CDI
CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

VALUING CAREERS

Empowering Careers Enhancing Economies

The Value of Professional Career Guidance in a Changing World



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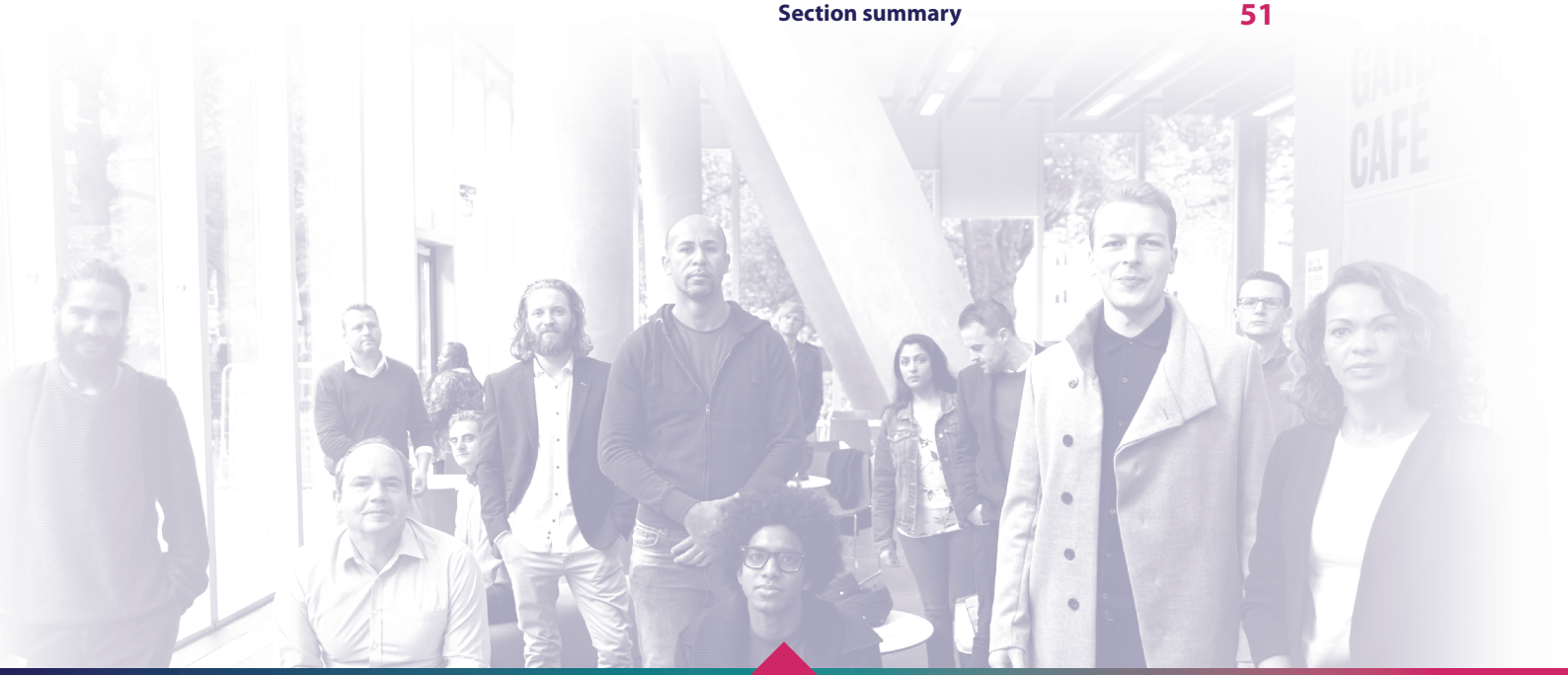
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Foreword

Context of this research

The UK is in the middle of a skills crisis. More than 20% of the working-age population are economically inactive[1]. We have seen a slight reduction in job vacancies (which peaked at 1.3 million mid-2022), and employers in many sectors continue to struggle to recruit people with the skills for existing roles[2].

Looking forward, major trends will continue to shape the demand for skills and the way we think about careers and professional development. Notably, digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) will change many job roles, leading to the emergence of new roles and the obsolescence of others. The imperative to decarbonise and create sustainable organisations has introduced a new dimension to career choices, as individuals seek roles that align with their values and contribute to a greener future[3]. With all these changes, we can expect that impacts on peoples' careers will only increase over the next few years[4] along with ways that the labour market is managed[5].

At the same time, inequalities such as gender pay gaps, racial inequalities, and socioeconomic and regional disparities, continue to hinder career progression for many[6]. Both COVID and technological advancements particularly affect those most vulnerable to begin with[7], and many people from different parts of the workforce are keen to work but face barriers related to ill-health or caring responsibilities[8].

These significant trends, affecting the economy and individuals, make it more important than ever that UK adults are equipped and supported to manage their careers throughout their working life, to gain skills that enable them to achieve career aspirations and that the economy needs to maintain or improve economic performance.

As the professional body for career development, it is clear to the Career Development Institute (CDI) that the sector has the potential to play an important role in enabling UK adults to engage with the skills system, to progress their individual careers, and develop skills that add to the economy. By being fulfilled in their work, they can play a positive role in society while having career experiences that enhance their sense of wellbeing.

To better understand this potential and the barriers to achieving it, the CDI carried out this research, to identify and quantify the opportunities and challenges for careers guidance in terms of supporting the working-age population.

Our research

We already know from many past studies that careers guidance produces positive impacts on peoples'[9] lives and has the potential to help individuals overcome their challenges and improve their career wellbeing. We also know that it delivers good value for money - providing a return on investment of 2.5:1 when delivered in education settings and 3.2:1 when delivered to unemployed people[10].

But for adults, there is little data on the underlying demand or need for careers guidance, the perceptions of members of the public about receiving support with their careers or the barriers they face in accessing that support. This is also a critical moment for the sector, following a review by the Commission on the Future of Employment support to evaluate the future requirements for employment support services, including career guidance[11].

We therefore commissioned out a UK-wide survey of 5,004 working-age adults to gain an up-to-date understanding of the nation's career challenges and opportunities, and associated challenges and opportunities for the careers sector.

We find that careers are hugely important to people's wider life satisfaction and optimism indicators. However, our main finding reveals a significant opportunity: careers support from a qualified professional offers substantive value to those who use it, but only 15% of the adult population have accessed such services since completing their education, despite around 8 in 10 having career aspirations and 8 in 10 anticipating barriers in their career too. We find many indicators that point to low awareness and understanding of what careers guidance can offer, and we discover that those who might benefit most in society are the least aware of these services.

The findings of this report lead to recommendations for policymakers, key organisations within career development (including the CDI) and those working in the profession.

We are proud that this research contributes to the growing body of evidence demonstrating the value of career development. The insights will not only for the next steps in the CDI's Valuing Careers campaign but will also be shared with careers researchers to support and encourage additional research.





David Morgan
Chief Executive, Career Development Institute

1. House of Commons Library (2024), UK Labour Market Statistics
2. British Chamber of Commerce (2024), Business Barometer: An analysis of the UK skills landscape
3. Public First (2023), Generation Green Jobs. Exploring young people's readiness for the Net Zero skills revolution
4. House of Commons Library (2023), Potential Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Labour Market
5. OECD (2023), Artificial Intelligence and Labour Market Matching
6. Institute for Fiscal Studies (2022), Labour Market Inequalities
7. The Health Foundation (2022), Inquiry finds working age adults in poorest areas almost four times more likely to die from COVID-19
8. Centre for Ageing Better (2023), Technical Report: State of Ageing 2023-24
9. Hughes et al (2016), Careers Education. An international literature review.
10. Hooley, T. et al (2023), Investing in careers: What is career guidance worth?
11. Institute of Economic Studies (2024), The Commission on the Future of Employment Support

Executive summary

About this study

Set against the context of a skills challenge, high economic inactivity rates and rapid change within the world of work in the UK, this study was motivated by the following observations:

1) A wide body of international research has evaluated careers guidance interventions and services over decades, and systematically demonstrated that it offers value to individuals and society.

2) We observe many challenges in the UK that careers guidance can help address, including skills shortages in key sectors, technological change, economic difficulties, high levels of economic inactivity, well-being challenges such as burnout, and poor social mobility that exacerbates inequalities. However, only a small fraction of those affected by these issues seek professional careers support.

3) Despite the benefits and value of careers guidance, the sector is itself struggling with recruitment and retention challenges due to an ageing workforce, low pay in some areas, and a lack of recognition of the value that professionals bring.

4) The scale and nature of the opportunity for careers guidance to provide support to working-age people is not well understood.

The CDI recognises the need to do more to evidence and communicate the value of careers guidance in addressing current and future challenges to policymakers, stakeholders and the public. While we note other studies offer useful indicators, none allowed us to quantify the challenges in this way, and particularly the overall picture for the adult working-age population.

The CDI commissioned YouGov to conduct a survey of 5,004 UK working-age adults who are currently in work, unemployed or economically inactive. We measured:

- Career attitudes, experiences and challenges
- Ways people are managing their careers
- Peoples' relationship with career support and careers guidance
- Indicators of the value of career guidance in the past
- Indicators of the potential and future value of career guidance
- Barriers to using career guidance.

This data allowed us to quantify the high-level challenges for the sector to support more people and make a bigger impact, offering evidence for policy makers and decision-makers in organisations in the career sector.

Key findings

We found that:

- Careers are vitally important: People who feel positive about their careers are about twice as likely to feel positive about their wider lives (86% vs 45%).
- However, only 54% feel optimistic about their future career.
- Generally fewer than 50% of people embark on activities associated with managing a career each year, such as taking courses or updating a CV.
- The population demonstrates a variable ability to achieve their career aspirations: 87% who aspired to build their knowledge or skills over the past five years managed to do so, but of the 23% who aspired to change their career path, only half were successful. (This means that only about 12% of the population successfully changed career path in the last five years, despite the rapidly changing demands of the labour market).
- Attitudes, experiences and challenges evolve over the career span. Notably, as people get older, career satisfaction and confidence to achieve career aspirations declines from decades before typical retirement age. While 71% of 18–24-year-olds are positive about their career prospects, only 42% of 45–54-year-olds feel the same.
- Our analysis shows a significant fraction (20%-30%) of the population face mutually reinforcing factors that hinder the attainment of a fulfilling career: Low optimism, low self-confidence, low engagement in career management activities, lower rewards (income and career satisfaction) from work. These people show a relatively low awareness and understanding of career advice, despite potentially having the most to gain. We also see very different indicators of career optimism between those who studied at higher education or completed apprenticeships compared to those whose highest qualification was from secondary education.
- 62% of UK working-age adults recall receiving careers support from a careers or education professional while in education, but only 15% recall support from a career professional since leaving education. via a public career service, private coach/counsellor or at work.
- Those that do receive support as an adult reported very strong positive results: 86% reported a substantive benefit from professional adult career guidance, and 82% would recommend it to others. Those who received professional career support are also significantly more optimistic about their future career. Those who received career support over the past five years have been better able to achieve their aspirations over this timeframe.
- Meanwhile, those that have not accessed this support are less optimistic, demonstrate lower levels of awareness and understanding of what career support could offer them, reinforcing their situation.
- We report data from various perspectives that shows the potential for careers guidance to support many more people than today, and with challenges that would benefit not only them but the wider economy, such as being able to find new career paths. 62% of people could name a challenge where they would benefit from careers guidance today.
- There is a clear case for more targeted interventions for people with mutually reinforcing barriers to fulfilling work, given the even lower perceived relevance of careers guidance. However, realising the potential requires creating increased awareness and understanding of the benefits of professional career support as a foundation.

Recommendations

Our findings lead us to recommend areas of challenge and opportunity, for the attention of policymakers, decision makers in the careers development sector, practitioners, analysts and researchers.

1) **Prepare people in education with career management skills for their working life:** While career development is provided in education to prepare people for transition to the next stage of education, training or into work, we see a need to equip young people with career management skills that will enable them to continue to review and progress their careers throughout their working life, encouraging them from a young age to continue to develop their skills and seek careers support when needed.

2) **Change perceptions that careers guidance is only for young people:** While 76% can cite a career aspiration and 80% anticipate barriers to achieving goals in the next five years, only 12% strongly agree that careers guidance is for "people like me". (This is despite the strong recommendations scores given by users of such services).

3) **Design targeted interventions for those with multiple barriers:** Depending on the exact calculation approach, we estimate up to 30% of the working population are trapped in unfulfilling careers with the combined characteristics of low optimism, low levels of career management activity, and poorer outcomes from their work. Targeted interventions are needed as these people demonstrate lower trust that careers support can help them.

4) **Design interventions for mid/later-career to target career longevity:** We see the opportunity to revitalise many careers where optimism and engagement have declined through middle-age, to contribute to longer careers and higher economic activity.

5) **Provide a single source of truth over the 'best source' of advice:** People access the nominally similar benefits from different sources of careers support, despite each having different pros and cons for users. There is also nothing preventing someone offering support despite having no training or qualifications. We need to clarify the options available to members of the public to get professional support to address their challenges, as well as accessing accurate information.

6) **Understand more about inclusive careers guidance:** Indicators suggest having careers support from someone with a shared background is important to a significant but growing minority, particularly 27% of ethnic minorities. Females are also twice as likely to feel uncomfortable talking to a careers professional than males.

7) **Address the demand for support from careers professionals with sector insight:** 45% said that it was important that the career adviser had specific industry knowledge. There is more to do to educate the public on the role of career development professionals in adding enormous value by providing support, frameworks and processes that do not need industry-specific knowledge. There is also more that could be done to support practitioners in readily accessing more specific industry knowledge, while making their sector expertise visible to members of the public, such as through the UK Register of Career Development Professionals.

8) **Fund a programme of "*What Works?*" research to inform investment:** Compared to careers guidance in education, it is less clear 'what works' for adults, as a function of the client challenge, client characteristics and the intervention options. Given the potential investment sums and value to the nation, it is recommended that governments fund further research and pilot schemes to better understand the impact and potential of support, especially for those adults with low education outcomes, on low incomes, with low career confidence and other barriers to achieving more fulfilling careers.

Overview of the study

Motivation

Set against the context of a skills challenge, high economic inactivity and rapid change within the world of work, this study was motivated by the following observations:

1) International research has evaluated careers guidance interventions and services over decades, and systematically shows that it offers important sources of value to individuals, the economy and society. However, it typically looks at the value based on interventions rather than attempt to estimate the potential demand – and therefore wider value and potential value – for careers guidance. It also does not often quantify the different barriers to different people who might access such support.

2) We see evidence for the existence and growth of many challenges in the UK that careers guidance can help with: skills shortages for key sectors, technological change, economic challenges, wellbeing challenges, high levels of economic inactivity, inequalities and social mobility.

3) Despite the benefits and value of careers guidance, the sector is itself struggling with recruitment and retention challenges, due to an ageing workforce, low levels of pay in key parts of the sector and a perception of being a poorly recognised profession.

4) Many of the changes and challenges in labour markets create uncertainty for individuals, accentuating the need for careers guidance. However, the scale and nature of the opportunity for careers guidance is not well understood.

We note previous studies, but not ones that allow us to understand the nature of the opportunity and challenges in the way we seek. Phoenix Insights (2023)[12] carried out a very useful study to understand people's broad career aspirations, expectations of - and motivations for - job changes, and high-level benefits of career services. The OECD (2021)[13] also carried out a study of six nations on the use of careers guidance by adults, but did not include the UK. The CIPD's annual surveys of the workforce[14] also provide useful insight, but more from the perspective of a current role than 'career'.

Therefore, we saw a need to understand the challenges and opportunities for the career sector.

We also saw the gap in evidence for adults rather than young people in education, and so saw the greatest value in conducting this survey among adults. This allows us to elicit insights with the benefit of the respondents' hindsight and understand peoples' career outcomes across a working lifespan.

12. Phoenix Insights, Careers for Longer Lives
13. OECD (2021), Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work
14. CIPD (2024), The Good Work Index

Objectives

The main objectives in this study were to:

- **Identify the opportunities for the career development profession to increase its impact** on the UK's challenges by supporting the UK adult working-age population. We aspire to inform policymakers and decision makers within the career sector, and to motivate discussion towards addressing the opportunities and challenges.
- **Provide feedback to professionals within the sector** and those considering working in the sector of the value of career development work, to support acquisition and retention challenges.
- **Provide benchmarks** around the health of peoples' careers and the career development profession in the UK, including the reputation of the career development profession; to identify intervention needs and to track progress.

Methodology

Our research was a quantitative survey of n=5,004 adults who are in the working-age population aged 18-65 and outside of full-time education. The structure of the survey elicited insights on several themes, which collectively provide a rounded picture of the careers guidance landscape and opportunities for the career development profession, including:

- The career experiences of adults in the UK and its inter-relationship with life satisfaction and optimism.
- The relationship between individuals' attitudes towards their careers, their engagement in career management activities, and the resulting career outcomes.
- The challenges people face where careers support could help, to the benefit of both the individual and the wider economy.People's past experiences with career support services;their perceptions of its value and its impact on career outcomes.
- Awareness and perceptions of the value of careers guidance in the UK adult population.
- Perceived barriers to using professional careers guidance.

To inform the design of the survey and the variables we measured, we reviewed a wide body of careers literature, covering various commonly used models and theories that have been derived from research, as well as the studies referenced above.

This research was led by Stephen Plimmer at the Career Development Instutute. To conduct the research, CDI commissioned YouGov Plc, who collaborated on the survey and analysis. Fieldwork was carried out during May 2024. Unless otherwise stated, all figures are from the data provided by YouGov Plc.

Data, sampling and delimiters

Within the constraints of our sample, we sought to get enough data to provide representative pictures of people across the four UK nations and to elicit differences in gender, age group, broad ethnicity group, broad socio-economic group, geographic region, type of region, income range, role type and employment status.

Quotas were set for these main independent variables, including numbers that had received careers guidance, and a normalisation factor was appended to each respondent used to ensure that the overall results were nationally representative when summarised.

We also appended a wide range of specific, more-granular variables to the data, such as highest educational qualification, welfare/benefits received, type of location (urban, suburban, rural), hours worked and more granular categories of ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation etc. For this more granular group, it was not feasible to set quotas and so was not always possible to draw reliable conclusions, or for intersectional groups. However, we were able to identify clues that could be used to create hypotheses for further investigations in more focussed areas.

