisions cannot easily be anticipated as they are made by individuals who are developing and changing and take place in a shifting context. Consequently, career management is a lifelong process which takes place in a complex world. ”

(Tristram Hooley, written submission)

Submissions also raised the point that as we move out of the pandemic, CIAG is likely to continue to be delivered in a blend of online/digital and in-person support. The pandemic has necessitated a rapid shift to online and digital delivery, which for many people has made CIAG much more convenient to access, and so it seems sensible that CIAG providers would continue some of this provision in the future. However, many providers highlighted the continuing importance of face-to-face provision for a number of groups. This includes those experiencing digital poverty, who struggle to get the required equipment or internet access, but also many people who might just prefer to interact with careers advisers in person.

“ The personal approach helps to overcome barriers for people who: are not confident in the use of technology; who are concerned about granting access to their digital profile; or who value the interpersonal interaction with a trusted adviser in discussing such important issues. ”

(Careers England, written submission)

¹⁰ Professor Tristram Hooley. 'The evidence base on lifelong guidance', 2014.

Some of our evidence raised concerns about the workforce of careers advisers in England, which necessarily must be supported and developed in order to ensure that CIAG is provided well.

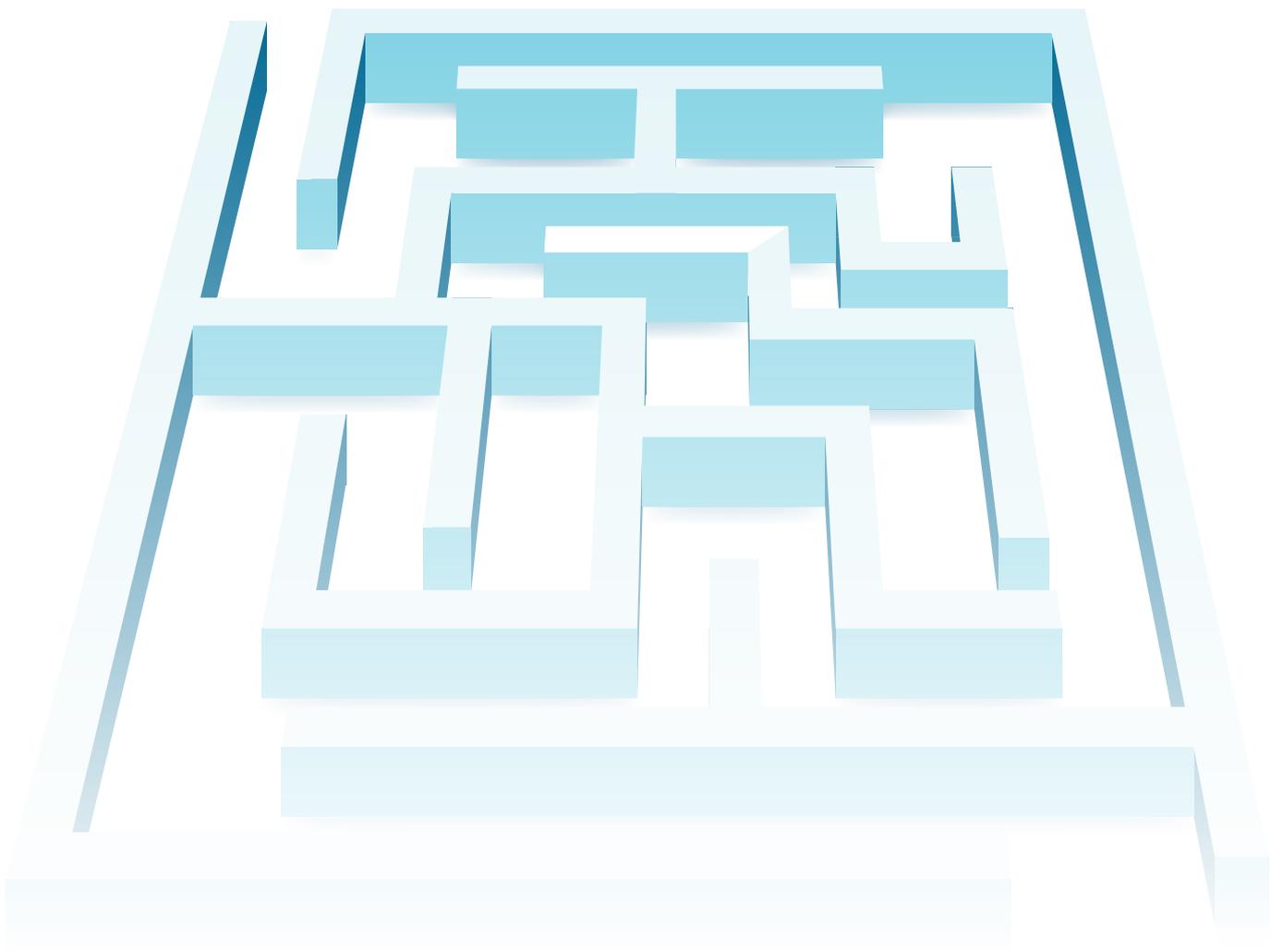
Research conducted for the Career Development Institute (CDI) (Neary and Priestley, 2018) identified a distinct skills shortage in the public funded careers sector (schools, FE and the National Careers Service), this is increasingly due to low salaries, precarious employment terms and conditions and a lack of career progression and CPD.

(iCeGS, written submission)

Finally, our evidence emphasised the value for the economy and for society of good CIAG provision. This must be a central component of our thinking about how we will ‘build back better’ as we move out of the pandemic. As summarised by the Career Development Institute:

Career professionals play a key role in meeting the Government’s aim of creating a stronger, fairer society in which people from all backgrounds can realise their potential; a thriving careers system, that is accessible to everyone, should be at the heart of the government’s focus on social mobility.

(CDI, written submission)



Careers strategy

The government's careers strategy published in 2017¹¹ emphasised the role that employers should play in the CIAG system, asked schools and colleges to work towards the Gatsby Benchmarks, and outlined a broadened remit for the Careers & Enterprise Company in supporting these ends. The strategy was originally described as running from 2017 to 2020, but since the end of that period, there has not been a new strategy and we are aware that the Department for Education (DfE) is not planning to issue one. However, there have not been clear pronouncements on this. The January 2021 Skills for Jobs white paper contained provisions on 'clear and trusted information, advice and guidance for careers and education choices' which follow on logically from the careers strategy, but the importance of the careers information, advice and guidance system at this pivotal time of economic upheaval should warrant a continued, dedicated strategy in its own right.

This is particularly important given the fact that various stakeholders articulated to us the confused and disjointed nature of the system of CIAG provision in England, which prevents the CIAG system from working as well as it could.

A key concern is access to career advice and guidance. England lacks a supported infrastructure that guarantees access for all young people. Since the demise of the Connexions Service, the careers sector has lost its presence on the high street. The service available to young people is school/college based. Post-16 careers guidance services through the National Careers Service (NCS) have been aligned with services offered by Job Centre Plus, so careers advice and guidance has limited public visibility and restricted access beyond a website, web chat or telephone helpline. Hence, few adults are aware of any careers advice and guidance that may be available to them.

(CDI, written submission)

Ultimately what exists in England is a series of siloed programmes funded by different parts of government. There is a need to draw it together into a single system that is understood by citizens.

(Tristram Hooley, written submission)

The government announced in the 2021 Skills for Jobs white paper that Professor Sir John Holman has been appointed as an Independent Strategic Advisor on Careers Guidance, and as part of this will undertake a review of how the Careers & Enterprise Company and National Careers Service work together. This review will be an important step on a journey to review and improve the way in which the constituent parts of the CIAG system in England work together, so that they do so coherently and without unnecessary crossover. This is fundamental to ensuring that the system is equipped and functioning well enough to support people with transitions into employment.

It is also vital to ensure that government schemes aiming to tackle increasing unemployment and persistent national skills gaps are correctly targeted and put to best use. We heard concerns from stakeholders about crossover between some of the work of Jobcentre Plus work coaches and National Careers Service advisers, meaning that both groups are sometimes competing for the same customers. Our evidence on this will be further elaborated on in the 'Adults outside of education' chapter of this report. This is clearly not the best use of government funding, and points to inconsistencies in the working relationship between the DWP and the DfE. These issues could be avoided if the advice and expertise of employers and careers professionals were taken into account at an early stage of programme conceptualisation.

¹¹ Department for Education. 'Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents', December 2017.

The 2017 careers strategy and 2021 Skills for Jobs white paper both articulated clear messages about the important role employers play in the education, skills and CIAG systems. Government must harness the expertise of employers alongside education and careers leaders to advise on the most effective interventions to support appropriate education, employment, training, and CIAG. This could be organised in the form of an independent advisory board, which could work alongside and regularly meet with the Skills and Productivity Board to inform its work. This recommendation was supported by numerous stakeholders throughout our evidence-gathering:

The Government should establish an Employer-led Advisory Board reporting directly to relevant ministers comprising senior representatives from employers, education and the career development profession. Such a body would advise on careers provision, guide the work of the National Careers Service and ensure value for money.

(Careers England)

There are other compelling reasons for maintaining a dedicated careers strategy. The majority of stakeholders told us that schools and colleges need more stability in the system and to avoid the churn of policy announcements and strategy changes. It is very difficult to create effective change in such a complex system in the space of only three or four years, particularly when the final year was taken up with adapting and responding to the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic. We recommend that the Department for Education should be clear that the Careers Strategy 2017-2020 will continue for a fixed term of at least five more years, before the results of the strategy are reviewed.

The final pressing issue communicated to us about careers strategy is the funding levels within the CIAG system. All stakeholders have told us that there is insufficient funding for schools and colleges to pay for the CIAG work they are required to provide. Our evidence on this will be elaborated on further in the 'Further education' chapter of this report. Given the vital role CIAG plays in helping individuals move successfully into the right education, training and employment, as well as its role in supporting social mobility, the system must be properly funded.

Our first recommendation draws together these three strands of the challenges for England's careers strategy, and seeks to provide long-term, viable answers to them.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Government should set the framework for a stable, longer-term careers strategy. This framework should have the following elements:

- a) The Department for Education must maintain its 2017-2020 careers strategy for a lifespan of at least five more years, to give some much-needed stability to the education system in its work on implementing the strategy.
- b) The creation of an employer-led careers strategy advisory board, to provide long-term leadership and strategic direction on national careers strategy and government policies regarding careers, skills, education, training and employment. This should have a right of access to the Secretaries of State for Education and of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, in recognition of the potential contribution to business and the economy.
- c) Adequate longer-term funding for the CIAG system should be made available in the Spending Review 2021, with a parallel review to ensure best value is achieved from ring-fenced funding for careers services in schools and colleges.

An advisory board could also monitor the implementation of the careers strategy, update regularly on its progress and any challenges, ensure collaboration between employers and educational institutions, and contribute to join-up between the work of government departments including the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Plan for Jobs schemes

In addition, written submissions told us about potential problems arising from the fact that CIAG is not automatically given to people who are put on to Plan for Jobs schemes. This can lead to people bouncing from one scheme to another and not receiving the work opportunities or training that are right for the individual, which prevents them from successfully transitioning into work as quickly as possible. The CDI and Careers England both highlighted the benefits that having CIAG embedded into these programmes would provide for the success of the programmes, in terms of successfully facilitating people to go on to a programme that's right for them and move into employment afterwards:

“ Sadly, there is no provision for careers guidance in these programmes. To increase their accessibility and success there needs to be a central facilitator able to act between the employer and prospective candidates - a role that careers service providers are ideally placed to deliver. ”

(CDI, written submission)

“ If the NCS was built into the pathway of support available to people via DWP programmes there would be a greater chance for them moving into the right opportunity and reduce the revolving door effect common in welfare to work programmes. ”

(Careers England, written submission)

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Careers advice and guidance should be a constituent part of all Plan for Jobs schemes, to ensure that these schemes are as useful as possible for those undertaking them. The DWP should also review its processes and take any action necessary to ensure that work coaches are consistently referring clients to the National Careers Service when it is evident that they need or would benefit from receiving careers information, advice and guidance.

Digital poverty

Digital poverty was a strong and clear theme arising from all of our evidence sessions, written evidence, and informal interviews with key stakeholders. It seems that a significant number of people lack sufficient access to broadband, appropriate computer equipment or other technology, and/or the digital literacy they need to access the online world. Some people have been excluded from the education or training they need in order to move into employment, or have been less able to access advice that would help them to make an informed decision about jobs to apply for or training to undertake.

As part of our evidence-gathering, we spoke to some of the National Careers Service's prime contractors, who provide the Service's area-based services across various regions of England. One organisation told us about their work with young people, adults and families experiencing digital poverty:

“Digital poverty has had a big impact on our customers. When you work with young people particularly, you see the impact of digital poverty because of them missing out. We run the family services division for [our local] County Council, and lots of the troubled families we work with are experiencing digital poverty; it's clear how this contributes to the education and skills gap because of this deprivation. The government package of rolling out laptops to people without equipment is good, but it's only a small drop in the ocean.”

(Anonymous prime contractor)

Digital poverty is also an issue affecting students in higher education. Although these students might be more likely to have a laptop, they might be facing challenges with affording wifi or mobile data while unable to access university campuses with free wifi. At our evidence session on higher education, Kate Wicklow, Policy Manager at GuildHE, told us about the experiences of students at GuildHE's members institutions in terms of digital poverty:

“The level of digital poverty in our student body is incredibly high and I don't think the sector as a whole was prepared for that... it was significantly higher than we had anticipated and specifically because we operate in rural and coastal regions, access to high speed broadband is severely lacking and that has had a really negative impact on student's ability to access online, live content... I think we as a sector should not take for granted our students have access to computer equipment, a stable internet connection, a quiet space and a stable home environment.”

(Kate Wicklow, GuildHE)

Written submissions to our public call for evidence described the effects of digital poverty, as well as highlighting the fact that those who need more help with moving into education or employment are also those who have struggled more with accessing help online:

“The digital world has expanded exponentially since March 2020 – those without digital skills are seriously marginalised. Many won't even be able to access or find out about opportunities.”

(dmh associates, written submission)

“Whilst young people are seen to be digital natives, they do not always want to use these systems for this type of activity. Therefore, it has been extremely challenging and time consuming to deliver a service at the scale needed. Many who need more help lack access to the technology that would have allowed them to interact with services.”

(CSW Group, written submission)

A separate inquiry by the APPG for Assistive Technology, for which Policy Connect provides the secretariat, is currently examining the issue of digital poverty experienced by disabled people¹². 'Standard' software can provide a digital barrier to access for disabled people unless they are provided with assistive technology. We do not therefore look at issues specific to disabled people and assistive technology in this report, but the issues in this report are equally relevant to disabled people as to other groups.

A February 2021 report from Jisc¹³ analysed preliminary findings from their FE Learner Digital Experience Insights Survey 2021, with specific regard to the effect of digital and data poverty on black and minority ethnic learners. The report found that "a higher proportion of BAME than white respondents have had problems with access to suitable devices, online platforms or services, software, Wi-Fi, mobile data costs and private and safe study space", and that Black African and Black Caribbean learners seemed to be the most affected out of the 'BAME' group. The report highlighted that digital and data poverty are linked to social disadvantage, and it follows logically that black and minority ethnic learners are more likely to be affected by digital and data poverty considering their increased likelihood of living in income poverty¹⁴.

