

Transforming careers support for young people and adults in Northern Ireland

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dmh associates

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Our expertise includes: consultancy, evaluation, evidence and impact assessment, literature reviews, qualitative and quantitative research, digital and labour market intelligence / information (LMI). We provide a full range of activities each tailored to meet specific organisational or individual needs.

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Acronyms

ALC	Area Learning Communities
ATE	Apprenticeships and Technical Education
BIT	Behavioural Insights Team
CAF	Careers Advisory Forum
CAs	Careers Advisers
CDI	Career Development Institute (UK)
CEIAG	Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance
CIAG	Career Information, Advice, and Guidance
CG	Career Guidance
CGD	City and Growth Deals
COIU	Careers and Occupational Information Unit
CRL	Careers-related Learning
DfC	Department for Communities
DfE	Department for Economy
DE	Department of Education
EA	Education Authority
EET	Education, Employment and/or Training
ETI	Education Training Inspectorate
FE	Further Education
FSM	Free School Meals
HE	Higher Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMD	Indices of Multiple Deprivation
ITPs	Independent Training Providers
KS	Key Stage
LLW	Learning for Life and Work
LMI	Labour Market Intelligence
LMPs	Local Labour Market Partnerships
LSIP	Local Skills Improvement Plans
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NI	Northern Ireland
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEND	Special Education Needs and Disabilities
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SF	Sixth Forms Schools/Colleges
SSA	Sector Subject Area
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UUEPC	Ulster University Economic Policy Centre
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VQs	Vocational Qualifications

Executive Summary

Context

In mid-November 2021, the Economy Minister, Gordon Lyons, announced an independent external review into the delivery of career guidance. The Department for the Economy (DfE) currently provides an all-age careers information, advice, and guidance service designed to help individuals make choices and about their career paths. DMH Associates, led by Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE, undertook research from mid-November 2021 – early March 2022 examining the current all-age DfE career guidance offer situated within a wider careers ecosystem that operates across Northern Ireland and further afield.

“Career guidance describes the services which help people of any age to manage their careers and to make the educational, training and occupational choices that are right for them. It helps people to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications, skills and talents – and to relate this knowledge about who they are to who they might become within the labour market” (OECD et al, 2019 and 2020)

Prior to the pandemic, career guidance was receiving increased attention from policymakers, reflecting a concern that the skills developed in initial education might not be well aligned with emerging labour market needs, generating costly skills mismatches and skills shortages. In the aftermath of the pandemic, policymakers, educationalists, employers, and community organisations must together find new ways of motivating and informing young people and adults on the social and cost benefits of career development and how their skills may be easily transferred to new settings. International evidence shows that government investment in career guidance brings prosperity for individuals and windfalls for government. Even if only a relatively small proportion of individuals improve their career decision-making skills, the education, social, wellbeing and economic gains are likely to far outweigh the costs, as illustrated in the main report.

The Careers Service has a current budget of £6m with circa 100 Careers Advisers employed as civil servants in the DfE. They are professionally trained, mainly at post-graduate level, who operate throughout all regions in Northern Ireland. This investment responds to education and labour market concerns and is there to deliver its services across a population of 1.9m in Northern Ireland. The service supports education, training providers and employers, young people aged 14+ in schools and colleges, and adults regardless of their work status.

Northern Ireland has similar levels of need for career guidance compared to other UK regions, considering standard metrics for education and employment trajectories. This similar need for career guidance can be contrasted with the very different annual amounts of dedicated public money invested by Scotland (c. £50m, via Skills Development Scotland CIAG budgets) and Wales (c. £29m, via Careers Wales and Working Wales)¹.

1 England is excluded from this comparison, since its marketised approach to career guidance is structurally different from the government delivery body approach chosen in the other nations.

When adjusted for population size and budget structure, significantly less public money is invested in career guidance in Northern Ireland than in Scotland or Wales.

From the outset, there is clear recognition that, at these levels of resource, the DfE's Careers Service simply cannot deliver the level of personalised, one-to-one support that many thousands of young people, adults, and employers might want and expect. Nonetheless, there are strong foundations to build upon, with strategic partners across Northern Ireland each playing their unique part.

Aim

To make recommendations to improve the targeting, timeliness, effectiveness, and efficiency of all-age career guidance in Northern Ireland.

This report is the culmination of a process designed to capture the views, experiences, and ideas of differing stakeholders within and outside the DfE's Careers Service. Between mid-November 2021 – mid-February 2022, over 4,117 individuals contributed to the research.

Method

To inform and develop a robust evidence-base, the research team:

- Held consultations with careers service staff and trade union representatives;
- Surveyed young people aged 14-18; adults 18+ in work, out of work, school leaders, careers teachers and subject teachers, and parents;
- Disseminated a template for scribes to complete, where necessary, to help capture the voices of vulnerable young people adults;
- Set up a 'have your say' call for evidence aimed at employers, professional associations, community and voluntary sector organisations;
- Met with employers and professional associations, school and college leaders, careers teachers, community and voluntary representatives through 1:1 online meetings and focus group sessions;
- Met with vulnerable young people and adults, including those with learning disabilities, experienced care leavers and youth justice system leavers;
- Reviewed international, national, and regional exemplar best practice career guidance delivery models; and
- Conducted a financial analysis of the DfE's Careers Service including high-level comparisons with Wales and Scotland to support reflections on Northern Ireland's approach to career guidance.

The findings in this evidence-based paper are designed to contribute to a new beginning. We all recognise the transformative impact of Northern Ireland’s education, training, career guidance and employability support on the lives of individuals, families, and communities. And there is an urgent imperative to continually improve them.

Drivers for change

Northern Ireland has experienced two once-in-a-lifetime shocks that have occurred simultaneously, alongside ongoing megatrends in life choices, education and work that are changing society for everyone. Like young people, adults changing careers either by choice or through redundancy need help to understand the opportunities available in the current and future labour market. They need and want to know how their individual talents, skills and experience could be further developed to ensure they benefit from new opportunities.



The pandemic

The pandemic has impacted on all aspects of societal wellbeing. Whilst the negative impacts of the pandemic are well known, there are now more job opportunities and more people working now than prior to the pandemic. However, Skills Barometer figures show adult under-employment is an issue, with over 10% of those aged 16-24 seeking to increase their working hours.



Brexit and the NI protocol

A recent survey of firms in Northern Ireland, conducted by Manufacturing NI, found that the availability of workers, rather than Brexit and the Northern Ireland protocol, was the most pressing issue for most businesses. NIESR forecasts that the output of the local economy will be 1.5% above its pre-pandemic level by the end of this year.



Demographics

Today’s children and young people are tomorrow’s adults driving the future economy and societal wellbeing. The demographics of the nation’s population have been shifting, placing growing demands on the education, careers and skills system. There is a major requirement to stem the flow leaving Northern Ireland and harness all the talent and skills available.



A changing labour market and nature of work

Skills shortages affect several key sectors. Labour market intelligence must be able to reach more people. There is growing evidence of people attempting to change the way they work to better control and direct their own work hours. Alongside this, there is an urgent need to increase innovation and productivity in the workforce. Career is by its nature uncertain. There are no guarantees that entry to an organisation or profession will translate into stability in the long-term.



Education Reform

There is an opportunity to reframe and refocus educational experience for students towards a more holistic 'career readiness' approach. From learning individual subjects and passing exams to becoming more 'life ready' through personalised, collaborative experiential learning with regular exposure to and experience of a changing in the world of work.

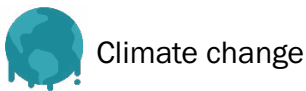


Growing poverty and inequality

With persistent poverty and other forms of disadvantage, the current system inadvertently produces unequal outcomes. Also, prices are not only rising mostly in areas where low-income households spend a disproportionately high amount of their income (fuel and food), but also on essential items. This has significant social and or health-related consequences. Finding opportunities has never been more important.



Many jobs and people's lives are being transformed by new forms of disruptive and social technology. New jobs, skills requirements, mooted 'metaverse' workplaces, AI and machine learning advances are emerging. Some skillsets are 'at risk' of becoming obsolete. Digital skills are essential, regardless of circumstance. Steps are needed to address the 'digital divide'. Technology can support learning in diverse settings and be available 24:7 responsive to career exploration and discovery. However, human support is also necessary, particularly to those most in need.



A new Bill in Stormont may result in new legislation to introduce a 2050 net zero target for Northern Ireland, along with an independent Climate Change Commissioner's office. The transition to a green economy requires a workforce with the right skills. This includes not only skills in the low carbon and environmental goods and services sector, but also those needed to help all businesses use natural resources efficiently and sustainably and to be resilient to climate change.

These drivers demand transformation and a road map for recovery and, in many cases a departure from what has gone before. There is a major opportunity to focus on strengthening the talent economy in Northern Ireland, underpinned by a high-quality careers ecosystem. This should inform, support, and connect citizens of all ages and abilities to relevant and sustainable learning and work opportunities on a lifelong basis.

The Northern Ireland careers support ecosystem is struggling

To address both challenges and opportunities, it is essential to achieve a culture change in all-age career guidance and careers education in post-primary schools, further and higher education, and in local communities. There should be a mutually agreed set of principles and priorities introduced offering universal support, with a strong emphasis on place-based approaches, complemented by online careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) supporting local people and local economies. Those working in the careers ecosystem should work together to agree how best to achieve this to support transitions, improve social inclusion and social mobility. **A strengthened Northern Ireland careers ecosystem, through a more strategic collaborative approach, should draw together experience and expertise from across the whole system to maximise the impact of its collective resources.**

We have identified inspiring and innovative UK and international exemplars of careers policies and practices for wider consideration outlined in a separate ‘stand-alone’ report. Based on stakeholder feedback from 4117+ individuals, easy-to-understand common language should be adopted by local, regional and national delivery agencies across Northern Ireland’s careers ecosystem, e.g.

1. Embed careers in the curriculum.

2. Enrichment careers activities for all.

3. Employability and skills development.

4. Enterprise, self-employment, and entrepreneurship.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority ²	Key steps
<i>Primary school children, parents, and teachers</i>			
Start career-related learning early in primary schools.	<p>Career-related learning (CRL) needs to start early in Northern Ireland primary schools. A UK and international evidence-base indicates this helps broaden horizons, reduces gender stereotypes, and increases children’s aspirations and motivation to learn.</p> <p>Rec: 1 – The DfE should include high-quality CRL resources in a new rebranded all-age national careers portal supporting parents in career conversations with their child(ren).</p>	<i>High</i>	<p>It is noted this is primarily the responsibility of the Department of Education, therefore outside the remit of this commissioned research.</p> <p>Embed high quality CRL resources into a new world-class rebranded all-age national careers portal.</p>

² High denotes to be actioned within 9-12 months, High-Medium denotes to be actioned within 18 months, Medium denotes to be actioned no later than 24 months.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>World-class digital and blended approaches to careers support services</i>			
<p>A new world-class rebranded all-age national careers portal with differing entry points for specific groups including young people, adults, parents, employers, apprentices and entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Employer and professional bodies, FE and HE providers have expressed a willingness to contribute and update programmes of study and/or opportunities for young people and adults.</p>	<p>Rec: 2 – The DfE with education, employers, and community strategic partners, should co-create the content of a new rebranded all-age national careers portal, led by the Careers Service. A partnership arrangement should set out plans for sustainability of the new national careers portal. Exemplars of good/interesting UK and international careers policies and practices should inform the commissioning and design principles.</p> <p>Clarify and agree within DfE Communications that a new all-age national careers portal must be freed up from the current nidirect portal which is generally perceived as “insufficiently inspiring” despite its rich content. Its full potential is restricted by the existing standardised website and constraints within the nidirect editorial style guide. There are some examples where this new approach has already been achieved in Northern Ireland in response to employer needs e.g. the Matrix website.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Involve employers, professional bodies, behavioural insights experts, trade unions and parent groups in the early planning and development of the modern all-age national careers portal with an expectation they will bring added value resources and experience to feed into the content and sustainability plan going forward. (Refer also to UK & International Exemplars Report).</p> <p>Set up DfE careers portal and digital technology team to horizon scan for digital innovations.</p> <p>Harness the expertise that exists in 6 further education colleges, 2 universities and the Department for Economy to make more accessible high-quality all-age career guidance resources, including professional expertise, quality assurance approaches, skills assessment toolkits, employer engagement, mentoring, virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI) and gamification of the world of work.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p><i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i></p>			
<p>Introduce greater flexibility and accountability within ALCs in meeting young people, parents, and employer needs within post-primary schools. This must be part of a wider education continuum that supports young people's career readiness, digital, employability and enterprise skills.</p>	<p>Rec: 3 – The DfE, DE and the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) should formally agree setting up and closely monitoring the performance of new ‘test and learn’ career guidance pilots in selected Area Learning Communities. These should be designed to deliver ‘an enhanced career guidance offer’ embedded within the curriculum, new freedoms for utilising Careers Adviser expertise, alongside simplifying and synchronising working links between post-primary schools, STEM, employability, and enterprise hubs to avoid duplication of effort and maximise impact of resources.</p> <p>For the pilots, all aspects of careers education and career guidance should be within an agreed set of common quality standards, training, monitoring and accountability framework. This should include: the responsibilities of the DfE, DE, ETI, EA, post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities (ALCs), including the allocation of DfE resources, with short, medium, and longer-term jointly agreed priorities and goals.</p>	<p><i>High</i></p>	<p>Support and strengthen thematic career guidance pilots, including employer and enterprise links, the 10X Economy, the Skills Barometer 2021, young people and parental engagement, leadership, and best practice in inclusive careers education and CIAG.</p> <p>Embrace new delivery methods in post-primary schools/ALCs with local employer, enterprise, and professional body strategic partners to include career competitions and out of school/college careers activities and publish findings mapped across the key sectors in the 10X Economy.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p><i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i></p>			
<p>A new ‘blended’ career guidance delivery model and careers education (including face-to-face and online careers activities starting earlier in the curriculum) in post-primary schools.</p>	<p>Rec: 4 – The DfE, with its strategic partner the DE, should formally introduce a new blended career guidance delivery model in post-primary schools, to complement careers education (including face-to-face and online careers activities starting earlier in the curriculum) with an agreed action plan for critical steps forward by 1st June 2022.</p> <p>This should include all post-primary schools working in genuine partnership with the DfE, taking responsibility, and each playing their part in helping to identify those students who need most assistance (through a transparent triage system), and regularly introduce students and parents to the differing levels of local and national careers support available to them on a lifelong basis.</p>	<p><i>High</i></p>	<p>Begin a new chapter in Northern Ireland’s post-primary schools with a move away from ‘blanket interviewing’ towards more enhanced targeted career guidance activities starting earlier in post-primary schools e.g. more groupwork, raising awareness of and providing increased access to skills assessment, 1:1 career guidance (where appropriate), virtual and experiential learning, and high-quality 24:7 integrated self-help careers resources within a new rebranded all-age national careers portal.</p> <p>Develop a robust triage system tailored to all young people’s unique circumstances. This should not stigmatise young people as being ‘at risk’ because they are not going to follow an academic route, instead it should be highly responsive to all young people’s circumstances which are likely to change over time.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i>			
Parents and employers report they expect young people to have access to skills assessment tools from an early age.	The Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) should include the totality of career guidance as defined above within its inspection framework for post-primary schools. It should assess the extent to which all post primary schools offer young people and parents a ‘blended careers offer’ with a range of delivery methods including skills assessment tools, new digital technologies, and a published careers programme in a standard format, including access to Careers Advisers’ expertise. The inspection framework for schools and colleges should reflect this requirement, alongside the DfE’s approach making skills assessment available 24:7 to all young people (and adults).	<i>High</i>	Address the deficit in not including career guidance in post-primary schools’ formal inspections. Make the current joint investment by DfE and the DE to provide every post-primary school with a high-quality skills assessment tool ³ for teachers and students work to good effect. Currently this is only being used by 42% of post-primary schools.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i>			
	Rec: 5 – The DfE, DE, Education Authority working with ALCs should co-publish data on annual trends in anonymised student occupational interests, young people’s exposure to and experiences of the world of work and how this aligns to the realities of local labour markets and the 10X Economy. DE, the Education Authority and ALCs should agree at least a minimum work experience offer for students which includes exposure to growing and emerging sectors in NI. These developments should be made available in standard format that can be shared across the careers ecosystem.	<i>High-Medium</i>	Establish a new regional system for analysing trends linked to young people’s career aspirations and how this aligns to the ambitions of the 10X Economy and make this type of anonymised data more readily available to those within the careers ecosystem. Explore options for career action plans and how these can be best applied with young people and adults.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p>Adults and young people in communities e.g. FE, HE, vocational training, other community/third sector providers including City Deals and local Labour Market Partnerships</p>			
<p>Deliver careers guidance in the heart of the community – making it visible and aligned with local economic strengthening and enterprise initiatives.</p>	<p>Rec: 6 – The DfE Careers Service knowledge and expertise should be embedded more fully within Local Councils e.g. City Deals, local Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs), and local community employability and entrepreneurial initiatives. This should make the Careers Service more visible and impactful working in the best interest of local citizens and employers. This is particularly important given the low rate of economic activity in Northern Ireland⁴.</p> <p>Rec: 7 – The DfE with the DfC, Local Councils and local LMPs should explore opportunities for match-funding arrangements to target specific adult and youth priority groups working in strong partnership with community agencies to achieve increased employer and enterprise engagement linked to the ambitions of the 10X Economy.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Increase joint investment for local career guidance support for adults, including a focus on re-engaging on skills assessment and job search activity.</p> <p>Jointly create an explicit ‘career guidance offer, particularly for adults. Career guidance needs to be made available for people in work as well as those in education. Link this campaign to TV, radio, and social media channels. Lessons can be learned from Working Wales #ChangeYourStory and other successful initiatives.</p>
<p>Regional and local strategic partnerships in communities.</p> <p>Once graduates have left higher education it is unclear where career support should be accessed.</p>	<p>Rec: 8 – The DfE should develop core principles, expected outcomes and a blended career guidance delivery model defining what individuals in all DfE funded provision can expect. It should set and make explicit targets for local and regional community strategic partnerships with place-based approaches in local communities as this is what most young people and adults want and need, alongside an easy-to-use content-rich all-age national careers portal.</p> <p>The DfE, FE and HE providers should focus together on targeted campaigns for those most in need of careers support and agree a standard offer of ongoing careers support available to specific groups including sixth form, FE and HE students.</p>	<p>High-Medium</p>	<p>Acknowledge the pandemic has significantly weakened DfE Careers Service ties to community organisations and seek to strengthen its blended career guidance offer and visibility in working closely with local and national agencies, supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups.</p> <p>Set targets for strategic place-based partnerships and online support.</p> <p>Agree a series of targeted campaigns set within specific 2022 – 2025 timelines.</p>