Interpretation and analysis

To help us to interpret these results, the CDI led a roundtable discussion with experts from career development. We would like to thank the following for their insights and support with this research, which have helped with interpretation and developing recommendations. Their contributions don't necessarily mean they agree with all the insights and recommendations, or reflect the positions of their institutions:

- **Beth Jones**, Gatsby
- **Catherine Sermon**, Phoenix Insights
- **Clare Viney**, CRAC
- **Julia Yates**, City University
- **Mark Bowman**, Inspira
- **Nina Chorzelewski**, Association of Colleges
- **Rebecca Passingham**, UNISON
- **Tom Shirt**, Gatsby
- **Tristram Hooley**, iCeGS, University of Derby.

We would also like to add special thanks to Carolyn Parry (Career Alchemy and CDI Project Associate for Wales), for valuable suggestions and insights into the final report.

Contents

The rest of this report is organised in the following sections:

- **Adults and their careers:** This section addresses the overall 'state of nation' regarding people and their careers. We examine career satisfaction, attitudes, levels of engagement in managing careers and how such factors vary with different key characteristics of the respondents. We show the career aspirations people have and the barriers that they anticipate facing.
- **Careers guidance:** This section reviews peoples' experiences with careers guidance, particularly since leaving education. We measure the formal and informal sources that people use, and the benefits of independent, professional career support. Attitudes to careers guidance are described, along with the ways these vary by the characteristics of the respondents.
- **The potential of guidance and barriers:** This section looks forward to the potential for careers support to be delivered more widely. Barriers that might prevent people accessing career support are measured.
- **Recommendations:** Several areas are proposed for further consideration and work for both policymakers and the career development sector, to unlock the value of career support for the individual, the economy and society.

Adults and their careers

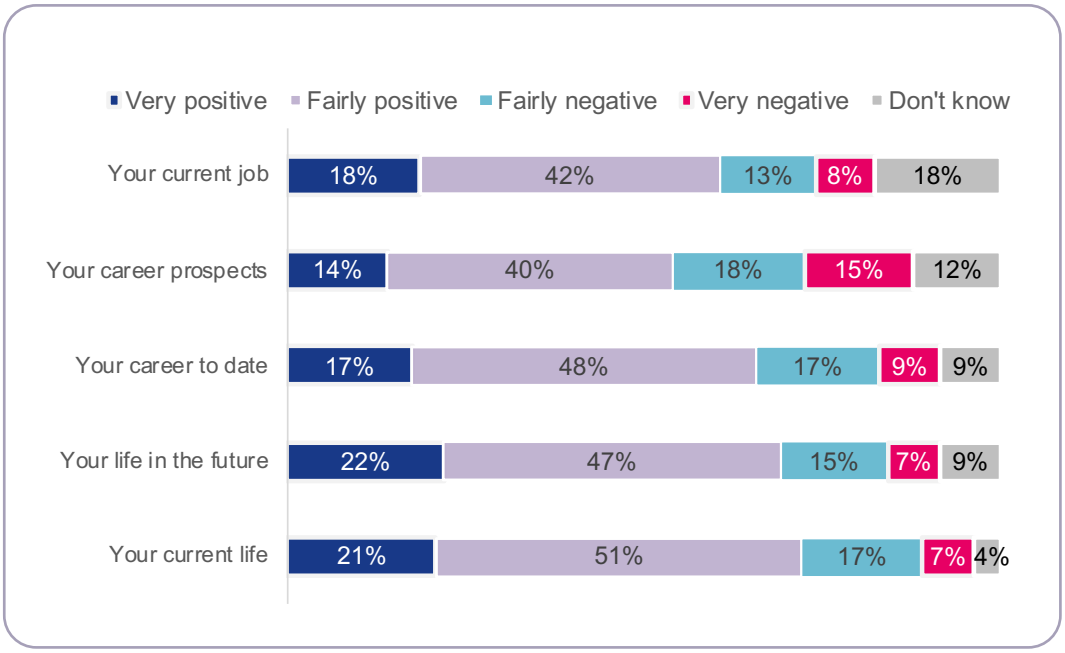
In this section, we look at the perceptions of careers across the UK: How do people feel about their career? What are they doing to manage it? What are they aspiring to? What do they perceive as the barriers to achieving what they want?

Adults and their careers

Across the UK today, 66% feel positively about their career to date but only 54% feel positively about their future career prospects (Fig 1.1).

While more people are satisfied with their current life and career situation than not, the results give some causes for concern nonetheless: 35% are not feeling positive about their career to date, 40% are not positive about their job, 46% of people are not feeling positive about their future career prospects. People feel less positive about the future than the past.

Fig 1.1: The importance of careers to our lives: Differences in wider satisfaction indicators of those that feel positive or not about their career to date.



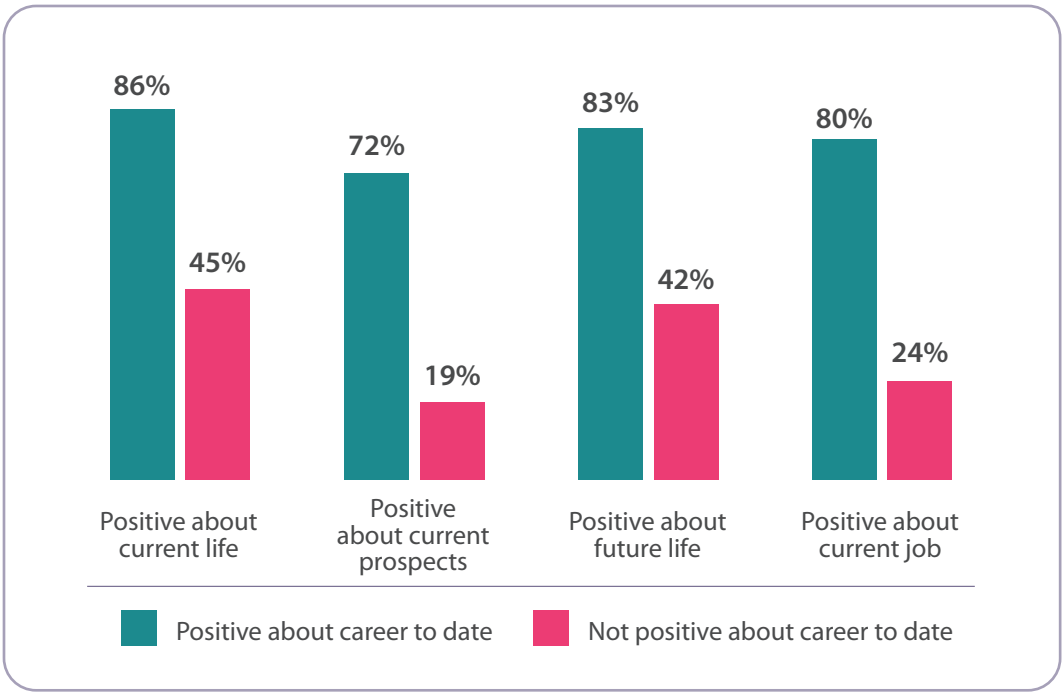
The wider importance of peoples' experiences of their career is demonstrated by the strong relationship it has with their wider feelings about life and the future. **Those who feel positively about their careers are about twice as likely to feel positively about their life** (Fig 1.2). Moreover, those that feel positively about their future career prospects are also nearly twice as likely to feel positive about their life in the future.

Other results in the survey reflected uncertainty regarding the future. For instance, people are more minded towards stability than to seek work that offers new challenges, and only 28% agreed that there are a lot of options open to them in the job market, while 42% disagreed.

I feel I have enough skills and experience to change roles if/when I want. I'm also not tied to any specific role, which gives me greater flexibility.

Female, 35-44 years old, Income £20k-£40k, Very positive about career

Fig 1.2: Differences in wider satisfaction indicators of those that feel positive or not about their career to date



There are fewer options available as I become more mature in my career. Generally, work seems more stressful and uncertain wherever you work.

Female, 35-44 years old, Income >£40k, Fairly negative about career prospects.

Like many of the results in this report, these data points show a strong correlation. We know causation is complicated and would require different types of research to understand. That said, our results reflect past studies, which found similarly strong relationships between indicators of career and life experience[15].

While there are likely to be complex factors that relate a feeling of being positive about one's career and life, individuals who feel positively about their career are far more likely to be living a happier and more optimistic life, demonstrating the important role that a fulfilling career plays in people's lives. The fact that nearly many don't feel this way, while 46% don't feel optimistic about the future, has wider implications for wellbeing across significant parts of the population.

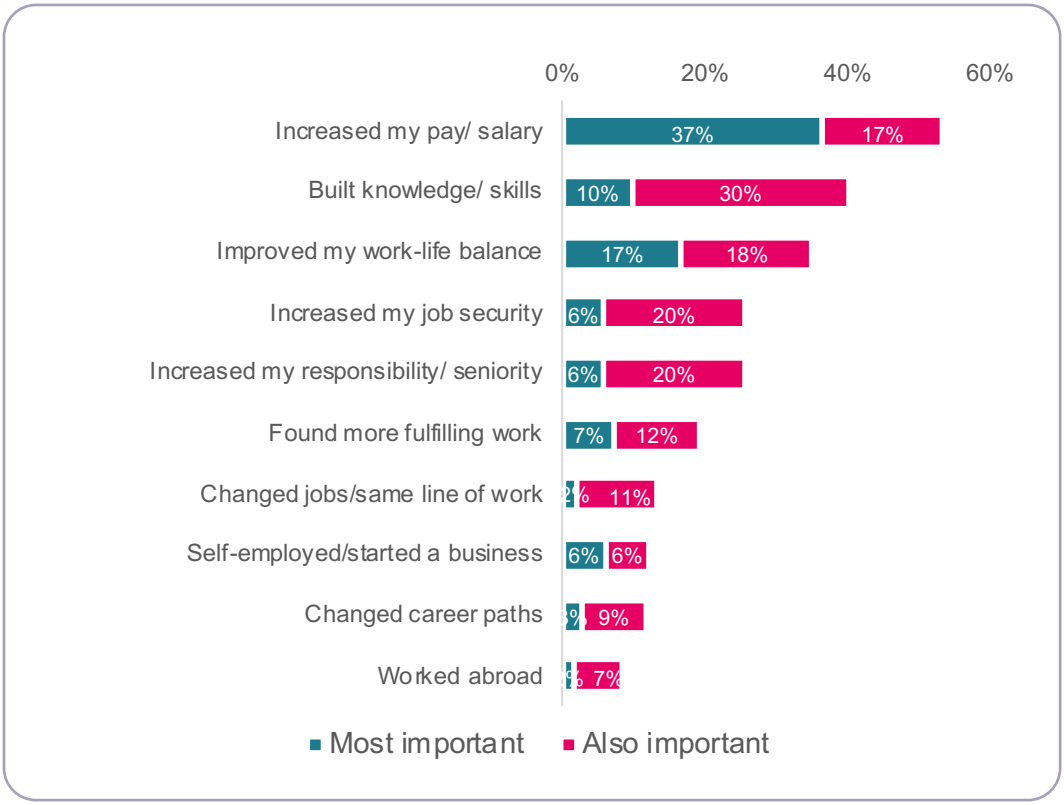
15. There are a wide number of studies relating job, career and life satisfaction e.g. Hagmaier, T., Abele, A. E., & Goebel, K. (2018). How do career satisfaction and life satisfaction associate?. Journal of Managerial Psychology, 33(2), 142-160.

Aspirations

We measured the career aspirations people have had over the past five years, and their aspirations for the next five years. Although many people may feel uncertain or concerned about their future, we still see that 76% of the population have at least one of these aspirations (Fig 1.3).

> I've changed jobs a lot, which has given me opportunities to progress, and I tend to go for jobs that I will genuinely enjoy and value.
>
> *Female, 45-54 years old, Income <20k, Fairly positive about career*

Fig 1.3: Percentage having different career aspirations for the next 5 years



It is unsurprising to see that the most significant single career aspiration over the next five years is to increase pay. However, while pay was the most important factor for 37% of respondents, it did not dominate as a motivating driver for most. People have broader career aspirations: 40% want to increase knowledge and skills and 35% want to improve work life balance for instance. Those who ticked one of these aspirations went on to indicate an average of 2.4.

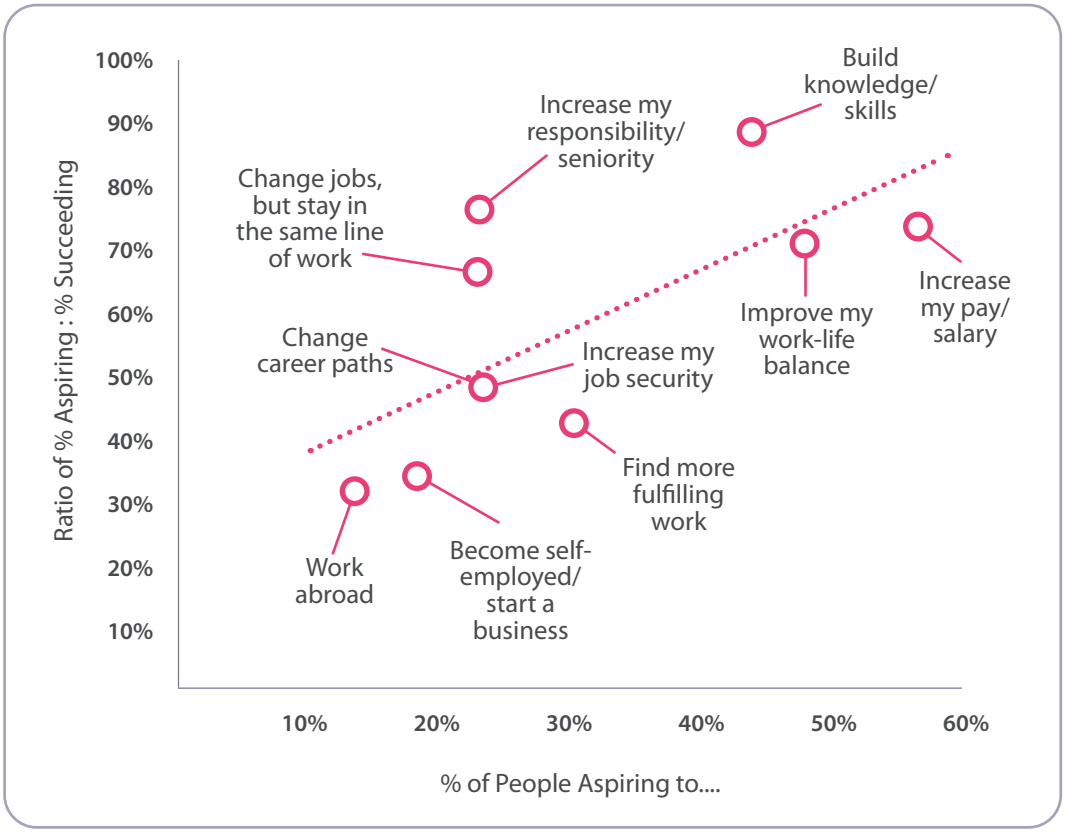
We found that the aspirations people held for the next five years were very similar to those they held over the previous five, from 2019-24, showing their stability in the face in significant factors such as COVID and a cost-of-living crisis. We saw only a marginal increase of a couple of percentage points in the relative importance of pay, and similar marginal reduction in the relative importance of finding fulfilling work as we look at peoples' future aspirations compared to those of their recent past.

We then examined whether people felt that they achieved their aspirations from 2019 (Fig 1.4). The population tend to take on aspirations at a rate that correlates with the probability of achieving different outcomes, denoted by the dotted trend line. We can see that there is a wide range of 'success rates' across the different types of aspiration.

I'm young still, I am learning on the job for two fields with a lot of opportunities available in different organisations (marketing and sales) but I am also happy in my current role and have developed and been promoted a lot since joining two years ago, so am hopeful for more development

Male, 18-24, Urban, Income >£40k, Positive about career

Fig 1.4: Ratio of the percentage of people who succeeded with aspirations since 2019-24, plotted against the percent who wanted to achieve them



Where people have sought to increase their pay or develop skills, the vast majority succeeded. However, some career aspirations are clearly harder to achieve, such as to change career path change, work abroad orstart a business. This suggests that more support is needed for people to achieve certain types of careers aspiration, and that without it, many of those with those aspirations could remain unfilled.

This graph has implications for the economy. The low levels of achievement for some careers aspirations would be expected to act against economic growth by, for instance, reducing the reducing the rate of skills acquisition, reducing the ability of people to move into higher growth sectors, or to start businesses that launch new products and services and provide employment.

Moreover, there is a question on whether enough people are considering actions such as training and changing career path, to address the trends in labour market demand.