A March 2021 Nesta report¹⁵ investigated data poverty experienced by adults in Scotland and Wales, defining data poverty as "individuals, households or communities who cannot afford sufficient, private and secure mobile or broadband data to meet their essential needs". The report found that data poverty widens other inequalities, such as increasing social isolation, having a negative impact on wellbeing, and limiting economic opportunities. It also found that one in seven adults in Scotland and Wales are experiencing data poverty, and 24% of unemployed people surveyed. The report similarly concluded that data poverty and income poverty are connected, and that disadvantaged groups are more likely to experience data poverty. It seems reasonable to surmise that these conclusions will equally be true for people in England, who are the focus of our report.

Throughout the pandemic, the government has run the 'Get help with technology' scheme¹⁶, which has provided laptops, tablets, and internet access for disadvantaged children and young people. The internet access support has primarily taken the form of increased mobile data, but 4G wireless routers have been distributed to people who are not able to increase their mobile data. The scheme also provided funding for accessing digital education platforms, and training and support with using technology and equipment. Third sector organisations have also responded to the issue of digital poverty, such as the Devices Dot Now scheme run by digital skills coalition Future Dot Now, which has provided devices, connectivity and support to over 10,000 people during the pandemic¹⁷.

The government also has plans to improve broadband infrastructure across the UK. The average broadband speed in the UK was 64 megabits per second in 2020, an increase of 18% on the previous year. In late 2020 the UK Gigabit Programme¹⁸ was announced, which aims to connect one million homes and businesses with gigabit broadband by 2025, including maximising coverage for the hardest to reach 20% of the UK. One gigabit is the same as 1,000 megabits, so it represents a significant increase in broadband capability, which could boost productivity and economic recovery from the pandemic. The government has promised £5 billion of funding for the scheme. However, a Social Market Foundation report published in 2020 raised concerns about the significant policy changes that would need to be made in order for the Gigabit Programme to succeed¹⁹.

¹² <https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/news/commission-launched-assistive-technology-and-employment> [accessed 10.06.21].

¹³ Charles Hutchings and Marianne Sheppard, Jisc. 'Exploring the impact of digital and data poverty on BAME learners', February 2021.

¹⁴ Equality and Human Rights Commission. 'Is Britain fairer? Key facts and findings on ethnicity', 2015.

¹⁵ Patricia J Lucas, Rosa Robinson and Lizzy Treacy, Nesta. 'Data poverty in Scotland and Wales', March 2021.

¹⁶ <https://get-help-with-tech.education.gov.uk/> [accessed 07.05.21].

¹⁷ <https://futuredotnow.uk/devicesdotnow/> [accessed 07.07.21].

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-new-5bn-project-gigabit> [accessed 07.05.21].

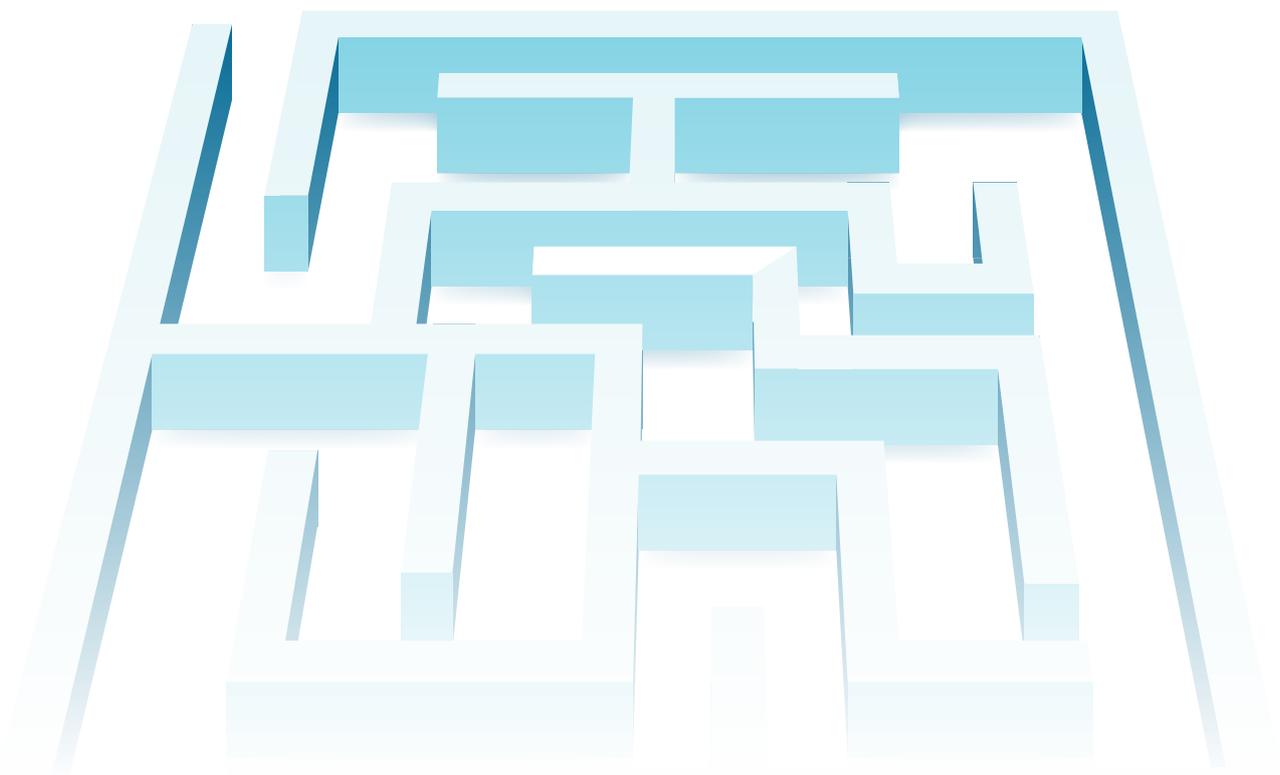
¹⁹ Scott Corfe, Richard Hyde, Kathryn Petrie, Social Market Foundation. 'Funding fibre', October 2020.

Despite these government and third sector investments in technology, internet access and broadband infrastructure, there are still large groups of people falling between the gaps. This means they remain without the necessary access to equipment, technology, wifi or mobile data that they need in order to be able to participate in education, careers advice or work. As we move towards a possible ‘end’ to the pandemic, when there will be a wider-scale return to learning and working in-person, many organisations are planning a blended delivery of online and in-person teaching, work, and CIAG provision. As such, the nominal end of the pandemic will not end the need to tackle digital poverty – a long-term strategy is necessary to ensure that no one is excluded from the digital world, which is an increasingly fundamental part of our lives in the twenty-first century.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Government must work with telecommunications companies to coordinate and enforce the zero rating of educational and careers resources on mobile data, so that the use of these resources does not count towards users’ mobile data allocation. This could be paid for by a percentage of telecommunications companies’ profits.

In 2020 ministers started a rollout of reaching school and college students with the equipment and internet access they need – we must now ramp up from our Covid-19 approach to ensure that no one is excluded from online education, training, work, or careers advice. Government should also consider bringing together the telecoms, public and education sector to identify ways of enabling broader digital connectivity across the UK, such as the proliferation of existing federated roaming networks. Jisc has already been contributing to this by encouraging local authorities to add eduroam to their existing govroam network at no extra charge, in order to increase the range of public places where students, researchers and academic staff can access eduroam.



Labour market information

During the rapid economic changes which have taken place throughout the pandemic, access to up-to-date labour market information (LMI) has become especially important. The destabilising effects of lockdown for particular sectors have meant that it's increasingly difficult for people to discern which roles and sectors they should be looking to for employment, as well as finding out the skills they need for these jobs. Existing LMI on job trends is not often very detailed at a local level, tending to highlight general trends in particular industries across a given region rather than describing the skills needs, job vacancies and growth industries in localities. In addition to the needs of individuals to understand their job prospects, institutions providing education and training need this locally-specific information in order to best advise people to help them into work, as well as to inform the courses which they offer. This will become increasingly the case post-pandemic, as the UK continues to move to a green, net-zero economy and shifts in the demand for particular skills and qualifications occur as a result.

The Careers & Enterprise Company told us in their written submission about some of the work of the Careers Hubs and Enterprise Adviser Network which they fund and support. These entities enable partnership with local government and regional organisations, as well as having strong networks with employers, all of which can then feed LMI into careers provision in schools and colleges. However, some stakeholders suggested that this data does not provide the level of detail that is needed to be able to give the most accurate information and advice, and is also difficult to procure:

Local labour market information can be tricky to source, especially during a pandemic. Much of the existing LMI data is based on historical trends and, in some cases, this is not linked to standard occupational classification (SOC) codes.

(dmh associates, written submission)

Peter Mayhew-Smith, Group Principal and CEO of South Thames College Group, confirmed during an evidence session that access to the most up-to-date data possible is vital for the college group's ability to provide the appropriate courses that are most likely to lead to students being able to secure employment after they leave.

We would really benefit from more extensive data around those economic dynamics so that we can better steer people towards the career openings that are coming through... we're struggling to get a really good picture of hard information that we can respond to, and thereby grow and adapt the curriculum to make sure it's fit for those opportunities.

(Peter Mayhew-Smith, Group Principal and CEO of South Thames College Group)

The Department for Education clearly intends to support access to LMI, based on its funding of the open data portal LMI for All. LMI for All was set up in 2012 by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), which recognised that there was a need for consistent, quality assured LMI. Previous to this, there was a proliferation of websites with LMI, but much of this was inconsistent or inaccurate, with its provenance unknown; people were receiving contradictory data on the labour market and there was no one source of primary information. The University of Warwick's Institute for Employment Research was commissioned to carry out a nine month pilot to bring together national sources of LMI and make it freely accessible for others to use. The pilot moved into full development mode from 2012 to 2015, and was given full project status in 2015. The management and funding of LMI for All moved over to the DfE when the UKCES closed. LMI for All makes a range of labour market data free to access and easier to source by collating information in a single access point, with the intention "for software developers to extract the labour market data, and use it to create informative and engaging apps, widgets or websites"²⁰. The data portal was described positively by stakeholders:

A key challenge faced by career professionals is securing accurate data – especially at the local level – in an ever-changing labour market, although access to LMI has benefitted from the developments stemming from ‘LMI for All’.

(CDI, written submission)

Forecast data on predicted job trends is very popular on the LMI for All website, but this can quickly become dated, particularly when there are rapid changes to the labour market such as those occasioned by the pandemic. One way of addressing this is through real-time LMI, such as up to date information on job vacancies. Since early 2020, LMI for All have been piloting a methodology and approach to scraping job vacancies websites for data²¹. These data are then cleaned, processed for trend analysis and job classification, and LMI for All publish a monthly vacancy dataset based on the information from the previous month. The team running the data portal use standard taxonomies of skills and occupational classifications, meaning this information is linked to data in LMI for All and can be easily used and understood by others. The team have run a small pilot with DfE to show the possibilities for long-term trend analysis of vacancy information at LEP level. This includes information on occupational trends, vacancy trends, and skills most demanded over a period of time.

The addition of this web-scraping methodology and the accompanying vacancy data to the LMI for All portal could provide the detailed, up-to-date, place-based data that is needed to support the efficient functioning of the education, skills and CIAG system.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The Department for Education should ensure that the collection of job vacancy data piloted by LMI for All is implemented permanently as part of the portal, fully funded for the foreseeable future and actively promoted to all stakeholders who could make use of it, including the general public.

²⁰ <https://www.lmiforall.org.uk/about-lmi-for-all/> [accessed 06.05.21].

²¹ <https://www.lmiforall.org.uk/2020/07/piloting-a-new-online-job-scraping-tool/> [accessed 07.05.21].

Further education

From the beginning of our evidence-gathering for this inquiry, we wanted to explore the experiences of young people and adults accessing CIAG in further education, including their experiences during the pandemic. We also wanted to hear about the challenges for further education providers of adapting their education and CIAG provision to the pandemic. Some of our findings reflect on CIAG in schools, particularly in terms of how this leads (or doesn't lead) people into further education. However, our evidence and analysis focuses on further education rather than schools due to the complexity of the schools system in England, and the limited scope of this report. The term 'young people' is a nebulous one, often used by different people to signify very different age groups, but in this report we use it to mean people aged 16-24 unless stated otherwise. Similarly, the category of 'adults' often overlaps to varying extents with 'young people', and is used in this report to refer to people aged 19 and over unless stated otherwise.

As the Skills for Jobs white paper notes, England's economy is currently facing the need to respond to three serious factors: the coronavirus pandemic, Brexit, and the need to meet the UK's commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Further education and training, particularly for adults, will be crucial to a long-term, sustainable economic recovery and adaptation. Despite this, there has been a gradual but significant decline of adult participation in further education, skills and training over the past decade.

The Department for Education's statistics on further education before the start of the pandemic evidence this: in the first two quarters of the 2019/20 academic year (August 2019 to January 2020), 1,373,800 adults aged 19+ were taking part in government-funded further education, including apprenticeships. This is a decrease of 4.8% from the same period in 2018/19. Similarly, participation in Adult Education Budget-funded education and training fell by 7.1% between the same periods of time, and participation in community learning fell by 8.2%²². The current time period is ripe for government to reassess how increased investment in and support of CIAG provision can bolster vitally necessary participation in lifelong education and training.

CIAG provision in further education

At our first evidence session, we heard from three young people about their experiences of CIAG in further education, and what they wanted to get from CIAG. Ciara, who had finished college one year previously, described feeling that she wasn't fully informed of all the different routes and options available to her, as her college wanted most students to go to university.

“ I wasn't shown all the different ways that I could use my qualifications and interests to enter into a field or career that I'd never thought about before or thought that I couldn't do, like engineering. And I had to go away and do a lot of painstaking research myself. And it was through my network of friends and family, the people at Youth Employment UK and my own perseverance and luck that I managed to find my apprenticeship... in 2020 young people should not need to rely on their luck and fortune to get to where they want to be in their life and their careers. ”

(Ciara, Youth Ambassador at Youth Employment UK)

²² Department for Education. 'Further education and skills, England: March 2020', March 2020.

Josh, who had finished college six years previously, similarly described an emphasis on higher education, as well as minimal visits from employers which might have helped him to understand the range of work and study options available. The fact that these young people had similar experiences of CIAG, despite the six years' difference between their times in further education, is troubling.

We did have visits from universities so they were quite good for if that's the route you wanted to go down. But I think maybe we had two employers across the two years I spent there, and they weren't in anything I was interested in.

(Josh, Youth Ambassador at Youth Employment UK)

The charity Youth Employment UK has for the past few years undertaken an annual Youth Voice Census, surveying young people aged 14 to 24 on their experiences of life, study and work. The 2020 report highlighted inequality in young people's experiences of CIAG by factors such as their gender and race. The results of the survey showed that young women were much more likely to hear about academic pathways than young men, and young men were more likely to hear about vocational routes such as traineeships and apprenticeships. However, still only 31% of young male respondents had heard about apprenticeships five times or more, versus 24% of young women. Concerningly, the survey also found that black respondents were less likely to have heard about all of the options. 33% of black respondents had never had apprenticeships discussed with them, versus 13% of white respondents; and 22% of black respondents had never had university discussed with them, compared to 9% of white respondents. Young people with additional needs were similarly less likely to hear about all of the options available to them²³.