4 E.g. Sep-Nov 2021 Labour Force Survey data shows 70% of NI is economically active compared to 76% in England.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p>Adults and young people in communities e.g. FE, HE, vocational training, other community/third sector providers including City Deals and local Labour Market Partnerships</p>			
<p>Careers and Occupational Information Unit, UUEPC Skills Barometer, labour market trends and digital horizon scanning expertise.</p>	<p>Rec: 9 – Build on the success of the DfE’s Careers and Occupational Information Unit (COIU), DfE economists, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC), FE Curriculum Hubs, and 10X Economy strategic partnerships (including other professional bodies that represent employer needs) to co-produce more excellent, economy driven careers information and LMI bulletins that can be accessed both online and within post-primary schools and other local community agencies.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Raise the profile of the COIU and 10X Economy strategic partnerships (including other professional bodies that represent employer needs) and further develop digital horizon scanning to strengthen young people and adults’ access to trustworthy CIAG.</p>
<p>Multi-agency one-stop centres, including new ‘State of the Art’ multi-agency places and online spaces for all-age career guidance.</p>	<p>Rec: 10 – The DfE should integrate specialist Careers Advisers within multi-agency one-stop shop arrangements working deep in local communities alongside Health and Social Care Trusts, other public, private and third sector organisations that have established close working links.</p> <p>The DfE and DfC should assess local delivery arrangements within City Deals, local LMPS and Economic Development plans to review existing capital spend projects and add a social value clause to ensure ‘State of the Art’ multi-agency places and online spaces for enhanced careers education, CIAG, employability and enterprise experiences made readily available in selected local towns and cities.</p> <p>The DfE should publish ‘success stories’ and ‘pockets of excellence’ where Careers Advisers and key community organisations have together made a positive impact on young people and adults’ lives, particularly those furthest away from the labour market to inspire more community partnerships.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Assess the efficacy of retaining the existing DfE Careers Centres in Belfast and L’Derry e.g. what is the likelihood of increase in footfall? are the premises fit for purpose to support multi-agency working? Is there duplication of resources at a local level?</p> <p>Draw inspiration from UK and international exemplars and set out a vision and new roadmap for world-class ‘State of the Art’ multi-agency ‘places and online spaces’ that make lifelong learning, career readiness, digital and employability skills fun, engaging and accessible for all, including career cafes, pods, skills and enterprise workshops, live events, coaching, mentoring, etc., co-designed by key stakeholders in local communities within the careers ecosystem.</p> <p>Explore options for connecting and engaging with Northern Ireland’s Youth Parliament so that the voices of young people can feed more regularly into a new DfE Careers Service design and delivery model.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Adults and young people in communities e.g. FE, HE, vocational training, other community/third sector providers including City Deals and local Labour Market Partnerships</i>			
Advocate and broker new work opportunities for under-represented groups in the labour market.	<p>Rec: 11 – DfE Careers Advisers should work in partnership with employers, enterprise hubs, the DfC and key community strategic partners to ensure that those with disabilities, health problems, caring responsibilities, people with low qualifications and older people are fully supported with professional career guidance to help achieve their full potential and contribute to NI economy.</p> <p>Employers should embrace the flexibility required to access these untapped labour reserves, in line with the Skills Barometer 2021 recommendations (p.51).</p>	<i>High</i>	<p>Actively promote career guidance support to all those looking to upskill to improve their chances of securing, retaining or progressing in employment. Supporting the working age population to develop skills in demand should be a key focus.</p> <p>Limit rises in long-term unemployment, by building on the Department for Communities' Work Ready Employment Services programme and fast tracking previously furloughed workers into DfE career guidance support.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Employers, professional bodies, trade unions and Careers Advisory Forum</i>			
Partners in the careers eco-system supporting the talent pipeline for micro-and small-medium-sized employers and entrepreneurs, as well as large companies.	<p>Rec: 12 – The Careers Advisory Forum, supported by DfE and its strategic partners should host an employers, education, professional bodies, and trade unions' formal event to jointly review and discuss UK and international exemplars of careers, employability, and enterprise initiatives.</p> <p>The Careers Advisory Forum should conduct an independent review of the implementation of the agreed priorities and actions by 1st June 2023, in line with the research recommendations.</p>	<i>High-Medium</i>	<p>Review and prioritise key thematic areas for further development within the careers ecosystem e.g. the New Brunswick, Canada Virtual 'Centres of Excellence' that focus on sector-specific online experiential learning, an all-age careers portal, virtual reality, AI and gaming, multi-agency one stop centres, CPD systems of support, etc.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Professionalisation within Northern Ireland's careers ecosystem</i>			
Careers Adviser 'specialisms' rather than 'generic'.	<p>Rec: 13 – The DfE should re-introduce specialist Careers Advisers bringing more focused expertise, specialist knowledge and agility to respond to the 10X Economy goals, employer, education, other local community provider and digital requirements. It should further upskill and train Careers Advisers in use of digital technology applied in careers practice e.g. the metaverse, virtual reality, gamification, chat bots, social media, etc.</p> <p>The DfE should examine closely with the UK Career Development Institute's (CDI) the Careers Adviser apprenticeship pathway and qualification to help attract new recruits to the Service i.e., recruit some apprentices who will bring diversity and social inclusion into the workforce.</p>	<i>Medium</i>	Strengthen the capacity and expertise of Careers Advisers and build in new channels for sharing specialist knowledge within DfE.
Careers education, career guidance and employability training, and quality standards are inconsistent between DfE, DE, EA, ETI, CCEA and DfC.	<p>Rec: 14 – DfE, DE supported by the CAF and key strategic partners should explore options for introducing a requirement for shared careers education, career guidance and employability continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, including the formation of a new NI Careers and Lifelong Learning Academy.</p>	<i>Medium</i>	<p>Include all CAF organisations, particularly community and voluntary agencies, to explore ways of breaking down existing barriers to joint CPD.</p> <p>Explore options for strengthening initial teacher training programmes in Northern Ireland's universities to include careers education and career guidance theory, research and best practice, similar to best practice in the North-East of England and further afield.</p> <p>Focus on careers innovation and more data driven approaches, including Masters' and PhD research scholarships similar to arrangements in Scotland, that inform and influence the strengthening of the careers eco-system.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Professionalisation within Northern Ireland's careers eco-system</i>			
A Careers Strategy and Career Guidance Framework.	Rec: 15 – Refresh the existing Careers Strategy and replace this with a Career Guidance Framework agreed between DfE as policy lead, DE and DfC which sets out the strategic aim, policy commitments, principles and expected outcomes of the all-age, future proof careers guidance system to ensure the Northern Ireland Talent Economy and world-class all-age career guidance supports the national economy and creates a more hopeful and prosperous future for all citizens of Northern Ireland.	<i>High</i>	Examine all options as part of a strategic review for a new Career Guidance and Careers Education vision set beyond 2023 for the future positioning of careers education and career guidance each uniquely placed to support the nation's economic recovery and the people of Northern Ireland in being able to access an all-age world-class cost-effective resource.

Northern Ireland has a unique opportunity to change the current careers education and career guidance system radically for future generations. Largely all the component parts of the system sit within central government control. With agreement at a strategic, political and policy level – careers guidance can be placed closer to where people need it – in schools, FE, HE and in many other local community settings – supported by an all-age modernised world-class national careers portal.

2021 has been a year - not just a moment - of incredible change. Northern Ireland is now in a period of major transformation. By enabling people of all ages to access self-help, brief-assisted and professional expert careers support, when and where they need it, tailored to their specific needs and individual circumstances, this will help significantly improve education, social, wellbeing and economic outcomes. Those in the careers ecosystem have a unique opportunity to take collective action based on these recommendations. A final remark from an employer:

“We’re a small and talented nation with people and skills as our biggest asset for economic recovery. I truly believe if we all come together collectively, we can position Northern Ireland as offering world-class careers support to young people and adults. Let the work begin and let’s all aim high!”

Main Report

1. Introduction

1.1 The Review of the Skills System in Northern Ireland carried out by the OECD (2019 - 2020) set out the nation's skills performance from an international perspective. It noted Northern Ireland (NI) had made significant progress in strengthening its skills and economic performance. Since then, the pandemic has reversed much of this positive performance. The implications of Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol agreement are still emerging and have uncertain economic and social consequences. There are a whole new range of challenges for the skills system.

1.2 Career guidance is a major lever to improve individual career choice and to help reduce skills imbalances. A strong international evidence-base supports this assertion. The OECD also noted career guidance and education in Northern Ireland could be better co-ordinated and targeted to reduce mismatches in the labour market. A key recommendation was "to complement current reforms to career guidance provision across all providers, by developing clear, common, transparent and accountable quality standards." (Rec. 1.1)

"Career guidance describes the services which help people of any age to manage their careers and to make the educational, training and occupational choices that are right for them. It helps people to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications, skills and talents – and to relate this knowledge about who they are to who they might become within the labour market." (OECD et al, 2019 and 2020³)

The right to access careers guidance is now enshrined in statute; a clause in the Employment Bill 2016 places a duty on the Department for the Economy (DfE) to provide impartial careers guidance. Schools in NI are legally required to provide details of the steps taken in relation to careers education, including the provision of careers guidance, in the annual report from the Board of Governors to parents. (Refer to Appendix 1: DE & DfE Self-Evaluation Report Preparing for Success 2015-2020 October 2021, pp. 4-11)

1.3 In mid-November 2021, the Economy Minister, Gordon Lyons, announced an independent external review into the delivery of career guidance. The Department for the Economy (DfE) currently provides an all-age careers information, advice, and guidance service designed to help individuals make choices about their career paths. DMH Associates, led by Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE, undertook research from mid-November 2021 – early March 2022 examining the current all-age DfE career guidance offer situated within a wider careers ecosystem that operates across Northern Ireland and further afield.

There is clear recognition that the DfE's Careers Service simply cannot deliver the level of personalised, one-to-one support that many thousands of young people, adults and employers might want and expect. Nonetheless, there are strong foundations to build upon, with strategic partners across Northern Ireland each playing their unique part.

This research is timely, as in line with OECD recommendations, the Careers Service will collaborate with other Departments and representatives in the Careers system in 2022 to develop a set of common quality standards to define and evaluate the desired outcomes from a successful system of career guidance provision. This is necessary as currently there are quality indicators for schools and different DfE guidance and standards for careers managers and advisers.

1.4 Aim and objectives

To make recommendations to improve the targeting, timeliness, effectiveness, and efficiency of all-age career guidance in Northern Ireland.

The five key objectives:

- Evaluate current service delivery, funding, service offers and performance across a range of stakeholders – using a combination of desk research, online surveys and focus groups: schools, colleges, vocational education and training providers, employers and dfe careers service staff including trade union representatives;
- Undertake desk research and telephone interviews to review and make recommendations to improve the timeliness, effectiveness, and efficiency of career interventions to deliver against the expectation of stakeholders, service users and the policy intent;
- Review and research targeting of career services and identify any gaps in service provision;
- Draw on international exemplars of good and/or interesting careers policies and practices for benchmarking purposes to inform future developments and priorities; and
- Produce a series of recommendations to inform the operating model going forward for presentation to the Minister and Careers Advisory Forum.

Over the next 2 years the Department for the Economy is focused on delivering 5 key priorities:

1. Development of a new online Careers Portal, providing a responsive information hub, supported by a targeted advertising campaign.
- 2. Explore the timing and mode for career guidance provision in schools.**
- 3. Review targeting to ensure ‘the Service’ maximises the value of career guidance to those who need it most.**
4. Continue to build collaborative working partners in the Department of Education and Department for Communities to build a cohesive and flexible careers ecosystem that provides tailored, evidence informed career guidance at every life decision point.
5. Build on the careers partnership model more widely to increase reach.

Priorities 2 and 3 highlighted above have been taken forward through this independent external review. The findings will provide the building blocks and research which will shape and inform the policy intent for careers delivery over the next 5-10 years.

1.5 A total of 4,117 individuals and organisations from a wide range of organisations, including DfE staff and trade union representatives, contributed to the research. An initial meeting was held with the Careers Advisory Forum (CAF) in November 2021, followed by an online meeting with Minister Lyons in early February 2022, with further consultations with the CAF and Civil Service trade union representatives.

1.6 Methodology

To inform and develop a robust evidence-base, the research team:

- Facilitated online meetings with 79 careers service staff at all levels and trade union representatives, with additional contributions received to a confidential staff online survey (x43) and evidence report submitted by the trade union in response to a formal 'call for evidence'.
- Conducted four online surveys and analysed responses from: young people aged 14-19 (2,511); parents/carers (992), schools and colleges (154) and adults 18+ (215). This was further supplemented by templates provided to volunteer scribes to support those vulnerable young people and adults who were unable to complete online surveys.
- Launched 'have your say: call for evidence' and received 57 formal responses from a wide variety of education, industry and community sector organisations.
- Undertook 27 follow-up telephone interviews with school and college headteachers, principals, university careers and employability leads, further college careers group, and health trust representatives.
- Hosted a series of online group meetings with 70 practitioners and managers from outside of the careers service including employers, employer bodies, vocational education and training providers, local councils, community/voluntary sector organisations, private sector careers and apprenticeship providers.
- Facilitated online group sessions with 12 young people and adults who had experience of the Care and/or Youth Justice System. In addition, we met with young adults on vocational and/or community programmes in the Belfast, North Down and L' Derry areas.

Chris Percy (Senior Associate & Economist) led on a financial analysis of the DfE's Careers Service working closely with the Careers Service operational planning and finance team, Ryan Hogg (Associate & Economist) and Deirdre Hughes. High-level comparisons with Wales and Scotland informed and supported reflections on Northern Ireland's approach to career guidance. England was excluded from this comparison, since its marketised approach to career guidance is structurally different from the government delivery body approach chosen in the other UK nations.

A unit cost analysis was completed which estimates the actual historical costs to deliver services in the last three financial years, based on current levels of demand and service delivery model. This indicates that, for example, guidance interventions have typically cost £100 on average to deliver per attendee, both for clients in education and in the labour market. Class talks, with 25 individuals in a room, cost an average of £4 per attendee. Workshop sessions were held with senior operational colleagues to discuss possible archetypal blends of remote and group guidance for lower secondary education, to inform cost estimates and recommendations in the final report.