Barriers

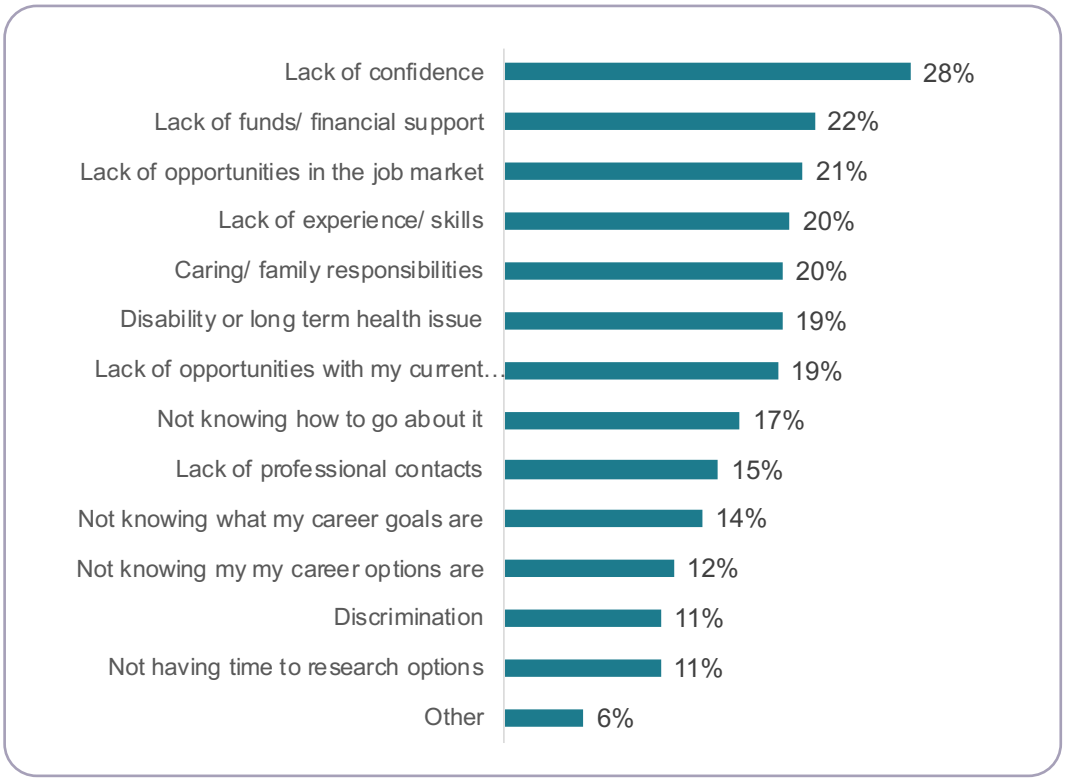
We asked people about the barriers that might stop them from achieving what they wanted to in their career and did not find a single dominant barrier.
The most frequently mentioned was a lack of confidence (28%) and several other factors affected one in five or more of the population. Financial security and a perceived lack of career options were the next most frequently mentioned barriers. Significant minorities of people also perceived a lack of skills/experience and caring responsibilities as potential barriers (Fig 1.5).

80% reported that they anticipated at least one of these barriers to achieving their career goals over the next five years.

I got a degree, but not a great one and at a time when graduate opportunities became less available. I got a job, but it had no development or prospects. Other aspects of my life got in the way. I became depressed, feeling trapped. This may have led to bad life choices. I left that job after 14 years and always found it easy to find work, but never graduate suited work and never got promoted. Meanwhile, my mental and physical health took a downward turn, so I was deemed 'limited capacity for work' a few years ago. I now live off savings and may look at equity release in the future

Female, 35-44 years old, Income <£20k, Fairly negative about career

Fig 1.5: Percentages of people who anticipate different barriers to achieving their career goals



I don't have modern skills and don't have time to study new ones.

Male, 35-44, Very negative about career prospects

Self-confidence

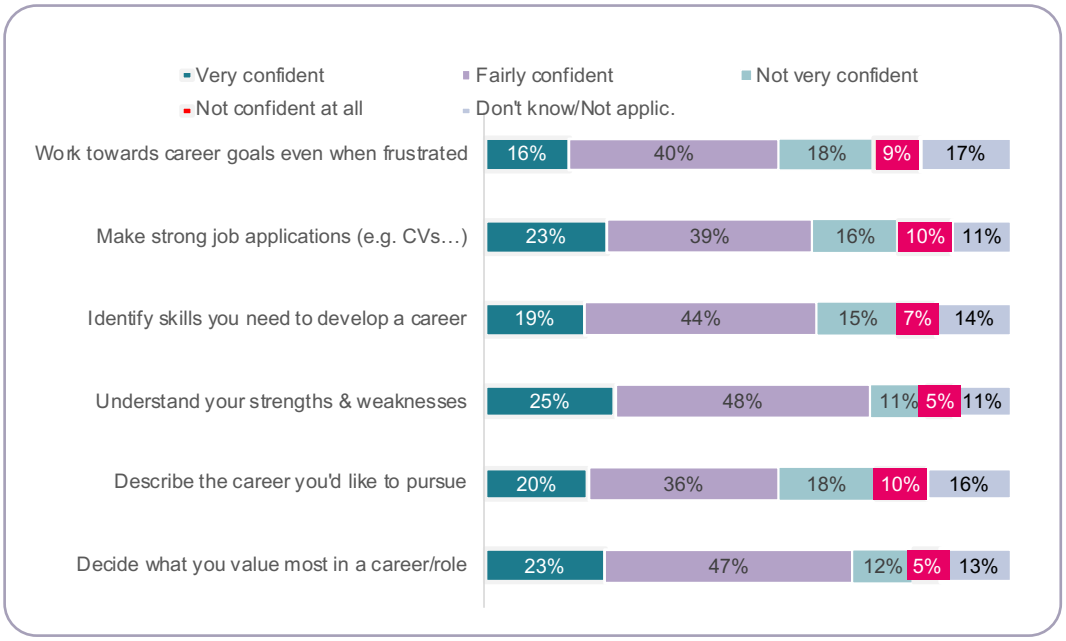
As per Fig 1.5, 28% of respondents said a lack of self-confidence would prevent them achieving their career goals. Similarly, while the majority of people are self-confident about taking fundamental actions related to their career, a significant number are not (Fig 1.6).

> I am an unpaid carer at the moment, I cannot say how long my parents will need me in this role so can't make other plans.
>
> *Female, 55-64, Town & Fringe, "Don't know" if positive about career prospects*

While 70% are confident about knowing their own strengths and weaknesses,, only 56% are confident about describing the career that they'd like to pursue and just over half (56%) are confident in their ability to work persistently towards goals even when frustrated.

People also tend to feel 'fairly confident' at about twice the rate that they feel "very confident". For example, only 19% feel 'very confident' about identifying the skills needed to develop a career and the different ways to get them. Consequently, we see that that there some people with a detrimental lack of self-confidence, and an overall population where career-related capability and self-confidence could be improved.

Fig 1.6: Confidence in different career management related decisions

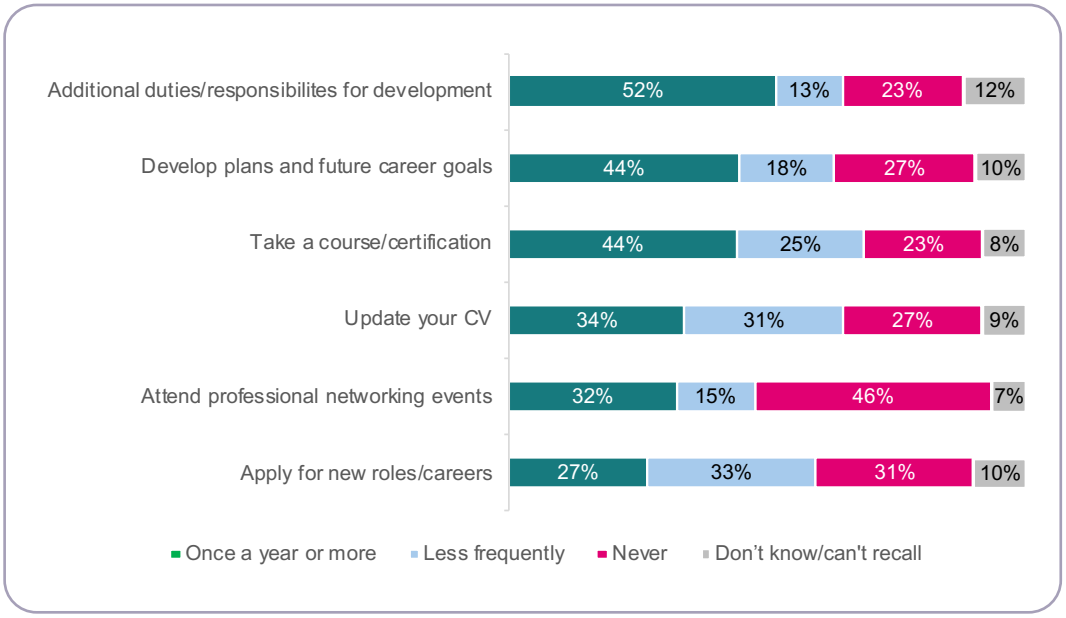


Career management activities

There are many activities that people do to manage their careers, to build their employability, beyond simply applying for specific jobs.

To understand the extent that people carried out such activities, we asked respondents how often they did the sample of activities listed in Fig 1.7. Most of the population do most individual activities less than once a year.

Fig 1.7: Frequency of engagement in different career management activities



The activity that people did most often was to take on extra responsibilities at work for development, which was the only one activity pursued by over half of respondents (52%). Slightly fewer than half (44%) take courses or pursue certifications.

Both activities are also ones that we can expect to have benefits beyond the individual, to an employer and ultimately to the economy. Consequently, motivating people to become more engaged in their own career can have benefits that transcend individual benefit.

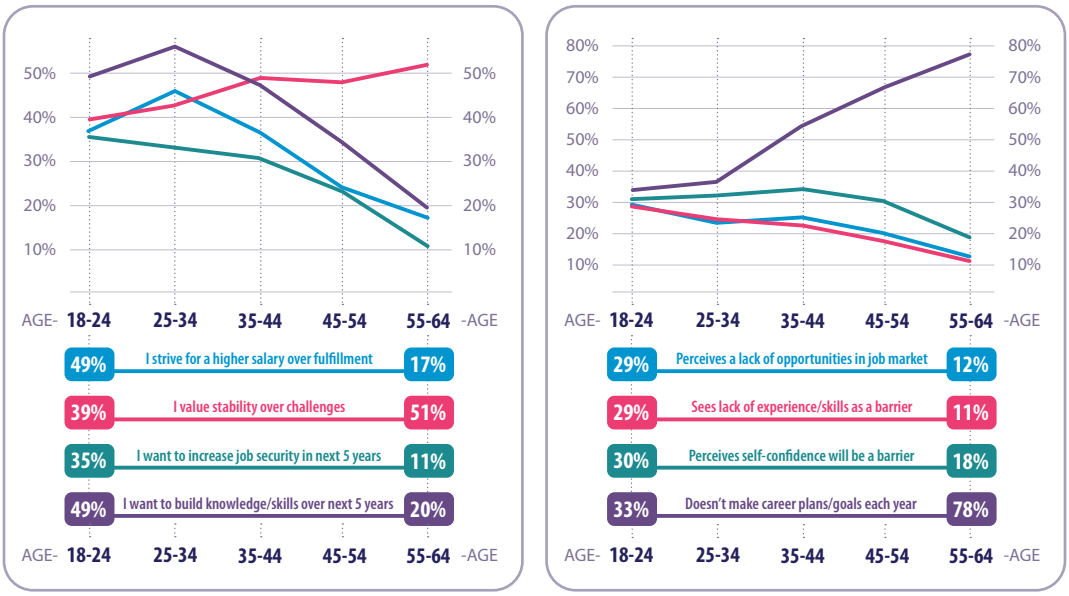
I spent 'too long' at home as full-time mum. Didn't keep up skills (I was a GP) and left it too late to go back - my cognitive abilities had deteriorated over time so couldn't do the necessary exams to rejoin work force. Health problems also a big factor - not enough support for return to work.

Female, 25-34 years old, Not working

Evolution over the career span

Through an indvidual's lifespan, motivations, challenges, and perceived barriers evolve. Fig 1.8 lists career motivations (left) and potential barriers (right), showing change with age.

Fig 1.8. Evolution of career motivations (left) and potential barriers to advancing towards career goals (right) over age ranges.

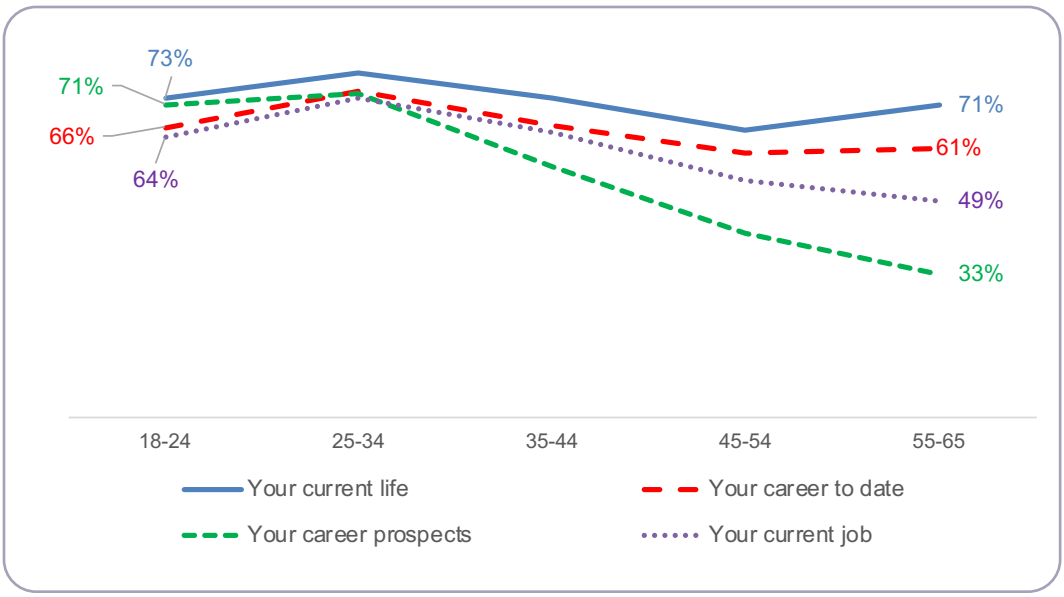


The graphs suggest people disengage from certain career motivations as time moves on, most notably, not setting goals or making plans. The appetite to continue building skills and knowledge starts to decline from the 25–34-year-old group. Motivations evolve away from seeking challenges towards stability.

Given that people are likely to be working to a later age in future, it is concerning that career motivations decline to this extent and in these ways (Fig 1.8). Beyond their 30s, peoples'positivity about career prospects starts to reduce quite markedly. By contrast, life satisfaction remains relatively stable over the career span – apart from the happiness "U-curve" in middle age, which can be seen in Fig 1.9 for those aged 45-54[16].

16. The happiness U-curve is a well-known phenomenon whereby happiness reduces for a period around mid-life in many countries e.g. Blanchflower, D. G. (2021). Is happiness U-shaped everywhere? Age and subjective well-being in 145 countries. Journal of population economics, 34(2), 575-624.

Fig. 1.9: Indicators of positivity over the career span



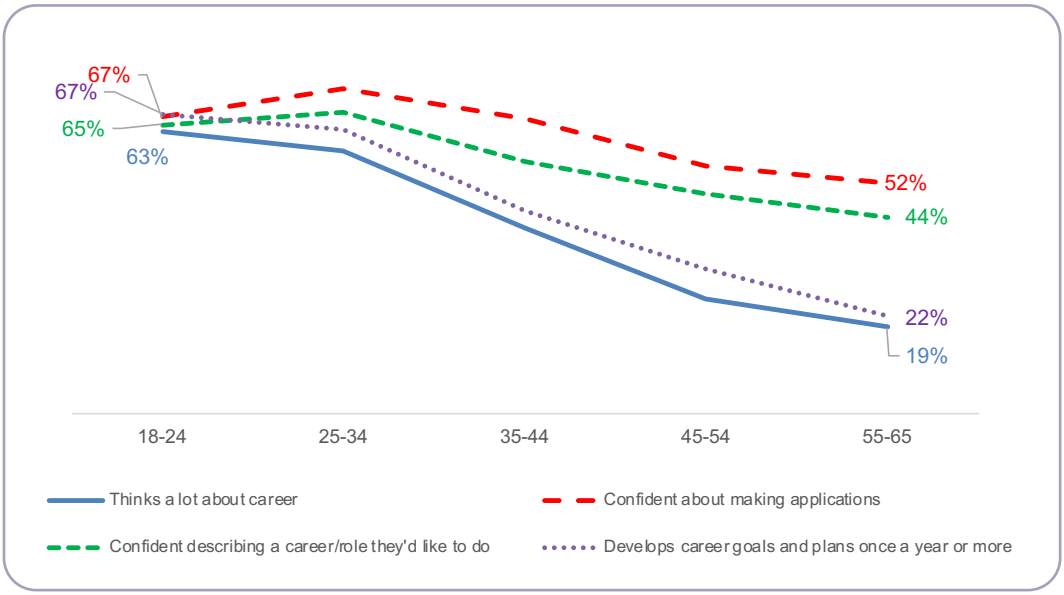
> Previously I've felt vey positive about my career. Now, as I'm approaching retirement age I feel positive in my job but, not my career. I've been offered promotion but, I only want to work part time and don't want to think about progression.
>
> *45-54, Female, Urban, £20-£40k income*

As well as the prospect of longer working lives, technological change, shorter lifecycles of businesses[17] , and of products and technologies[18] are likely to lead to people having several career phases and changes through their lives[19] .

So, it will be important for people to have access to support to make the transitions that could benefit them and meet the needs of the labour market. The ability of different career transitions to increase forms of career satisfaction has been evidenced with decisions such as to pursue continuous learning or professional development in various fields[20], or make mid-career changes[21]. Fig 1.10 shows how several indicators of engagement in career management actions tend to change.

17.Statista (2020), Average company lifespan on Standard and Poor's 500 Index from 1965 to 2030, in years
18. Consumer Technology Association (2023), Product Lifecycles Shrinking
19. World Economic Forum (2023), Having many careers will be the norm, experts say
20. Hollar, N., Kuchinka, D. G., & Feinberg, J. (2022). Professional Development Opportunities and Job Satisfaction: A systematic review of research. Journal of International Management Studies, 22(1).
21. Carless, S. A., & Arnup, J. L. (2011). A longitudinal study of the determinants and outcomes of career change. Journal of vocational behavior, 78(1), 80-91.

Fig 1.10. Indicators of engagement in career management activities over the career span



Systemic challenges

Our research also showed that those who are least happy with their career often face more factors that hamper progress towards more fulfilling work and careers. Lower education attainment levels correlate with a lower propensity to take actions towards career management, less optimism about future prospects and the receipt of lower intrinsic rewards (e.g. feelings of positivity) and extrinsic rewards (e.g. income) as feedback.

The nature of the relationships is strong. In Fig 1.11, we show that those staying on to complete higher education or apprenticeships are far more likely to feel positive about their career prospects than those that left after secondary school, who are more likely to feel negatively[22].