Inequality in experiences of CIAG is particularly problematic because young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be out of education, employment or training than their more advantaged peers, and so need additional support to help them succeed in education and work. Samantha Windett, Director of Policy at Impetus, spoke at our evidence session about Impetus's Youth Jobs Gap research²⁴. Sam explained:

Our research found that even when [disadvantaged] young people reach the same qualification level as their peers, so whether that's GCSE, A-level, exactly the same qualification level, they were still 50% more likely to be out of education, employment, and training.

(Sam Windett, Impetus)

Impetus's research also highlighted that the starkest differences in the outcomes of young people are not between regions, but within regions. For example, the gap between the rate of disadvantaged and advantaged young people who are NEET is twice as large in Wigan (18 percentage points) as it is in Oldham (9 percentage points)²⁵. The Greater Manchester region where both of these areas are found is usually referred to as a whole, in relation to the overall difference in the NEET rate between regions; this disappears the individual experiences of young people in different local areas. This research emphasises the importance of young people receiving information, advice and guidance that are informed by the specifics of their local area, rather than assuming that all young people within a particular region have the same access to education and employment. The implementation of Recommendation 4 would empower careers professionals with detailed local labour market information that could strengthen the support they provide.

²³ Youth Employment UK. 'Youth Voice Census Report 2020', June 2020.

²⁴ Impetus. 'Research briefing 1: Establishing the Employment Gap', April 2019.

²⁵ Impetus. 'Research briefing 4: The Employment Gap in the North West', June 2019.

The Careers & Enterprise Company

The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) was established in 2015 as a government-funded national strategic body which invests in and supports CIAG in English schools and colleges. The CEC works to embed employer engagement at the heart of CIAG, primarily through its Enterprise Adviser Network. The network connects local professionals and business leaders (who then become Enterprise Advisers) with nearby schools or colleges, to support schools and colleges' CIAG work. Enterprise Advisers use their own experience and knowledge of their industry and the world of work more generally, as well as their connections with other local employers, to advise strategically on schools and colleges' CIAG provision. This includes supporting with preparing young people for the world of work by engaging in providing CIAG themselves, such as through attending careers fairs, offering interview practice, or hosting students for work experience.

The programmes of work previously described are informed by the Gatsby Benchmarks. In 2014 the Gatsby Foundation published a report by Sir John Holman which detailed the national and international research he had undertaken into what good careers guidance looks like²⁶. This research culminated in the creation of the Gatsby Benchmarks, eight principles of good careers guidance which form a coherent framework. The government's Careers Strategy 2017-2020 and related statutory guidance set out that schools and colleges should use the benchmarks to inform and improve their CIAG provision, supported by the work of the CEC.

As part of this work, in September 2018 the CEC embarked on a programme of creating and funding Careers Hubs based in Local Enterprise Partnerships around England. These are groups of between 20 and 40 secondary schools and colleges in a local area, working in collaboration with business partners, local authorities, education providers and the voluntary sector. Careers Hubs receive support, resources and funding from the CEC, and bring together these different stakeholders to work together on achieving improved careers outcomes for young people. The CEC's most recent report into the results of the Careers Hub programme shows that schools and colleges which are part of a Careers Hub outperform other schools and colleges on each Gatsby Benchmark, and have improved their performance faster²⁷. According to the CEC's written submission to our inquiry, today the organisation works with nearly 80% of secondary schools and colleges in England.

The CEC also offers a free online tool, Compass, which allows schools and colleges to self-assess the quality of their CIAG provision against the Gatsby Benchmarks. Compass is used by 85% of schools and colleges in England, more than are engaged in the Enterprise Adviser Network or Careers Hubs. According to the CEC's 2019 State of the Nation report, the last report issued before the pandemic, by the end of the 2018/19 academic year schools and colleges were fully achieving an average of 3 Gatsby Benchmarks. The report also states that "The proportion of schools and colleges achieving at least half of the Gatsby Benchmarks almost doubled between 2018 and 2019 (19.9% to 37.3%) and there was an increase in the proportion achieving 7 or 8 Benchmarks"²⁸.

Some stakeholders raised concerns to us that the primary form of assessing and monitoring the quality of CIAG provided in schools is through self-assessment, suggesting instead that schools and colleges work towards the Quality in Careers Standard award, or that Ofsted should strengthen its monitoring and reporting on CIAG. We hope that this consideration will be explored as part of Ofsted's thematic review of the inspection of careers provision, given the fact that accurate and objective monitoring is essential in order to achieve real progress.

²⁶ Gatsby Foundation. 'Good Career Guidance', April 2014.

²⁷ SQW. 'Enterprise Adviser Network and Careers Hubs: Evaluation Report', October 2020.

²⁸ Careers & Enterprise Company. 'State of the Nation 2019', September 2019.

While improving the quality of CIAG provision in education providers takes time, and schools have only been explicitly working towards the Gatsby Benchmarks for the past roughly three years, the fact that so many schools and colleges are not meeting many of the benchmarks is concerning. This shows how much progress still needs to be made on achieving the principles set out in the government's 2017 Careers Strategy. In addition, it is positive that schools and colleges supported by the Enterprise Adviser Network or Careers Hubs have higher quality CIAG according to their self-assessment, and undoubtedly the partnerships with business leaders and other stakeholders are a key component of this. However, it is probable that the increased funding and resources associated with engaging with the Network or being part of a Careers Hub are also key to improving schools and colleges' CIAG. All schools and colleges would likely be able to improve the quality of their CIAG provision somewhat, given increased funding and resources. For these reasons, we believe **recommendation 1** is fundamental to ensuring the continued development and success of the Careers Strategy and of the implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks in schools and colleges.

Funding challenges

We heard from a number of contributors to the inquiry about the challenges for schools and colleges of funding CIAG provision sufficient for their whole student population and which meets the Gatsby Benchmarks. A 2019 survey by dmh associates for Careers England engaged with 191 head teachers, senior teachers, careers professionals and enterprise coordinators working within secondary schools and academies in England. The survey highlighted that 75% of respondents said they had either limited, insufficient, or no funding for CIAG provision²⁹.

Statutory Duties for schools and colleges in respect of the provision of careers information, advice and guidance provide an expectation on institutions to comply, without it being mandatory and without the funding to enable it to happen. We ought to recognise the many competing priorities for schools and colleges and the burden of targets they are expected to report on in understanding why careers lacks the status it should be afforded.

(Careers England, written submission)

²⁹ Dr Deirdre Hughes, dmh associates. 'National Survey of School Leaders and Careers Professionals', November 2019.

Further education colleges in particular are consistently struggling with years of underfunding, compounding the funding and time constraints. The Institute for Fiscal Studies reported in 2020 that further education and sixth form colleges had seen a 12% drop in real-terms funding per student since 2010/11, and a 23% drop in school sixth forms, the largest drop in any sector of the education system³⁰. Budget constraints have an inevitable knock-on effect on CIAG provision, which competes for budget with a number of other priorities which it is mandatory for the provider to meet. Catherine Sezen, Senior Policy Manager at the Association of Colleges, described the challenge for colleges with large cohorts but limited funding for CIAG provision:

I think funding is quite key for colleges. So, if you look at a very large college, one of the Gatsby Benchmarks is that every young person is entitled to information, advice, and guidance and that actual careers interview. For some colleges, that would mean every single day, every single minute of every single day, every careers advisor being engaged and still running out of time. So, I think one of the things we really do need to invest in is invest in careers, but invest in careers staff.

(Catherine Sezen, Association of Colleges)

In the Association of Colleges' written submission to the inquiry, it highlighted findings from its March 2020 Careers survey. This includes that just under 50% of colleges raised the difficulty for their institution of delivering Gatsby Benchmark 8, which requires one to one personal careers guidance for every student delivered by a practitioner qualified to a minimum of level 6. Colleges felt that this was impractical without additional funding to support this provision. While government might shy away from the prospect of a significant increase of funding for CIAG, CEC-funded research has found that one to one personal guidance has a return on investment for the government of at least £3 for every £1 spent, and most likely much more. The research highlights that personal guidance has the capacity to support young people with transitioning into employment, as well as conferring benefits for economic growth³¹. This is one of the reasons why we have made **Recommendation 1c**, described in the Cross-cutting themes chapter, asserting the need for increased funding in the CIAG system for schools and colleges.

The Skills Commission has made recommendations in previous reports in relation to further education, specifically that England should have a long-term framework for skills and life-long learning³². It is encouraging that provision is made for a long-term framework and lifelong learning entitlement in the Skills for Jobs White Paper, but this is dependent on both budget and consultation. For a life-long learning system to be helpful to people, it needs to be supported with access to good life-long careers information, advice and guidance. The government must incorporate this consideration into the spending review 2021 and beyond.

³⁰ Jack Britton, Christine Farquharson, Luke Sibieta, Imran Tahir, and Ben Waltmann, Institute for Fiscal Studies. '2020 annual report on education spending in England', November 2020.

³¹ Chris Percy. 'Personal Guidance in English Secondary Education: An initial Return-on-Investment estimate', August 2020.

³² Simon Kelleher, Policy Connect. 'England's Skills Puzzle', March 2020.

Effects of the pandemic

Research shows that adults had high levels of participation in learning during lockdown. The Learning and Work Institute's report 'Learning through lockdown'³³ examined the findings of the organisation's annual Adult Participation in Learning survey, highlighting that 43% of adults surveyed had taken part in some form of learning in 2020. However, this varied widely across different groups of learners: only 20% of adults who left school at the first opportunity participated in learning during lockdown, versus 57% of adults who stayed in education until the age of 21. In addition, only 29% of adults in lower socio-economic groups undertook learning in 2020 compared to 57% of adults in higher socio-economic groups; and only 34% of adults who were unemployed took part in learning, versus 52% of adults in employment. These last few statistics show that adults who might be most in need of additional qualifications, upskilling or reskilling were less likely to participate in learning during the pandemic.

Many 16-18 year olds in further education will have been learning from home during the pandemic, although this depends on what they were studying – we examine the situation for apprentices further on in this chapter. Adaptation to online learning varied between institutions as to how many classes were delivered 'live', versus some young people being sent work to carry out largely by themselves. As explored during the 'Cross-cutting themes' chapter, some young people experienced challenges with accessing education or training due to digital poverty, such as not having consistent access to a laptop or not being able to afford the wifi or mobile data needed.

Young people's access to CIAG from their education or training provider was necessarily also impacted by the pandemic. In July 2020 EngineeringUK commissioned Ipsos Mori to carry out a survey of over 1,000 young people, aged 11-19, to find out about how their attitudes towards their education and career prospects might have changed because of the pandemic³⁴. The majority of young people surveyed felt that the pandemic would have a negative effect on the job opportunities available to them, including worrying that going to university or becoming an apprentice would be more difficult during and following the pandemic. 44% of young people surveyed felt that 'having a job you can be certain to keep' was more important to them now in their thinking about their career, as a result of the pandemic. However, most stakeholders believe we are moving increasingly towards people having 'portfolio' careers made up of a range of jobs throughout their lifetime, rather than remaining primarily in one role: navigating young people's expectations and concerns around this, and drawing out the implications in their careers advice, is a key task for careers professionals.

The survey also asked young people about to what extent they had been able to take part in career activities since March 2020, when lockdown started. 55% of young people stated that they had taken part in some kind of careers activity between March and July 2020, but the largest percentage of this (37%) was in the form of discussing career options with parents. The second largest percentage of these activities, 23%, was searching for careers information online. Only 13% had had an online careers advice session with someone from their school, and 6% had attended an online careers events with an employer. It is perhaps unsurprising that schools and colleges may have focused their attention on adapting teaching and learning to online or digital delivery, particularly given the need for a very rapid transition to prevent young people from falling behind. Searching for careers information online can also be a useful activity which empowers young people to inform themselves about their options, but this is only true insofar as they are able to understand and interpret the information they find. It seems likely that young people would have benefitted from receiving increased CIAG provision during the pandemic, to help them remain engaged with education and training and to support them through key transition points.

³³ Fiona Aldridge, David Jones and Emily Southgate, Learning and Work Institute. 'Learning through lockdown: findings from the 2020 Adult Participation in Learning Survey', November 2020.

³⁴ EngineeringUK. 'Young people and Covid-19: how the pandemic has affected careers experiences and aspirations', August 2020.

Challenges for further education providers and local authorities

FE colleges and independent training providers have faced a range of challenges in adapting their educational and careers provision during the pandemic, and leaders from some of these organisations spoke at our evidence sessions. Mark Malcomson, Principal of City Lit and Chair of the Institutes for Adult Learning Group, told us about how the shift to online provision entailed a wider learner base which was a positive development for his institution:

“We went online substantially and we’re seeing a big change in the actual make up of our student audience, where we’re getting people who didn’t previously have access to adult education around the country suddenly going, ‘Wow, there’s this thing. It’s predominantly based in London and typical north-south divide. But it’s something that if I’m in Middlesbrough or St Ives I’m suddenly able to access.”

(Mark Malcomson, City Lit)

Peter Mayhew-Smith, Group Principal and CEO of South Thames College Group, described the increased demand the Group has seen from learners looking to take short-term qualifications which will help them rapidly get into employment. These qualifications are focused in a few particular growth sectors:

“The effort to create bridges from those declining sectors into those expanding sectors for people displaced by the pandemic, is really where our efforts are focusing. So, we are seeing a lot of demand for cleaning services, for security, and in the care sector, where there are organisations employing more and more staff into those much less glamorous careers than the ones those displaced people have previously experienced.”

(Peter Mayhew-Smith, South Thames College Group)

As part of the Group’s CIAG work, after finding learners an appropriate course which will help them move into employment, careers professionals and other staff at the college would normally help learners either on to a work placement or into a job with a local employer. However, the networking required to facilitate these transitions has become more difficult to achieve, given the fact that careers fairs and other employer interactions had to be stopped during lockdown. Careers professionals at the Group have run events such as virtual job fairs to try and counter this problem, and to rebuild the connections between students looking for work and local employers looking to grow their workforce. This networking needs to be built back in post-pandemic.

Peter also described the difficulties for careers professionals at the Group of supporting adult learners through the changes to their career plans necessitated by the pandemic. Often these changes have meant that learners are contemplating moving into a sector that is drastically different from what they had planned, which might not pay as well and doesn’t have the same career prospects, leading to strong feelings of frustration and disappointment. Careers professionals at the Group have found it challenging to provide the emotional support needed by learners when delivering this support online. It can be difficult to build a relationship with someone and provide reassurance to them when it’s not possible to have face to face discussions or share physical resources with them.

Henry Lawes, Programme Manager for the Adult Education Budget at the West of England Combined Authority, spoke about how the combined authority had to adapt its management and delivery of its Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding due to the pandemic.