This report

Following the introduction, the report is set out in six chapters:

- **Section 2:** Understanding the Wider Context sets out the Northern Ireland policy context, 10X Economy ambition, drivers for change and seven big challenges. It highlights the growing importance of career guidance, skills, lifelong learning, innovation, and entrepreneurialism to support the economy. Career guidance in Northern Ireland contributes and supports a range of policy goals in education, employment and wider social welfare systems.
- **Section 3:** The Career Guidance Ecosystem is outlined followed by a more detailed review of the DfE funded Careers Service – its purpose, funding, delivery model, target groups and recent performance. We consider how the Service works with a broad customer base in a diverse education, skills and employment landscape. A summary of key strengths and areas for improvement are outlined, drawing mainly on internal staff and trade union representative feedback. External stakeholder feedback is captured in subsequent chapters.
- **Section 4:** Citizens’ perspectives include a brief overview of key headlines from citizens, followed by more detailed analysis of findings from the online surveys, telephone and focus groups, including young people aged 14-18, headteachers /principals/teachers/careers co-ordinators in schools; further education (FE) colleges, parents/carers and adults 18+ in work, those unemployed, or participating in vocational training. In addition, an overview of feedback from a formal Call for Evidence is provided including contributions from education and sector specific bodies, as well as industry specialists, private, public and third sector organisations.
- **Section 5:** The Targeting of Career Services explores options and identifies gaps in service provision. We also signpost to UK and international exemplars of good and/or interesting careers policies and practices for benchmarking. The DFE is interested in concrete, operational ideas that might emerge from good practice, which can then be adapted to the local context and tested for feasibility.
- **Section 6:** A financial analysis of the Careers Service provides robust data to inform expenditure and service design and delivery going forward.
- **Section 7:** The Future of Career Guidance Delivery in NI draws together six key challenges and makes 15 key recommendations for consideration by the Minister for the Economy, the Careers Advisory Forum and strategic partners.

2. Understanding the Wider Context

This chapter sets out the Northern Ireland policy context, 10X Economy ambition, drivers for change and seven big challenges. It highlights the growing importance of career guidance, skills, lifelong learning, innovation, and entrepreneurialism to support the economy. Career guidance in Northern Ireland contributes and supports a range of policy goals in education, employment and wider social welfare systems.

2.1 This research is situated within the context of a Programme of Government (2020) '[A New Decade: A New Approach](#)'⁴ and '10X Economy - an economic vision for a decade of innovation' (DfE, 2021)⁵ which sets out an ambition that will deliver a ten times better economy with benefits for all Northern Ireland citizens. It is predicated on there being a window of opportunity to profoundly reshape the economy in the current period of exceptional turbulence. In an economy with limited natural resource, the skills and talents of the people in Northern Ireland must be harnessed for economic, social and cultural prosperity. This is a key driver for the Department for the Economy (DFE) in Northern Ireland.

2.2 A recent consultation on Northern Ireland's new Skills Strategy 'Skills for a 10X Economy'⁶ set out the long-term vision for skills development aligned with the national economic ambition. Key sectors are made explicit, entrepreneurship and enterprise underpin Northern Ireland's 10X priority clusters and core areas of strength and are key to maximising innovation and job creation. There is a strong focus on:

- A culture of lifelong learning;
- Innovation and entrepreneurialism;
- A digital spine supporting an agile and strong talent pipeline supporting the northern ireland economy;
- Greater inclusion, participation, upskilling and reskilling, particularly for those most disadvantaged; and
- Finding new ways to connect with people of all ages and abilities to meet new skills requirements.

2.3 A new [Northern Ireland Skills Strategy](#) led by the DfE and 14-19 Review paper, led by the Department of Education (DE), are due to be published shortly. An [Independent Review of Education](#)⁷ is currently underway with careers advice, curriculum training and apprenticeships featuring in the 'Terms of Reference' (p.2). Good career guidance complements and supports careers education and career-related learning (CRL) in Northern Ireland's schools and colleges. Careers education in post-primary NI schools is externally assessed by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) as part of the school inspection process. It does not currently inspect career guidance. Careers education:

“...includes taught timetabled provision which includes meaningful opportunities for progressive personal career planning; realistic and meaningful cross curricular opportunities for development of employability skills; and opportunities for planned and relevant work-related learning experience.” ([Preparing for Success, 2016](#), p. 13).⁸

The statutory curriculum in post-primary schools has at its centre, [‘Learning for Life and Work’ \(LLW\)](#).⁹ This Area of Learning consists of: - Education for Employability; - Home Economics (at Key Stage 3); - Local and Global Citizenship; and - Personal Development embedded within an Entitlement Framework in all post-primary schools (CCEA, 2021). Every post-primary school in Northern Ireland is a member of an Area Learning Community (ALC). ALCs provide a mechanism within which schools come together to plan the curriculum they offer on an area basis. In September 2019 the Education Authority (EA) published new arrangements which schools should follow in relation to work experience placements¹⁰. Schools have responsibility to ensure the appropriateness of the placement, the health and safety of all pupils, parental consent, and the presence of employers’ liability cover and consent.

2.4 The DE Children and Young People’s Strategy (2020)¹¹ sets out a strategic framework for improving the wellbeing of children and young people in Northern Ireland. It outlines how all government departments, agencies and those who provide children’s services will work together to deliver better outcomes and links directly to the draft Programme for Government outcomes. The Department for Communities and Local Council led City and Growth Deal partnerships¹² are moving forward together with new plans for local labour market partnerships (LMPs), complementing and including career, employability and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) initiatives embedded in local communities.

2.5 Over the next few years, Northern Ireland will benefit from a package of investment from four City and Growth Deals. The combined funding from the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government will total £1.3bn, which will be complemented by private sector and other sources of funding. This will help create centres of excellence in key growth areas. They will provide opportunities for businesses, located both within and outside of Northern Ireland, to collaborate and develop products, services and the infra-structure for ‘test and learn environments, including careers, employability, social inclusion and enterprise.

2.6 Enterprise hubs are also in operation at a local and regional level. The 6 Further Education (FE) colleges in Northern Ireland collaborate through the Entrepreneurship Hub, led by Northern Regional College, to promote best practice in this field across all colleges, thereby ensuring that the curriculum delivered is consistent, current and responsive to the needs and demands of the economy, improving economic development and performance. The aim of the Hub is to highlight entrepreneurship as a viable career pathway for FE students, by promoting the possibilities that lie ahead - [Careers Service - Careers Occupational Information Unit Bulletin Entrepreneurship \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](#). The FE and university sectors perform a vitally important role to meet the needs of a fast-changing economy and address the aspirations of thousands of young people and adults. They have invested in careers and employability in-house services for both students and employers.

2.7 Employability Northern Ireland (ENI) led by the Department for Communities (DfC) was established in 2020 to design, procure and implement a fresh suite of employability provisions/initiatives to support people into meaningful employment. Local Labour Market Partnerships (LMP's) is a key design strand of ENI building collaborative, multi-agency partnerships to improve employability outcomes. The model is still developing but includes establishing a single regional partnership and 11 local partnerships geographically based within existing Council boundaries. A LMP Co-Design group includes key stakeholders, local Councils and Government Departments, including the DfE's Careers Service. Development of the LMP model has already helped to identify collaborative working opportunities and potential joint funding opportunities between Government Departments.

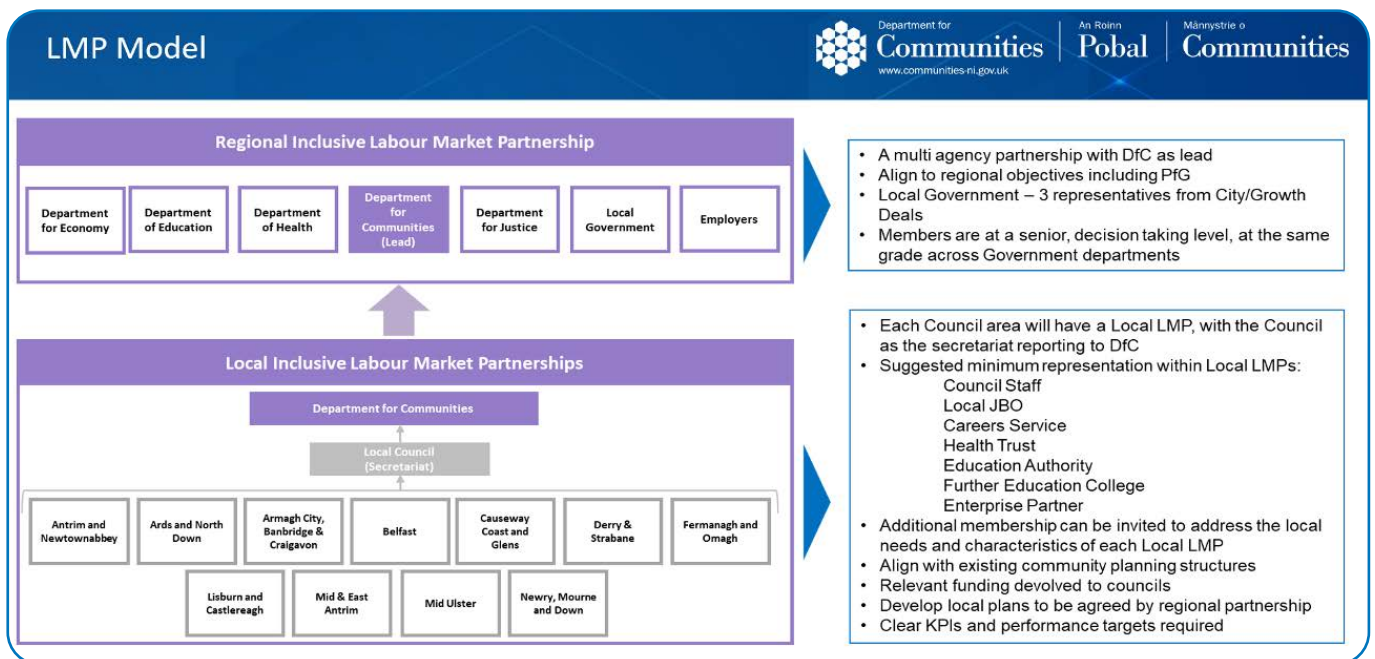


Figure 1: LMP Model

The Institute for Employment Studies (2021) reviewed, on behalf of the DfC, support to long-term unemployed (LTU) people in Northern Ireland. A key recommendation was local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships driven through the local councils and also the development of a ‘Gateway’ approach for engaging and advising those long-term unemployed on the steps they can take to get jobs, change careers, etc. For example, Belfast City Council, as part of the Partnership, are developing a Gateway for the City.

Local LMP Interim Action Plans will be implemented in 2021/23 to enable response to the impact of the ongoing pandemic. The formal LMP model is anticipated to proceed from 2023/24 onwards. Further implementation of the LMP model from 2022/23 onwards is dependent upon funding being available. The NI Executive is currently giving some consideration to the possibility of a multi-year budget. Funding from other sources is being explored including potential for funding from other Government Departments. In view of this, the DfE has a strategic opportunity to embed its careers guidance services in local LMPs offering a menu of all-age career guidance services, alongside other education, health, employability, and community organisations.

- Implementation of Local LMP Action Plans is anticipated to assist in achieving Community Planning outcomes and other strategic objectives (i.e.city/growth deals).
- Partnership model assists in building relationships within the employability/skills ecosystem locally and help to avoid duplication of services.
- Working collaboratively should ultimately help deliver a clearer and more efficient service for citizens.
- Councils will be pivotal in continuing work with all local stakeholders in developing an agreement of local Interim Action plans for 2021/23.
- Potential to escalate issues identified through Strategic Assessment – careers guidance and advice as a significant issue in early development process. (DfC, 2021).

2.8 The careers strategy, [Preparing for success 2015-20](#), jointly agreed between the [Department for the Economy](#) (formerly, Department for Employment and Learning) and the [Department of Education](#), was published in March 2016.

A ministerial appointed Careers Advisory Forum was established to advise both the Department for the Economy and the Department of Education on current and future Careers provision in the context of the refreshed Careers Strategy, '*Preparing for Success 2015-2020*'. The Forum comprises representatives from education, business, and other key stakeholders including parents and the community and voluntary sector. It held its inaugural meeting on 12th November 2015 and provides stakeholders with a platform to voice their opinions on the 'careers ecosystem'. The role of the Careers Advisory Forum is to:

- a) Advise both Departments on current and future Careers provision in the context of the refreshed Careers Strategy 2015-2020;
- b) Facilitate system level engagement between employers, educators and other key stakeholders, including parents, to support them in their advisory role; and
- c) Support local level stakeholder involvement with service users and the education and business sectors.

Of critical importance is finding effective ways to help ensure citizens of all ages have access to the career guidance services they need on a lifelong basis and to be prepared and excited about their future.

“Never before in human history has career guidance been more important.”
 (Dr Anthony Mann, Senior Policy Adviser, OECD Education and Skills Directorate)

2.9 The NI Skills Barometer (UUEPC 2021)¹³ indicates that in a high growth scenario the NI economy is expected to return to pre-pandemic levels of employment during 2022, supported by strong demand for talent and labour. The figure below is an extract from the latest report in which a high growth scenario shows anticipated growth occupations. The disruption associated with the pandemic has highlighted the importance of careers education, career guidance and lifelong learning.

“Collaboratively the education system, employers and policy makers must work to develop a system that sufficiently prepares talented young people to prosper within the world of work” (p. 7).

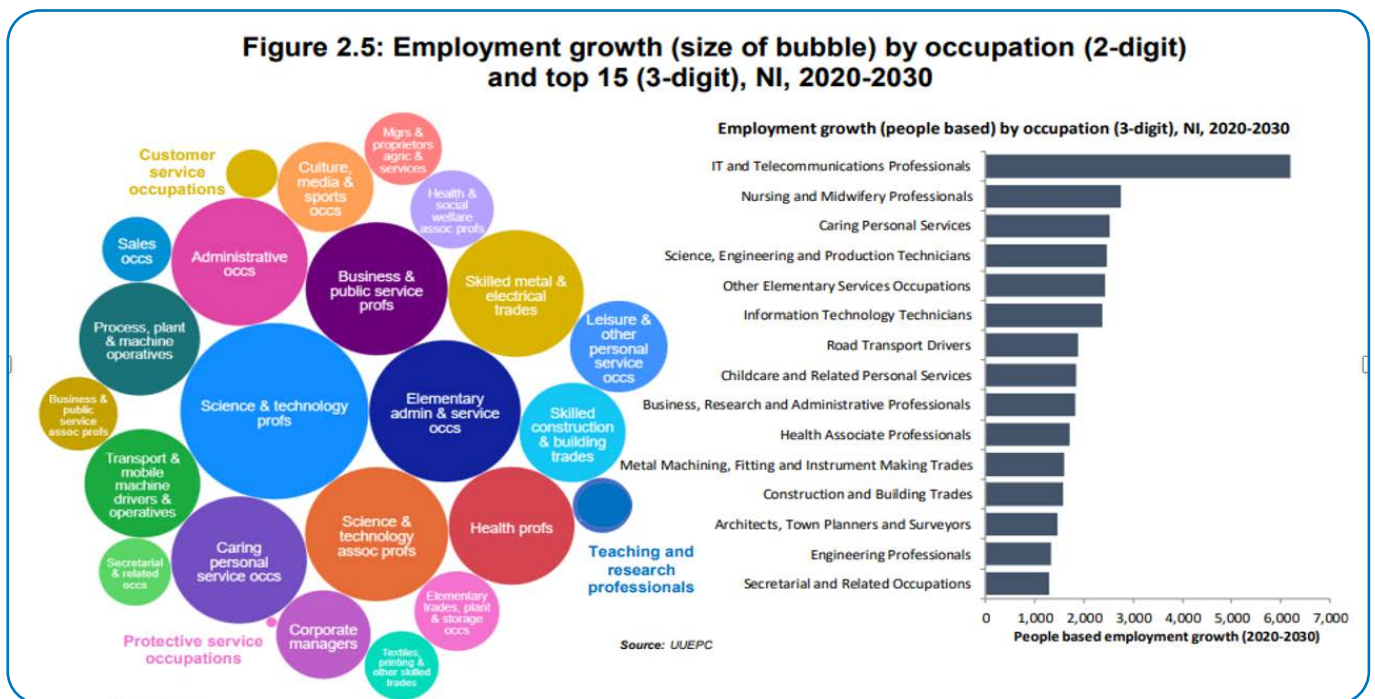


Figure 2: Extract from report *The NI Skills Barometer (UUEPC 2021)*

Sectors and occupations do not necessarily have to be growing rapidly in order to provide a plentiful supply of career opportunities. Careers education and career guidance needs to communicate this message clearly to encourage students to broaden their options and not to close down opportunities too soon.