The sample sizes for some of these qualifications remained quite small. The qualification with the highest net positive result (recognised trade apprenticeships) was measured from n=64 respondents. Therefore, we would be cautious about making definitive conclusions, but would suggest that vocational and technical pathways look very promising as a route to provide highly fulfilling careers comparable with academic pathways.

22. Not all forms of highest qualification could be shown due to low samples for some qualifications. We showed results where the sample size was n>50.

Fig. 1.11. Differences in feeling positive about career based on education level

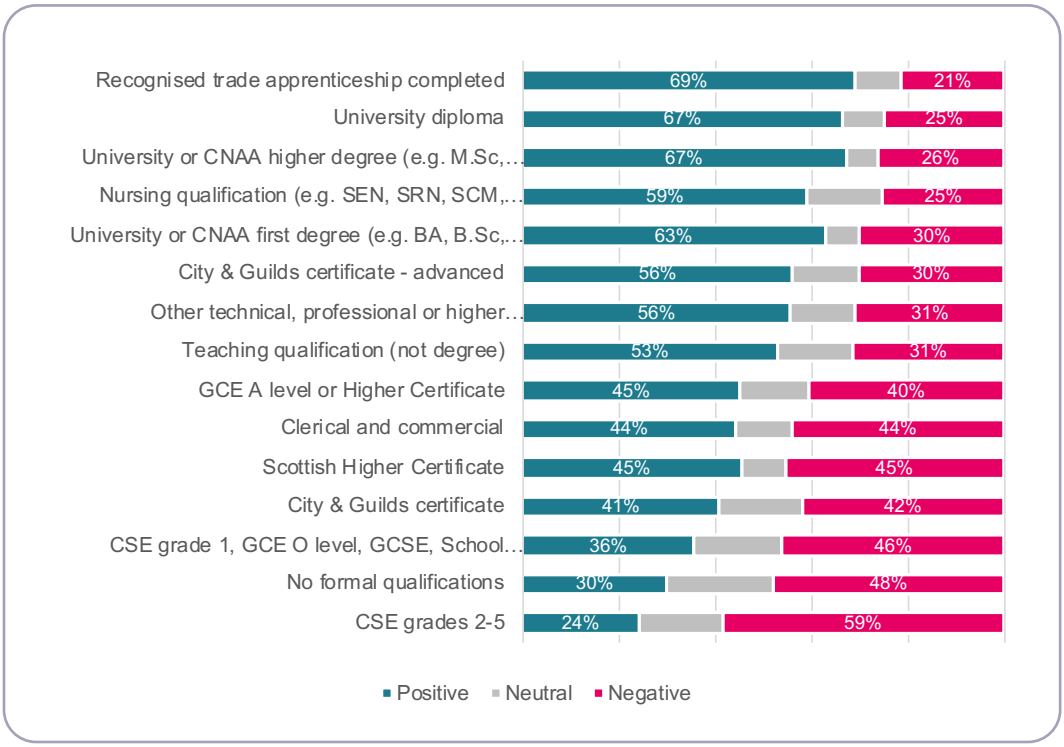
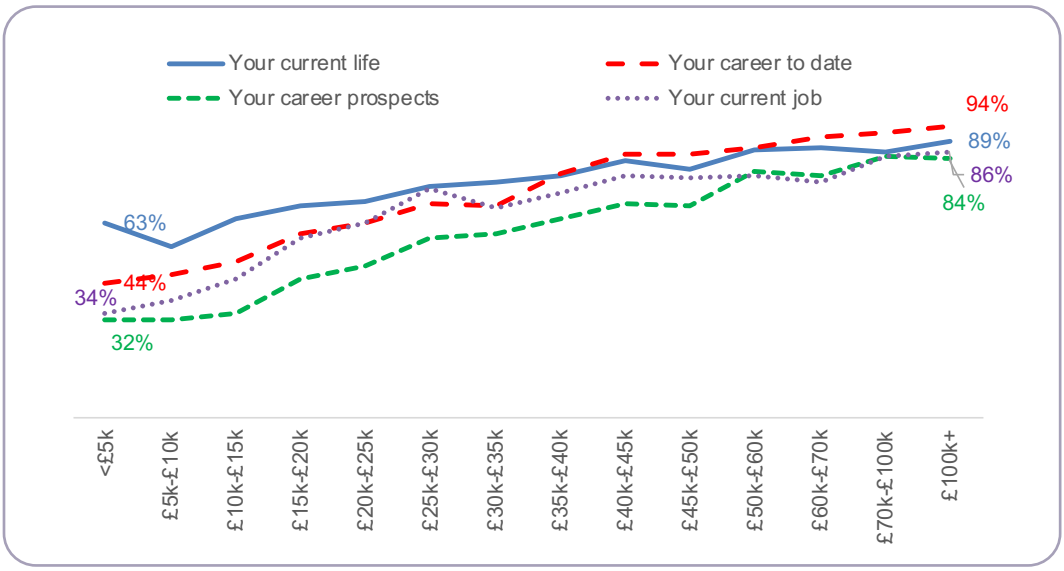


Fig 1.12 shows that those feeling positive about job, career and life are strongly correlated with income.

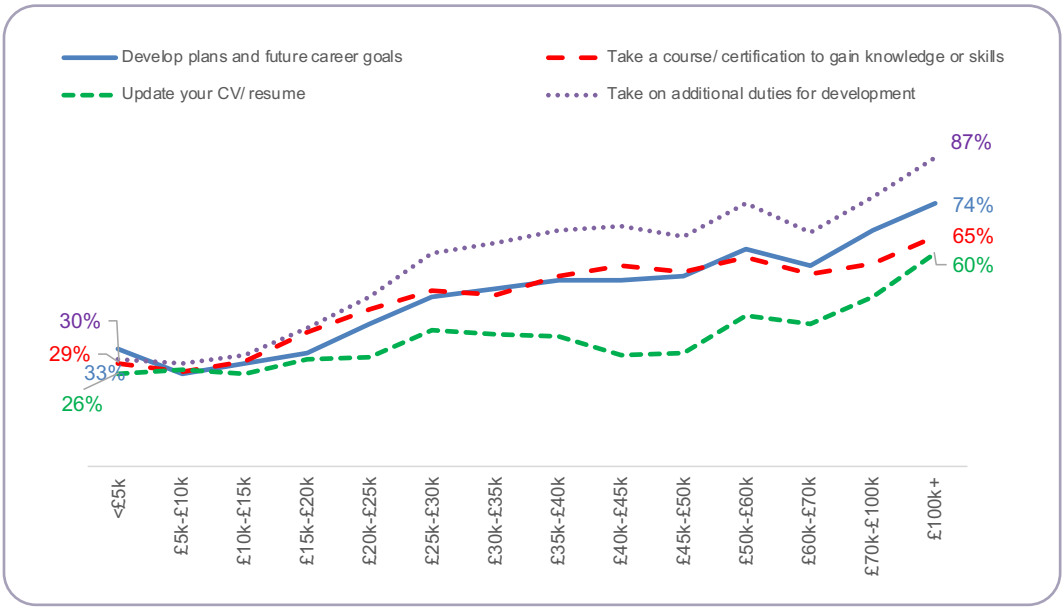
> I left school not believing that I could achieve anything. This meant I wasn't sure what career angle I should aim for, as the jobs I thought I wanted when younger didn't seem achievable, not because I wasn't smart or have the ability. But because I didn't feel that I had the ability. I spent my 20's in dead end low paid jobs. Then in my 30's up till now, I'm still in a lower paid dead end job, but I learnt that I was actually very smart, and I could pick things up very quickly like a sponge
>
> *Male, 35-44 years old, Income not known, Fairly negative about career prospects*

Fig 1.12: Percentages who express being positive about career and life by income



This is likely to be linked to people with higher earnings being more likely to take active career management steps (Fig 1.13).

Fig 1.13: Percentages engaging in different career management activities at least once a year by income



My age and mental health issues are a challenge. The jobs available to me are limited for these reasons. Job sites have plenty of jobs which I'm under qualified for or will put me in a worse financial situation than I'm already in because of extra car running costs, extra fuel, the loss of certain benefits which have been hard to get anyway and my mental health means I can have a few good days and then days where I can't actually get out of bed which makes it hard to be consistent in the work place.

Female, 35-44 years old, Income not known, Not working, Very negative about career prospects

Of acute concern, those who gain the lowest rewards – by way of feeling positive about their career to date and a lower income level - are the least engaged in thinking about their career, and least optimistic. Consequently, they embark on fewer activities to manage their careers, creating a viciousvcycle that perpetuates inequalities in different parts of society. In the verbatim comments of people exhibiting these factors, we frequently saw mention of health conditions to exacerbate the situation further.

To quantify the numbers of people facing these systemic issues, Fig 1.14 below shows the numbers of people with different indicators that could compound and create challenges of a systemic nature: Eleven factors are grouped into four categories: 1) low hope, 2) lower confidence in capabilities to manage their career, 3) lower levels of career management activities, and 4) less favourable extrinsic (income) and intrinsic (a feeling of positivity) rewards or outcomes from their efforts at work.

Fig 1.14. Indicators of hope, career management capabilities, engagement levels in career management and outcomes

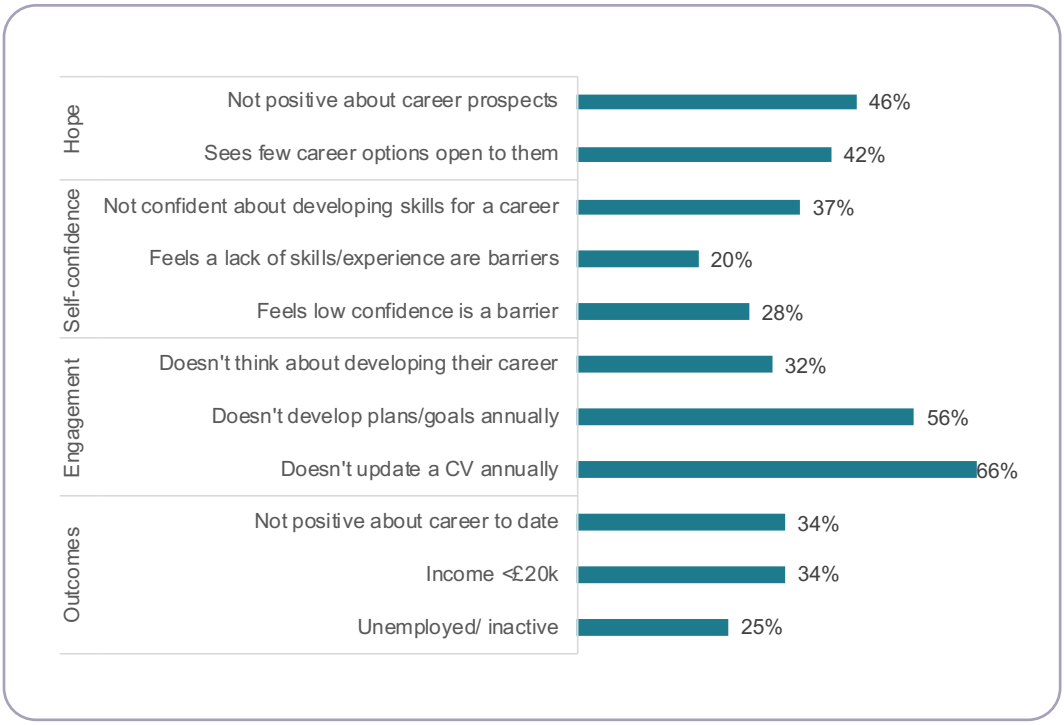
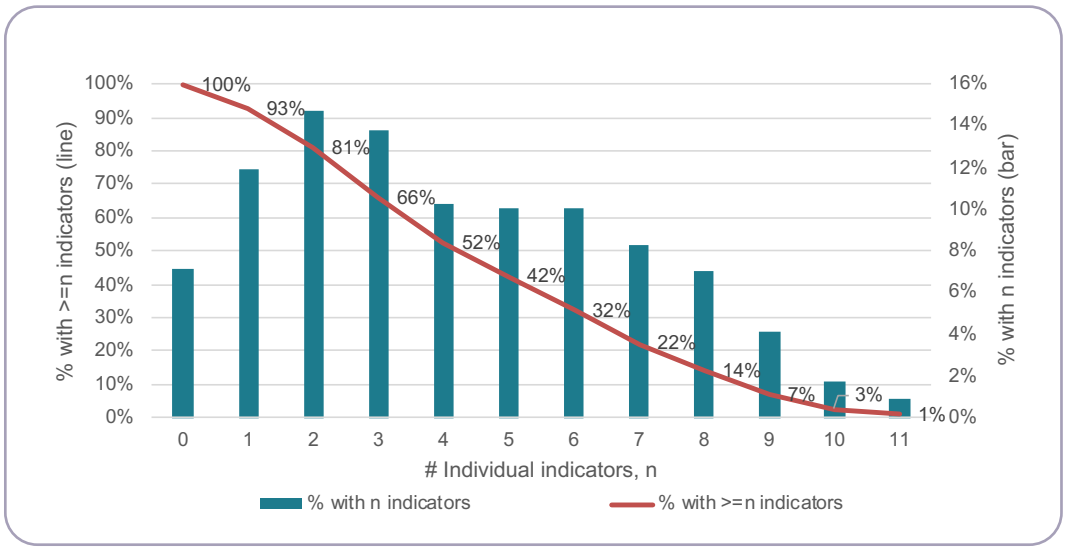


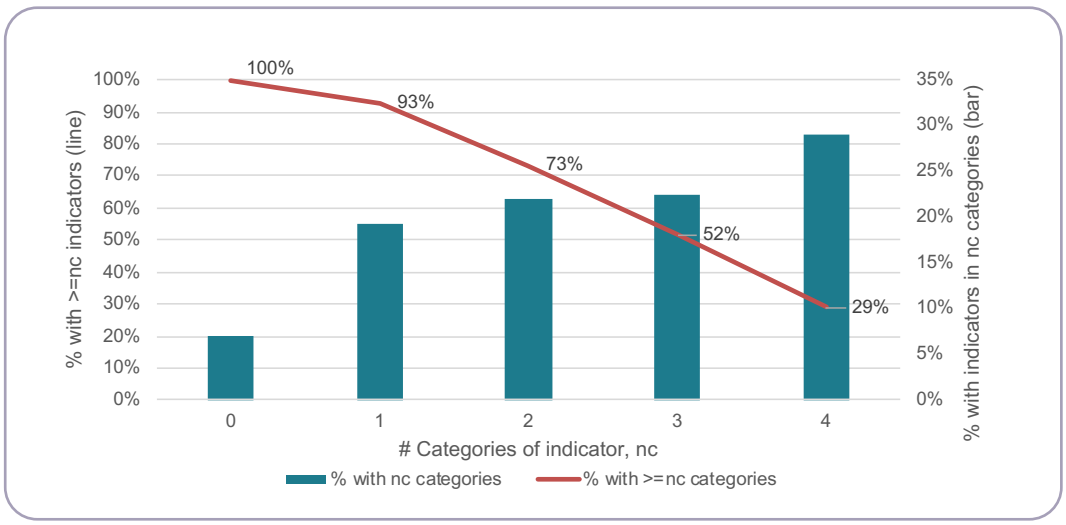
Fig 1.15a shows the distribution of people with different numbers of these 11 factors. The most common result is that people have two factors present (12%). However, there is a long tail to this distribution – with 52% of people having five or more of these factors present and 32% having seven or more.

> I have been out of work looking after autistic children for so long that I now have no references. Worrying. . .
>
> *Male, 55-65 years old, Urban, Income <£20k, Very negative about career prospects*

People may manifest different forms of these barriers in each category. In Fig 1.15b, the most common response is that people have an indicator in all four: 29% of the population is experiencing some form of low hope, and low self-confidence in capabilities, and low engagement with career management activities, and less favourable career outcomes than most. Slightly more than half of the population exhibit factors in at least three categories.

Fig 1.15a (top): The percentages of people with different numbers of factors. Fig 1.15b (bottom): The percentages of people with indicators in the four categories of factor





Given 29% have indicators in all four categories and 22% exhibit more than seven of the individual barriers, we estimate that 20-30% of the adult population exhibit characteristics of concern. To improve their prospects, help would be needed to build career self-confidence, engage in career management activities and grow optimism, as well as potential help with health conditions. This goes far beyond just helping them 'get a job'.

Section summary

In summary in this section, we have measured indicators about the general 'state of the nation' regarding people's careers. This has shown:

- 66% of adults are satisfied with their career to date
- Those who are satisfied with their career to date are nearly twice as likely to be satisfied with life, demonstrating the importance of career to quality of life
- However, only 54% feel positive about their career prospects
- 76% have career aspirations for the next five years. While increasing pay is the most important factor, people want to achieve a wider range of career outcomes, including to learn, progress and achieve work-life balance
- Some indicators exist that may reflect the uncertainty of the moment, and some anxiety about the future, notably that significantly more people are seeking job security compared to new challenges, when faced with the option of either
- 80% anticipate facing barriers in achieving what they'd like in their careers over the next five years. There was no dominant single barrier amongst those we measured, but 28% anticipate that their lack of self-confidence may hinder them.
- We see a group of 20%-30% (depending on exact definition) of the population who are of particular concern as they likely face more systemic issues with regard to improving their careers. They exhibit low optimism, lower self-confidence in their own capabilities, low engagement in career management activities, and less favourable outcomes.

The value of careers guidance

In this section, we introduce careers guidance and related forms of support. We examine the general ways that people seek career support, the value they derive from professional career support, and the relationship between outcomes of those that use such support and those that don't.