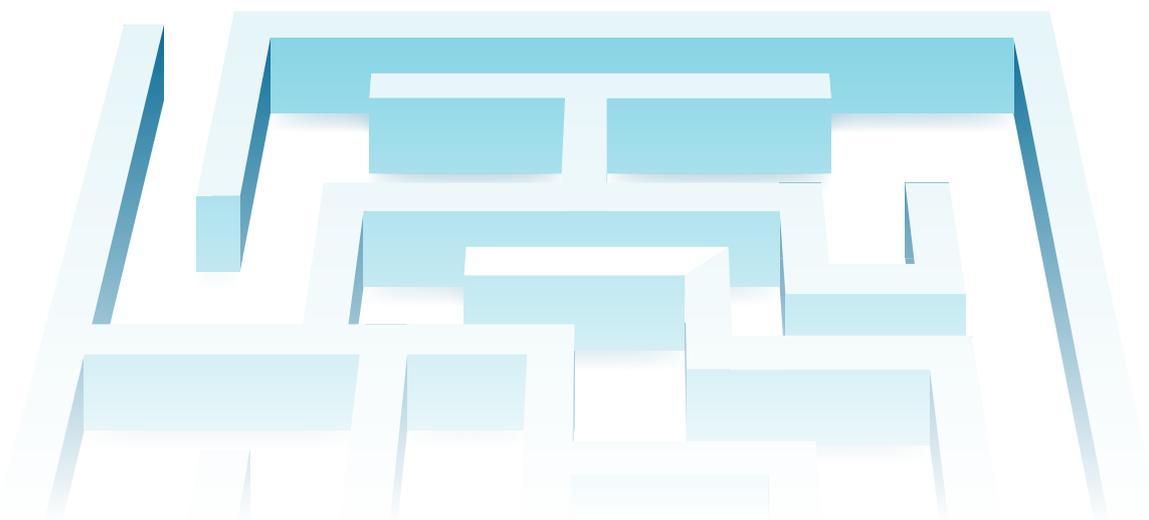
We put some emergency protections in place in order to ensure that our grant funding still flowed through, and that we gave the provider base some reassurance that they wouldn't be penalised for under-delivery due to Covid-19, because the pandemic, one of the impacts straight away is on the financial situation for the providers. They're paid in advance, but then they're reconciled back later in the year, and suddenly their ability to deliver the work which enables them to earn that funding in a sense was removed from them, or made much more significantly difficult.

(Henry Lawes, West of England Combined Authority)

In addition, Henry described the educational provision of the area's AEB providers having to rapidly change in terms of content. This entailed shifting from its focus on learners furthest away from the labour market, those with fewer skills and in need of deeper interventions, to the sudden influx of higher-skilled people who had found themselves furloughed or being made redundant due to the pandemic.

The CEC carried out a survey of careers leaders in schools and colleges in June and July 2020, which found that 61% of careers leaders said they had not been able to maintain the same quality of careers provision as before the pandemic. In addition to that, 32% said that they had been able to only partly. 17% per cent of the careers leaders surveyed said that their institution had put careers provision on hold due to the pandemic. Particular aspects of CIAG provision were worse hit than others, such as interactions with employers, and further and higher education providers³⁵. In response to these challenges for CIAG provision, the CEC put together a range of events and resources to support careers professionals with online delivery. This included a series of video career talks, a programme of resources for students, and 'My Week of Work', a week of virtual engagement with employers to replace lost work experience.

Learners will need increased support and CIAG provision as we move out of the pandemic, partly to make up for the provision they have missed but also to help them to consider their education and employment options as we move out of the pandemic. Government should urgently consider our **Recommendation 1**, detailed in the Cross-cutting themes chapter, to ensure that further education providers are equipped to provide the support that learners need.



Apprenticeships

During the pandemic, many apprenticeships were paused and apprentices furloughed, leaving people in limbo over whether they will be able to finish their qualification and move into employment. The Sutton Trust published research in mid-2020 which showed that, as of early April 2020, employers surveyed reported an average of only 39% of apprenticeships continuing as normal. Employers reported that 36% of apprentices were furloughed and 8% made redundant, as well as 17% having their off-the-job learning suspended. Looking forwards, 31% of employers reported that they were likely to hire fewer or no apprentices over the coming year (the rest of 2020). The survey also highlighted the challenges for apprentices themselves, as 37% of employers stated that some of their apprentices were not able to work from home due to lack of access to the equipment needed, or because their role wasn't suitable for working from home.³⁶ More recent research from Make UK in May 2021 showed that only 47% of manufacturers had recruited an engineering or manufacturing apprentice in the previous 12 months, due to the effects of the pandemic³⁷.

In April 2021 the government increased the incentive for employers to a £3000 payment for those hiring a new apprentice between 1st April and 30th September 2021, which we hope will make some difference to this issue. However, Chinara Rustamova, Senior Policy Adviser for Education and Skills at the Federation of Small Businesses, raised concerns about the fact that these payments are received quite late on in the course of the apprenticeship:

Then I read the funding rules and I found out that they are actually going to transfer the funds so you can get those incentives in two instalments. The first one is going to be after the 90th day of the apprenticeship, which means three months, and the second instalment after the 365th day, so that's like a year after. So, it's not actually that big an incentive if you're bearing in mind that you're paying 5% co-investment plus you're losing the employee for one day a week because they still have to do the 20% off-the-job training.

(Chinara Rustamova, Federation of Small Businesses)

The Association of Education and Learning Providers (AELP) represents providers of apprenticeships, employability support and vocational learning, including the providers of over 70% of apprenticeships in England. During our evidence session AELP told us about the challenges facing their members during the pandemic, specifically in regard to apprenticeship provision. One of the difficulties was that there were only two awarding organisations who had the ability to offer remote invigilation of functional skills exams, which apprentices need to pass in order to be able to complete their apprenticeship. This resulted in a pile-up of apprentices unable to finish their qualification and subsequently move into employment.

³⁵ The Careers & Enterprise Company. 'Careers education in England's schools and colleges 2020', November 2020.

³⁶ Katherine Doherty, Carl Cullinane, The Sutton Trust. 'Covid-19 impacts: apprenticeships', May 2020.

³⁷ Make UK. 'Retain, Recruit, Revise: Four years on from the apprenticeship levy', May 2021.

Another was the threat posed to lower level apprenticeships by schemes such as Kickstart: the AELP articulated that some employers who were already suffering financially were more interested in taking on young people through the Kickstart programme rather than hiring an apprentice. The Kickstart programme offered them a young person whose salary would be paid (at minimum wage) by the government for six months, rather than the employer having to pay the salary of an apprentice who would also be off the job to study one day a week. As a result, AELP has been calling on government to offer a 50% wage subsidy for 16-24 year old apprentices, so that employers are able to take young people on through these longer-term routes. Paul Warner, Director of Research and Development at AELP, described the possible consequences for the further education system if apprenticeship provision was badly affected by the pandemic:

“The financial importance of apprenticeships to independents in particular is so key, that if that provision is de-railed by this crisis then we also threaten to knock away one of the underpinning struts of the FE system because independents will just, for one reason or another, withdraw from the system all together.”

(Paul Warner, AELP)

As various stakeholders asserted in their written submissions, having a strong pipeline of young people moving into apprenticeships will be key for allowing the economy and labour market not just to recover from the pandemic, but also to respond to the existing and future challenges arising from Brexit. There are also other considerations, such as the need for people to be moving into green jobs that will help us to achieve net zero carbon emissions within the next decade or so.

Providers of technical and vocational education have long felt that the education system was stacked against them. The historical deprioritisation and devaluing of vocational and technical education in England has led to schools directing the majority of young people into traditional academic routes rather than allowing them to explore all of the options available. To support careers professionals in advising people about apprenticeships and other forms of technical education, AELP (supported by the Careers & Enterprise Company) launched in April 2021 a Technical Education Pathways Resource³⁸. The guide includes a map of how the various technical qualifications sit together, descriptions of each learning type, what they cost, and how learners can apply for them.

The government has also recently tried to counteract this issue in a number of ways, including by introducing the Baker clause into statutory guidance.

The Baker Clause

The Baker Clause requires schools to allow further education colleges and training providers to speak to students in years 8 to 13 about the vocational routes available to them. We heard through written submissions that there is too much variation in the extent to which schools are complying with the requirement. This contributes to the issue of the lack of parity of esteem between academic and vocational education routes in the UK, as well as leading to people going through an educational route which might not best help them move into employment.

³⁸ <https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/technical-education-pathways-resource> [accessed 29.06.21].

³⁹ Dean Hochlaf and Joe Dromey, IPPR. 'The Baker Clause, one year on', January 2019.

A 2019 IPPR report found that two in five schools hadn't published a provider access statement, and seven in 10 technical education providers found it difficult to access their local schools to talk to pupils about their offer³⁹. It's not therefore surprising that vocational routes are regarded as second best. Written submissions to our inquiry echoed the IPPR report's findings:

Schools keep failing in this crucial task by frequently preventing FE providers and colleges from presenting what they have to offer. Several AELP members often report being turned away from advertising opportunities in apprenticeships and technical education at the school gates.

(AELP, written submission)

The monitoring and regulation of schools' implementation of the Baker clause was frequently raised throughout our evidence-gathering, as well as Ofsted's monitoring of CIAG provision in schools and colleges more generally. It is mandatory in legislation for Ofsted inspection reports on further education and skills providers to describe the provider's CIAG provision, but this is not the case for schools. As a result, many Ofsted inspection reports for schools do not comment on CIAG provision, including adherence to the Baker clause.

The Skills for Jobs white paper stated that Ofsted will be asked to undertake a thematic review in order "to provide an up-to-date assessment of careers guidance in schools and colleges and provide recommendations to improve practice". This review is likely to cover all education and training provision for 12-18 year olds, and will include examining compliance with the Baker clause. However, independent training and apprenticeship providers are not in the scope of the review. This is concerning, considering the worries stakeholders expressed to us about the quality of CIAG delivered by these providers. The white paper also stated the Department for Education's intentions to introduce further measures to enforce the Baker Clause, including "tougher formal action against non-compliance", and "government-funded careers support for schools to be made conditional on Baker Clause compliance". Further details on these measures would be welcome.

The updated version of the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework released in 2019 stated that teachers and schools should be inspected on CIAG provision as part of assessing the 'personal development' grade. As a result, inspectors do gather evidence on this, even if commentary on it is not included in their final report. However, better public clarity and transparency is needed about the quality of CIAG provision in all schools and colleges, including the implementation of the Baker clause. Ofsted inspectors should look to make CIAG assessment a constituent part of all of their evidence-gathering, assessment and reporting.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Ofsted inspectors must assess and report on schools' compliance with the Baker Clause as a mandatory part of the inspection process. The Department for Education should issue supporting guidance on compliance and good practice, such as a minimum number of interactions between pupils and representatives from further education colleges or training providers throughout a pupil's time at school, similar to those required with employers.

Higher education

Students in higher education can access careers information, advice and guidance from their institution's dedicated careers services department, which are usually well-connected to local and national businesses and recruiters. Most institutions also entitle graduates to receive support from their careers services for a certain number of years after graduation. Graduates during the 2008/09 recession had their employment prospects diminished, and it's possible that we should have similar concerns for graduates now, but the complex economic consequences of the pandemic are still making themselves clear. We wanted to hear about the support that students and graduates need, and the challenges for HEI careers services of providing this during the pandemic and moving forwards, to ensure that students and graduates don't get left behind in the recovery from Covid-19.

Graduate labour market

At our evidence session focused on higher education, we heard from experts about the ongoing and expected future effects of the pandemic on the graduate labour market. We also asked experts to tell us what we could learn from the 2008/09 recession that would enable students and graduates to be better supported throughout the ongoing effects of the pandemic on the UK and global economy. During that recession, the unemployment rate for young people aged 18 to 29 increased by 4%, and the chance of a graduate working in a low-paid occupation rose by 30%, with this effect persisting for seven years after graduation⁴⁰.

It's clear from data from the past 12 months that the pandemic has had an unequal effect geographically and on particular sectors of the economy. Larger cities like London, Manchester and Birmingham experienced the greatest drops in footfall due to the successive lockdowns, and London has seen the largest drop in the number of people working in their offices⁴¹. This correlates with evidence showing that the pandemic has had the strongest effect on sectors such as hospitality, retail, and food service⁴².

One possible effect of the pandemic described was that more graduates will go on to postgraduate studies as a way of delaying their entry into the labour market, and perhaps also to try and make themselves more competitive candidates for jobs. Prospects research from 2020 showed that 47% of final-year students were now considering taking a postgraduate course⁴³. However, this is not necessarily a viable solution for graduates, as Charlie Ball, head of Higher Education Intelligence at Jisc, highlighted:

“we don't have a very strong or pronounced niche for generalist Masters qualifications, and that will present a challenge in its own right for all these people who are completing or taking Masters qualifications this year.”

Another possible effect is that graduates are more likely to look for jobs in particular industries that they regard as more stable:

“Graduates will change their job-seeking behaviour. We know that they will be more inclined to prioritise jobs that seem stable and secure. A very, very good example and one that we've seen already is you'll see more graduates applying to do teaching.”

(Charlie Ball, Jisc)

Research by EngineeringUK in summer 2020⁴⁴ also showed that young people aged 11-19 are increasingly thinking about working in sectors they consider to be valuable to society, after the pandemic has highlighted the important role played by key workers including health and social care workers. Increases in graduates moving into work in sectors they regard as stable or economically valuable, as well as increases in those going on to postgraduate study, were both reported following the 2008/09 recession, as in the Universities UK report ‘Changes in student choices and graduate employment’⁴⁵.

A number of contributors highlighted that this will have an impact on graduate salary metrics, as graduates might be more likely to try and go into public sector roles that they perceive as being more resistant to the effects of the pandemic (such as teaching or health and social care), but which historically have lower levels of pay. We must ensure that universities and careers services are not penalised by league tables because they have supported students and graduates into more stable and potentially more personally fulfilling employment, even if those jobs are lower paid than others.

University careers services

We heard evidence from contributors about how university careers services have responded to the pandemic. On the whole careers services have adapted well, extending and strengthening their online provision to ensure that students and recent graduates are still able to access careers information, advice and guidance. Careers services have highlighted that despite the pandemic, they have actually been supporting more students than usual, because online provision can make it easier for many students to access support.

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) is the expert membership organisation for higher education student career development and graduate employment professionals, of which 86% of higher education careers services are members. At the evidence session Marc Lintern, President of AGCAS, summarised that:

“The pandemic, whilst it’s been really difficult for all of us, has really sped transition, and I think if you look across the sector I think many more students are finding much greater levels of accessibility and career services are getting good feedback on the support that they’re able to provide.”

(Marc Lintern, AGCAS)

⁴⁰ Stephen Clarke, Resolution Foundation. ‘Growing pains: the impact of leaving education during a recession on earnings and employment’, May 2019.

⁴¹ Centre for Cities, <https://www.centreforcities.org/coronavirus/> [accessed 20.04.21].

⁴² OECD. ‘Coronavirus (COVID-19): SME policy responses’ [accessed 20.04.21].

⁴³ Jisc. <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/more-than-half-of-final-year-students-lose-jobs-or-internships-during-pandemic-06-may-2020> [accessed 26.04.21].

⁴⁴ Engineering UK. ‘Young people and Covid 19’, September 2020.

⁴⁵ Universities UK. ‘Changes in student choices and graduate employment’, October 2010.

⁴⁶ <https://www.agcas.org.uk/Phoenix>

⁴⁷ AGCAS. ‘How have university careers services responded to Covid-19?’, July 2020.

⁴⁸ The Office for Students. ‘Graduate students: getting into employment’, June 2020.

The October 2020 edition of AGCAS's journal, Phoenix⁴⁶, highlights examples of how careers services have responded to the pandemic. AGCAS also worked with Universities UK to publish in July 2020 a document with collected case studies outlining the initial response of AGCAS members to Covid-19⁴⁷. The latter publication demonstrates the diversity of responses by careers services. Many services offered online one to one advice appointments with students; organised virtual careers fairs, and virtual work experience opportunities; and offered online webinars and workshops on developing the skills for online recruitment processes, as well as traditional employability topics. The Office for Students also produced a briefing note in June 2020 which collected further examples of good practice from university careers services and employers working with students and graduates⁴⁸.