Skills projections and skills shortages interact with factors like social attitudes towards technology, wages, the mobility of workers between countries, and macro-economic developments will inevitably shape highly divergent futures for industry and local communities. Latest Skills Barometer data (op. cit) shows that NI has the lowest proportion of people in employment receiving job-related education or training of any UK region (p.35). Career guidance performs a key role in both motivating and supporting both young people and adults in work, out of work, and in the gig economy to become lifelong learners.

Employers need to be able to attract the right talent for their businesses to maintain their competitive edge. Individuals need to be able to fulfil their potential with barriers removed to progression. There is a skills supply and demand mismatch with a large and growing gap between the skills needs of employers and the skills and aspirations of individuals.

Drivers for change

2.10 Northern Ireland has experienced two once-in-a-lifetime shocks that have occurred simultaneously, alongside ongoing megatrends in life choices, education and work that are changing society for everyone. Like young people, adults changing careers either by choice or through redundancy need help to understand the opportunities available in the current and future labour market. They need and want to know how their individual talents, skills and experience could be further developed to ensure they benefit from new opportunities.



The pandemic

The pandemic has impacted on all aspects of societal wellbeing. Whilst the negative impacts of the pandemic are well known, there are now more job opportunities and more people working now than prior to the pandemic. However, Skills Barometer figures show adult under-employment is an issue, with over 10% of those aged 16-24 seeking to increase their working hours.



Brexit and the NI protocol

A recent survey of firms in Northern Ireland, conducted by Manufacturing NI, found that the availability of workers, rather than Brexit and the Northern Ireland protocol, was the most pressing issue for most businesses. NIESR forecasts that the output of the local economy will be 1.5% above its pre-pandemic level by the end of this year.



Demographics

Today’s children and young people are tomorrow’s adults driving the future economy and societal wellbeing. The demographics of the nation’s population have been shifting, placing growing demands on the education, careers and skills system. There is a major requirement to stem the flow leaving Northern Ireland and harness all the talent and skills available.



A changing labour market and nature of work

Skills shortages affect several key sectors. Labour market intelligence must be able to reach more people. There is growing evidence of people attempting to change the way they work to better control and direct their own work hours. Alongside this, there is an urgent need to increase innovation and productivity in the workforce. Career is by its nature uncertain. There are no guarantees that entry to an organisation or profession will translate into stability in the long-term.



Education Reform

There is an opportunity to reframe and refocus educational experience for students towards a more holistic ‘career readiness’ approach. From learning individual subjects and passing exams to becoming more ‘life ready’ through personalised, collaborative experiential learning with regular exposure to and experience of a changing in the world of work.



Growing poverty and inequality

With persistent poverty and other forms of disadvantage, the current system inadvertently produces unequal outcomes. Also, prices are not only rising mostly in areas where low-income households spend a disproportionately high amount of their income (fuel and food), but also on essential items. This has significant social and or health-related consequences. Finding opportunities has never been more important.



Industry 4.0

Many jobs and people's lives are being transformed by new forms of disruptive and social technology. New jobs, skills requirements, mooted 'metaverse' workplaces, AI and machine learning advances are emerging. Some skillsets are 'at risk' of becoming obsolete. Digital skills are essential, regardless of circumstance. Steps are needed to address the 'digital divide'. Technology can support learning in diverse settings and be available 24:7 responsive to career exploration and discovery. However, human support is also necessary, particularly to those most in need.



Climate change

A new Bill in Stormont may result in new legislation to introduce a 2050 net zero target for Northern Ireland, along with an independent Climate Change Commissioner's office. The transition to a green economy requires a workforce with the right skills. This includes not only skills in the low carbon and environmental goods and services sector, but also those needed to help all businesses use natural resources efficiently and sustainably and to be resilient to climate change.

These drivers demand transformation and a road map for recovery and, in many cases a departure from what has gone before. There is a major opportunity to focus on strengthening the talent economy in Northern Ireland, underpinned by a high-quality careers ecosystem. This should inform, support, and connect citizens of all ages and abilities to relevant and sustainable learning and work opportunities on a lifelong basis.

"Young people suffer disproportionately in any recession and that initiated by the COVID19 pandemic promises to be no exception. Lacking useful work experience, information and contacts, young people struggle to compete for available employment" (OECD, 2021, p.8).¹⁴

2.11 The pandemic has underscored the importance of career guidance services. As school budgets and resources remain squeezed crucial 'soft' elements of provision (which aren't soft at all but vital) such as career education, employability skills and career guidance get pushed further down the priorities listing. The children who suffer most and miss out are again those who do not have the home support or finance to make up the shortfalls.

2.12 Archer, et. al. (March 2021)¹⁵ found that not all schools provide a “balanced view of all post-16 options” with less focus on TVET routes. Therefore, the independence of careers advisers and the breadth of their advice is important. CfE Research, 2017¹⁶ reports:

“Most teachers are well rehearsed in what to do when it comes to applying to uni, but few really know about apprenticeships and work opportunities. If you’re going to uni that’s fine, but what about everyone else? I had to be strong and stay determined with my decision not to follow everyone else.” (Apprentice) p.56.

2.13 The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that across OECD countries:

- Career uncertainty has increased by 81% since 2000;
- One-third of disadvantaged students have career and education plans that are misaligned and 28% possess the ability, but do not aspire to tertiary education; and
- Young people express an aspiration expecting to work in only one of ten jobs, a proportion rising to more than 70% in many countries.

This data also shows young people commonly possess a distorted view of the labour market heavily shaped by social background, gender and migrant status. Further OECD research ([Career Readiness, 2021](#)) shows better than anticipated adult employment outcomes are statistically connected to (i) what teenagers think about their futures in work, (ii) the extent to which they explore potential futures, and (iii) whether they gain workplace experience while still in school.

“From the mid-2030s, workers in their 20s will have lower skills than they would otherwise have. For the next 50 years, this has the potential to affect a quarter of the entire workforce and disadvantaged pupils are particularly at risk of falling into poverty.” (RSA Delve Initiative, 2020, para 7)¹⁷

2.14 The Princes Trust Youth Index (January 2021)¹⁸, conducted by YouGov, gauges young people’s happiness and confidence levels across a range of areas, from their working life to their physical and mental health. The research suggests that young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are even more likely to feel “unable to cope with life” and more likely to be experiencing anxiety. The report also reveals that 23% of young people in Northern Ireland do not feel confident about their future work. 65 per cent of NEETs agree that the longer they are jobless, the worse they feel about themselves. Career guidance can help support and ameliorate this effect working closely with local community partner agencies.

“The need for career guidance is further accentuated by growing evidence that teenage expectations of work are very often narrow, confused and highly shaped by social background.” (OECD, 2021)

2.15 Many adults have lost their jobs during the pandemic and require assistance to better understand career options in a changing world. At a time like this, professional career guidance can be an essential support in navigating a constantly evolving labour market and facilitating re-employment by identifying suitable new job opportunities and proposing relevant training.

2.16 The most vulnerable adults are frequently the least supported by career guidance. As the pandemic has demonstrated, individuals working in low income and low skilled occupations tend to have lower job security. Adults working informally, including those in charge of household domestic work, including carers, are commonly presented with greater challenges in accessing the information and support that can enable progression into decent work.

2.17 Digital career guidance services have expanded in Northern Ireland and in other parts of the world. However, experience shows that more often the most vulnerable groups have had difficulties in accessing digital equipment and the internet, and often lack the skills needed to benefit from digital services.

2.18 More than ever, government and employers expect all individuals to take responsibility for their own education and training, but workers can only make good decisions about investments in learning, education and training if they have access to reliable information and support which enable them to develop career adaptability skills (Hughes et al, 2019).¹⁹

2.19 Career guidance enables reskilling and upskilling. It is especially important to workers needing to move within the labour market and to people who have migrated between countries and who want to have their skills validated. With labour markets restructuring, it is essential that people in work, as well as adults seeking work, have easy access to good quality guidance.

“The economy benefits from supporting disadvantaged jobseekers into sustainable employment through reduced reliance on government welfare, decreased public spending on services, and increased tax revenue and consumer spending. Having accessible ‘places and spaces’ that promote career guidance to young people and adults can help overcome many barriers to progression in learning and work.” (Hughes & Percy, In Press)²⁰

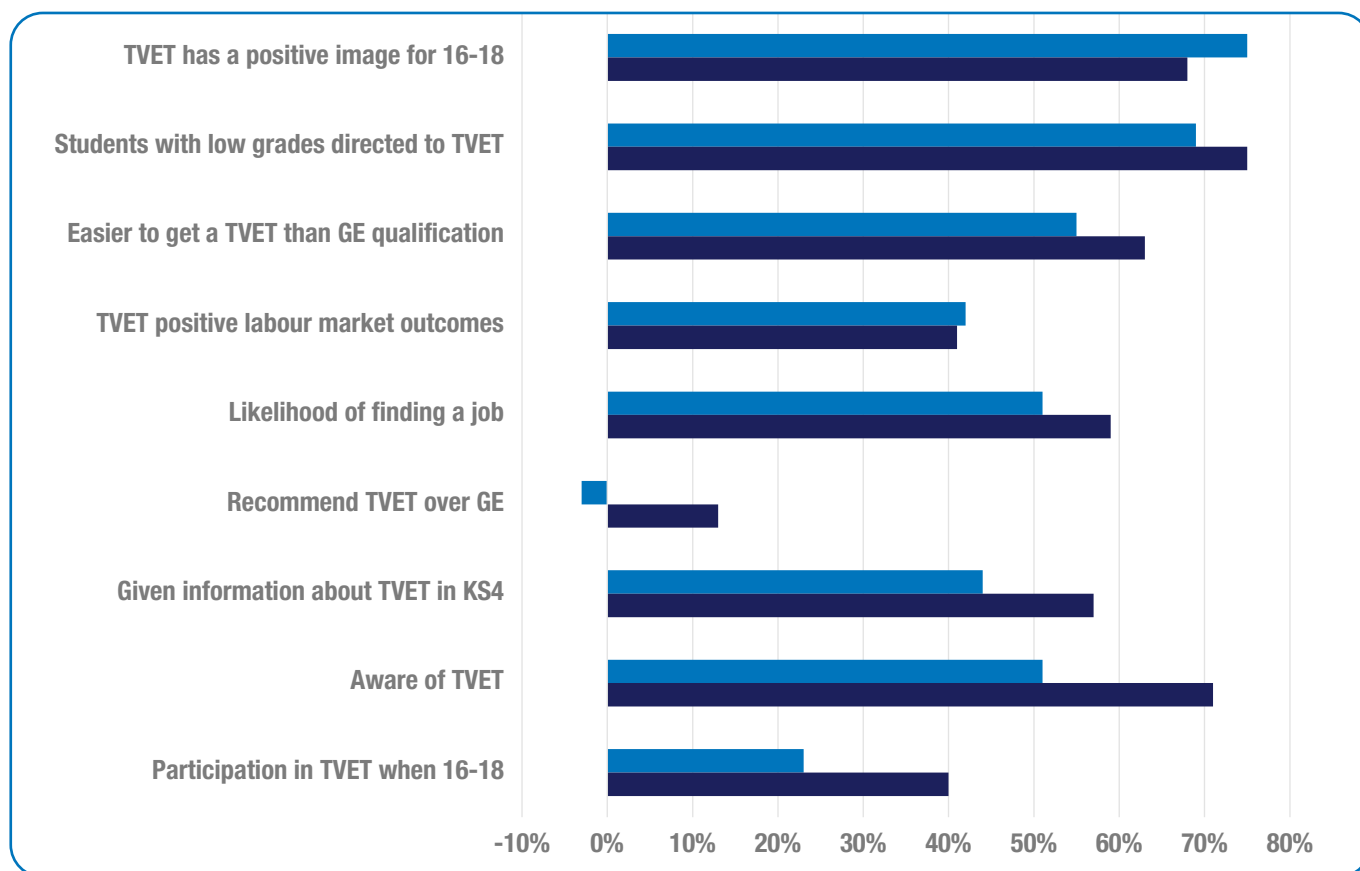


Figure 3: UK adult's views on technical vocational education and training compared to EU-28 countries
 Source: Figure based on data in Cedefop (2017)²¹. Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training.

2.20 When comparing Northern Ireland and Denmark (both countries with a similar lack of parity between vocational and general education), Kersh and Juul (2015) found that in Denmark employers hold vocational education in higher esteem. It was suggested that this was because in Denmark students are paid a higher wage by employers, and businesses are more involved in decision making and the day-to-day running of the programmes along with other social partners.

2.21 FE Colleges highlight barriers to engaging with young people and parents to promote the vocational and education and training (VET) options available on completion of Key Stage 4 and Post GCSE. The level of partnership working between schools and colleges has declined in recent years primarily as a result in the reduction in direct funding received by schools. FE and HE institutions in Northern Ireland are seeking a new partnership approach with all post-primary schools.

“Work is currently underway between Colleges and other Higher Education Institutions to develop a single portal to promote all higher education options available in Northern Ireland. Building on the development of microsites with QUB and Ulster University, Colleges are committed to playing their role in the development of the portal thus providing parents and young people with access to a resource that explains the higher education options on offer including those delivered by FE Colleges.” (Submission to the Independent Review of Education, p 26).

SIX BIG CHALLENGES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Transformations are taking place in learning and work which require more frequent and more complex choices from individuals than ever before. Northern Ireland's talent pipeline is severely weakened by many individuals being inadequately prepared as part of their formal schooling to develop career readiness, digital and life skills. Citizens are competing for jobs and career openings not just with each other but with people across the UK and much of the rest of the world. To succeed, they need to be prepared – and are entitled to that support. Labour market opportunities, education and training pathways, destinations are changing at a rapid pace.
2. There is a long-standing concern in NI on the academic and technical vocational education and training divide. Attitudes, misconceptions, and myths surround academic and vocational learning pathways. There are concerns that any change will weaken educational standards, yet too many people are dropping out of the education system post-16 e.g., there is a serious decline in further education college entrants - “Overall enrolments have dropped by 42% from a combined total across the regional College of 9,090 in 2013-14 to 5,271 in 2018-19.” (Independent Review of Education Submission, p.24).
3. High levels of economic inactivity are resulting in widening and deep inequalities between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. For many vulnerable young people and adults, the pandemic has not only knocked their confidence and affected their motivation but has also created a distance between them and labour market opportunities. Skilled careers, employability and entrepreneurial professionals within multi-agencies, working more closely together deep in local communities, are needed to address this.
4. Public awareness of and access to high-quality all-age career guidance is low. The current system is viewed by many as ‘a schools only’ careers service which means adults are not benefitting fully from the services available to them. The current nidirect portal is generally perceived as “insufficiently inspiring” despite its rich content. Its full potential is restricted by the existing standardised website and constraints within the nidirect editorial style guide.
5. Many employers are frustrated with the current system of all-age careers support, particularly the schools approach. Many are unaware of the adult career guidance offer. Employers report they are often confused by the myriad of contacts they regularly receive. There are concerns about a ‘brain drain’ loss of individuals choosing to leave Northern Ireland to study and/or work in other parts of the UK (or further afield).
6. Northern Ireland has no formal training structure for careers education delivered by teachers. There is an immediate shortage of professionally trained and qualified careers advisers (with no postgraduate specialist career guidance pathways available in Northern Ireland) and shortfalls in continuous professional development (CPD) for those working with young people, adults, employers and parents in complementary education, careers, employability, and community development settings.

“Earlier this year, City & Guilds uncovered the serious impact of the pandemic on young people’s decisions about their future...many young people are still struggling to get good career guidance. Yet, most school pupils are keen and willing to invest their own time in career learning activities. It’s more important than ever that investments are made in career guidance that benefit directly this generation and help close the skills gaps and shortages faced by our national economy.” (City & Guilds, Group Director, 2021).

Northern Ireland needs a coherent all-age career guidance ecosystem that builds on individual’s skills, talents, and capabilities. It should be more joined up between and across agencies and promotion of opportunities across all economic sectors to help guide individuals’ expectations with opportunities available in the labour market.

3. The Careers Support Ecosystem in Northern Ireland

We provide a brief overview of the Careers Support Ecosystem, followed by a more detailed review of the DfE funded Careers Service – its purpose, funding, delivery model, target groups and recent performance. We consider how the Service works with a broad customer base in a diverse education, skills and employment landscape. A summary of key strengths and areas for improvement are outlined, drawing mainly on internal staff and trade union representative feedback. External stakeholder feedback is captured in subsequent chapters.