Sources of informal support

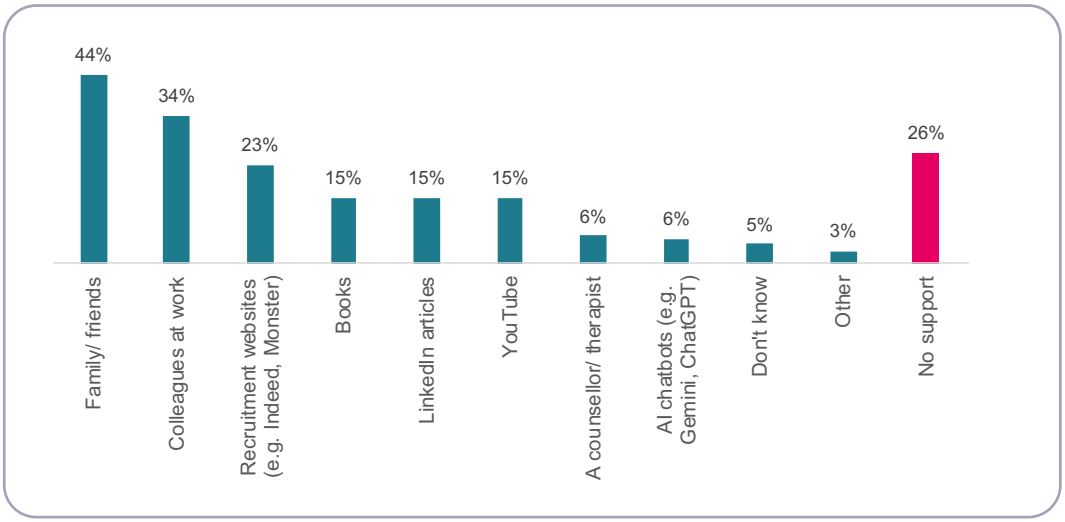
We asked about both informal and formal sources of careers support. The most popular sources of informal support are friends and family (used by 44%) then colleagues at work (34%).

We also see the role of digital sources, including social media and recruitment websites. AI has started to be adopted to help people with career decisions (used by 6%).

> I think a member of your family is in most cases someone who knows you well and you can trust. I also think career websites are useful as they provide so much detailed info.
>
> *Female, 25-34, Income <£20k, Fairly positive about career prospectsnegative about career prospects*

70% use at least one of these methods, while 26% don't receive any support.

Fig 2.1: Percentages of people using different informal support methods to help with their career



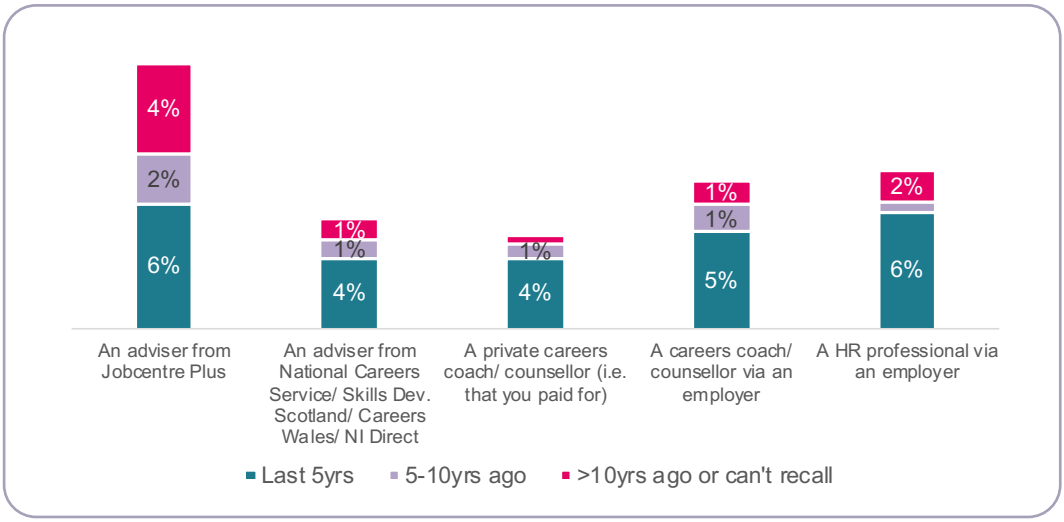
While such informal sources can be positive, much depends on the nature of the use and details of the interactions.

Use of formal careers guidance

We found that 68% of the working-age population recall some form of careers guidance from their time in education, and 62% of those recall at least one benefit from the experience. They cited that they were helped to: understand what roles they'd enjoy (26%), to consider a wider range of careers (22%), to understand specific roles they could do (22%) and to write CVs/applications (20%).

By contrast, it is concerning that very few adults have received professional careers guidance post education (Fig 2.2).

Fig 2.2: Percentages of the adult working-age population who have accessed independent support post education and the time they last accessed



I would advise people to use as many different sources as possible to help form a full picture of their options

Male, 45-54 years old, Income > £40k, Very positive about career prospects

While not strictly careers guidance provision as the profession would see it, we have included Jobcentre Plus and HR professionals in the survey for completeness and to gain a comparison with career development professionals. Seeking support from Jobcentre Plus was the highest used source of support, though still low at 13%, 5% accessed career counsellors or advisers privately or a public career service, 7% accessed support through employment with a coach/counsellor and 7% used a HR professional.

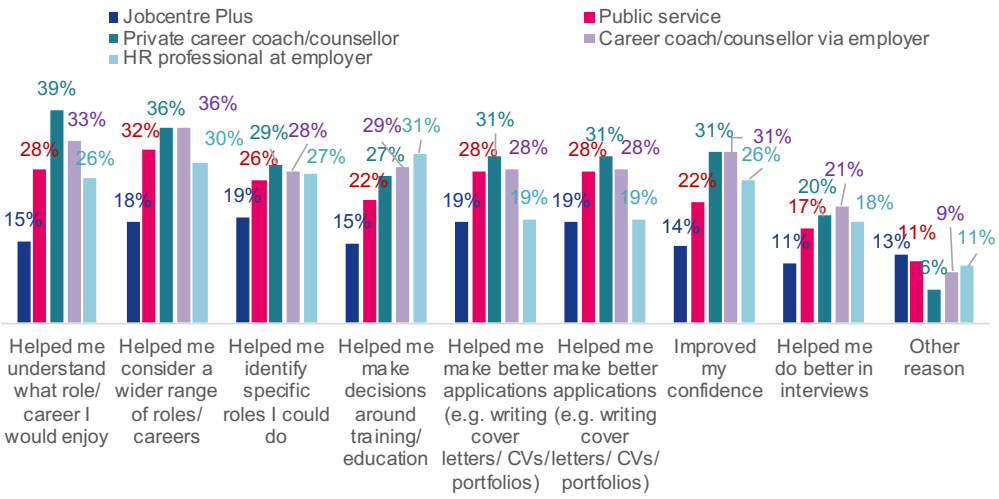
Of the three professional and nominally independent sources of career advice (from a publicly funded careers service, a private careers practitioner and a careers professional funded by an employer), 85% of the population had never used any, 12% had used one, 2% had used two and 0.4% had used all three. In total, about 15% of adults have used at least one of these sources to date, and we estimate that only 1%-2% are using one of these sources each year. This is very low given the extent of the career aspirations, challenges and barriers felt by upwards of 70% of the adult population.

Benefits of using careers guidance

When we asked the people who had accessed professional careers guidance about the benefits that they gained, there was no dominant single benefit (Fig 2.3). The benefits vary from helping with deeper questions about career aspirations to more tactical help with applications.

The single most cited combination of source and benefit was from career coaches or career counsellors helping people decide what role/career they'd enjoy, derived by 39% of those who used this source. For each source, the majority of users cited at least one benefit.

Fig 2.3: Benefits gained from using sources of independent career support



As well as specific individual benefits received from guidance described in the previous section, we identified indicators of the value of careers guidance from different perspectives: 1) Users' perceptions of services, 2) The ability to achieve aspirations, and 3) Career outcomes. We cover these in turn below. We also acknowledge the complex relationship between people's career outcomes and careers guidance so make comments about causation, correlation and the role of evaluation studies.

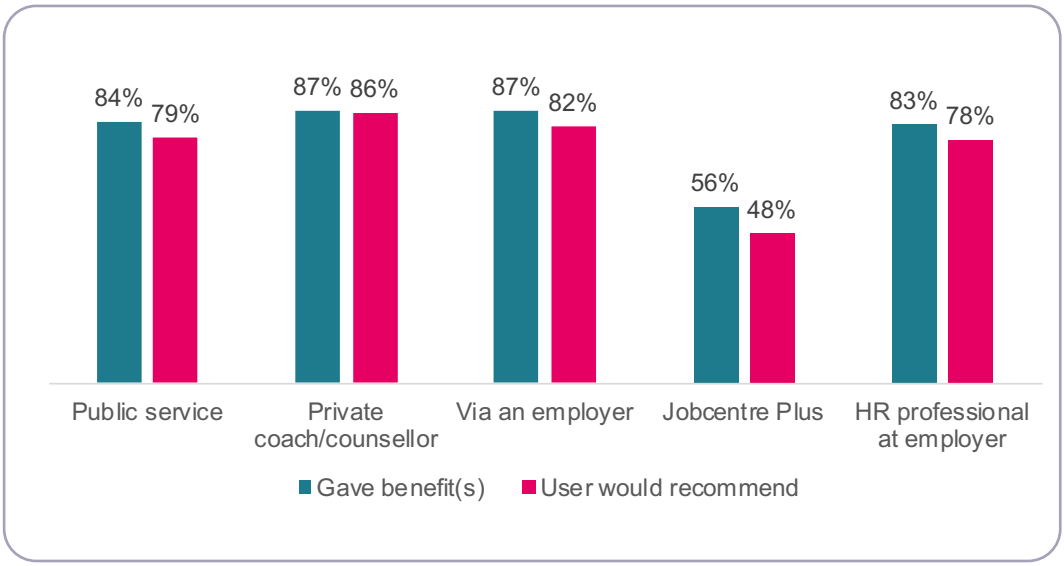
> I would recommend because in moments of doubt and tying times, there's someone to motivate you
>
> *Male, 25-34 years old, Income not known, Positive about career prospects*

> I received really tailored advice for my profession. How to frame your transferable soft skills. What to do, what not to do. It had been such a long time since I was in the job market. Everything had changed and it {had felt} really overwhelming
>
> *Male, 25-34 years old, Income £20k-£40k, Fairly positive about career prospects*

Perspective 1: Users' perceptions of services

Although the results show no single dominant reason for using any one source of support, the majority believe that they are deriving value. For instance, 86% of users of professional careers guidance services report receiving at least one benefit. Moreover, the vast majority of users of these sources of support would readily recommend them to others (Fig 2.4). The willingness to recommend services to others represents a high benchmark for service in any field, so we can conclude that support is considered highly valuable by most users.

Fig 2.4: Percentage of service users that a) derived at least one benefit (as per Fig 2.3), and b) would recommend the service to others. The three independent, professional career guidance services are to the left, in bold.



Somewhat surprisingly, given the sometimes-limited remit and funding of public careers services, the willingness to recommend one of the four home nation public careers services was only marginally lower than that for private career coaches.

> My coaching sessions were pivotal to ordering my thoughts around career progression and the pros and cons. It has also subsequently helped me have professional conversations with my line managers about my priorities.
>
> *Male, 25-34 years old, Income not known, Very positive about career prospects*

We should also make the point that comparisons between these services are not "like for like". As well as the resources available for each client being different, the clients using the different sorts of support will likely have different backgrounds and confidence levels etc, so represent cases of different complexities. Our analysis suggested that users of the public career services had an income that was c20% lower than users of private career coaches/counsellors, and younger, for instance, suggesting that they would have fewer resources. (More research would be useful to understand the portfolio of client challenges each service is presented with, and how resources affect outcomes for different classes of career challenge.)

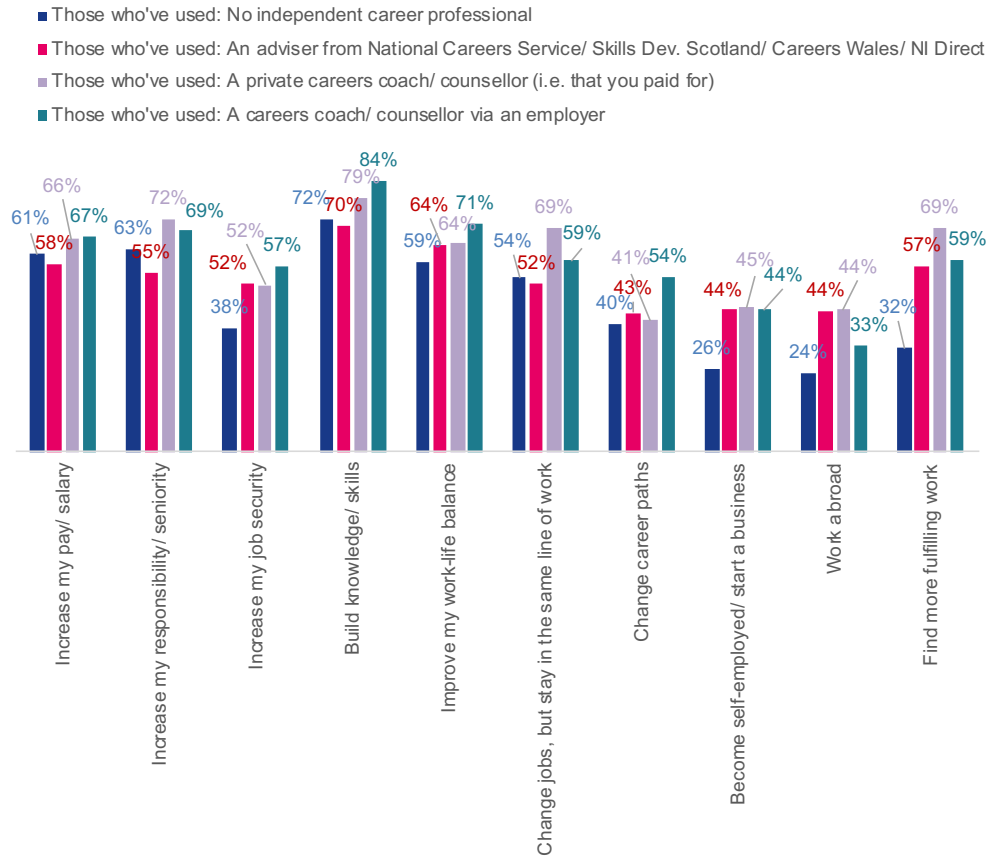
> The job centre advisor just wanted me in work, the national careers service advisor seemed to genuinely love her job and getting me on my chosen career path
>
> *Male, 45-54 years old, Income £20-£40k, Fairly negative about career prospects*

The numbers deriving a stated benefit (57%) and willing to recommend the services (48%) for Jobcentre Plus were much lower. Some verbatim comments reflected frustration at wanting something more than to "get a job" in relation to job centres. The objectives for job centres differ markedly to those for public career services or career counsellors, which these results reflect. This reinforces the CDI view that the employability support provided by Jobcentre Plus should not be confused or equated with the deeper support offered by professional careers guidance services.

Perspective 2: The ability to achieve aspirations

We looked at the people who felt that they succeeded with their 2019 aspirations and whether they had engaged with professional careers support post education. Fig 2.5 shows that those who use career support are more likely to achieve their career aspirations.

Fig 2.5: Relationship with rates of successfully achieving aspirations over the last 5 years, and use of professional careers support in the same time span

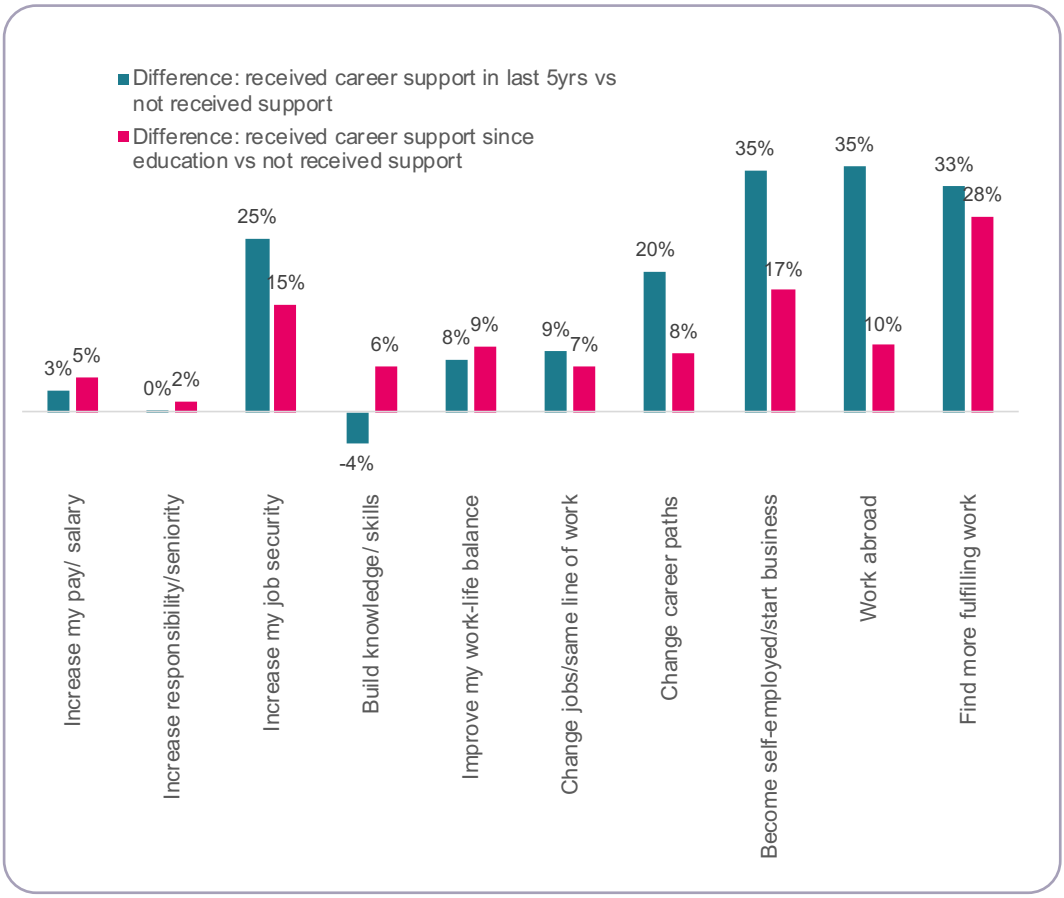


Despite the many factors at play in peoples' lives, people who use professional career support are more likely to achieve their aspirations. Fig 2.6 shows the average difference in success rates as a function of whether the type of career support used a) since education and b) in the last five years.