At the evidence session Kate Wicklow, Policy Manager at GuildHE, told us about how GuildHE's careers advice and guidance adapted during the pandemic.

With regards to careers, we obviously moved online. We offered ranges of workshops delivered by industry professionals, our academics and also our career staff, and we actually saw a marked increase in sign-ups and attendances at these events, so we're quite heartened that actually online has given the opportunity for more people to engage in some of our work than they may have done if we had done it on campus. Members also provide free CPD courses for this summer's graduates, supporting them into employment, and for those that may have lost confidence due to the lack of study time and connecting with other people.

(Kate Wicklow, GuildHE)

According to AGCAS's July 2020 collection of case studies, De Montfort University piloted a new scheme to offer placements with local SMEs to students with technical skills, whereby the students could support these businesses to sustain their business activity during the pandemic. Students worked on website development, social media and marketing content, and supporting the development and functioning of digital platforms, to enable local businesses to adapt and respond to the pandemic. These virtual placements also offered students excellent work experience and skill development.

Challenges for delivery

However, careers services have also faced challenges to their ability to respond to the pandemic, key among these being the resourcing of careers services. As AGCAS explained in their written submission:

The biggest challenge currently facing careers services is budgetary and resource constraints. In order to offer the best support for graduates at risk of precarious employment or under/unemployment, careers services must receive appropriate investment, resource and capacity.

(AGCAS, written submission)

The Career Development Institute reinforced this view, stating that:

Despite the 'employability' narrative and talk of how important direct labour market outcomes are for the economy, career guidance in higher education and beyond remains under-resourced.

(Career Development Institute, written submission)

Kate Wicklow talked about GuildHE's members, many of whom are smaller, specialist institutions working closely with industry and professions in the creative economy, agriculture, education, sport and health. Many of these institutions are also situated in rural and coastal areas, or on the edges of cities. Smaller institutions with tighter budgets are more vulnerable to income shocks, and thus might struggle to continue funding careers services at the same level even at a time when students need those services most.

Our biggest member has 11,000 students but on average they have around 1,500 students.

There is often less room for manoeuvre in terms of budgets with less income. It isn't fixed to specific activities and they also have smaller surpluses, so during the pandemic the loss of the income streams that [they] have through catering, conferences, clinics etc. has had quite a significant impact... [There are also] budgetary pressures around the uncertainty over student recruitment. Because they're small, actually missing the numbers by a few can have quite a significant impact on their budgets.

(Kate Wicklow, GuildHE)

According to AGCAS's latest survey of careers services, 91% of services had experienced a decrease in income compared to previous years, primarily because of having to move careers fairs online and thus having to charge less (or nothing) for employers to participate. This is greater than the number predicted in September 2020 as likely to lose income due to the pandemic. However, the survey also found that 82% of respondents had seen greater demand for support from the 2020 cohort of graduates in comparison to previous cohorts. At the same time, the survey highlighted that the average number of staff employed in careers services has decreased from 26 in 2018 to 25 in 2020, with an average careers service staff to student ratio of 1:995⁴⁹.

Given our evidence showing that many careers services departments are seeing an increased take-up of the services they offer, which puts increased strain on their ability to deliver for the needs of every individual student, this clash of decreasing budget and staffing levels with increased need could mean that careers services are unable to provide the support that students need. Cuts to internal funding for careers services, which lead in turn to cuts in staffing levels, can result from a number of different issues. However, one of the issues is the prioritisation given to careers information, advice and guidance by senior leadership in higher education, in general and particularly during the pandemic.

One of the other real challenges in higher education right now is a focus on the here and now.

So, universities and colleges are looking at how we manage and support students who are isolating, and as careers services we have a responsibility to say, 'Yes, but our students need support in order to get into the job market' and make sure that the voice of student graduates is heard.

(AGCAS, written submission)

⁴⁹ AGCAS. 'The resourcing of careers services during a pandemic and beyond', January 2021.

Senior leaders are understandably concerned primarily about the ability of their students to access teaching and learning, but they must not lose sight of the importance of careers information, advice and guidance in supporting students to make the most of their teaching and learning, and successfully transition into employment following graduation. At times of considerable change in the labour market, university careers advisers can offer expert advice on job opportunities in the local labour market given their links with employers and other organisations, and can be key to ensuring that students and graduates don't end up under- or unemployed.

Careers services have also faced challenges in supporting particular groups of vulnerable students. Jayne Rowley, Executive Director of Student Services at Jisc, described the wide range of issues that disadvantaged students can face outside of the pandemic:

“ Research from the Sutton Trust highlighted how disadvantaged students find it harder to identify and evidence examples of skills, types of work and life experiences. They're also less likely to take an internship. If they do, they're more likely to take an unpaid internship. ”

(Jayne Rowley, Jisc)

However, the pandemic has also exacerbated many issues, particularly by making it difficult for students to undertake part-time paid work to support themselves throughout their studies and to gain vital work experience:

“ The pandemic has led to a sharp reduction in term-time part-time work to provide financial support and to build employability skills, which runs a serious risk of widening the divide for disadvantaged students and impacting social mobility further. They also may have reduced access to digital education resources off campus. They could be negatively impacted through suboptimal living and studying arrangements, shared properties, lack of appropriate study spaces, shared or limited broadband or laptops. They could also be negatively impacted through pandemic-related family circumstances, for example lockdown, self-isolation, shielding needs of family members, carer responsibilities and the consequent impact on wellbeing. ”

(Jayne Rowley, Jisc)

Beth Eyre, President of the University of Sheffield Students' Union, spoke at our evidence session about her own experiences and those of the students she represents. She emphasised the difficulty of lockdown and the effects on the labour market for disadvantaged students, who might not be able to move home or find suitable or relevant work at home.

“ I was elected into this full-time role and I definitely relied on getting it. Couldn't really afford a Master's. I come from a village just outside of Hull. There remains next to no job opportunity there for the sectors that I'm interested in. There's no space for me at my mum's house. Going back home just isn't an option, so there's a real sense of urgency and anxiety about what I do next. ”

(Beth Eyre, President of the University of Sheffield Students' Union)

⁵⁰ Disabled Students' Commission. 'Annual report 2020-2021: Enhancing the disabled student experience', January 2021.

As highlighted by GuildHE's contributions, this can have a particularly strong impact on students and graduates studying and working in sectors which are traditionally already quite precarious, and in which it can be difficult to get paid work experience:

“With less money in the creative industry, we're concerned that unpaid internships will rise again which, as we've heard already, will significantly disadvantage many of our students from non-traditional backgrounds.”

(Kate Wicklow, GuildHE)

During the pandemic, many disabled students have found it easier to engage with teaching and learning because of the increased digital and online accessibility⁵⁰, and we can assume that this might also extend to online careers advice provision. However, some disabled students have struggled, for example with lectures which have not been captioned or don't have British Sign Language provision; presentation slides or PDFs which are not accessible for screenreaders; and autistic students who might struggle with being asked to follow multiple different activities on screen. Again, we can imagine that this might extend to careers services provision. AGCAS highlighted the challenge for careers services of ensuring that their provision is accessible to all students:

“In transitioning to 'digital first' solutions, AGCAS member services have quickly recognised that not all staff and students have the same level of digital capital and confidence... While online support has many potential benefits for disabled students, such as screen readers, the option to change background colours or to add subtitles and captions, making suitable adjustments can be time consuming and challenging for staff, or they may not recognise the need for this.”

(AGCAS, written submission)

A report previously published by Policy Connect's Higher Education Commission, 'Arriving at Thriving: Learning from disabled students to ensure access for all'⁵¹, described the sometimes negative experiences disabled students had with careers information, advice and guidance, including speaking to careers advisers who didn't understand their condition or impairment, and had no knowledge of whether they would be able to participate in work experience or study abroad schemes. However, AGCAS research also shows that careers services are working on this area:

“The vast majority of careers services provide careers advice and guidance that is tailored to the particular needs of disadvantaged groups (AGCAS HE careers service resourcing report 2018). Over two thirds of careers services had developed initiatives for students with a disability or physical/mental condition(s).”

(AGCAS, written submission)

Over the past year, we have seen that the pandemic has further entrenched inequality and poverty in numerous ways. The needs of students from 'widening participation' or 'non-traditional' backgrounds must be brought to the fore in discussions and action around supporting students and graduates to transition into employment during and after the pandemic, so that we can robustly combat the increasing gap between the outcomes of different groups of students.

⁵¹ Megan Hector, Policy Connect. <https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/research/arriving-thriving-learning-disabled-students-ensure-access-all>.

⁵² National Union of Students. <https://www.nus.org.uk/articles/nus-student-survey-finds-students-relying-on-food-banks> [accessed 26.04.21].

Students and graduates

At our evidence session Beth Eyre described the effects of the pandemic on higher education students and graduates.

“ I think it’s fair to say that this disadvantage that the current cohort are having will have serious long-term effects. There’s no way to put together a team presentation, to have a professional meeting with your tutors, to organise for your society, to volunteer or to do placement years or part-time work. I know personally this is where I picked up a lot of my skill-set at university. ”

(Beth Eyre, University of Sheffield Students’ Union)

While many careers services have been working hard to try and replace these missed experiences with workshops and training for students in vital employability skills, it’s possibly unrealistic to expect them to be able to completely replace everything that is being missed. This is particularly the case with some of the interpersonal skills and experience which can only be developed through in-person interactions.

As referenced in the previous section of this chapter, many students rely on being able to work part-time during their studies in order to support themselves. Given the fact that most have not been able to continue this, as a considerable number of student jobs are to be found in sectors like hospitality and retail which were largely shut down earlier on during the pandemic, there are serious ongoing concerns around students’ financial situations.

Statistics from a National Union of Students (NUS) survey which took place in November 2020 show that 61% of students surveyed said that Covid-19 had had some impact on their income, with the proportion of students working part-time down to only a fifth of those surveyed, compared to around a third in September 2020. Most concerning, 9% of students surveyed said that they had used a food bank during the pandemic⁵². Students experiencing poverty or a financial crisis will have a much more limited ability to engage with their teaching and learning.

Another concern for students is the possibility that, having worked hard to successfully win a place on a graduate job scheme or internship, these offers could be rescinded by organisations who are no longer able to support them. Prospects research from 2020 showed that 29% of final-year undergraduates had lost their jobs, 26% had lost their internships, and 28% had had their graduate job offer either deferred or rescinded⁵³. Further Prospects research from a survey later on in 2020 showed that 27% of students and graduates (including those in school, college and higher education) had changed their career plans due to the effects of the pandemic, leaving 37% of students and graduates still uncertain about what they would do⁵⁴.

Clearly careers services are doing a great deal to try to provide students with what they want and need, supporting their employability skills, advising them on career plans, helping them to access employment, and perhaps also providing them with the emotional support needed to navigate these troubled economic waters. To make this as effective as possible, senior leaders in higher education institutions, along with academic staff, local businesses and others, must collaborate with careers advisers in their work.

⁵⁴ Prospects, at Jisc. <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/survey-shows-27-percent-of-students-and-graduates-change-career-plans-due-to-covid-19-01-mar-2021> [accessed 26.04.21].

⁵⁵ Higher Education Statistics Agency. ‘Higher Education Graduate Outcomes Statistics: UK, 2017/18 – Summary’, June 2020.

⁵⁶ CIPD. ‘To gig or not to gig? Stories from the modern economy’, March 2017.

⁵⁷ Foundation for European Progressive Studies. ‘Platform work in the UK 2016 to 2019’, June 2019.

Students and graduates from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups

Students and graduates from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to become unemployed or underemployed. HESA statistics for the 2017/18 academic year show that 62% of white UK domiciled graduates were in full-time employment more than 12 months after graduation, versus 53% of black UK domiciled graduates⁵⁵. In slightly less stark terms, the same statistics also showed that 11.1% of black and minority ethnic students were in part-time work in comparison to 10.3% of white students, and 1.7% of black and minority ethnic students were undertaking voluntary or unpaid work in comparison to 1.2% of white students. Working part-time, or undertaking voluntary or unpaid work, are often characteristics of people who are underemployed: those who are able and willing to undertake more hours of work but cannot find enough work.

Students and graduates from ethnic minority backgrounds are also more likely to go into gig economy work: a CIPD report from 2018 showed that only 68% of respondents in gig economy work described themselves as white British, in comparison to 85% of the sample of non-gig economy workers⁵⁶. This could be exacerbated by the pandemic, as there has been high demand from customers for some kinds of gig economy work such as delivery services throughout the pandemic. Black and minority ethnic people are more likely to be living in poverty, and so gig economy work might seem like one of the few viable options left. This could particularly be the case for students who are trying to fit paid work in around their studies, or graduates who struggle to compete in the labour market due to their lack of work experience.

A Trades Union Congress and Foundation for European Progressive Studies report from 2019⁵⁷ showed that gig economy or 'platform' work was becoming more prevalent over time, with the number of gig economy workers more than doubling between 2016 and 2019. Platform work is defined as work that is found using a website or an app, and accessed using a laptop or smartphone. Their research showed that nearly one in ten workers were doing platform work at least once a week, and that this work is particularly taken up by young people, with six in ten platform workers between the ages of 16 and 34.

A survey of 125 graduates undertaking gig economy work by Wikijob found that three fifths of graduates described their overall experience of gig economy work positively, largely because of the flexibility of the hours. However, 57% of respondents also described the lack of sick pay as a factor that made the job negative, along with other factors such as no holiday pay, not being able to work as much as they wanted, and no minimum wage⁵⁸. The flaws of a model of work where workers are classed as self-employed contractors and thus not entitled to sick pay have been made drastically apparent during the pandemic. Many gig economy workers could not afford to self-isolate if they had symptoms of Covid-19, risking their own health and possibly contributing to the spread of the virus.

As well as being more likely to go into gig economy work, many students and graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds or widening participation groups traditionally had worse employment outcomes after graduation even before the pandemic. We also know that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on certain groups of people, particularly those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and those living in poverty. We must ensure that government, higher education providers and careers services consider the particular needs and vulnerabilities of students and graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds or widening participation groups when supporting them with CIAG and transitions into employment, so that all students and graduates are enabled to succeed in their careers.

⁵⁸ Wikijob. 'Survey: How do graduates feel about the gig economy?', October 2020 [accessed 11.05.21].

Student and graduate employers

Tristram Hooley, Chief Research Officer at the Institute of Student Employers (ISE), spoke at our evidence session in late 2020 about ISE's research into graduate employers' recruitment plans.

There's been a drop in graduate hiring really across the board, with the public sector being the exception. It's very different depending on which sector you're in, with areas like retail and the built environment particularly hard-hit. Overall, we think that this year [2020] graduate hiring will decline by about 12%.

(Tristram Hooley, Institute of Student Employers)

Another significant area of concern highlighted was internships and work placements:

Where we've got a really worrying impact is in internships and placement students, where we're seeing a huge drop [in intentions to hire].

(Tristram Hooley, Institute of Student Employers)

Work placements offer students vitally important experience of the real workplace, upskilling them and increasing their knowledge of the potential roles they could move into after graduation. Placements, along with internships, also provide a useful 'try before you buy' opportunity to employers, who are able to get to know and train students and graduates before committing to employing them. These schemes have excellent success rates in helping students and graduates to transition into permanent employment: AGCAS told us that on graduate internship programmes promoted by them, there is an 85% to 90% retention rate.