3.1 There are at least three distinct categories of differing types of careers support providers within the Career Guidance Ecosystem:

- Those organisations with **responsibility for strategic policy and/or inspection** within the career guidance, career education and/or employability landscape e.g., the Department for the Economy, the Department of Education, the Education Authority, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessments (CCEA), Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), the Department for Communities and Local Councils.
- Those organisations who have **a direct responsibility for careers support delivery** to young people and adults within the career guidance, career education and employability landscape e.g., schools, including 39 SEN and 16 independents (241), the DfE’s Careers Service, the further and higher education careers and employability services (x8), Job Centres and Jobs and Benefits Offices (36).
- Those organisations who **support or are directly/indirectly involved in career guidance, employability and enterprise initiatives.**

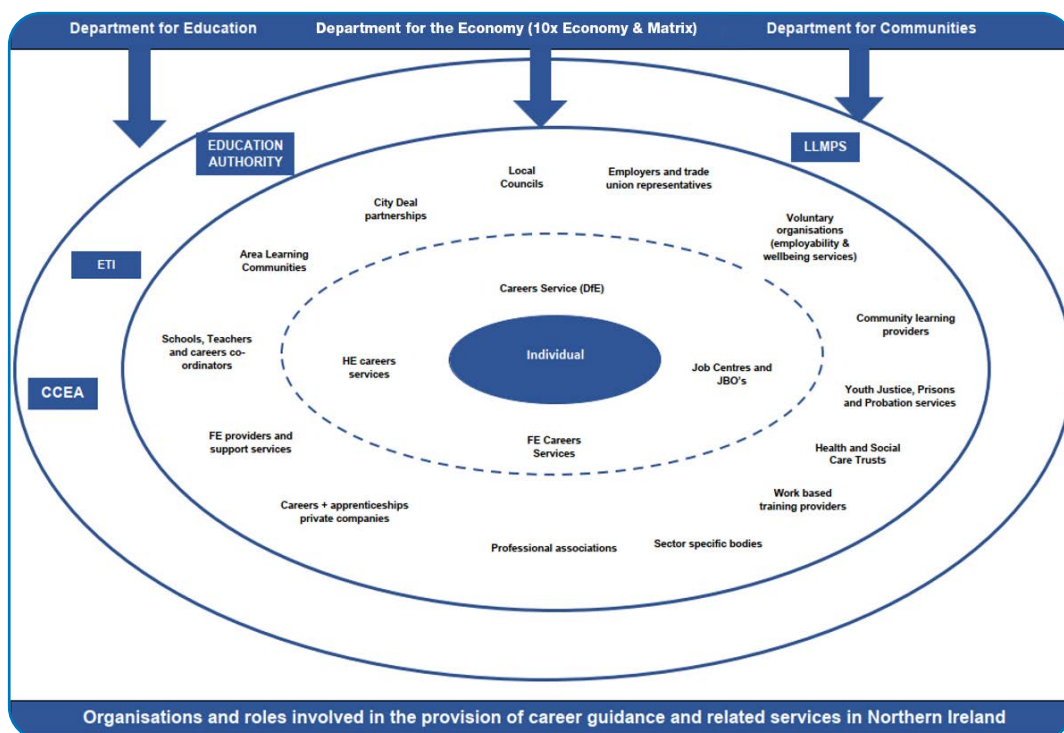


Figure 4: The Career Guidance Ecosystem

The Careers Service

3.2 The Careers Service has a current budget of £6m with circa 100 Careers Advisers employed as civil servants in the Department for the Economy. They are professionally trained, mainly at post-graduate level, who operate throughout all regions in Northern Ireland. Careers Advisers are required to undertake at least 20 hours of Continuous Professional Development as well as a minimum of six industry visits, 50% of which should be in growth areas per year. Civil Servant Executive and Administrative support workers provide invaluable support within the delivery model. It provides an impartial all-age careers information, advice and guidance service to promote employment, education and training opportunities. The Careers Service Delivery model is outlined below.

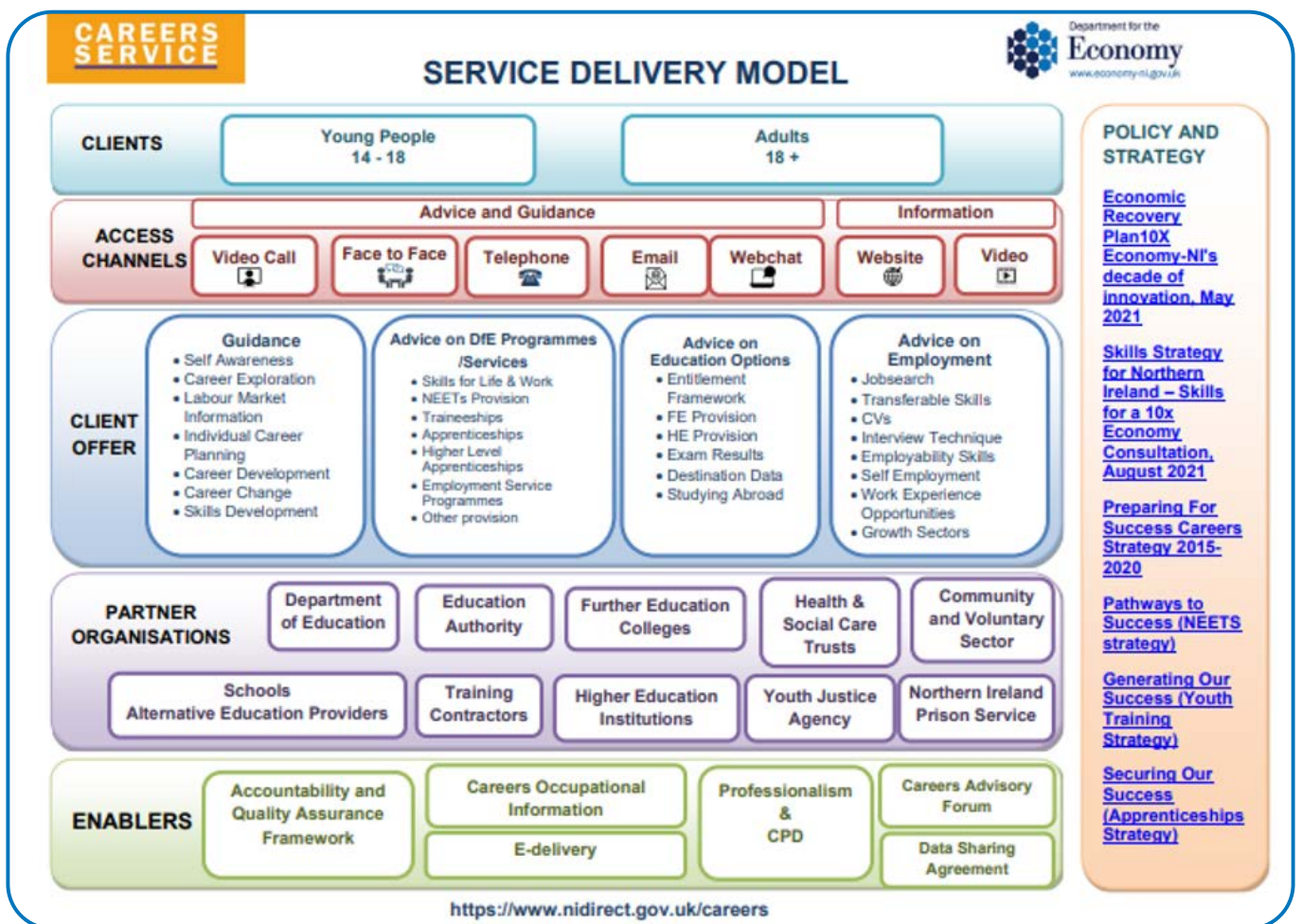


Figure 5: Service delivery model

3.3 Careers advisers currently work mainly (though not exclusively) with careers teachers in secondary and grammar schools, supporting students aged 14-19. In this context, schools act as 'gatekeepers' to careers service links with parents. Partnership Agreements are negotiated annually between Careers Service senior managers and headteachers/principals. Work with employers during the pandemic has been somewhat curtailed. A specialist DfE Careers Service 'Careers Occupational Information Unit' (COIU) produces high-quality Northern Ireland focused labour market bulletins and e-zines to ensure labour market intelligence and information (LMI) are readily available in schools, colleges and other community settings, including STEM Newsletters and other publications. This draws upon LMI data from DfE economists, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC), FE Curriculum Hubs and 10X Economy strategic partnerships (including other professional bodies that represent employer needs).

3.4 The primary operational target in the Careers Service is the under-18 age group, with Careers Adviser inputs in schools taking place mostly in Year 10, followed by one-to-one guidance interviews with the 15–16 year olds in Year 12, committing to important routes and choices in post-16 study. Careers advisers often also deliver class or group-based activities, but this is not typically formally required or formally structured as part of a guidance sequence.

It takes significant operational pressure and investment by advisers to reach Year 12 targets, with reluctance in some schools and difficulty reaching all students. In response to the targets, the Year 12 one-to-one interview is the primary focus. The targets are typically met, with some 95% or more of Year 12s having their compulsory guidance interview. A small number of Year 12 students have follow-up appointments, but follow-ups typically account for only around 10% of total Year 12 guidance interviews.

3.5 Careers Advisers also work in Job Centres, Jobs and Benefits Offices and within DfE 'stand-alone high-street premises' in Belfast and Londonderry. Since the start of the pandemic, footfall into premises has significantly reduced which is a common phenomenon across the world. Their work is also embedded in community and voluntary organisations, though not all. Figure 4 above provides insight to the types of organisations. Work in Further Education and Higher Education is limited as these institutions have their own specialist careers and employability services.

3.6 Current staffing arrangements are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Current staffing arrangements

Grade/Position	at 31 March 2019		at 31 March 2020		at 31 March 2021	
	SIP	FTE	SIP	FTE	SIP	FTE
Grade 7 (Head of Branch)	1	1.00	1	1.00	1	1.00
Deputy Principal	5	4.73	6	5.73	6	5.73
Careers Manager	13	12.20	13	12.14	13	12.16
Staff Officer	3	3.00	3	3.00	4	4.00
Careers Adviser	100	90.43	96	86.33	92	82.74
Executive Officer I	5	3.51	5	3.58	4	2.97
Executive Officer II	3	3.00	4	4.00	4	4.00
Administrative Officer	31	26.62	30	25.25	27	22.32
TOTAL	161	144.49	158	141.03	151	134.92

SIP = Staff in Post (headcount)

FTE = Full Time Equivalent

Costs available cover the full budget of the DfE Careers Service, including all frontline staff, all managers/administrative staff, as well as general administrative expenditure, premises overheads, and training budgets. The main category of costs excluded is the rental value equivalent of premises used, since facilities are primarily government buildings whose cost is not assigned to individual departments. Contributing activity by schools is also excluded, such as premises/facilities' costs for guidance that takes place on school premises or the cost of school staff time in supporting guidance. Since the analysis focuses on fiscal costs, the opportunity cost to individuals of participating is not analysed.

3.7 The summary budget figures are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Total budget (GBP)

	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21
Staffing	4,947,691	5,465,462	5,526,527
GAE	167,284	179,229	73,940
Careers SBRI – Capital Grant	0	102,006	133,018
CIAG spend [Project related spend: contracts, advertising, CPD/Training]	237,791	129,094	236,199
Total	5,352,767	5,875,791	5,969,684

3.8 A Quality Assurance Framework (ETI, 2022)²² is in place underpinned by the [matrix Standard](#)²³ to manage and monitor the quality of Careers Service delivery. The Careers Service Quality Improvement Group is responsible for embedding the culture of continuous improvement and managing and monitoring quality standards. The Careers Service achieved the matrix Standard in 2013 and achieved reaccreditation in 2016 and 2019 and will seek reaccreditation again in 2022.

3.9 Prior to the pandemic, career guidance in an education setting (c. 65% being Year 12 guidance interviews) accounted for 60%-65% of frontline delivery time, with a total of c. 10% on statemented SEND pupils support and c.5% spent on information and advice, groupwork and class talks. During the pandemic, there was a significant shift to in-education advice or guidance by telephone, webchat or email away from in-education guidance. It is also worth noting that the impact of the pandemic on the front-line careers service staff. Services provided to school pupils were significantly disrupted and access to school pupils was difficult and extremely challenging. Many schools were pre-occupied and unable to facilitate DfE Careers Service access to pupils. Services delivered to all other beneficiary groups were also hampered. e.g., trainees, unemployed and all other routine outreach services such as Job Fairs, redundancy clinics, work with those not in education, employment and/or training (NEET) groups. The current service to adults is mostly reactive based on clients proactively seeking out the service. Careers Advisers perform a key role in the DfC’s Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities to ensure a seamless transition for those who need support from school age right through to adulthood. The Careers Service has also established effective referral processes with Disability Action Job Match Employment Support Officers, to help with the career planning needs of adults with a significant disability.

Table 3: Summary of activity provision in NI, number of non-unique participants/recipients of different activities

	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21
Education-based (frontline)			
Guidance (schools/other educ)	35,476	32,873	20,838
Change I&A to Information & Advice	3,089	3,039	41,602
Group (schools/other educ)	2,732	2,971	1,019
Class Talks (schools/other educ)	32,481	24,915	13,100
SEND	2,898	2,705	1,522
Labour market based (frontline)			
Guidance (adult)	7,932	10,873	6,117
I&A (O18)	1,029	2,007	12,538
Change to Information & Advice (Over 18)	84	199	7

3.10 The range and types of careers support activities vary depending on age-range, context and specific needs. Prior to the pandemic, remote guidance for students was very rare in NI. Telephone and webchat guidance took place with adults, on some occasions, prior to the pandemic, with advisers typically delivering a mixture of activities across adults and students. As such all advisers typically have some experience with a diversity of delivery approaches and client groups. Following the pandemic, remote guidance became the primary delivery method for large periods of time, as an operational requirement.

3.11 The pandemic has shifted most of the one-to-one guidance into a videoconferencing setting across the majority of broadly comparable cities or countries to NI e.g., Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore and Flanders (Belgium). For instance, Savitz-Romer et al. (2020)²⁴ draw on surveys of 984 school counsellors to discuss the US experience, and Cedefop et al. (2020)²⁵ draw on similar surveys of 963 respondents to cover the international experience across 93 countries. This reflects a remarkable and courageous adjustment to working practices by practitioners, many of whom have been dealing with significant personal issues brought on by the pandemic as well. Guidance has been developed or adapted to reflect the new ways of working, with advice from the CDI and government departments both within and outside of NI, among others. Much of this guidance focuses on practicalities, technology, and logistics, such as privacy concerns and button-pressing. Nonetheless, as time progresses other guidance and training is likely to emerge for making the most of the strengths of remote guidance from a practice perspective, while mitigating its weaknesses.

3.12 The Careers Service has modernised the way services are designed and delivered with the introduction of new digital contact methods, self-help resources and user-friendly local labour market information about growth and emerging sectors. In response to the pandemic crisis, a contingency service delivery model was developed for the delivery of services in schools during the academic year 2020/21 using digital channels i.e., video interviews, telephone, email and Live Chat. This ensured continued delivery of services to clients. Malone (2002) describes the use of career guidance delivered by video interview as a new but emerging field in the early 2000s. There have been few explicitly comparative studies of in-person vs face-to-face guidance, but there has been much more analysis of more medical domains, such as telehealth, which provide some indication as to the efficiency of the medium.

In May of 2021 the DfE's Careers Service conducted its own survey of a contingency digital service model for the delivery of career guidance in post-primary schools (academic year 2020/21). A total of 1,343 responses were received. This May 2021 survey was aimed at post-primary school students, teachers, parents, headteachers and principals. The findings showed that 87% of young people and parents expressed a preference for face-to face delivery, particularly aimed at years 10 and 12. At least 49% of young people and 73% of parents were not aware that they could still access career guidance after leaving school. Schools engaged with the "new" digital delivery model because this was the only alternative available. Generally, the digital delivery was well received, but there was a 72% preference for a return to 1:1 interviews. There is a commitment to continue to develop the way CIAG can be accessed with the aim of offering a 'blended and enhanced approach' of both digital and face-to-face services going forward.

3.13 Careers Advisers have rapidly adapted and transformed the service delivery arrangements. They have discovered more inclusive and innovative ways of using technology to good effect. Examples include distant and e-based careers policies and practices, delivered either by telephone, online interviews 1:1 or in groups, webchat or webinar sessions. Each are designed to offer more personalised and interactive digital and non-digital support, commonly referred to as ‘a blended approach’ usually adopted in FE and HE settings. The Careers Service has developed dedicated web pages on nidirect to offer information and advice to young people, parents and employers. In theory, this gives rise to the potential of increases in self-directed learning that can potentially transform people’s lives. However, the website is not user-friendly. Funding to develop a new careers and skills online portal, which would deliver an improved and interactive careers and skills focused service to clients, has been secured. As part of this planned development, the Service should further upskill and train Careers Advisers in the use of digital technology applied in career guidance practice e.g., the metaverse, virtual reality, gamification, chat bots, social media, etc.