> The career support was beneficial to me especially in the aspect of writing a better CV, and I believe it will help others. So I'll be happy to recommend it.
>
> *Male, 35-44 years old, Income <£20k, Fairly positive about career prospects*

The results show that those who have careers guidance in the same timescale as their aspiration are significantly more likely to achieve aspirations that include increasing their job security, becoming self-employed, working abroad and finding more fulfilling work (blue bars). There is also a suggestion from the data that career support received at any point since education coincides with more favourable outcomes (orange bars).

Fig 2.6: Percentage change in the probability of success with different aspirations over the past five years as a function of a) whether the respondent had received professional career support in this time (teal), b) had received career support since secondary/tertiary education (magenta).



We reiterate the comments made in relation to Fig 2.4 for this analysis: differences in the users of these services, and resources that the services can draw on for each client, mean that the comparison between different services is not intended as a "like for like" evaluation of their relative 'quality' or value.

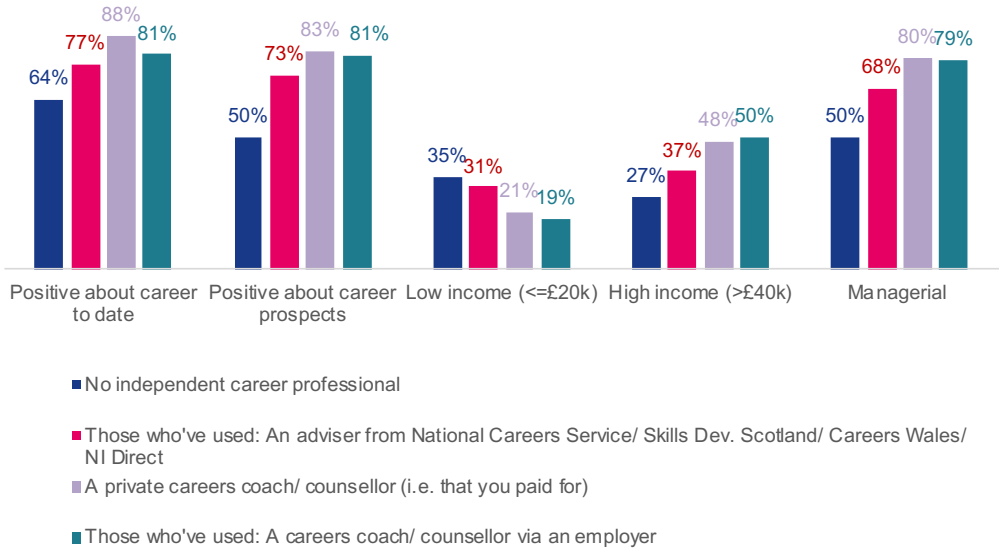
> I have recommended the career support I received to someone I know as it helped me to change to a better job
>
> *Female, 25-34 years old, Income £20k-£40k, Fairly positive about career prospects*

Perspective 3: Career outcomes

A career can offer intrinsic rewards, such as indicators of career satisfaction and optimism, and extrinsic rewards, such as income or status.

Fig 2.7 shows the relationship between career rewards and whether the respondent to the survey had received career support from an independent professional.

Fig 2.7: Percentages of the research sample who achieved different outcomes as a function of whether they received career support as adults



> Helps to get an outside perspective. Helps to see your experience and skills and weaknesses in an objective way.
>
> *Male, 25-34, Income <£20k, Disability benefit claimant, Fairly positive about career prospects*

The results show that those who seek career support tend to have more rewards, with profound differences in some cases: They are more likely to feel positive about their career to date and their career prospects; they are less likely to be in the lower earning group (£20k), and are more likely to be the highest earning group (>£40k), as well as more likely to have managerial responsibilities.

We would again hypothesise that the different results from users of public career services (e.g. National Career Service in England) and the private career coaches/counsellors or coaches accessed via employers, are likely to have been influenced by the different levels of resources the client received, such as the number of counselling or coaching sessions, as well as their different starting points.

Previously, we noted the concerning result that people across the population generally felt more optimistic about their career to date than their career prospects. However, we can see from Fig 2.7 that the 73%-83% of people who receive the three main forms of professional adult career support feel positive about their future career, as well as their career to date.

Verbatim comments in the research from those in lower income bands also showed that such career support has helped them.

A note on causation and correlation

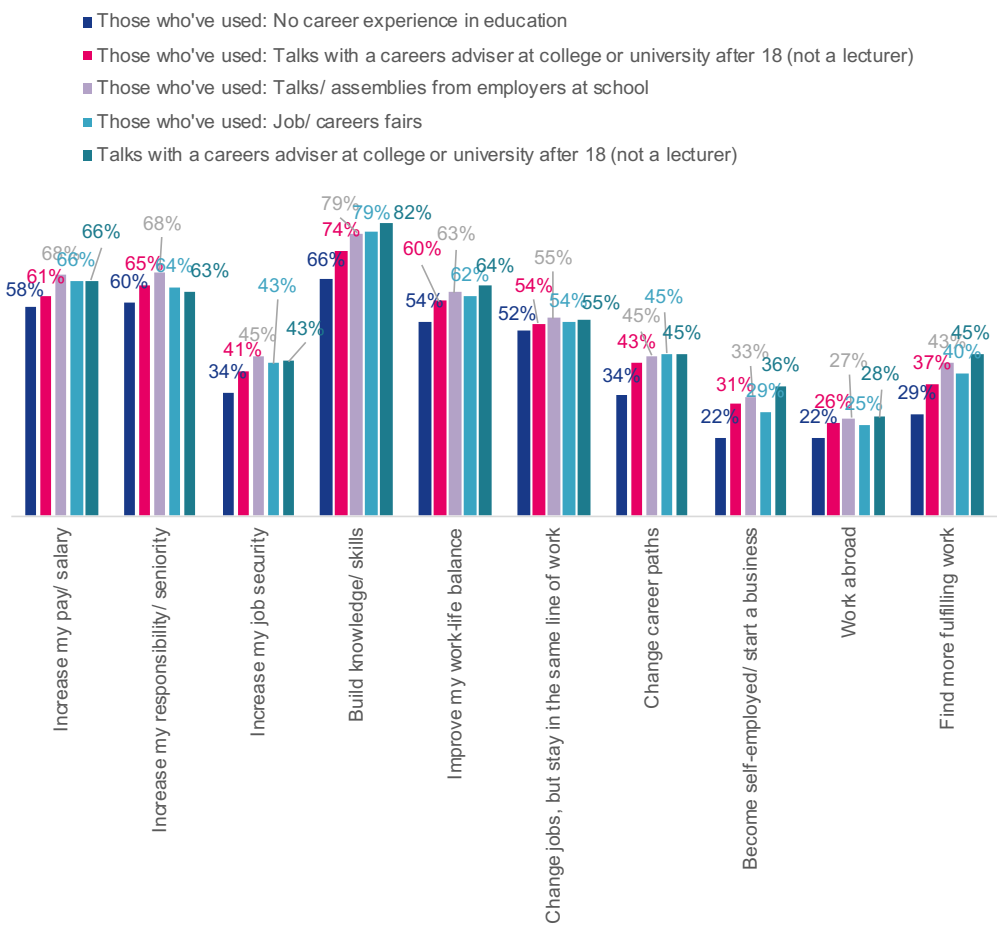
> I think getting career coaching can help you understand yourself and your next career move
>
> *Female, 45-54 years old, Income £20k-£40k Fairly positive about career prospects*

This study is not an evaluation of the cause and effect of individual interventions, but it does show a clear and significant correlation between career support and positive career results. We have shown that the majority of people who received professional careers support cited one or more substantive benefits and that they would recommended the service. They are more likely to achieve their aspirations and achieve better career outcomes in terms of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.

We found that those who recalled receiving careers support during secondary or tertiary education were also better able to achieve their aspirations (Fig 2.8), though effects were smaller.

The results complement evaluation studies that better examine the impact of specific careers guidance interventions, such as a study which measured the impact of careers guidance interventions with a group of UK adults over a five year period and found strong impacts for the majority that were retained throughout the study duration[23]. Most recipients of the support retained the benefits over the duration of that study.

Fig 2.8: Relationship with rates of successfully achieving aspirations and recall of different sorts of (illustrative) career intervention during education



23. Bimrose, J., Barnes, S. A., & Hughes, D. (2008). Adult career progression and advancement: A five year study of the effectiveness of guidance. Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

Section summary

In this section, we examined the use of career support, from different forms of professional career development sources. Our key findings are:

> Careers Wales helped me see my options and helped me get into a Traineeship
>
> *Male, 45-54, Income <£20k, Very positive about career prospects*

- While 68% of adults can recall forms of career support from secondary or tertiary education, only 15% recall professional careers guidance since leaving education.
- However, the few people that have used support post education strongly indicate that they found the support of value.
- People who use this support are also more likely to achieve career aspirations, particularly to achieve more fulfilling work.
- They are also likely to have higher incomes and feel more positively about their career.
- Whereas only 54% of the population we studied feel positive about their career prospects, more than 80% feel this way who have accessed career support through a private career counsellor or coach or via an employer. For the group that accessed support, there is little difference between their feelings about the past and future, compared to those who haven't accessed this support, where differences are marked.
- We acknowledge that this study is not a formal evaluation of different careers guidance interventions but propose that it complements the body of evaluation studies that show careers guidance (and related support) generates positive impacts for the users.

Overall, the research shows that careers guidance is a valued service that contributes to people feeling more positive and optimistic, and confident at making good career decisions when needed.

Moreover, the higher achievement of career aspirations includes accruing knowledge or changing jobs and sectors that can benefit the labour market and improve social mobility.

The potential of guidance and barriers to realisation

In this section, we look towards the future, and the potential of careers guidance. If there is a demand and opportunity for adults to use careers guidance, then we also need to ask, "What stops them?"

The potential of careers guidance

Given the ability for careers support to play a positive role in peoples' careers, then the promise for careers guidance is two-fold - scaling-up the benefits that careers guidance already provides to a much wider population, while offering a more targeted treatment of those who appear to be in a situation with systemic barriers to achieving fulfilling careers.

Scaling up the benefits

The potential for careers guidance to help more people is likely to be hugely significant. When asked what a career adviser could help them with, 63% of the population cited at least one challenge. This is around four times more adults than have received some sort of professional careers guidance at any stage since education.

Fig 3.1 (top) shows the challenges that people perceive a career adviser could help them with. Around a third of respondents demonstrated an appetite to explore different careers and roles, or their own suitability for roles. 27% expect that they could benefit from support to make decisions about training. 34% also believe that they could benefit from support with applications and CVs.

While these challenges were *explicit*, in that the respondent could name them, we recognise that people do not immediately associate career guidance as a solution to their challenges. Therefore, in the lower chart in Fig 3.1, we also summarised the percentage of people with common challenges or barriers. These reflect *implicit* opportunities for career guidance to tackle, as they reflect challenges that the career profession routinely helps users to resolve, but people might not have immediately recognised when asked directly how a career adviser could help them.

Fig 3.1: Ways that respondents said that they thought a career adviser could help

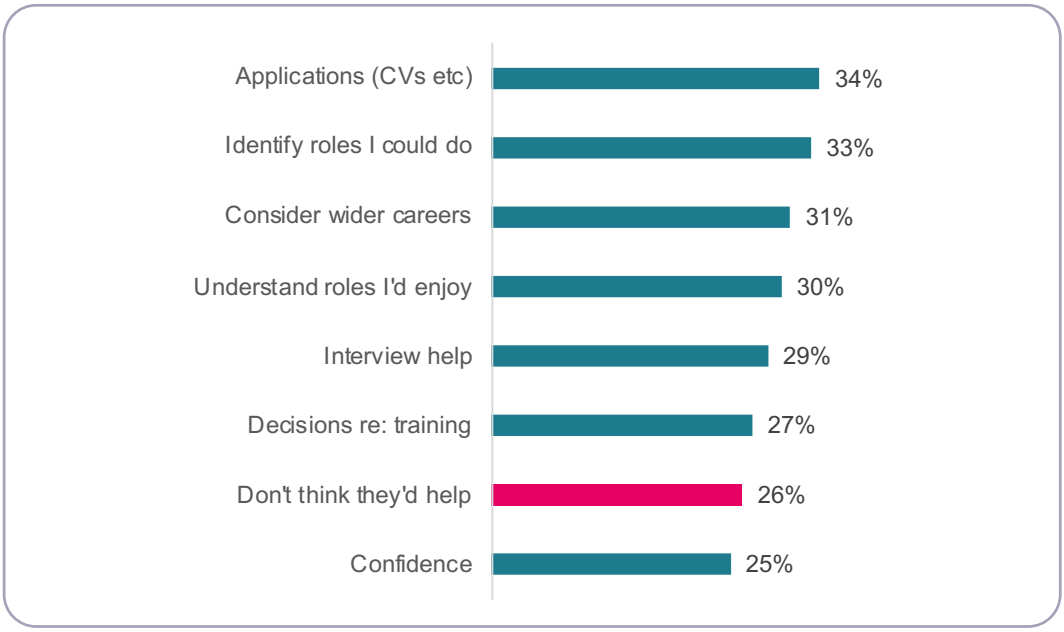
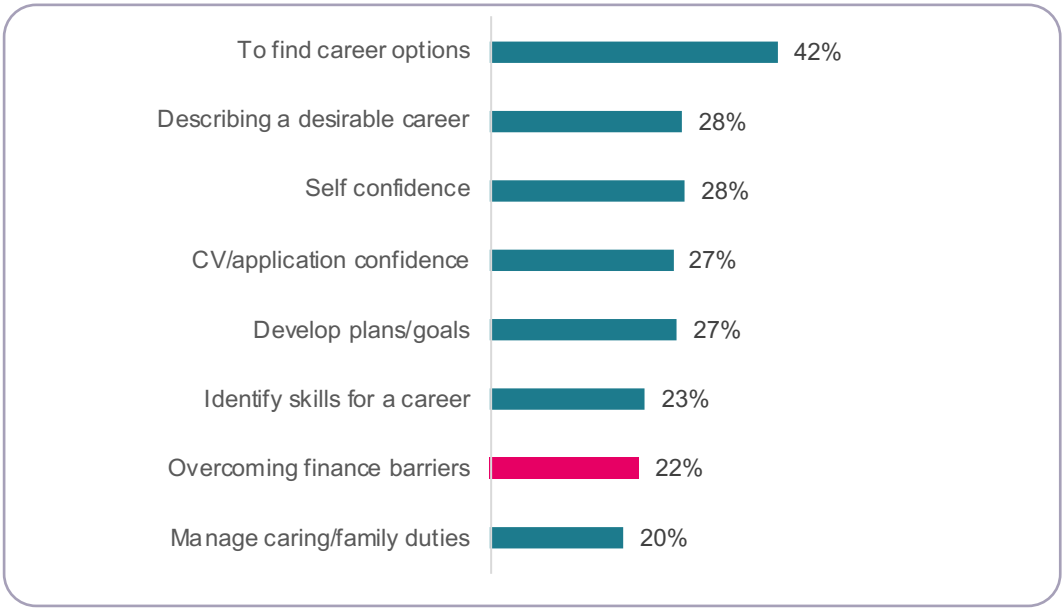


Fig 3.2: Other opportunities for career guidance, implicit in the career aspirations and barriers cited throughout the survev.



Offering targeted treatment

As well as a general opportunity for careers guidance to help many more people than it does today, we draw particular attention to groups that are in systemic traps of lower educational attainment, low engagement with managing their career, fewer rewards (income and career satisfaction) and lower optimism.

> I'm not sure what to do next and even if I did I'm unsure how I would get there. Applying for jobs is such a soul destroying process.
>
> *Female, 45-54, Income not known, Fairly negative about career prospects*

Our previous analysis suggests that people who exhibit such characteristics represent about 20-30% of the working population, with the understanding that there are a wide range of situations and contexts in this group.

Yet, when we look at the people from lower income groups (or lower socio-economic groups) that have accessed careers support, they receive comparable benefits. For instance, while 90% of the population receive a substantive benefit from using a private career counsellor or coach, the number is only marginally lower for those with an income of <£20k at 87%.

The potential for careers guidance to help people is likely to be under-estimated by respondents in Fig. 3.1, based on low awareness and understanding levels of what careers guidance entails. As we will describe further below (Fig 3.5), the group who appear to need most support is the least likely to seek it.

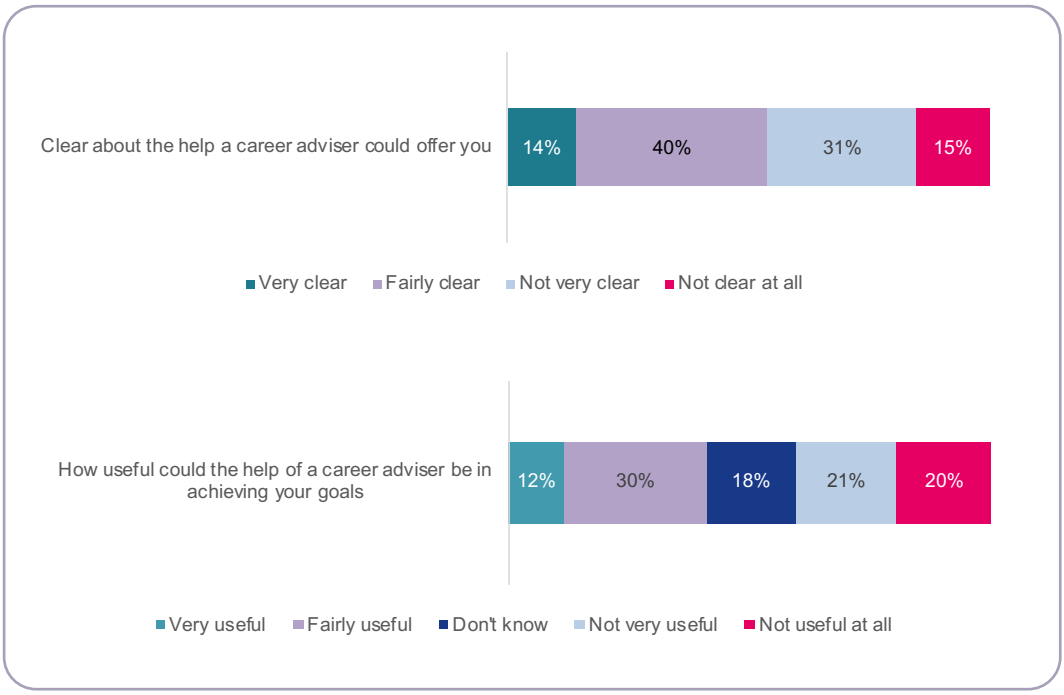
Barriers to accessing careers guidance

Awareness and understanding

We would argue that our results show that the most fundamental barrier for adults addressing careers guidance is that the awareness and understanding of career guidance is relatively low (Fig 3.3).