Kate Wicklow reinforced the importance of internships and placements, alongside the concerns of employers about offering these during the pandemic:

We also definitely need further support for industry placements with the sandwich courses etc, because we know that sandwich placements are a useful means to securing long-term employment, but employers are still quite reluctant to open their doors to students to do that because they don't have the infrastructure to support it.

(Kate Wicklow, GuildHE)

Franziska von Blumenthal, Policy and Research Manager at the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB), explained that ECITB's member organisations have not been able to recruit people with the right level of skills through Plan for Jobs schemes, as they need people with graduate-level skills:

We need young people, so what we'd like is some support for young people to enter the industry, to continue training while employed with a salary, of course, and that's not happening. We're seeing the Plan for Jobs, very short-term programmes that don't target the level of skill that is required, and I will echo what Tristram presented. Our employers aren't interested. They can't even take on a Kickstart student or young person because it's a level of skill and resource that they just can't support at the moment.

(Franziska von Blumenthal, ECITB)

For those businesses who do take on graduates, there is a responsibility to think carefully about the increased support their new employees will need as a result of remote working:

“What is particularly important is the preparation for induction and onboarding into employment. Employers should be advised and supported to put measures in place for the care of new graduate recruits who may well be working remotely... We should not underestimate the impact of the loss of social contact in a work environment on new recruits in their first job. And we should be mindful of the potential detriment to wellbeing through isolation from new and unfamiliar colleagues.”

(Jayne Rowley, Jisc)

In positive news, ISE polling of its employer members in April 2021 found that fewer were reporting shrinkage in their planned recruitment of graduates. In its annual recruitment survey in 2020, 44% of employer respondents reported that their hiring of graduates was shrinking, but this fell by 28 percentage points to only 16% of employer respondents stating this in April of this year. Falls were also shown in employers' reports of shrinking recruitment of interns and school leavers. The survey found that on balance, respondents agreed that their organisation was likely to grow over the next three years. However, respondents still did not feel that there were enough opportunities for young people, and on balance disagreed with the statement that the economic crisis was over.

While it is a good sign that recruitment intentions are bouncing back in some large graduate employers, the consequences of the pandemic are still being felt by many businesses, particularly SMEs. A number of contributors to our evidence suggested that a possible solution to the fall in graduate employment is for there to be increased support for SMEs to hire graduates. Graduates can provide a powerful boost to small businesses with their high-level skills and expertise in particular topics. It is also the case that none of the government's Plan for Jobs schemes have been targeted at graduates, despite the important role that graduates will play in the UK's economic recovery from Covid-19.

“Since many of our graduates tend to work in SMEs, it would be great if there was some more support for SMEs to offer paid entry level roles, whether that's through graduate placement and internships.”

(Kate Wicklow, GuildHE)

“There needs to be targeted support for graduates in order to help the economy to fully recover and combat the potential long-term 'scarring' effect of the pandemic on graduates' future success.”

(AGCAS, written submission)

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Government should create and fund a national scheme to help small businesses to hire a graduate for 6 to 12 months, boosting businesses' adaptation to and recovery from Covid-19, while boosting graduates' employability. This scheme could be delivered locally through business-facing organisations. This would align with Government's provision of management and digital skills training for SMEs as part of its Help to Grow scheme. In the future (2022 onwards), this could be funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and could be extended to non-graduates.

This would obviously benefit graduates themselves by providing them with paid employment and vital work experience, but would also help SMEs to boost the functioning of their business with the skills and knowledge that graduates can bring. The scheme could also help HEIs by potentially supporting the translation of academic research into practical applications in business settings. This could also support HEIs' performance within the Knowledge Exchange Framework⁵⁹. Universities UK, a representative organisation for 137 universities in the UK, similarly recommended in its report 'Supporting graduates in a Covid-19 economy'⁶⁰ that the government should provide funding for universities and businesses to set up paid internship opportunities for graduates.

As Beth Eyre told us at an evidence session:

“ I think it's time as well to start re-envisioning the world after the pandemic, and obviously graduates are going to be intrinsic to formulating that. We don't want people just waiting for an economy that isn't going to return to the place it was. ”

(Beth Eyre, University of Sheffield Students' Union)

Graduates will play an important role in supporting the economy to recover in the coming months and years. Government, education providers, and careers information, advice and guidance providers should all ensure they have a clear plan for enabling graduates to make the most of their knowledge and skills.

⁵⁹ <https://re.ukri.org/knowledge-exchange/knowledge-exchange-framework/> [accessed 07.06.21].

⁶⁰ Universities UK. 'Supporting graduates in a Covid-19 economy', June 2020.

Adults outside of education

Having examined the experiences and needs of young people and adults in further and higher education, we turned to adults who are not currently in education or training. This includes adults who are in work, but who need upskilling or reskilling in order to progress in their career; adults who are at risk of redundancy due to the pandemic, Brexit, automation, or other factors such as health issues; and adults who have been furloughed or made redundant, or who were unemployed before the pandemic began. All adults, including adults who are not in education or training, can turn to the National Careers Service for careers information, advice and guidance and can make use of the Service's website and telephone offer. We gathered evidence for this section of the report to try and understand how CIAG provision for adults outside of education was affected by the pandemic, and what wider lessons might need to be learnt about how the CIAG system works for various groups of adults.

Reskilling, retraining and redundancy

At our evidence session we heard from Alissa Dhaliwal, Head of Education and Skills Policy at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), about the CBI's report into the extent of upskilling and reskilling needs in the UK workforce, *Learning for Life*⁶¹. According to research undertaken by the CBI before the pandemic, over the next decade 28 million workers will require upskilling as their role evolves, and a further 5 million workers will need retraining, amounting overall to 90% of the workforce. This research estimates that the cost of this training will be £130 billion by 2030, a 25% increase on current expenditure. At the same time, as described in the Further education chapter, adult participation in learning has consistently declined over the last decade. Participation levels reached a low in 2019 of just 33% of adults having participated in learning in the previous three years, as highlighted by Learning & Work Institute's Adult Participation in Learning Survey⁶².

The CBI's research took place before the pandemic, and thus before the destabilising effects of Covid-19 on the economy and particular industries had taken place. It is likely that as we move out of the pandemic into a changed world and labour market, there will be even more need for adults to upskill, reskill and/or retrain. However, many businesses have had their income hit by the pandemic, and so are possibly less able to invest in upskilling or reskilling their own workers, let alone vastly increasing the amount they are spending on this.

At our evidence session, Mark Malcomson raised concerns about workers' access to professional development and upskilling through their employers:

“If you're very lucky and you work for one of the top corporations in the country who have a very good continuing professional development programme, you might be able to go on leadership programmes or technical skills programmes. But the vast majority of working people don't get those opportunities. Or if they do get those opportunities, they're very specific to the job they're in at the moment.”

(Mark Malcomson, City Lit)

There are also adults who might need to change their career or industry entirely, requiring a rethinking of the skills they already have and how they could be relevant in another sector, as well as a possible return to further or higher education. Mark Malcomson spoke about what this prospect presents for mid- or late-career workers, and the wave of adults we might see needing to change career due to the pandemic.

⁶¹ Confederation of British Industry. 'Learning for Life', October 2020.

⁶² Learning & Work Institute. <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2019/>, December 2019.

What we see is people later in their careers who have defined themselves by their job and their career, finding it's gone away and then having to re-imagine but not having the skills or support to re-imagine themselves into another form of employment. What I fear the most about what we're talking about now is that you will end up, similar to the 1980s, tens of thousands plus of 40, 50 and 60 year olds who have a potential for another working life, being deprived of that because they won't get the right levels of support.

(Mark Malcomson, City Lit)

Some organisations are already responding to this challenge, such as City & Guilds, which in 2020 partnered with FutureLearn to put together a set of online courses tailored for workers recently made unemployed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The courses form part of the Skills Bridges programme, a career bridging programme to help unemployed people move into jobs in higher growth industries. The first phase of the programme launched in September 2020 with the 'Step into Social Care' course, and helps people to identify the skills and talents they already have which might be relevant to the social care sector. City & Guilds provided research to back the courses with their report 'Building bridges towards future jobs', published in February 2021. The report identifies growth industries and job vacancies, and explores how workers in industries which have been badly affected by the pandemic could have transferable skills relevant to those growth industries.

The picture remains unclear around the effects of Brexit on the labour market, and thus on immigration and recruitment, although some sectors such as hospitality are already discussing the negative effects for their workforce⁶³. The combined effects of both the pandemic and Brexit might make it difficult for some businesses to recruit and train workers at a time when they most need them. We also heard concerns about the effect that automation is already having on the UK labour market, with even more significant changes likely to come in the future, and whether our education and skills system is equipped to support people whose jobs may fall victim to this trend.

Finally, we considered the situation for adults who have been furloughed or made redundant throughout the pandemic, or who were unemployed and perhaps further away from the labour market before the pandemic began. As of May 14th 2021, 11.5 million jobs had been furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme since April 20th 2020, from 1.3 million different employers⁶⁴. The furlough scheme is due to end at the end of September 2021, at which point it is likely that there will be an increase in the numbers of unemployed people needing to find new jobs. We must anticipate this outcome by working now to prepare and support people into new employment, or into education and training that will help them to move into a new job or industry.

This influx of newly unemployed people will present a challenge for our education, skills, and CIAG systems:

One thing that the pandemic has really done is increase the potential need for skills training and skills intervention, but one of the things that us and the providers are juggling with are what are those interventions, and who needs what? Because somebody who has been in the labour market for quite a while, has up to date skills, but has been made redundant, may need a significantly different intervention than an individual who's further away from the labour market, needs to gain a greater set of skills etcetera to enter the labour market.

(Henry Lawes, West of England Combined Authority)

⁶³ <https://www.caterer.com/recruiter-advice/the-impact-of-brex-it-and-covid-on-the-uk-hospitality-workforce> [accessed 27.05.21].

⁶⁴ Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1116638/uk-number-of-people-on-furlough/> [accessed 22.06.21].

Particular disadvantaged groups had higher rates of unemployment before the pandemic, and will need extra support and long-term interventions to help them move into work. For example, disabled people have an employment rate that is usually 28.8 percentage points lower than non-disabled people⁶⁵. The changed and changing labour market we have seen over the past year, now with increased numbers of more experienced and well qualified people seeking work, could mean that some people who were further away from the labour market in 2019 are even less likely to be able to find work amidst more competition and decreased opportunities.

“ If we are getting a lot of learners who are coming, who have been made redundant but need and now are drawing funding out of the skills system, what happens to those individuals who were already further away from the labour market, deprived, disadvantaged? The key concern there is that they’re pushed further away from the intervention and further away from the impact as well. ”

(Henry Lawes, West of England Combined Authority)

In November 2020, the Chancellor announced £375 million of funding for the National Skills Fund, which will help adults to train and get the skills they need to help them move into work. This includes funding for adults to access free level 3 qualifications if they don’t already have one, available in a range of sector subject areas which the government has determined will address skills needs in the economy and will help adults to improve their job prospects⁶⁶.

The government’s Lifelong Loan Entitlement for those wishing to access post-18 technical education in a more flexible way is a welcome development. However, the Lifetime Skills Guarantee only offers fully funded level 3 qualifications for adults who do not already possess a full level 3 qualification. As Mark Malcomson describes, this assumes that progression through qualification levels is always linear. This system does not provide support for people who are retraining in a different sector at a qualification level they already hold, or who wish to specialise in particular work.

“ Assume that progression is not always about going level 3, level 4, level 5. There’s huge barriers for taking additional qualifications at a level that you already had at. If I’m a social worker and I’ve got a level 3 qualification and I want to get a level 3 qualification in a specialisation... well actually that’s actively discouraged by the present system because I can’t get funding to do that. ”

(Mark Malcomson, City Lit)

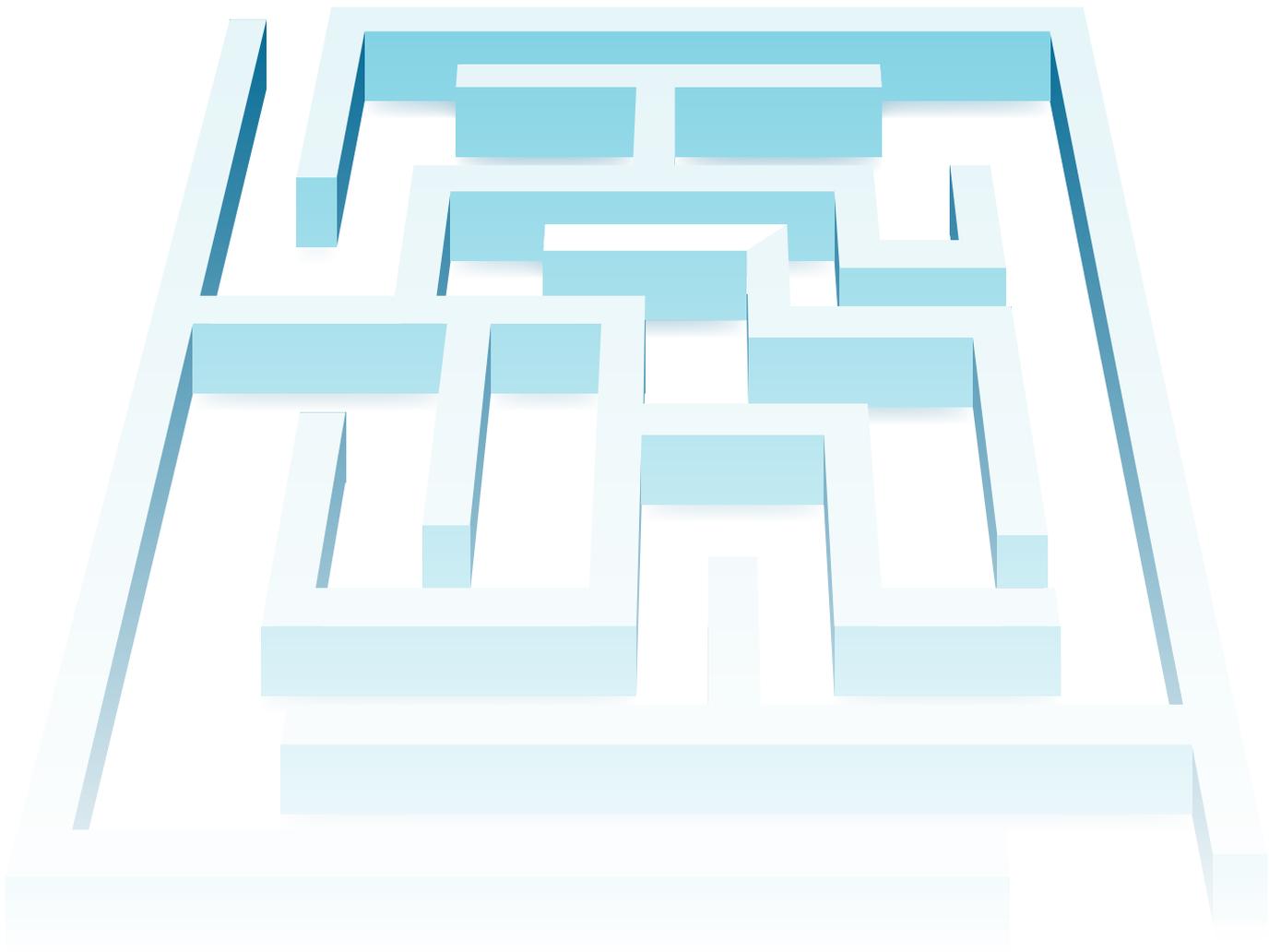
We are missing the opportunity to offer truly flexible learning and retraining opportunities throughout life to adults who may already have qualifications that are not suitable for their current role, or who need to retrain to move into a growth industry. Similarly, those who have been furloughed or made redundant may benefit from additional upskilling or training which they are not in a position to fund themselves. Government does seem to have identified this as a concern, given its funding of the Skills Bootcamp programme as part of the National Skills Fund. The programme offers a range of free, flexible digital and technical skills courses to adults in work or recently unemployed, enabling them to develop sector-specific skills in demand in their local area and get a better job. The principles of these flexible and free short courses should be expanded more widely: ensuring that people have the right skills and qualifications for the work that would suit them best is crucial to creating the workforce that we need.