3.14 There are currently some staff recruitment challenges, particularly in recruiting professionally trained and qualified Careers Advisers. The Service, like many others, has an ageing workforce. A pilot to recruit Trainee Careers Advisers is currently underway. It should examine closely the UK Career Development Institute’s (CDI) Careers Adviser apprenticeship pathway and qualification to help attract new recruits to the Service i.e., recruit some apprentices who will bring diversity and social inclusion into the workforce. The Service also needs to consider re-introducing specialist Careers Advisers to bring in more focused expertise, specialist knowledge and agility to respond to the 10X Economy goals, employer, education, other local community provider and digital requirements.

3.15 Performance data 2021-2022

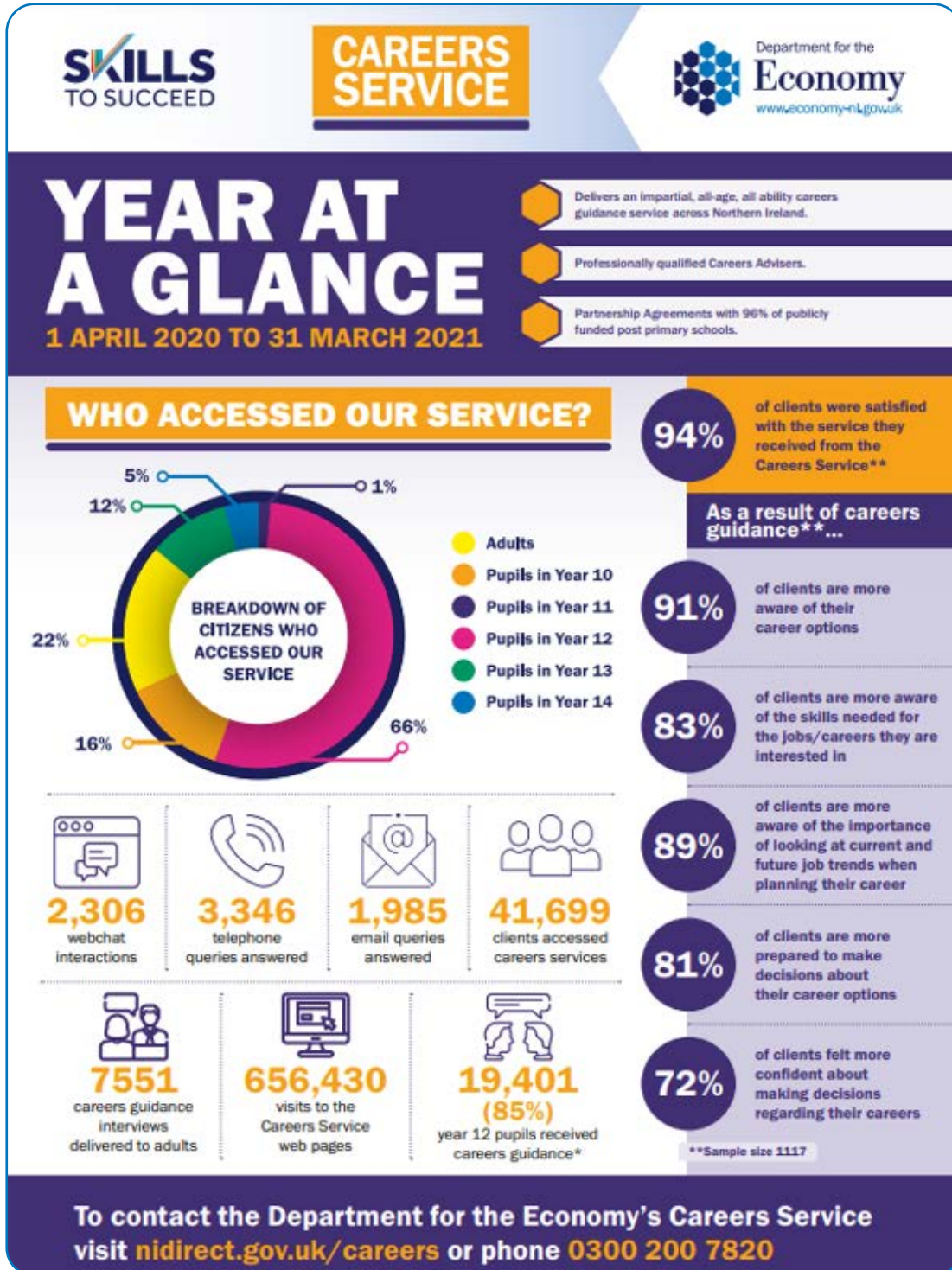


Figure 6: Performance data 2021-2022

The number of people accessing the service in 2020/21 is much lower than the pre-pandemic rate of 59,288 in 2017/18, impacting on young people and mostly adults. There has been a significant increase in the number of website visits from 450,265 in 2017/18 to 656,430. A similar trend can be observed in email correspondence with rises from 1,250 to 1,785. However, telephone queries decreased and while webchats decreased initially from 2017/18 – 2019/20, it is noticeable that from 2019/2020 this has started to increase again. Clearly, the effect of the pandemic has been to increase digital approaches, similar to other parts of the UK and further afield.

3.16 Staff and trade union representatives who attended online focus group sessions and/or completed a template to feed in their views as part of the research consultation reflected on key strengths of the service and areas for improvement. They were asked 3 main questions:

1. What are the greatest strengths of the Department for the Economy's all-age career service delivery?
2. What are the main challenges and/or weaknesses of the Department for the Economy's all-age career service delivery?
3. What are your top 3 recommendations for further improving the Department for the Economy's career service modes and timing of delivery over the coming year(s)?

Strengths

- A **free impartial all-age careers service available to citizens across Northern Ireland.**
- A service of **professionally trained and qualified staff who are passionate and highly committed** to making a positive difference to young people and adults' lives.
- A **good internal support system of Executive Officers and dedicated administrative staff.**
- **All staff have risen to the challenge of working remotely** during the pandemic, even though this is not their first choice.
- **A high-quality COIU Unit** which provides excellent Spotlight articles and Careers Bulletins.
- **All-age digital Careers Service delivery through the pandemic.**
- Matrix information, advice and guidance **quality Standard successfully underpins the service** delivery model.
- **Community partnerships in place with Schools and Alternative Education Providers, Health and Social Care Trusts, Training Providers, Youth Justice Agencies and Prisons** ("though strategic partnerships have significantly weakened over the last two years").

Weaknesses

- There is an **over-emphasis on the number of face-to-face interviews**, especially with year 12 students at the expense of other students and adults.

“We currently interview every single year 12 and some do not really need this in-depth service.”

“I don’t understand the rationale behind our target of 95% of Year 12 pupils receiving a CGI. By virtue of this, I think we are neglecting Y13 and 14 pupils and adult clients.”

- The service is too focused on achieving **statistical targets and KPIs are not always fully understood**.

“We would like more flexibility to do follow up interviews with young people and adults.”

“The caseloads are high re: schools work. We’re gathering lots of data. Our performance and success should be promoted on the website.”

- The Careers Service is **not well enough known** throughout Northern Ireland.

“We are not well enough known – so many adults need our help but they don’t know we exist!”

“Lots of admin and data gathered but much of this isn’t shared with the outside world.”

“Raising our profile in the community – our identity is hidden (under the wider Department or ‘Skills to Succeed’ banners) and we need a separate identity that young people and adults recognise easily.”

“I feel is that even though we are all age I feel adults miss out on this service.”

“I think it is one of the areas of weakness and reflective of our marketing and awareness of our service. We have highly skilled staff to offer free professional career guidance while in other countries you would have to pay for it so I think we are not been given the opportunity to showcase our strengths and maybe there needs to be a radical change for this to be seen.”

- The **careers website is not user-friendly, and the NI Direct platform is confusing for young people, adults, parents, and employers**.

“We need a careers website which is user friendly and interactive. The current site is too wordy, not attractive and looks out-of-date, even though it has lots of useful information within.”

“Our website is very poor. This should be a ‘go to’ tool. I find it difficult to navigate never mind a member of the public. There is no careers interest questionnaire on the website unless a school has subscribed to Xello and not all schools have engaged with this.”

“Even one of my schools has mentioned to get onto the ‘A-Z of Careers’ you have to click 5 times to enter this part on our website”

- **Insufficient sharing** of careers information and resources within and outside of the Careers Service.

“We need and want to work more collaboratively on FAQs to avoid duplication of effort and save time.”

“We should introduce specialist roles to build capacity in the organisation and to increase our credibility with employers, community groups, schools, colleges and universities.”

“We want to work with our colleagues in FE and HE careers but seldom have time to do so in a meaningful way. It would be great if this could be fixed!”

“Create Knowledge Hubs for sharing good practice.”

Areas for improvement

- **There can be an imbalance in the relationship between the Careers Service and schools** – “Some schools think Careers Advisers are at their beck and call.” “Schools are receiving a free, professional service and this needs to be appreciated and acknowledged.”
- **Comprehensive action plans are sent to students regardless of need** – there is a feeling among advisers that pupils tend not to read these. “Could schools be doing more to encourage pupils to read and act upon these?” or “Should we be creating a careers plan for every Year 12 given some already have transition plans well in place?”
- **Advisers are allocated on average around 30 minutes per interview.** “This is not “bespoke” guidance” and “Advisers would welcome more professional discretion to meet individuals’ needs – start earlier in schools promoting the service.”
- **Careers Advisers spend too much time on admin work**, although it is hoped that the new client management system will be more streamlined.
- **More specific local labour market intelligence** – “The Skills Barometer has only limited use, as the information is too general for client use.” “We would like to do more work in local communities to help people, particularly those most vulnerable, to find employment.
- **A common triage system should feature across all schools** – “There are pockets of good practice with some teachers very dedicated to working in genuine partnership. Having a better triage system would help everyone rather than a blanket interview approach.”
- **There is a place for clients to make contact online**; however, **web chat is not a suitable method to impart careers guidance**, this is mostly for general information and advice. Clients expect an immediate response, which is rarely possible, considering the diverse nature of careers guidance.

- **The Department of Education and the Education Authority could do more** to “support Careers Advisers work in schools and encourage better cooperation from schools to help us do our job.”
- **Careers advisers, despite being professionally qualified, are not given the same status as other professional grades within the Civil Service** as they are not paid a professional salary. This can lead to a lack of professional confidence and problems with recruitment and retention.
- **Careers advisers should have an opportunity to train in specialist roles rather than generic roles throughout the Service.**

These and other UK and international research findings have informed the independent external review and generated ideas for improving all-age career guidance over the coming year(s). We considered options for new delivery models and/or structural arrangements. However, our primary focus was to capture the views and recommendations of NI citizens and to listen to their experiences, ideas and suggestions for improvement in the career guidance ecosystem.

4. Citizens' Perspectives

This section begins with a brief overview of key headlines from citizens, followed by more detailed analysis of findings from the online surveys, telephone and focus groups, including young people aged 14-18, headteachers/principals/teachers/careers co-ordinators in schools; further education (FE) colleges, parents/carers and adults 18+ in work, those unemployed, or participating in vocational training. In addition, an overview of feedback from a formal Call for Evidence is provided including contributions from education and sector specific bodies, as well as industry specialists, private, public and third sector organisations.

Based on stakeholder feedback, easy-to-understand common language should be adopted by local and regional delivery agencies in local communities throughout the Northern Ireland career guidance ecosystem.

- 1. Embed careers in the curriculum.**
- 2. Enrichment careers activities for all.**
- 3. Employability and skills development.**
- 4. Enterprise, self-employment, and entrepreneurship.**

Survey and groupwork summary feedback from young people 14-18

Most young people recognise the importance of career guidance. They discuss options and careers mainly with family members or subject teachers, those people with whom they have regular daily contact. This concurs with OECD findings. Young people report careers interviews in Years 10 and 12 are the key touch points with Careers Advisers. Those who have spoken to a DfE careers adviser report they have found this helpful. In addition to 1:1 careers interviews, the most frequently reported other careers activities were career talks, followed by skills assessment and careers videos. The activity that young people participated in the least was webchat conversations with the Careers Service and virtual reality experiences. Students would ideally like more careers activities both within and outside of school.

Young people reported the DfE should do more to support the Living Wage rather than Minimum Wage. They wanted good signposting to employment opportunities and greater investment in digital technology including gaming, experiential learning, virtual work experience, etc. Fundamentally, they asked for significant improvements in the careers curriculum.

Survey summary of feedback from parents

Most parents expressed the need for more individual meetings with a Careers Adviser for their child(ren). They also identified skills assessment tools as a useful method of delivery of careers work in schools. There was a preference for more groupwork sessions with a Careers Adviser and more individual meetings to talk about future plans with a Careers Teacher in post-primary schooling. Overall, parents reported communication with them needs to be strengthened. For example, only 30% knew schools brought employers into the classroom. 27% agree the DfE Careers Service provides valuable information on opportunities for their children to make informed careers decisions.

Survey, telephone interviews and online meetings with headteachers, principals and careers teachers

The main message from most of the schools and colleges that responded to the survey was that they wanted a return to face-to-face career guidance. The impact of the Covid pandemic resulted in Careers Advisers having to work remotely and conduct interviews virtually in response to formal Government guidelines. For many this worked well and for others this was problematic, either because of digital setbacks or ‘Safeguarding’ that resulted in the need for a teacher to be present at all interviews. The situation was compounded by absenteeism due to Covid.

Face-to-face interviews were deemed by headteachers, principals, teachers, parents, and young people as most important, especially for year 12 students. However, other activities were identified as impactful such as virtual work experiences, groupwork and skills assessment tools for young people. The majority asked for greater freedoms and local flexibility to tailor Careers Advisers’ work to the specific needs of their school or college.

Some examples of a “triage” style system to identify young people in need of career guidance were cited in the feedback, though this was not standard across all schools. Careers teachers, in some cases, worked positively with the DfE careers adviser in this regard. Schools are passionate about ensuring students get the best start in life, though many are unaware of the full scope of careers resources and tools available and the wider array of activities that can be offered to young people. This is reinforced by the fact that only 42% of schools have engaged with Xello –

<https://help.xello.world/en-gb/Content/Get-Started/Educator/Teaching-Resources/Lesson-Resources-NI.htm>

Survey of adults 18+

The main finding was a desire to make the service more available to people at times that are more suitable to those out working. 36% (n=77) of respondents said they had talked to someone from the Department for the Economy’s Careers Service in the past 5 years, while 59% (n=125) said “No” and 5% (n=11) could not remember. 70% (n=150) knew where to go to get careers advice and/or guidance. 71% (n=151) believe that career guidance for them is “Very Important” or “Essential”, and a further 20% (n=43) see this as “Important”. Adults would like to access the Careers Service if it became *more modern, technology-led, understand skill sets and how to transfer skills in various sectors, etc.* Individual meetings with a careers adviser were ranked highest at 4.49 out of 5.

Group sessions and interviews with employers, employer and professional bodies and enterprise organisations

The respondents cited there was no joined up collaboration between and across government departments. In most cases, the reality of an all-age Careers Service was alien to them, as most felt this work only took place in schools and colleges. They were highly positive about forging closer working links, particularly contributing their knowledge and experience of sector specific developments, mentoring, labour market information, work taster or experiential learning opportunities and teacher and Careers Adviser industry day or week insights.

Most felt, the school careers system was inadequate in its current form, with some citing a concern that careers teachers generally had no formal training in careers work. In all cases, they indicated career-related learning should begin in primary school and continue throughout schooling and beyond.

Community and voluntary sector organisations and private careers and apprenticeship organisations

There was evidence of growing concern about increased poverty and inter-generational unemployment in many local areas. The pandemic has resulted in many young adults 18+, particularly those with learning disabilities or special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) feeling isolated and at a distance from the world of work. It was reported there has been a gradual return to community centres though many young people and adults are suffering from a lack of confidence, mental health and wellbeing issues. There were good examples of multi-agency working between third sector organisations with Health Trusts, Rehabilitation Wards, the Youth Justice System and Prisons, Further Education Colleges, Social Services, GPs and Jobs and Benefits Offices. In some cases, the Careers Service was involved in multi-agency working but in general respondents reported the formal strategic partnership has weakened over the last two years. There was a strong appetite to reignite or begin closer working in partnership. There was evidence of public, private and third sector organisations keen and willing to support the DfE's work on skills, career guidance and apprenticeships.