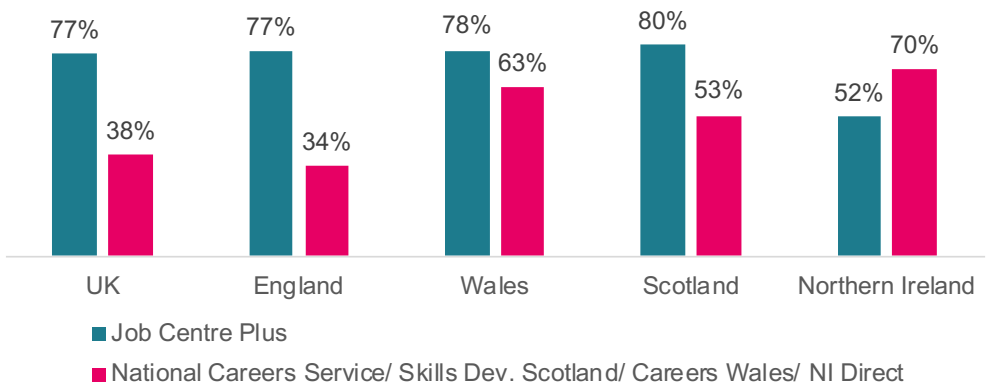
While just 54% believe that they are "clear" about what careers guidance could offer them, only 14% felt "very clear". Similarly, despite the strong indicators of value and advocacy by those who receive professional career support, only 12% felt a careers guidance professional could be "very useful" to them.

Fig 3.3: How clear are people that a career adviser could help them (top) and how useful do people perceive a career adviser could be in helping to achieve their goals (bottom)



We also found that only 38% were aware of the four home nation public career services, though numbers were higher outside of England (Fig 3.4).

Fig 3.4. Awareness of public career services and Jobcentre Plus by home nation



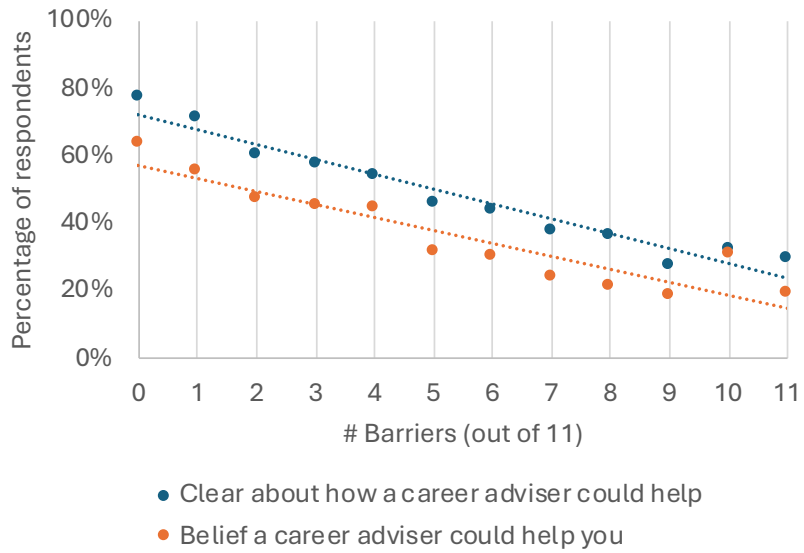
We asked people directly which of a series of options "would you say are barriers to you using a professional careers adviser?" 30% responded "I don't know how/ where to find one".

We then examined differences with the group who illustrated the most potential for careers guidance to help - namely, those experiencing low self-confidence, low career engagement, fewer rewards from their career and low optimism.

Fig 3.5 shows people's belief that careers guidance could help them and the perceived usefulness of a career adviser: The results are plotted against the number of factors out of the 11 that they exhibit which are barriers to a fulfilling career, which we showed previously in Fig. 1.14.

Fig 3.5 indicates that the more characteristics that people exhibit that would be detrimental to achieving a fulfilling career, then the less likely they are to be aware of what careers guidance can offer them and the less likely they are to think that it could help them.

Fig 3.5. Relationships between the percentages of people who are clear about how career advice could help, believe it could help, and the number of barriers that they exhibit to a successful career



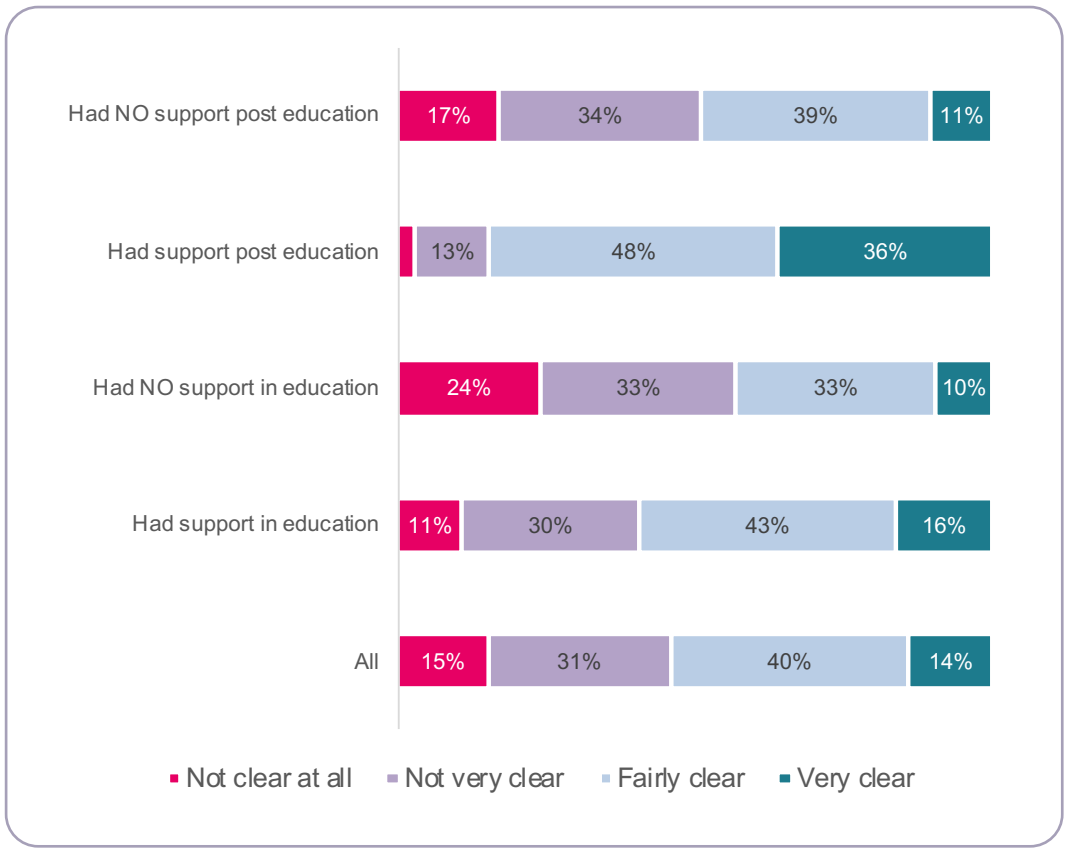
Further work is needed to define the characteristics and needs of the different groups who most need different forms of support, but, for the present, we note that there is a general need to increase the perceived relevance of careers guidance to be able to support the groups who may need it most.

> I have had mental health problems that have limited any career goals, careers teachers at school didn't offer me any help in choosing a career path when I was at school
>
> *Male, 18-24 years old, Income not known, Doesn't know how he feels about career prospects*

The importance of careers guidance during education is also clear. Those who had careers support in education are 1.4x more likely to feel clear how a career adviser could help them, and 1.9x more likely if they had received forms of career support after education (Fig 3.6).

The results suggest more could and should be done to illustrate different examples of careers challenges and career guidance through education, to build people's career management skills and encourage them to engage with careers guidance throughout their life as needed.

Fig 3.6. Percentages of people who are clear about how careers guidance could help them as a function of having received career support while a) in education and b) post-education.



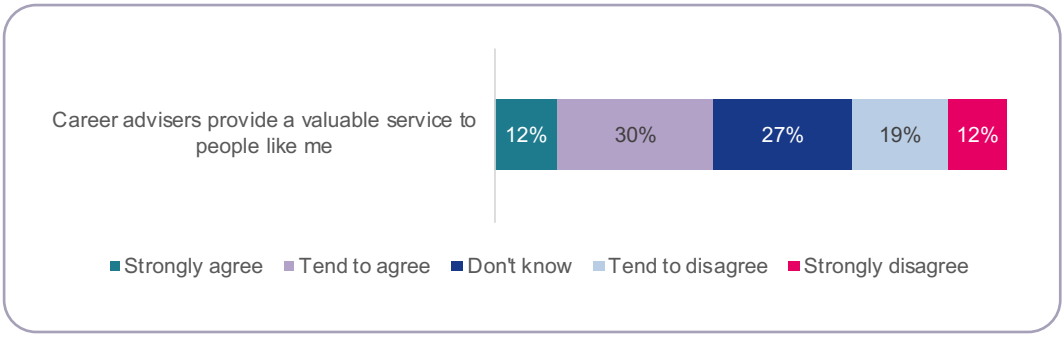
Although 68% recall careers guidance from education, the lack of clarity reflected in Fig 3.6 shows that respondents did not immediately know what career guidance might offer at a later career stage.

This result indicates that adults are (correctly) assuming that the nature of support that they could receive today will not take the same form as the support received during education. However, it seems that most are not very clear on what it entails.

Perceptions of relevance

With awareness and understanding being patchy, it was not surprising to see a mixed response when asking people about the perceived relevance of career services to them (Fig 3.7).

Fig 3.7: Perception of the personal relevance of career advisers



> The career support I received has boosted my confidence, I gained more knowledge on the specific niche I should go for
>
> *Male, 45-54 years old, Income £>40k, Very positive about career ;prospects*

Despite 80% anticipating barriers to achieving their goals in the next five years and only 54% feeling optimistic about their career prospects, there is a gap between people recognising that they have challenges and considering career support as an effective mechanism to help to overcome them.

12% of people appear to reject the idea that careers guidance might help them outright (Fig 3.7), but the majority demonstrate mixed levels of awareness, understanding and perceived relevance and few have clarity. A lack of experience and exposure to adult careers guidance is a key factor amongst those who see a lower perceived relevance, but not the only factor.

When we asked "Which, if any, of the following {considerations} do you think would be most important in your decision of which careers adviser to use?", the most cited factor (45%) was that the careers guidance professional has specific industry knowledge. This response was skewed towards those from higher income bands (55% with an income of more than £40k) and was lower amongst the lowest incomes (36% with an income under £20k).

Careers guidance professionals are trained to support people regardless of the industry they work in and enable the user to develop their industry-specific or role-related knowledge. Respondents may be thinking of careers guidance in more limited terms as providing answers to employability or recruitment queries, due to the low level of understanding already identified.

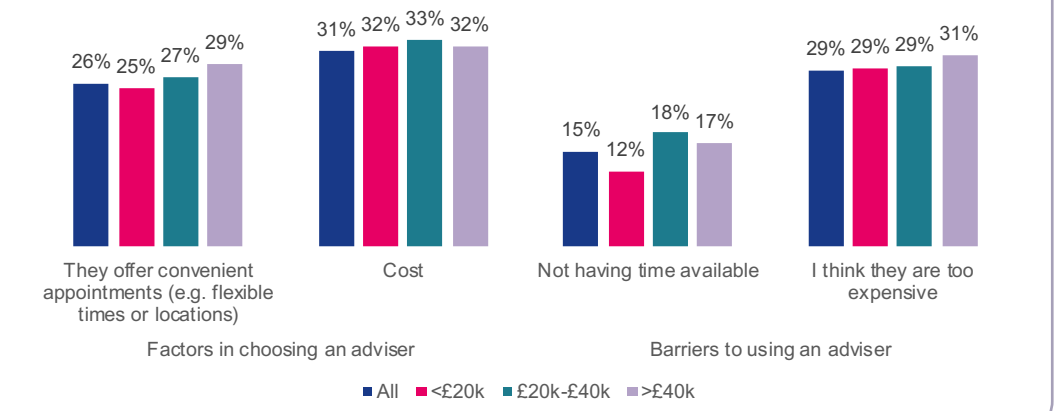
Nonetheless, this raises two questions: 1) Does the role and value of a career adviser need to be better communicated to the public? And 2) Are there cases where deeper specialist knowledge of industries and roles would be beneficial for career development professionals? (Alternatively, the career professional might facilitate access to, rather than hold, knowledge on sector career paths[24].)

24. There are many examples of research studies on sector or profession specific career support interventions. This example of career advice delivered via a career conference for foundational doctors is one of many: Thompson, R., Razzaq, D., & Zaman, M. E. (2023). 482 Evaluating the effects of careers advice on Foundation Doctors' perspectives of a paediatric career at the National Paediatric Foundation Conference.

Time and money

Time and money also appear as key barriers to someone using a careers professional. 15% said that they thought that not having time would be a barrier and 29% thought that the support would be too expensive. When asked which factor would be most important when choosing a careers professional, 26% cited the convenience of appointment times and 31% cited the cost. These answers were not strongly dependent on income (Fig 3.8).

Fig 3.8: Relationship between citing time and cost related factors when a) considering choosing a career adviser and b) anticipating barriers to accessing career advisers and income



Trust

Trust in the accreditation of the career adviser was a barrier to some. 24% said that they considered it would be a potential barrier for using a career adviser if "I don't think they can help me." A very similar fraction of 25% said the qualifications and accreditation of the adviser would be very important, and a further 31% said their reviews and recommendations would be important.

> I have no idea of the cost
>
> *Female, 45-54 years old, Income >£40k, Fairly positive about career prospects*

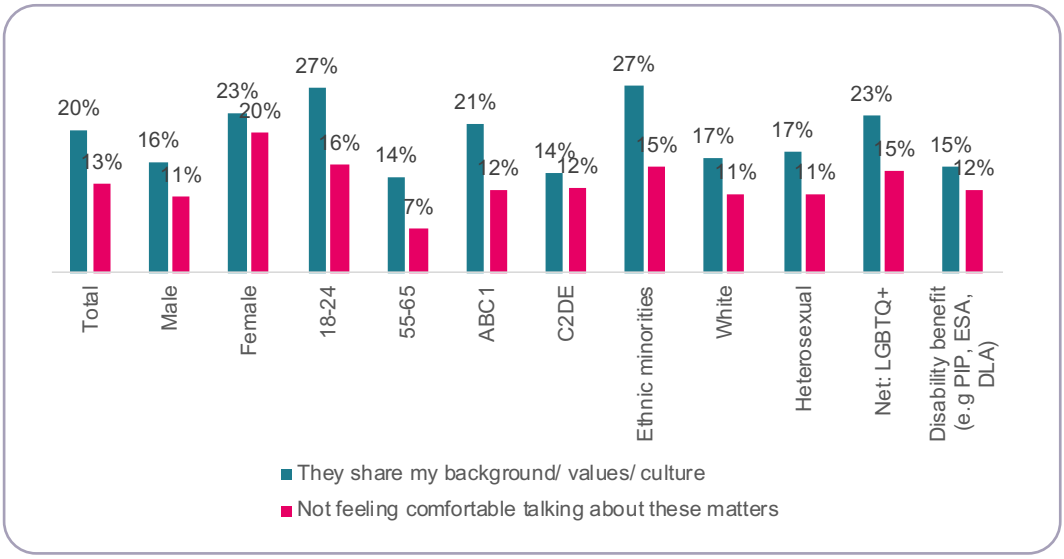
Inclusion and safety

Careers guidance is striving to be more inclusive to all parts of the population. Two related barriers that people cited were that it was important that the career adviser "share my background/ values/ culture" (18%) and "not feeling comfortable talking about these matters (12%) might be a barrier to not using career advice."

> I would recommend {career advice} if you find the right person who has your best interests at heart
>
> *Female, 55-65, Income > £40k*

Our sample size did not allow us to reliably identify differences between different minority groups or all specific groups relating to gender and sexual orientation. However, Fig 3.9 examines how these perceptions vary by the respondent's broader identity characteristic.

Fig 3.9: Indicators of feelings of inclusion and safety as considerations of using careers advisers



While most of the population did not experience these concerns when considering careers guidance, significant fractions of people did. Younger people and ethnic minorities felt it more important that a career adviser shared their background and values. About twice as many females perceived it could be a barrier to getting support from a professional that they felt uncomfortable talking about career matters compared to males. There also appears to be elevated concern among those identifying as LGBTQ+, though a more focussed study would be needed to make specific conclusions.

> It's good to take advice from people that have been where you currently are.
>
> *Female, 35-44 years old, Income <£20k, Fairly negative about career prospects*

As well as changing the broad overall perceptions of careers guidance, we need to ensure that services are perceived as welcoming and relevant to all groups in society, and to recognise the additional barriers that exist for some.