⁶⁵ House of Commons Library research briefing, Andy Powell. ‘Disabled people in employment’, 1st April 2021.

⁶⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-skills-fund> [accessed 20.05.21].

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Lifelong learning loans must be made truly flexible, so that people can take out a loan to study a qualification at whatever level they need in order to boost their employability, even if they already have an equivalent qualification at that level.



National Careers Service

Key to tackling the challenges facing these different groups of adults not currently in education or training is the work of the National Careers Service. The National Careers Service is a publicly-funded service providing free careers information, advice and guidance for adults and young people 13+, which was established in 2012 by the Coalition government. Everyone over the age of 13 is entitled to access careers guidance from the Service over the telephone or online, through a web chat, and by making use of the Service's website. Additionally, the Service has identified six priority groups⁶⁷ who qualify for enhanced support, including face-to-face support in their local area. These priority groups were identified following research into the advice needs and employment prospects of particular groups of adults.

The National Careers Service is delivered by nine prime contractors, who go through a competitive process run by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in order to bid for contracts to deliver the Service in particular regions of England. Prime contractors sometimes then sub-contract some of the work to smaller organisations who are able to deliver services in particular areas, or to particular specialist groups of customers. The Service is funded on a payment-by-results system, where contractors have to claim their funding by evidencing that customers have achieved particular careers, skills, learning or employability outcomes. These outcomes include customer satisfaction with the service provided and their Careers and Skills Action Plan; evidence that the customer is actively managing their career through digital and non-digital activities; and the customer's progression into appropriate learning or work. Contractors receive enhanced funding for supporting customers in priority groups to achieve any of these outcomes.

Throughout our evidence-gathering for this inquiry, we spoke to a wide range of stakeholders about the work of the National Careers Service, in general and during the pandemic. This included speaking to a number of the Service's prime contractors, some of whom agreed to speak on the basis of anonymity. All contributors agreed that the National Careers Service is a valuable asset to society and to the customers who receive support, one which plays an important role in supporting the functioning of the education system and the labour market. The most recent report on customer satisfaction and progression of the National Careers Service highlighted that 93% of telephone and face-to-face customers agreed that the overall quality of the service was good⁶⁸.

Effects of the pandemic

We heard from a number of prime contractors about the ways in which they have adapted to online and digital provision during the pandemic. In the 'Cross-cutting themes' chapter of this report, we describe the challenges faced by some organisations whose customers were experiencing digital poverty. However, some prime contractors also mentioned the challenges they faced in needing to upskill their own workforce in using new equipment and technology, such as getting used to working a camera and microphone, and using video calling software. One prime contractor described having to buy all new laptops and headsets for their advisers, as their previous equipment wasn't fit for purpose. This was a significant cost to the business which they could ill afford, but was necessary in order to be able to continue some level of delivery during lockdown.

⁶⁷ The priority groups are: 18-24 year olds who are NEET; adults without a level 2 qualification; adults who have been unemployed for more than 12 months; single parents with at least one dependent child living in the same household; adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities; and adults aged 50 years and over who are unemployed or at demonstrable risk of unemployment. Further information here.

⁶⁸ Ipsos MORI. 'National Careers Service: Customer satisfaction and progression annual report', July 2020.

Various organisations talked about the positive sides of online and digital delivery. Lots of young people like online and digital delivery of CIAG, as so much of their own lives are now mediated through technology. Online provision has also enabled more parents to get involved and engaged, a group which traditionally can be quite hard for careers advisers to reach. New formats and modes of delivery have made accessing CIAG more flexible, and easier to fit in around people's busy lives:

We've learnt that we can do webinars and deliver information many times over, including by recording it so that people don't have to participate live – they can engage at a time that suits them. That's a new flexibility. It's like on-demand TV. Job coaches have also been really positive about webinars, they're much more accessible than in-person events – people don't have to travel, pay for travel, get childcare, etcetera.

(Katharine Horler, CEO of Adviza)

There are also difficulties for online or digital CIAG delivery beyond issues of digital poverty. A number of organisations mentioned the difficulties for careers advisers of not working face-to-face with customers, and thus being unable to pick up on non-verbal emotional cues from customers. This can make it more difficult for advisers to build up a strong relationship with customers, and to give holistic support. There can also be safeguarding issues around delivering online or digital content to young people, particularly if video calling is used. As a result, as mentioned in the 'Cross-cutting themes' section, all organisations and stakeholders stressed the need to continue providing CIAG in person as well as online in the future. Even young people and adults who have good digital skills and can access support online, sometimes prefer to speak to a human being face-to-face when looking for advice⁶⁹.

During the pandemic, it was expected that the National Careers Service would need to increase its capacity in order to support increasing numbers of people facing unemployment due to the economic consequences of successive lockdowns. In response to this expectation, the Chancellor promised an extra £32 million for the Service in 2020/21. Following this announcement, prime contractors were told to increase the recruitment and training of new staff. However, the money promised by the Chancellor is at risk of not being fully spent, as customer levels in the Service dropped dramatically during the pandemic.

In reality, every prime contractor we spoke to told us that they had had to furlough significant proportions of their staff throughout the pandemic. For some organisations this was partially because a majority of careers advisers are women, and many advisers had children who suddenly had to be supported with learning from home. This new responsibility understandably prevented some advisers from being able to undertake their paid work. However, all of the prime contractors we spoke to told us that the primary reason for furloughing staff was due to reduced customer levels. One organisation described having 77% of their staff furloughed at one point; others described half or two thirds of their workforce being furloughed for some period of time.

Customer levels dropped for a number of reasons, some of which are an inevitable result of the pandemic and lockdown. Many National Careers Service advisers are usually co-located in Jobcentres, meaning it's easy for DWP work coaches to refer customers to go and speak to them or make an appointment, and careers advisers can pick up customers ad hoc. With Jobcentres closed, this ad hoc and in-person picking up of customers disappeared, which compounded on the challenges faced by Service providers in marketing the Service, described later on in this section. At the beginning of the pandemic the DWP also stopped making work-related interventions for a few months, presumably while the focus shifted to supporting the greatly increased numbers of people applying for Universal Credit. This meant that they didn't have the opportunities to assess people's needs and refer them on to the National Careers Service.

⁶⁹ <https://www.theopenworkpartnership.com/news/demand-for-face-to-face-advice-increases-as-a-result-of-covid-19/> [accessed 07.06.21].

Additionally, a number of prime contractors mentioned the effect they feel the furlough scheme had on workers: they described the scheme putting people into a state of suspended animation, where they aren't working but haven't been made redundant, and as such aren't actively trying to look for jobs or considering their career options. Stakeholders mentioned this leading to high numbers of people making appointments and then not attending, including some organisations having a 40% or 50% 'fail to attend' rate:

“ We're also getting quite high 'fail to attend' rates, where people book an appointment and then forget about it, which I think is partially due to the lethargy that's created by furlough. ”

(Anonymous prime contractor)

Later on in 2020 the work of Jobcentres broadened back to the more usual activities and interventions, but there were still low levels of referrals coming through to the National Careers Service. This could be partially due to the influx of new work coaches, as the DWP undertook a big recruitment drive to try and respond to increased demand for their services. These new work coaches necessarily arrived with less or no knowledge of the National Careers Service, and so were less likely to refer customers on to the Service. Civil servants at the National Careers Service described contributing to refreshed guidance for new work coaches on the role of the Service to ensure that it is fully understood, but agreed that work coaches are sometimes not as aware of the Service as they could or should be.

Some stakeholders also pointed out the possibility that work coaches are incentivised by internal targets to put customers on to DWP programmes, such as the Plan for Jobs schemes, rather than refer them to the National Careers Service. While the Plan for Jobs schemes present excellent opportunities for many people to gain experience of work or develop their skills, they will not be right for everyone. In order for people to be supported into sustainable learning or employment in the right sector for them, many will need advice and support from highly qualified careers advisers.

The government must be wary of drawing the wrong lessons from the reduction in customer demand for the National Careers Service during the pandemic: CIAG should not be devalued or deprioritised, but recognised as an essential component of the education, skills, and employment systems. All elements of the CIAG system must work together more efficiently in order to overcome the effects of the drop in demand, including through more flexible funding and better marketing of the service, as we recommend later on in this chapter.

System misalignment

Leaving aside issues specific to the pandemic, we heard of a number of areas of challenge, gaps in the system, or misalignment. The Service is described as an all-age service, as all adults and young people over the age of 13 are entitled to access support online and over the phone. Young people and adults in education or training are also entitled to receive face-to-face CIAG from their education or training provider. However, contributors to our inquiry told us that young people under the age of 18 can fall between the cracks if they have left education or haven't moved on to university, but are not in school or training – they are unlikely to get support from an education or training provider, and are not entitled to face-to-face support from the National Careers Service. Careers England highlighted the importance of this gap:

“ Studies have shown that we have lost track of over 150,000 young people ages 16-18; and over 50,000 of these are believed to be NEET; 'the hidden NEET', before the pandemic struck. There is a danger that they will be further left behind as the country grapples with the immediate consequences of spiralling unemployment amongst young people more generally. ”

(Careers England, written submission)

Some of the Service's prime contractors told us that they struggle to reach the people who they think are most in need of CIAG, including those who are economically inactive or others who could benefit from support but aren't aware that the Service exists.

“ We're not able to reach some of the customers who are most in need of careers advice and guidance, specifically those customers who are economically inactive, aren't on any register with DWP or sit outside of the school regime, or are not engaging with family services/troubled families, those customers within the communities that are very hard to engage. Targeted advertising of careers advice, whether from Careers & Enterprise Company or the NCS, would go a long way to engaging with these people, so that when you knock on their door they've heard of careers advice. ”

(Anonymous prime contractor)

Stakeholders described to us that there is often an overlap between some of the schemes and services provided by the DWP and the National Careers Service. This leads to Jobcentres and National Careers Service advisers competing for the same customers, which is not the best use of government funding. Some organisations told us that they were able to collaborate well with local Jobcentres, which goes some way to preventing this issue:

“ We have really good relationships with the DWP and Jobcentre Plus at the local level. We ran sector-based work academies around the recruitment of work coaches, helping to prepare applicants for the civil service recruitment process. We have also collaborated with Jobcentre Plus and the local authority in working with big businesses who are preparing to make lots of redundancies, helping those staff members to get back into work as quickly as possible when they're being made redundant. ”

(Katharine Horler, Adviza)

However, there is clearly inconsistency between Jobcentres who collaborate effectively with National Careers Service providers at the local level, and those who do not. While DWP and the National Careers Service seem to work together at a national level, this must be articulated as a key priority to local DWP leadership.

“ In some areas, at a really specific ward level the collaboration is amazing, the local Jobcentre Plus absolutely recognise the value of careers guidance and make sure we're included in important conversations at an early stage, making sure there's no duplication and that we can collaborate well. There are other areas where that just isn't the case at all, and there's duplication of provision as a consequence of that. ”

(Laura Bell, Director for Careers and Employability, Education Development Trust)

Concerns have also been raised about careers advisers at the Service leaving to move into new work coach roles at Jobcentre Plus because of the higher level of pay and similar tasks being performed. Some prime contractors told us that they had lost careers advisers over recent months because they were going to work for the DWP as work coaches. Some stakeholders also mentioned that they were concerned about the same effect happening as a result of the government's Restart scheme⁷⁰, which again is offering higher pay levels than advisers can be paid on National Careers Service contracts for undertaking similar work. If we are to avoid an increasing exodus of advisers from the Service, then government must urgently revisit and rethink the funding levels of National Careers Service contracts.

Payment by results

One sometimes controversial aspect of how the National Careers Service functions is the fact that contractors are paid by results according to the outcomes they achieve for each customer, as described earlier on in this chapter. Some prime contractors stated that they feel the payment-by-results system incentivises the wrong behaviour from providers – they might target people who are easier to move into work or learning in order to more quickly achieve an ‘outcome’ for which they can claim funding. Priority group customers are funded at a higher rate in order to try and minimise this, so providers are encouraged by the increased funding to work with people in those groups.

In reality, the payment rates for both non-priority and priority group customers are very low in comparison to the funding for customer outcomes on DWP schemes: National Careers Service providers receive £130 for one learning and one work outcome for a priority group customer, where other schemes might pay £1,000 or more for the same outcomes. The figure decreases to £50 for non-priority group customers⁷¹. As a result, providers have to primarily work with priority group customers in order to be able to afford to run the contract. Within these groups, the customers who need much more support before being able to achieve a learning or work outcome might be deprioritised, as this longer-term work is not funded until an outcome is achieved.

A related problem is the fact that National Careers Service prime contractors do not receive any kind of management or ‘service’ fee to help with the costs of running the organisation while delivering the contract; these costs are expected to be covered by the payments for customer outcomes. Prime contractors told us that it is extremely difficult to recruit careers advisers who are already qualified. 2018 research into the workforce needs of the careers sector highlighted that 58% of employers surveyed felt there was a shortage of people with the right qualifications, skills, knowledge and experience needed for their roles⁷². As a result, organisations are faced with having to fund significant training for staff, but the income from the contract isn’t enough to cover these costs. A number of contractors told us that they use income from other parts of the business to cover the loss they make on running the National Careers Service contract. This does not seem like a sustainable or positive situation for providers of the National Careers Service, especially given the continued challenges in accessing customers.

One issue with the payment-by-results system mentioned by contractors was specific to the pandemic. Laura Bell, Director for Careers and Employability at the Education Development Trust, described some customers during the pandemic having a more fundamental rethink of their career than the average customer used to, and so wanting to be in touch with the service more often in order to receive more support with this complete change of career plans. It is difficult for providers to afford this higher level of support, with additional time and interventions but the same number of learning or work outcomes for the customer. National Careers Service contracts must allow for the likelihood that this will be a phenomenon which endures after the pandemic, given the changes we expect to see in the world of work as a result of technological advancement and climate change; this means providing appropriate funding for the support needed.

⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restart-scheme/how-the-restart-scheme-will-work> [accessed 19.05.21].

⁷¹ Education & Skills Funding Agency. ‘Funding rules for the National Careers Service’, March 2021.

⁷² Dr Siobhan Neary and Peter Priestley. ‘Workforce Needs of the Career Development Sector in the UK’, November 2018.

“ At one point we weren’t seeing a drop in the number of interventions, we had the same number of interventions but with fewer people. ... For example, there are customers in their 30s and 40s with mortgages and families, completely rethinking their careers. They’re needing to really consider these decisions and want to get a lot of support from us to find out about the labour market, how sustainable is this new career they’re wondering about? People want more support, advice and reassurance. The ability to maintain the level of resource to support that when you’re not being paid for it is difficult. ”

(Laura Bell, EDT)

Some prime contractors stated that they had no issue with the payment-by-results system in itself, but that the aforementioned different funding levels for National Careers Service or DWP contracts devalues the work of professionally qualified careers advisers.