Call for Evidence for career guidance policy development the top three priorities were:

1. *Flexibility and access:* Widening access by increasing the availability of career guidance for adults, workplace-based learning and making effective use of digital tools; putting in place procedures to identify and assess the skills of low qualified adults and providing sufficient second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised qualification for those without level 2 or above qualifications.
2. *Supply and take up:* Significantly increasing the supply of high-quality adult learning provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Specifically in relation to career guidance, use this as a lever to increase take-up of local opportunities through effective outreach and motivation strategies which target the groups most in need.
3. *Governance:* Ensuring the coherence of career guidance with other policy areas, improving coordination, effectiveness and relevance to the needs of society, the economy and the environment; increasing, where appropriate, both public and/or private investment.

4.1 Feedback from young people, post-primary schools and parents⁵

4.1.1 Demographics: young people aged 14-18

A total of 2,511 young people completed the online survey to date. Respondents were initially asked to identify the name of their school or college and in which town or city these are located. The overall list of schools and colleges represented by the respondents can be seen in Appendix 1. The chart below illustrates the geographical locations of the respondents to the survey.

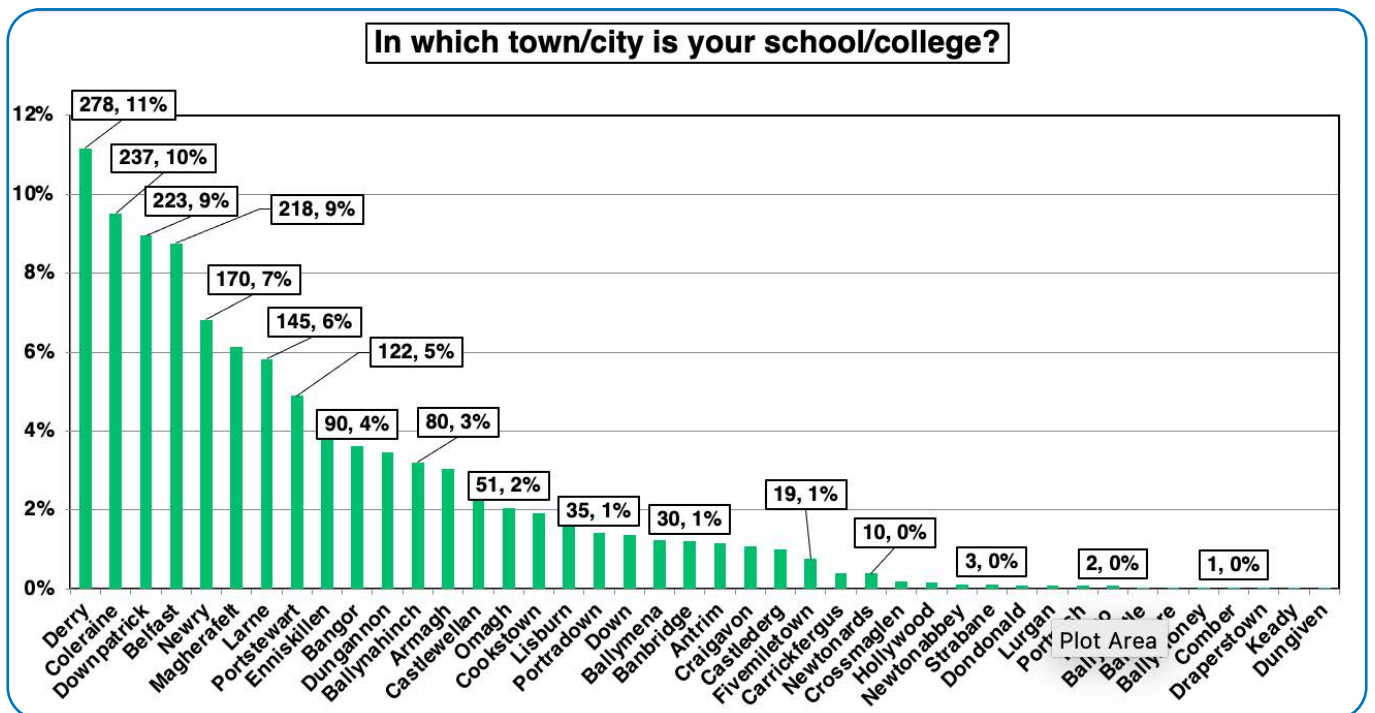


Figure 7: Geographic locations of respondents

A total of 58% (n=1063) of respondents were female, 38% (n=708) were male and the remainder 4% (n=82) preferred not to say. The table below shows the school and college year groups who responded to the survey, with most being in year 12 and 13.

Table 4: Year groups represented

Year Group	Number of respondents
10	16% (n=291)
11	6% (n=119)
12	38% (n= 706)
13	21% (n= 380)
14	14% (n=260)
Other	5% (n=96) – training organisation

Note: 659 did not answer the question

⁵ The reference to parents denotes parents, carers and guardians throughout the report

4.1.2 Schools and colleges

Responses were received from 154 schools of which 47% (n=73) were received from Careers Co-ordinators, 42% (n=64) Subject teachers; 6%(n=9) Headteachers/Principals; and 1% (n=2) College Principals. 11% (n=17) of respondents had additional responsibilities such as Head of Careers; careers teacher, administrator, guidance officer or similar title and a further 3% (n=4) are Vice-Principals. School descriptions and types are identified in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Description and types of schools and colleges

Description of school or college	Percentage and Number
Controlled	28% (n=43)
Voluntary	27% (n=42)
Maintained	24% (n=37)
Integrated	11% (n=17)
FE College	6% (n=9)
Regional College	1% (n=2)
EOTAS	1% (n=1)
Children and Young People's Service's Centre	1% (n=1)
Education Unit	1% (n=1)
Third sector	1% (n=1)
Type of school	Percentage and Number
Non-selective post-primary	51% (n=79)
Selective post-primary	34% (n=52)
Further Education College	8% (n=12)
SEN (Special School)	3% (n=4)
Other	4% (n=7)

The chart below illustrates the volume of responses have been received from schools in each of the regions.

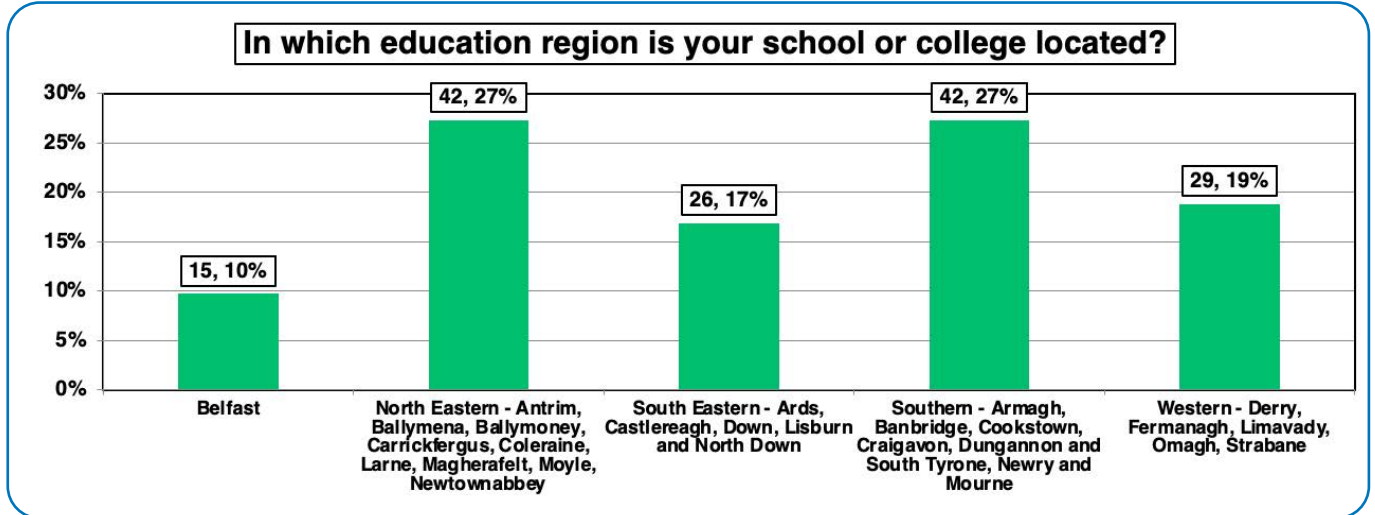


Figure 8: Geographical responses by school

4.1.3 Demographics of parents

992 parents participated in the survey. 86% (n=540) of respondents were female with only 13% (n=87) being male and 1%(n=9) preferring not to say. (Note:340 skipped the question). Their geographic locations are shown in the chart below which again illustrates the spread of responses across Northern Ireland. The ages of their children were evenly spread across the age ranges: 19%(n=192) in year 8; 20% (n=198) in year 9; 22% (n=221) in year 10; 17% (n=172) in year 11; 23%(n=231) in year 12; 24% (n=241) had children aged 16-18 and 7% (n=68) had children over 18. (Note: Parents who had more than 1 child in education entered multiple responses)

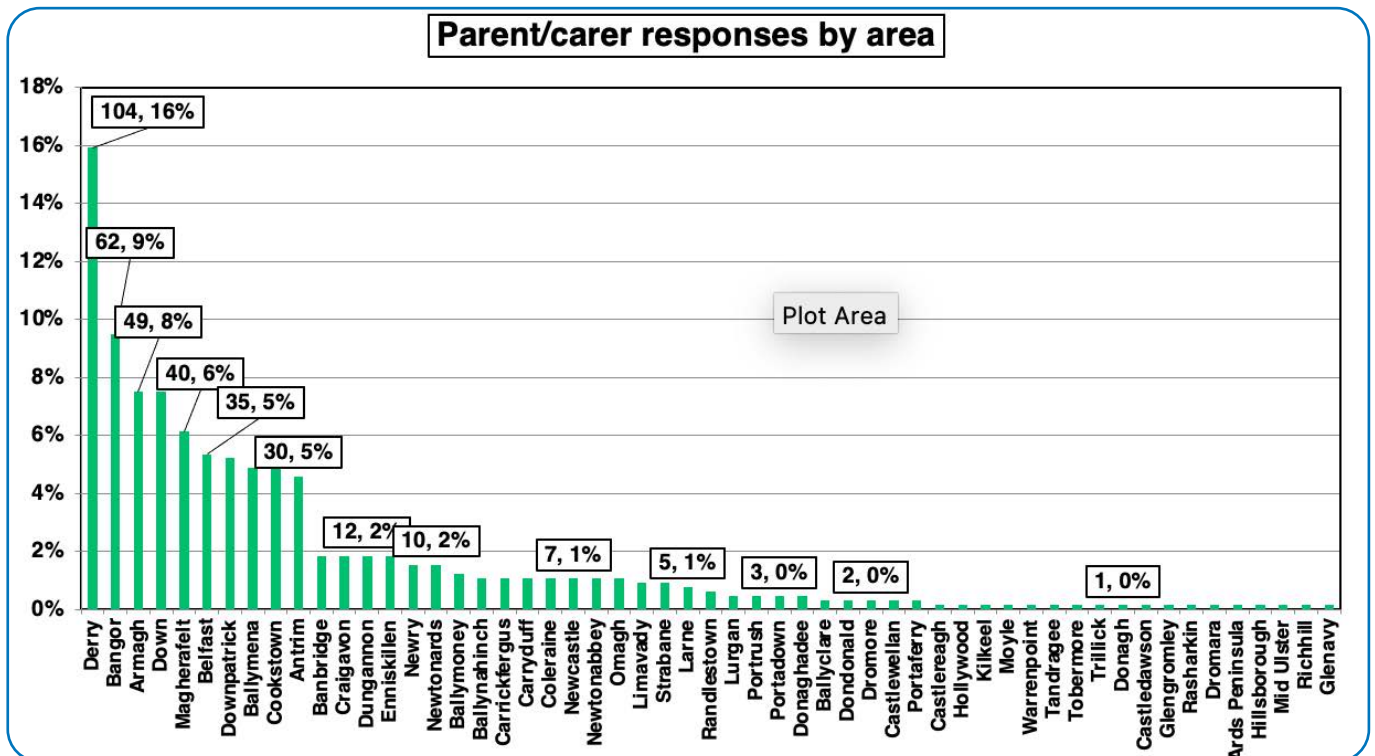


Figure 9: Parent/carer response by location

4.2 Young people's perceptions of career guidance

There is significant UK and international literature on how young people make decisions about their future education, training and employment options (inter alia: Archer et al., 2014²⁷; CfE, 2017²⁸; Indecon, 2019²⁹; Covacevich et al., 2021)³⁰. Career guidance should ideally vary across the learner journey (from consideration to take-up and completion of chosen options). For example, in the early stages of decision-making (pre-contemplation), careers support should focus on encouraging self-reflection. As young people become more engaged with the idea of learning, more specific, detailed information becomes valuable. Throughout their compulsory education they are required to make 'soft' (and later 'hard') choices or preferences as to their future options. Some young people decide on an option in their early teens and stick with it ('early deciders'). Others are unsure until quite older ('drifters'), some switch options ('switchers'), whilst some remain 'undecided' (CFE Research, 2017).

Research suggests that young people are developing their preferences as early as primary school. UCAS (2021)³¹ found that one third of university students started thinking about Higher Education (HE) when in primary school. In Ireland, Indecon (2019) found that one in four young people first considered career choices in primary school, whereas in England 7% first thought about post-16 options prior to KS3 (CFE Research, 2017). The Department of Education (DE) is currently exploring a potential pilot project with primary schools focusing on career-related learning. This builds on good practice both in other parts of the UK and internationally.

4.2.1 Differing perceptions of the DfE's career guidance offer

The infographic below highlights how the 'career guidance offer' is perceived by young people, parents, post-secondary school leaders and teachers. In summary, most students recognise the importance of career guidance, and they discuss options and careers mainly with family or subject teachers - effectively those people with whom they have regular daily contact. Those who have spoken to a DfE Careers Adviser or school careers lead have done so mainly in year 12 and above.

The infographic highlights only 50% of parents agree that their child(ren) are collecting useful information about their achievements and employability skills, and only 27% agree that the Careers Service provides valuable information on opportunities for their children. The reason for some of these responses may be due to shortfalls in communication between schools and parent/carers due to the impact of Covid with schools having other pressing priorities at this time. In some cases, their child(ren) is/are in the earlier years of secondary school, years 8 and 9, and at this stage of their child(ren)'s development many do not consider career guidance applicable.

"Career aspirations have been developed independently and through own research. No appointment with a DfE Careers adviser has occurred." (Parent of year 12 student, Belfast)

Parents have differing interpretations of the careers guidance offer and believe their child(ren) needs are not being met. There appears to be a lack of distinction between the role of the careers teacher and careers adviser. This has implications for a continuing positive relationship outside of school. Also, the distinctive features of the Careers Advisers all-age and impartial work is not being fully understood in relation to services available beyond formal schooling.