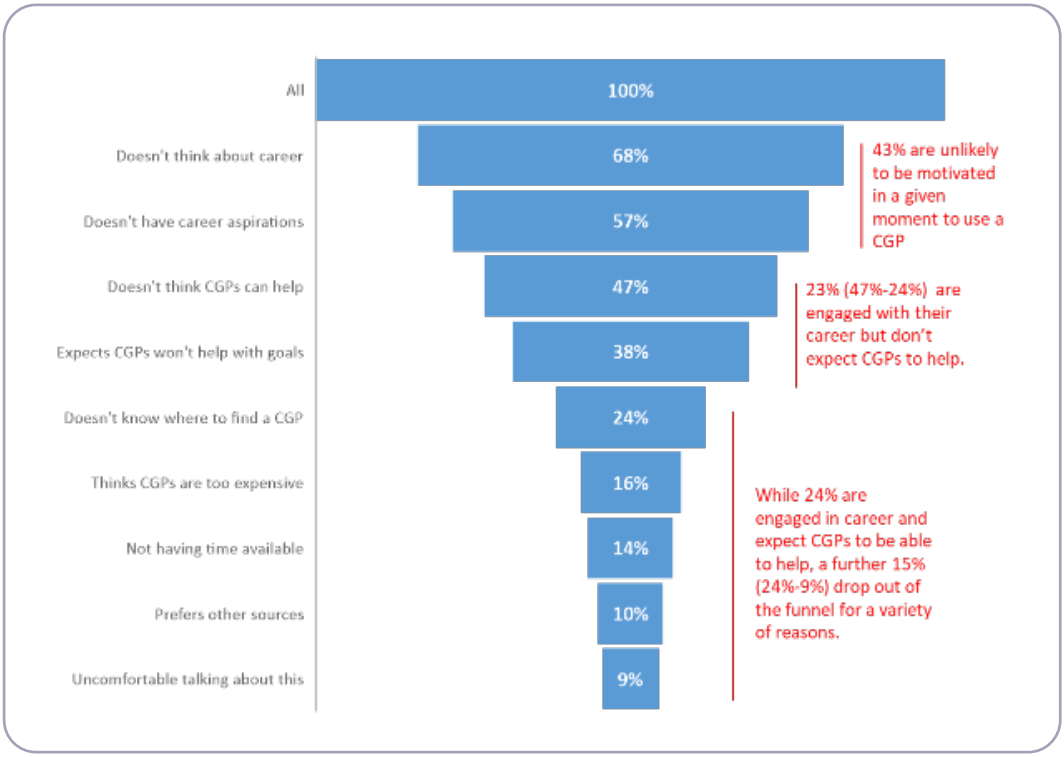
Cumulative barriers

We also noted that, aithough no single barrier was dominant, these barriers are cumulative. While 63% of people could imagine a challenge where careers guidance could help, the cumulative barriers of awareness, understanding, perceived relevance, accessibility and other inclusion-related barriers mean that only around 10% adults are potentially 'in the market' for careers guidance at any given time (Fig 3.10).

The funnel starts with 100% of the population and removes the population experiencing each barrier from the remaining population. For instance, as 32% of people say that they don't think about their career much, then this leaves 68% of people as realistic candidates. Of these, others are then removed from the population who don't express any career aspirations, leaving 57%, and so on until only 9% of the population remains.

We could create different "funnels", with factors in different orders, so the one below is indicative, but nonetheless serves to indicate the cumulative nature of the barriers.

Fig 3.10: Illustration of the cumulative nature of barriers to accessing a career guidance professional (CGP) to find the realistic numbers of possible users



Therefore, it is important that a concerted effort is made to tackle these multiple barriers. For example, if more was done in education to encourage young people to think about their careers throughout life and equip them with career management skills, the numbers who drop out of this funnel in Fig 3.10 could be reduced at most stages.

Origins of attitudes towards career advice

We asked people where they received their impressions of careers advice Fig 3.11 plots this as a function of age and net income level.

Fig 3.11: Times and places from where people thought their impressions of careers advice had come from, as a function of age (top) and net income (lower)



Many in the sector are concerned about a prevalent, inaccurate and outdated public opinion about careers guidance gained from poor advice in schools, from many years ago. However, our results showed this worry is largely unfounded. Only 35% recall career advice in education as the source of their impressions of career advice today. By contrast, 39% of people either don't know how they formed their impressions or said that nothing had influenced them, re-emphasising the generally low levels of awareness and understanding - which are bigger hurdles than negative preconceptions. People were more likely to fall into this bracket from lower income backgrounds.

We also found that those who cited that their impressions had come from career advice in education were more likely to say that they were fairly or very clear on a how a career adviser could help them compared to the average respondent (61% vs. 54%) and more likely to say that they perceived a career adviser would be useful for people like them than the average (57% vs 41%). If people do recall career guidance from school, it is likely to make them more favourable than less.

Section summary

Looking forward, there is significant potential for careers guidance to better support adults compared to current levels. More than four times as many adults believe they face career challenges that could be addressed by guidance services, compared to the number who have actually accessed such support since completing their formal education.

There is an opportunity to reduce inequalities by providing targeted support for individuals facing multiple barriers to securing fulfilling work. However, additional challenges arise in delivering career guidance services, particularly due to the prevalent belief among many that such guidance cannot help them. Addressing both the barriers to access and the misconceptions about the effectiveness of career guidance is essential for creating a more equitable job market.

We identified several barriers to adults for accessing career support. While only 12% appeared to reject the proposition of careers guidance as being useful to them, most of the adult population experience at least one barrier to using a career adviser. Raising awareness of what career advice can offer and how it can be relevant to different people would help this situation.

Another prominent factor of note was that 45% of people perceive that it could be a barrier to them if a career adviser does not have specific industry expertise.

To a lesser extent, although still significant, anticipation of time and cost commitments were perceived as barriers, and some people would not be comfortable discussing career matters with an adviser or would prefer an adviser with a background or values that they could relate to.

Our analysis suggested that these barriers are cumulative, such that all but around one in 10 adults experience at least one, significantly reducing the numbers that are likely to proactively seek career support.

Recommendations

Our research has demonstrated the state of play with peoples' careers in the UK. It shows that many have been happy with their career to date, but only 54% are optimistic about their future career. Professional support from a public careers service, private careers counsellor/coach or careers coach through work, has only been used by about 15% of UK adults since secondary or tertiary education. However, such interactions were overwhelmingly reported as positive. We argue for the potential to expand these benefits across the population, and especially for up to 30% of the population who would require specific targeted initiatives.

To unlock the potential for careers guidance, we make the recommendations below, noting that many areas will require further research.

#1 Prepare people in education with a career mindset for working life

While much work is ongoing in schools, further and higher education to prepare young people for their education and employment decisions, we suggest that there is a missed opportunity to promote the idea that career management is a lifelong pursuit and careers guidance is a resource that can be accessed later in life.

Observations:

- While two in three of the working-age population received forms of career support while in education, there is a mixed sense of confidence about what careers guidance entails during one's career: Only 42% believe that career advisers are relevant to people like them, and only 14% are very clear about "the help a career adviser could offer you."
- The 35% of respondents who formed their impression of career advisers in secondary or tertiary education were more likely to consider that a career adviser would be useful to them (though only marginally).

Recommended steps

- Invest in careers guidance in education settings to improve career management skills and encourage increased participation with careers guidance support throughout their careers.
- Increase recognition of the value of accessing careers guidance throughout life to handle challenges and opportunities.

CDI actions

- The CDI will be endeavouring to share results and findings and collaborate with all home nation bodies responsible for career guidance in schools.
- Through the Valuing Careers campaign, work with the Career Development Policy Group on the Careers Guidance Guarantee, and responses to policy consultations, the CDI will continue to champion deeper and more consistent provision of careers guidance for young people.
- We will also make the results of this research available to researchers to explore any further insights into lifelong careers success and access to careers guidance during education.

#2 Change perceptions that careers guidance is only for young people

The evidence we collected shows that the majority of people have aspirations for their career and anticipate facing barriers to achieving them. Yet most people are not automatically associating their challenges with gaining professional careers support.

Observations:

- There is a significant disconnect between the anticipation of a careers guidance professional being relevant and the value perceptions of those that access professional career support. (As per above) only 42% believe that career advisers are relevant to people like them.

- Despite the likely differences in available resources and client challenges 73% who used one of the public career services, 83% of those who used private career coaches/counsellors and 81% who used career coaches via their employer feel very positive about their career in the future. This compares with 54% who have not and suggests career guidance is beneficial for optimism and motivation, as well as addressing specific concerns.

- Individuals who accessed various adult career support services experienced a wide range of benefits. These included overarching advantages, such as a clearer understanding of different roles, as well as more tactical benefits, like being able to make better job applications.

Recommended steps

- As well as addressing perceptions in education, funding should be provided for a national campaign to promote the benefits of career support, with a proposition clarified for the working population based on addressing key challenges, such as career confidence for the future, career change and making more effective applications.

- Careers guidance should ideally be integrated with related services (e.g. adult education) by governments and employers, to enable easier access to those who would derive value. We know that this takes place to different extents in different places, so we suggest that it would be useful to review processes for triaging clients from other services.

CDI actions

- As part of the Valuing Careers campaign, the CDI is developing a series of case studies of people working in career development, to illustrate the range of backgrounds and approaches to providing support.

- CDI is also developing content to showcase the different ways careers guidance can support people, reflecting different stages of career and varying needs.

- The new CDI website will increase the functionality and usability of the UK Register of Career Development Professionals, and, over time, we will add to this to enable members of the public to find professionals who would best fit their needs.

- Illustrative videos of what careers guidance entails as an adult, for addressing a range of common aspirations or barriers, would be useful to increase understanding and perceived relevance amongst the public.

#3 Design targeted interventions for those with multiple barriers

We profiled a range of barriers that would hinder people achieving fulfilling careers and work, which have a strong potential to mutually reinforce each other: a) low optimism, b) low engagement in career management activities, c) less positive feedback from work by way of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and d) a lower propensity to seek professional support.

Observations:

- Feeling positive about career to date was strongly correlated with feeling positive about career prospects. (We know from many other studies that optimism is also correlated with wellbeing).
- Feeling positive about career prospects is strongly correlated with the propensity to undertake activities towards career management.
- However, those who experience most factors that appear to be a hindrance to a fulfilling work life are least likely to consider that careers guidance is relevant to their challenges.

Recommended steps

- More research is needed to address systemic barriers and vicious circles, which would start by defining the groups that need this support. For instance, we particularly note that those prone to these situations are those out of work, those claiming disability allowance and people from lower socio-economic groups.

CDI actions

- The CDI will continue to create and promote equity, diversity and inclusion continuous professional development modules amongst practitioners.

#4 Design interventions for mid/later-career to target career longevity

While feeling positive about life appeared relatively stable across the working life span, this was not the case for some indicators of job satisfaction and engagement with career. With the anticipation of people having longer careers in the future, there appears to be a missing intervention that can reinvigorate career optimism, with benefits to individual wellbeing, society and the economy.

Observations:

- 74% of 25–34-year-olds feel positive about their career prospects, but only 42% of 45–54-year-olds.
- 63% of 18–24-year-olds think a lot about their career, but only 54% of 45–54-year-olds.
- While people might be expected to know themselves better as they get older, 81% of 25–34-year-olds say that they are confident in defining their strengths and weaknesses in relation to a career, but this falls to 69% for 45–54-year-olds.
- 30% of 55–64-year-olds perceive a health issue or disability as a barrier to achieving what they'd like in their career.

Recommended steps

- Design pilot studies for a "career re-evaluation and recovery" intervention, with the goal to promote steps such as upskilling, retraining, and changes in career path to improve career wellbeing and longevity.

#5 Provide a single source of truth over the 'best source' of advice.

We found that people use a very broad range of sources for careers support, spanning family and friends and AI through to professional career development practitioners. People also accessed different sources of support to get what were nominally the same benefits. Therefore, there is scope to clarify the best sources of help for different challenges and situations.

Observations:

- People are already accessing different informal sources of support for their career, mostly from family and friends, and 6% already use AI for career support. Others use social media and online sources which will have different degrees of bias, such as recruitment sites and employer HR functions. Undoubtedly, there will be good advice and information held in these places. However, such sources may also have different limitations and biases for particular challenges.

- When examining the number of people that gained different benefits from using a) a public career service, b) a private career coach/counsellor and c) a career coach at work, people tended to derive clusters of nominally similar benefits. However, there are likely to be different benefits of each of these sources, which vary not only by the client but their specific challenge. Each of these services also has a different investment requirement and model.

- Awareness of the public careers services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is high, though the awareness of the National Careers Service in England is notably lower.

- While use of Jobcentre Plus services was higher than for the public careers services, the level of value received and likelihood to recommend was significantly lower. This is likely to be due to the focus on employability support, rather than deeper careers guidance. Some comments in our survey that expressed dissatisfaction with Jobcentre Plus lamented that the support was merely to find a job.

- 30% of people said that a barrier to using professional careers guidance was simply not knowing where to access it.

Recommended steps

- As public sector careers services are well regarded by those who use them, additional promotion and integration of services will raise awareness and ease of engagement.

CDI actions

- The broad eco-system of careers guidance available can be confusing. As part of the Valuing Careers campaign, the CDI will work to create content that highlights the different support available to individuals that help them to overcome barriers or realise opportunities.

- A planned focus on raising the visibility of the UK Register of Career Development Professionals will highlight the need to check that practitioners are appropriately qualified and make it easier to identify practitioners with relevant areas of experience.

- The CDI is leading the project to gain chartership status for the profession, which will further raise the profile and standing of career development.

#6. Understand more about inclusive careers guidance

With an increasingly diverse population, it's clear that one size doesn't fit all. Our survey provided clues on areas that need further exploration, in order to make suitable adaptation to ensure services remain inclusive.

Observations:

- Females are around twice (at 20%) as likely as males to say that a potential barrier to accessing career advice is that they don't feel comfortable talking about career related issues.

- People who belong to an ethnic minority are far more likely to say that the background/values of a career adviser would be a significant factor, with 27% saying that this is important compared to 17% of white respondents.

- This was also more important to those identifying as LGBTQ+, with 23% saying that the career adviser's values are important compared to 17% who are heterosexual.

- There is some suggestion that minority groups have propensities to use different sources for career support: As an example, ethnic minority respondents to our survey said that they are far more likely to use YouTube as a source of career support (32% compared to 12% for white respondents.) However, we suggest further research before drawing definitive conclusions, with career research behaviour potentially differing by group.

Recommendations

- Undertake further research to understand more about the barriers facing different groups when considering accessing careers guidance, and discussing career matters, to provide suitable information to service providers and career development professionals.

- Continue efforts to recruit people to work in career development from diverse backgrounds. This will require issues such as low pay in parts of the profession, low perceived value from policymakers and the public, and progression opportunities to be addressed.

CDI actions

- The CDI's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategy aims to welcome, encourage and enable those from diverse backgrounds looking to work in career development. Activities under the strategy are ongoing and include a series of EDI webinars exploring different aspects of diversity, working with the four nations to address workforce issues and developing case studies of current practitioners, showcasing the variety of backgrounds and experiences they have.

- As part of the Valuing Careers campaign, we are developing content aimed at those interested in working in career development that demonstrates the breadth of opportunities, the pride that practitioners feel in enabling clients to achieve their goals and the routes to become qualified.

#7. Explore the mechanisms to equip practitioners with sector insight

Careers guidance practitioners presently access a range of sources and embark on professional development activities to be able to provide relevant information. Our research revealed an appetite from the public for sector-specific advice.

Observations:

- When asked what people might anticipate as barriers to using career advisers in the future, 45% said that they thought it could be that the career adviser did not have sector specific insight.

Recommendations

- Explore additional professional development for careers guidance practitioners to gain deeper levels of insight in industries and role-types.

- There is a need to better explain the role of careers guidance and that their training means they can support people regardless of the industry.

CDI actions

- As previously mentioned, the CDI is developing content to make the role of career development professional clearer to members of the public with differing needs.

- We will continue to work with industry bodies to provide insight into their unique recruitment needs, so practitioners are fully informed when working with clients.

- We will explore future development of the UK Register to enable members to highlight specific industry skills and experiences.

#8. Fund a programme of 'What Works?' research to inform investment

We reiterate the importance of a recommendation of the research conducted by the Commission on the Future of the Employment Support [25].

While there have been many studies of careers activities, there remain gaps in understanding 'What Works?' in terms of delivering the most effective and cost-effective interventions to different people based on their situation, characteristics and aspirations.

With analytics and AI playing an increasing role in career advice and the information available to the public, there are now more options for both formal and informal career support than ever.

Given the amount of investment and the importance of outcomes, there is a strong case for supporting research to inform some of the key investment options facing policymakers, leaders of career service organisations and career development practitioners.

Presently, careers guidance also finds it hard to attract funding with public bodies set against other agendas. This creates a "chicken and egg" situation where there is less robust evidence to conclusively quantify the economic and social value of different potential programmes.

Observations:

The challenges and opportunities highlighted by this research reflect investment dilemmas for policymakers and leaders of career services, on how best to allocate a finite budget: For instance:

- Increasing the awareness of existing careers guidance services vs developing new services
- Investing in awareness for the 'mass' population versus investing in specific groups who face multiple barriers
- Investing in digital technologies and AI to augment personal support and maximise the coverage of career guidance but reducing the numbers who benefit from face-to-face one-to-one career support
- Investing in more careers practitioners gaining deeper specific sector knowledge, versus developing more interventions (e.g. events, web portals) that address the needs of people making decisions about careers in specific sectors.

Recommendations

- Invest in a research programme to test the most promising pilot studies for career interventions, in terms of maximising value of money, and compare results with standard or existing practice.
- Test the potential use cases for technology, big data, analytics and AI to augment career support.

CDI actions

- The CDI has developed a Research Directory that collates relevant research related to career development, including studies on the effectiveness of different careers interventions and activities. As this builds up, it will enable easier access to a wide range of careers research for policymakers, practitioners and researchers.

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25. Commission for the Future of Employment Support (2024), Working for the Future: Final report of the Commission on the Future of Employment Support

Section summary

This research has shown that the great majority of the UK population have career aspirations but anticipate barriers. The majority of the 15% of adults who have accessed professional careers support have derived substantial value. There is a clear opportunity to expand these benefits across the UK population and better support the 20%-30% of people facing factors that limit their likelihood of finding fulfilling work.

There is no single solution to unlock the value of careers support, so we have outlined areas where we recommend further work, which will involve a range of stakeholders and potential further targeted research and analysis.

By working on these recommended areas, we would not only increase the number of people achieving fulfilling careers, and deriving benefits to their wellbeing, but we would also create a workforce that is better able to adapt and develop skills that support the future economy.

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