Priority groups

Many individuals and organisations raised the topic of the National Careers Service’s priority groups throughout the inquiry. People who were furloughed during the pandemic, or made redundant but have been redundant for less than 12 months, do not fall into the Service’s priority groups. This means they may not be able to receive face-to-face support in their local area, and the Service’s providers don’t receive the higher rate of pay for supporting them. This can mean it is more difficult for contractors to afford to provide CIAG to these customers.

Most of the submissions to our call for evidence suggested that the National Careers Service’s priority groups should be expanded. An equivalent alternative to this is that the Service’s funding should be made more flexible, so that contractors are able to receive a higher rate of pay for supporting people who have been furloughed or recently made redundant, without the need for redefining the priority groups.

“ The NCS Priority Groups were set before the latest economic shock brought about by the pandemic. Consequently, there are many adults who are not sufficiently prioritised in the way funding is channelled to providers to ensure that those recently unemployed are guaranteed the level of support they need to re-enter employment. ”

(Careers England, written submission)

It is generally held by civil servants that people who have been redundant for fewer than 12 months do not need to be in a priority group or to access a higher level of support, because those people will be able to self-serve by accessing the resources and advice available on the National Careers Service’s website. This assumption may have been logical in the past, but the economic and labour market situation currently facing England’s workers is quite different from the situation over the past few decades. It seems more logical to suggest that this is a time when some people’s capacity to move back into work might have been damaged, such as by the effects of successive lockdowns, rapid labour market changes, and the stress of a public health emergency. Some of the prime contractors we spoke to articulated this clearly, including highlighting the benefits of supporting people as early on as possible when they have been made redundant.

Pre-pandemic, maybe it was true that people redundant for less time would be able to self-serve back into something similar. But during the pandemic sectors like hospitality have been hammered... People have had to change their employment sector in a way they never have before, and that's where careers guidance would be really helpful, helping people look at their transferable skills and core talents that would apply in different roles or sectors.

(Katharine Horler, CEO of Adviza)

Specifically more could be done to support redundancy, and people being made redundant but only being in a priority group after 12 months of being unemployed. Research shows they lose a lot of motivation after six to nine months, so why not work with them at an earlier stage? It becomes harder to support them into work the longer they've been redundant. People are falling into the gap between people who are able to self-serve and won't be redundant for long, vs people who will end up being redundant for 12 months and should or could have received an intervention earlier. Careers advisers could also potentially help people to move into employment more quickly than they might do with self-serving.

(Anonymous prime contractor)

National Careers Service prime contractors were able to benefit from more flexible funding during parts of the pandemic to ensure that they could deliver some level of CIAG and reach the customers they were able to find. Currently the furlough scheme is supposed to draw to a close in September 2021, at which point there may well be a wave of newly unemployed people; in addition, the economic consequences of the pandemic will likely still be evident after the end of this year. As a result, we have made the following recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

The ESFA must widen the National Careers Service's priority groups for the rest of 2021/22, temporarily broadening them out to include people furloughed or at risk of redundancy regardless of their age, and those unemployed regardless of how long they have been unemployed. This will ensure that the large numbers of people affected by the pandemic can get back into work as quickly as possible, boosting the economic recovery from Covid-19.

The government should keep this open as a future option, in order to respond to the possibility that the job market remains unstable or unpredictable for some time to come.

Perceptions of and communication of the service

We heard frequently through our evidence that there is insufficient awareness of the existence and services of the National Careers Service, which means that many adults don't know where to go for careers information, advice and guidance (particularly non-graduates, as many graduates are entitled to continue using the careers services of their university). Many of the people who are most in need of CIAG might engage with other organisations or services such as the DWP's Jobcentres, and so might be referred to the National Careers Service through this. However, as we have already explored, this is not always sufficient to ensure awareness of the Service in people who need CIAG.

Prime contractors undertake a lot of communications work and collaboration with other local-level organisations to try and raise awareness and bring in customers. This work requires significant investment in people and resources, which is expected to be paid for from the funding received for customer outcomes. As previously detailed, this is rarely sufficient to cover these costs.

“ We invest a lot in partnership working and community engagement, with combined authorities, local enterprise partnerships and local authorities. We also work at project-level, with welfare to work projects, community networks, faith organisations, women’s groups, and small projects targeting people who are unemployed. We work very closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to understand what their priorities are, which customer groups they’re trying to engage with. We provide web copy for people’s websites, we have a lot of social media campaign activity going on, hard copy leaflets which get sent to schools and other organisations, food banks, housing associations. We try and make the service as accessible as possible, but there’s a lot of work and investment to make that happen. ”

(Anonymous prime contractor)

All of the prime contractors we spoke to told us that the customers who do engage with their services are extremely positive about the quality of the support provided, but many mention that they had never previously heard of the National Careers Service.

“ Our customer satisfaction surveys tell us that we’re the best-kept secret. People don’t know what’s available to them in terms of accessing support. That’s our biggest barrier to accessing customers. ”

(Laura Bell, EDT)

“ It seems ridiculous that there is no national advertising. If you saw the National Careers Service advertised on the back of a bus or on TV in between a TV show, what would the take-up be then? We have so much feedback from customers about how fantastic the service is, but they tell us that they never knew the National Careers Service existed. ”

(Anonymous prime contractor)

Some stakeholders told us that part of the issue of awareness is adults’ perceptions of CIAG itself. Many adults have only ever received CIAG at school, which for many was a long time ago, and may not have been very high quality or personalised support. Because there is a lack of awareness of the National Careers Service and of the positive feedback it receives from customers, people’s perceptions of CIAG are not in tune with what is actually available to them. While the co-location of careers advisers in Jobcentres is a valuable way of finding customers, some careers professionals described their belief that this co-location and alignment as feeding a perception that CIAG is a ‘deficit’ service, only appropriate or useful for those who are disadvantaged or ‘down on their luck’.

⁷³ Tristram Hooley and Vanessa Dodd, Careers England. ‘The economic benefits of careers guidance’, July 2015.

Stakeholders have told us that the National Careers Service's strength is at the local level, where its providers are able to connect and partner with education and training providers, local businesses, community organisations, and local government. However, all communications for and about the service are tightly controlled by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and so take place at the national level, or it can sometimes be a lengthy process to get local-level communications signed off.

Civil servants at the National Careers Service told us that the Service's prime contractors undertake a great deal of low and no-cost advertising of the service, as previously described by an anonymous contractor, which they consider to be sufficient for raising awareness and bringing customers in. However, at a time of labour market and economic upheaval, it surely makes sense for the government to do as much as possible to raise awareness of the National Careers Service. Academic literature has explored the return on investment arising from CIAG⁷³, such as increased human and social capital leading to increasing participation in the labour market and enhanced skills and knowledge. Given this, it can only be positive for more adults to be able to access the Service.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

There must be much better communication of the existence and services of the National Careers Service, to ensure take-up of its services by all those who need careers advice and guidance. This should take the form of an ongoing national campaign but with a strong focus on communications activity at the local level as well.

Conclusion

The evidence we have gathered makes clear the strength of good will from individuals and organisations in the CIAG sector, as well as professionals in education and training, and business. Everyone wants young people and adults to be supported and empowered to succeed in education, employment, and their wider lives. We have highlighted some excellent examples of good practice in CIAG provision, and adaptation in response to the disruption caused by the pandemic. However, there are also some evident flaws in the functioning of the CIAG system which must be addressed. Government must improve the clarity and strategic functioning of the CIAG system with long-term stability, including putting in place the funding required; take further steps to tackle digital poverty; and strengthen the monitoring of CIAG provision. Graduates must not be left out of the Chancellor's plans for economic recovery; and changes should be made to ensure the National Careers Service can deliver its excellent support and advice to all those who need it, with an ongoing communications campaign to ensure it stops being 'the best kept secret'.

Looking to the future, there is a strong consensus that the CIAG system in England needs to become a truly all-age national service, where all the constituent parts work together coherently and without gaps or unhelpful overlap. This means careers information, advice and guidance which is well-informed by the local labour market; well-advertised and easy to access; and provided through a blend of digital and in-person modes, to suit people with a range of needs and preferences. This also means a key role for employers in collaborating with education and training providers, CIAG providers and careers professionals, supporting CIAG provision and committing to forward planning about the skills and workforce they need. Government must harness the expertise and passion of all these sectors to ensure that everyone in England has the support needed as we move out of the Covid-19 pandemic, and into a changed economy.

Methodology and contributions

We carried out three evidence sessions in July and October 2020, which were focused on young people in further education; adults in further education or outside of education and training; and higher education, respectively. We issued a public call for evidence which ran through November and December, and carried out meetings and informal interviews in early 2021 with a wide range of key stakeholders.

Evidence Session One

Laura-Jane Rawlings	CEO, Youth Employment UK
Ciara	Youth Ambassador, Youth Employment UK
Patrick	Youth Ambassador, Youth Employment UK
Josh	Youth Ambassador, Youth Employment UK
Chinara Rustamova	Senior Policy Adviser, Federation of Small Businesses
Catherine Sezen	Senior Policy Manager for FE, Association of Colleges
Sam Windett	Director of Policy, Impetus

Evidence Session Two

Alissa Dhaliwal	Head of Education, Confederation of British Industry
Henry Lawes	Programme Manager for the Adult Education Budget, West of England Combined Authority
Mark Malcomson	Principal of City Lit and Chair of the Institutes for Adult Learning
Peter Mayhew-Smith	Principal and CEO, South Thames College Group
Paul Warner	Director of Research and Development, Association of Education and Learning Providers

Evidence Session Three

Charlie Ball	Head of Higher Education Intelligence, Jisc
Beth Eyre	President, Sheffield University Students' Union
Tristram Hooley	Chief Research Officer, Institute for Student Employers
Marc Lintern	President, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
Jayne Rowley	Executive Director – Student Services, Jisc
Kate Wicklow	Policy Manager, GuildHE

Interviews, written evidence and other contributions:

Association of Education and Learning Providers
Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
Association of Colleges
Anonymous National Careers Service prime contractors
Careers England
Careers & Enterprise Company
Career Development Institute
CSW Group
Deirdre Hughes
Department for Education
Department for Work and Pensions
dmh associates
EngineeringUK
The Gatsby Foundation
International Centre for Guidance Studies
InChief
Katharine Horler, Adviza
Laura Bell, Education Development Trust
National Careers Service
Ofsted
Professor Sir John Holman
Sally-Anne Barnes, LMI for All
Tristram Hooley
UKESF

Inquiry chairs

Lord Jim Knight
Nicola Richards MP
Dr Siobhan Neary

Steering Group

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Simon Ashworth	Chief Policy Officer, AELP
Dee Aylett-Smith	Head of National Competitions and Careers Advice, WorldSkills UK
Alice Barnard	CEO, Edge Foundation
Claire Bennison	Head of UK, ACCA
Verity Davidge	Director of Policy, Make UK
Jan Ellis	CEO, Career Development Institute
Anne Frost	Former civil servant at the Department for Education
Robin Ghurbhurun	Managing Director, FE & Skills, Jisc
Lindsey Mann	Strategy and Business Development Director, Ingeus
Peter Mayhew-Smith	Principal and CEO, South Thames College Group
Julie Nugent	Director of Skills and Productivity, West Midlands Combined Authority
Chidi Ogbonnaya	Senior Lecturer, University of Sussex
Jane Samuels	Director of Projects and Operations, Edge Foundation
Franziska von Blumenthal	Policy and Research Manager, ECITB

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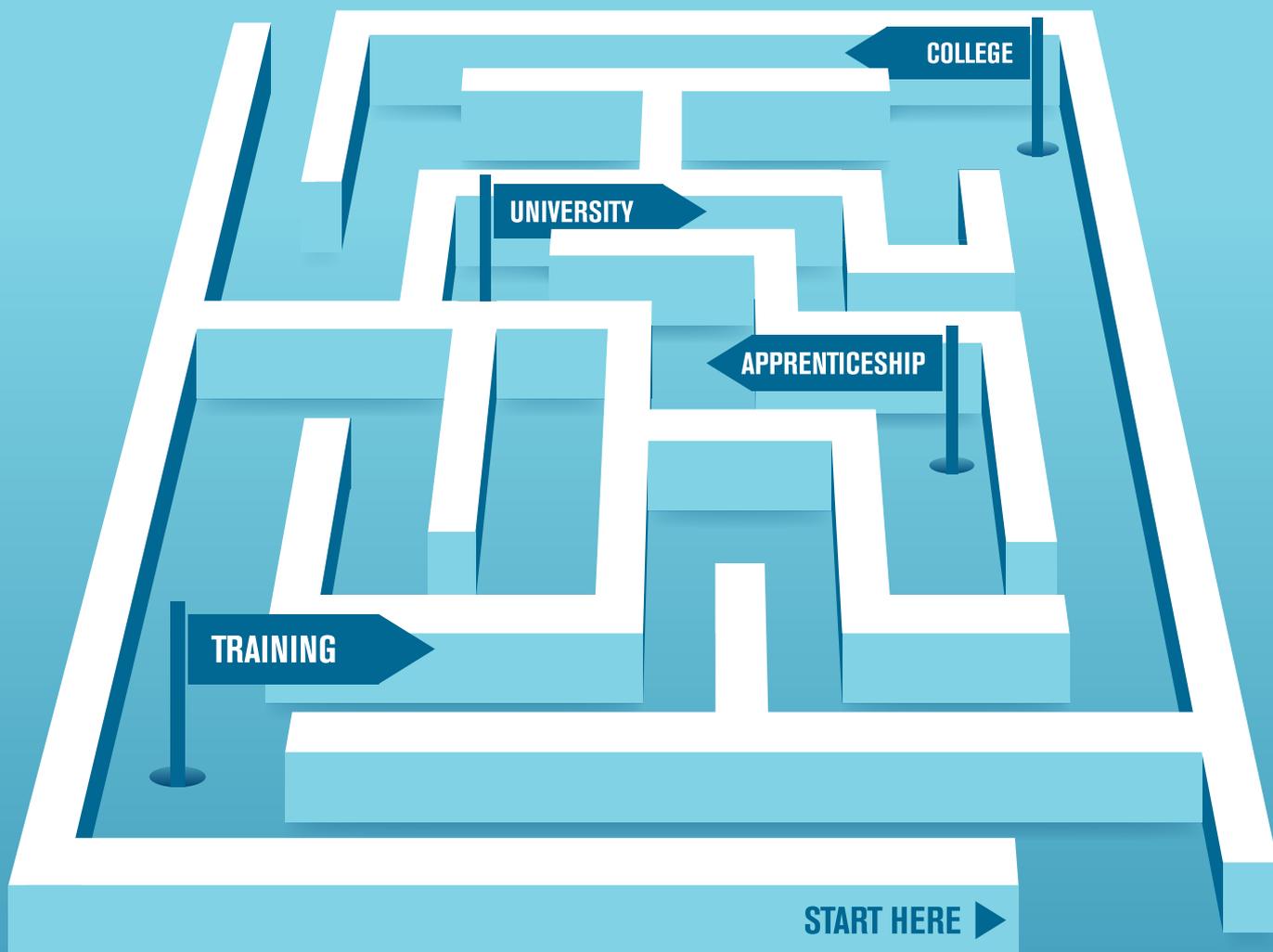
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