“Was unsure of career choice in year 12. Needed more guidance from careers teacher. Not really helpful. Have asked numerous times for her to call me to discuss career options. Has never contacted me. Spoke to child in school and having decided on midwifery she was not forthcoming on helpful choices of A levels needed. (Parent of year 12 student, Castlewellan)

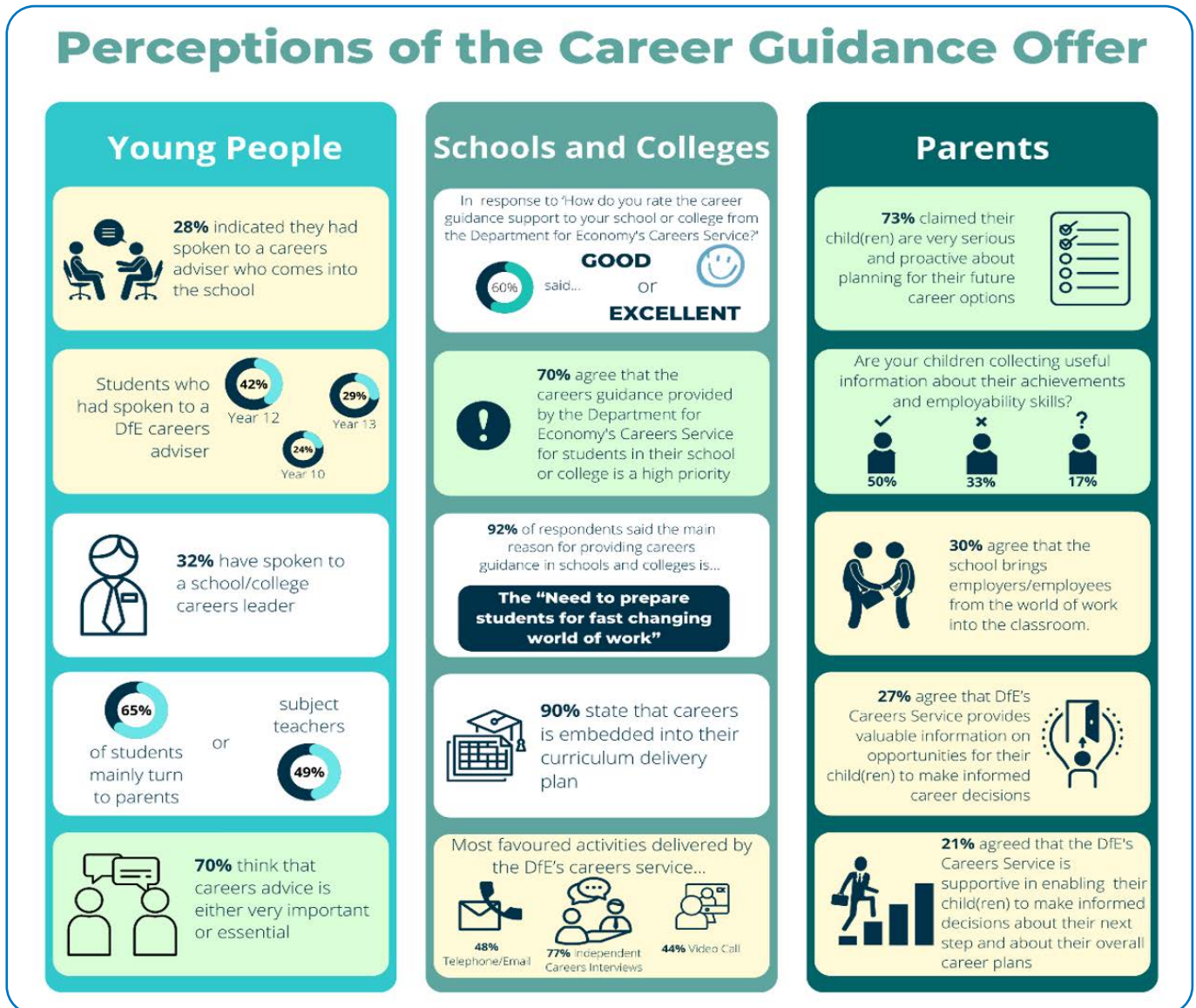


Figure 10: Perceptions of the Career Guidance Offer

Note: Survey data can be found in Appendix 5

There are several surveys which ask young people the sorts of career guidance they rely on. The findings from these studies are varied because they often include different age ranges and geographical areas. These studies generally identify ‘informal sources’ including parents/carers, teachers and friends. Dickerson, Maragkou and McIntosh (October 2018)³² reported that friends also influenced choices after Year 11. The results show that pupils who attend school with lower achieving peers, a greater proportion of peers from a lower socio-economic background, and with peers who are less likely to aspire to an academic post-16 route, are more likely to aspire to follow a TVET route themselves. Battiston. et. al. (2020)³³ also found a similar relationship between peer attainment levels and post-16 choices, the higher the attainment level the less likely the young person is to enrol on a TVET course. The magnitude of the peer ability effect is approximately half as large as the own ability effect on the choice of post-compulsory

Although more limited use is made of careers advisers and employers, those who do consult them find them useful (*inter alia*: Engineering UK, 2019 & 2021³⁴; Mann, Denis and Percy, 2020³⁵; Youth Employment UK, 2021³⁶; Stewart, 2021³⁷; and Hughes, 2021³⁸).

4.3 Methods of delivery

The OECD (2021) reports young people’s participation in multiple careers activities, such as ‘Job fair’ and job shadowing/worksite visit and career advisor interview, careers questionnaire and researching the Internet for careers is around 17.4% for UK 15-year-olds i.e., this age group report they have done all of these activities against an average for participating OECD countries of 15.6%. However, more than 30% in Iceland, Denmark and Malta report they have undertaken all of these things by the age 15.

4.3.1 Views of young people, parents and schools

The figure below illustrates the preferred methods of delivery of career guidance according to young people, parents and schools/colleges. While a common theme for all three groups is for individual meetings with a Careers Adviser or Careers Teacher other common activities surfaced such as employment and employability activities, work experience, workshops and/or skills assessment tools.

Young people said: the most useful career-related activities they have participated in over the past 12 months are...



Talking with an adviser

Skills assessments



Careers videos or Vlogs

They also said: these were their most preferred methods of learning about the world of work (ranked in order)...



Individual meeting with a careers adviser



Individual meeting with a school careers leader



Virtual work experiences

the schools said: these methods would enhance the delivery of career guidance (ranked in order)...



Employer engagement activities



Employability workshops



Interactive 24/7 careers portal

and parents said: these methods would work best for their child(ren) (ranked in order)...



Individual meeting with a careers adviser



A skills/interests/aptitudes assessment tool



Individual meeting with a school careers leader

Figure 11: Preferred methods of delivery
 Note: Survey data can be found in Appendix 5

4.3.2 Young people

The main activities which young people state they have participated in and found most useful over the previous 12-month period. The most frequently reported activities were **Career Talks** reported by 60% (n=1126) followed by **Skills Assessment** 47% (n=876) and **Careers Videos** 44% (n=811).

The activity that young people participated in the least was **Webchat conversation with the Careers Service** and **Virtual Reality Experiences**, with 79% (n=1,452) of respondents who answered the question reporting they did not do these activities. It is unsurprising that activities such as Careers Fairs would have been rated low as a direct consequence of Covid restrictions.

When asked the question “**How would you want to learn about careers and the world of work?**” students were asked to rank activities in order of most useful/importance to them. The responses in the infographic above illustrate the top 3 activities identified by the young people are:

- **More individual careers meetings with a careers adviser** ranked at 3.84 out of 5 by 1211 students.
- **More individual careers meetings with a careers leader** in the school/college ranked at 3.71 by 968 students.
- **Virtual work experiences** ranked at 3.51 by 915 students.

Other highly ranked activities by young people included:

- **More group work sessions with a careers adviser** rated at 3.18 by 983 students.
- **A skills assessment** tool rated at 3.08 by 978 students.

Some comments included:

“More conversations to help choose what to do with my life and to be able to get work experience on what I’m interested in.” (Year 12)

“Personally, I think we should have more employers come into our school to show us what their job is like, although a variety of employers.” (Year 13 Grammar School Student)

“I think we need to be taught more about careers and then understanding of workplace environment and how we can accomplish our dream jobs or help us figure out what path we should choose.” (Year 10 Grammar School Student)

“For teachers to actually be involved and interested in helping pupils to figure out what they want to do. The current system of sending us links to personality tests or leaving us to our own devices in a computer room is simply not helpful. I have received minimal career advice in school and what was given to me was discouraging or useless as they want to push everyone down the same path of doing 3 A-Levels which may not be useful but will give the school a good name for grades, so that everyone can then go to QUB or Ulster. There is a distinct lack of help for pupils who wish to go abroad or want to do anything slightly different. Interviews are such a big part of university admission now a days and there is no help for this either.” (Year 13 Endowed School)

Other careers activities:

- Students were asked “**Have you done any online exercises/tests to see what jobs in the future or careers would best suit you? e.g., Xello, Unifrog, Start, iCould, etc**” to which 59% (n=1145) of those who responded to the question said “Yes”.
- 66% (n=1277) of those who answered the question had done **exercises at school/college to identify what their skills are and/or personality**.
- 57% (n=1097) reported they knew how to get **work experience** and 36% (n=699) said they had managed to gain some work experience which was mainly arranged by their parents or by themselves. Half of those who gained work experience found it useful.

4.3.3 Headteachers, principals and teachers

While feedback from school/college principals and teachers indicated the most frequent activities delivered to them by the DfE Careers Service are **Individual careers interviews with students** (77% (n=118)) and **Telephone interviews with students** (47% (n=73)), the infographic above highlights the most impactful activities identified by the schools and colleges are: **Employer engagement; Employability workshops** and an **Interactive Careers Portal 24/7**.

“Careers should be a partnership with schools and teachers. A careers adviser should be able to work flexibly with subject teachers to help keep our knowledge of courses and apprenticeships up to date allowing us to share this knowledge with our students.”
(Subject Teacher, Belfast)

“I’d like to take this opportunity to thank our advisers and the Careers Service for the work they do, which is very much appreciated and, I feel, undervalued by government.”
(Careers co-ordinator, Southern Region)

“More careers and employer engagement activities are needed in Area Learning Communities.” (Employer)

“Broaden the range of careers activities provided (beyond interviews) involving local industry and start earlier in the curriculum.” (Careers Co-ordinator Southern Region)

“Young people need face-to-face contact with Advisers, whether in person or via video call. DfE need to invest more in career guidance specialists, as the CEIAG provision in many schools is ad-hoc and nowhere near uniform across all schools.” (Careers Co-ordinator, School)

Some careers teachers requested a more user-friendly system to be introduced for downloading career action plans and called for data analysis on key trends to help feed into curriculum planning. Explore options for career action plans and how these can be best applied with young people (and adults). There were also some concerns about Careers Adviser staff shortages.

4.3.4 Parents

Some of the questions were difficult for parents to provide an answer as 59% (n=422) had not gained any knowledge of the career opportunities available through the school / college activities supported by the DfE's Careers Service. A further 36% (n=256) indicated they have gained a little knowledge of the career opportunities available through the school / college career activities supported by the DfE's Careers Service.

Of those who felt able to answer the question **“What method of delivery of careers guidance do you think would work best for your child(ren)?”**, the most popular responses were:

- **More individual careers meetings with a careers adviser** (71% (n=520)).
- **A skills/interests/aptitudes assessment tool** (50% (n=364)).
- **Individual careers meetings with a careers leader in your school/college and Groupwork sessions** with a careers adviser (47% (n=340)).
- **Virtual work experiences** (37% (n=271)).

Comments included:

“Work experience should be encouraged in all schools at the same age not left until pupils are in sixth form.” (Parent of Year 10 Derry)

“Careers advisers in DfE and in Schools need more training and more time with industry so they are aware of new opportunities and how to find them.” (Parent of Year 10 Belfast)

“We need engaging work experience packages available to our young people to ensure they are motivated hard-working employees/entrepreneurs of the future.” (Parent of Year 11 Cookstown)

“The most important information is what will the jobs be in 5-10 years' time when you graduate. I realise that is really difficult to know but things like the Skills Barometer and feedback from industry could give a good steer.” (Parent of 18+ grammar school pupil Newry)

In summary, while an individual meeting with a careers adviser is seen as a preference by these 3 groups, it is apparent that this needs to be supplemented with the other career exploration activities introduced much earlier in the curriculum. More employer and enterprise engagement, understanding of the workplace through virtual and non-virtual work experiences, and ongoing skills assessment is needed. Resources for such a “blended” delivery approach can be made available through a well-designed, highly interactive national careers portal, complemented by an enhanced career guidance delivery model.

Most schools and colleges want a return to face-to-face interviews but also mention a paucity of careers training for teachers, particularly in labour market intelligence trends. Communication with parents takes place in most schools using a parent app e.g., SIMS. However, Careers Advisers do not have direct access to this facility, therefore, schools act as the ‘gatekeepers’ or ‘controllers’ of parental engagement. There is significant scope for more innovation and improvements in parental engagement involving Careers Advisers working in post-primary schools.

Schools and colleges expect to see improvements in the DfE Careers Service website, ideally a new rebranded user-friendly online national careers portal that can house best practice and share careers skills and personality assessment tools; more videos about careers; apprenticeship information; after school talks, etc. Teachers would also like to have a careers portal that links students with employers. Employability workshops are desirable but there were some concerns about insufficient space in the timetable to accommodate this.

4.4 Timing of delivery of career guidance

All three groups believe that career guidance should be provided during the first term of year 12 to allow for time to assimilate information and make clearly informed choices by the end of the year. This reflects a traditional way that most have been used to expect.

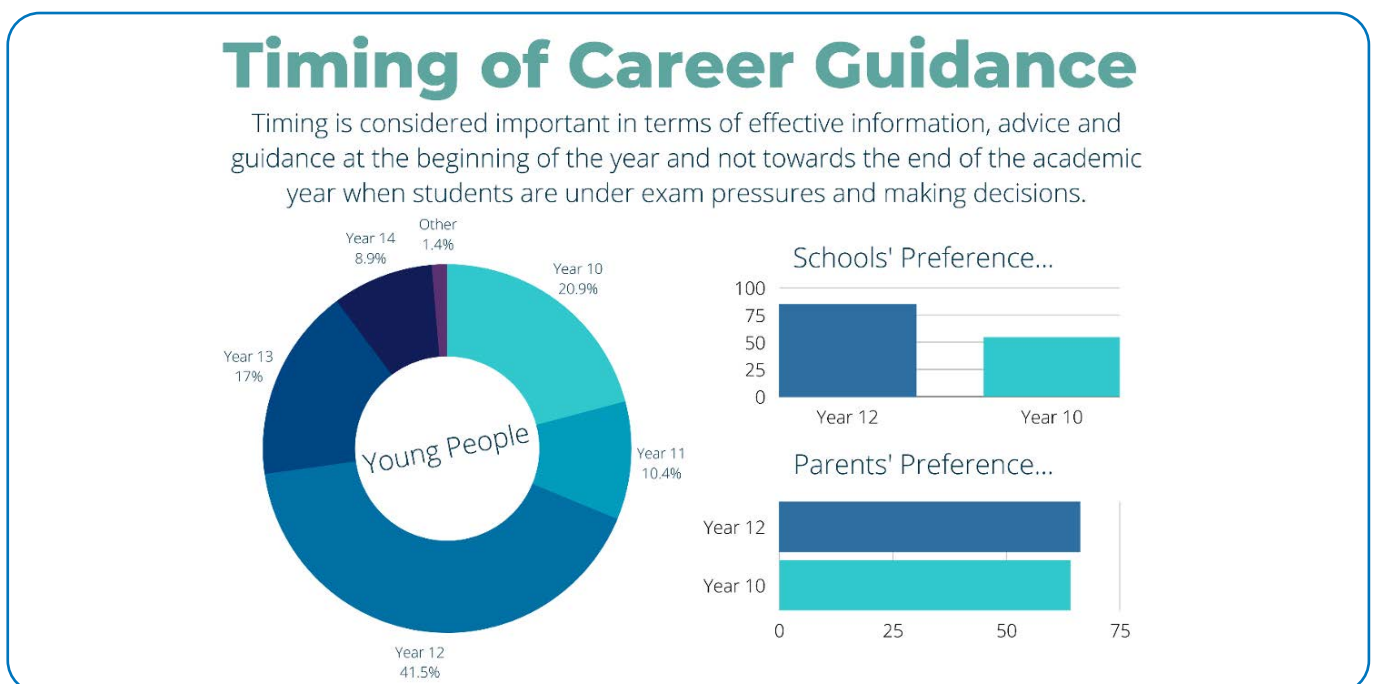


Figure 12: Timing of career guidance

In reply to the question “**In which years have you received career guidance or is career guidance planned for you whilst at school/college?**” the most popular response by 66% (n=1,266) was **year 12** followed by 47% (n=910) choosing **years 10 and 13**. Just over 38% (725) student selected years 11 and 39% (n=762) identified year 14 or the second year at 6th form college. Clearly the most popular years selected by students are those in which subject choices need to be made as try to match subject choices to potential career pathways.

This question was followed up with “**If you can only have career guidance in one year, what would be/have been most useful for you?**” to which the most popular choice was during **year 12 identified by 42% (n=800)** of the students who answered this question. Timing is important in terms of effective information, advice and guidance at the beginning of the year and not towards the end of the academic year when students are under exam pressures and making decisions. Respondents to the survey highlighted the need for:

- Help with gaining work experience;
- More one-to-one meetings or the chance to speak with a careers adviser;
- More information about jobs, including employers and alumni speakers coming into school to talk about jobs; and
- Better communication and explain things better.

Some selected comments from young people:

“I think it is pretty good. When we have meetings with career adviser, we are given plenty of options and she runs through other potential roads we can take.” (Year 13, College Student)

“I believe that secondary school children should be familiar with the careers they can pursue in life throughout their years in school. Most importantly in Year 10 or the year where students pick their GCSE’s. There are booklets and career advice around schools, but many people tend to be oblivious to these so I think if there were more active and engaging projects for us students it would keep us interested and keen to take up careers in life.” (Year 10 Grammar School Student)

“I would have preferred to see a stronger emphasis on career guidance earlier on in my school career, and be urged into making a decision sooner. Making a later decision can rule out some university options as indecision over choice can mean less focus on an individual career choice, and therefore less experience gained.” (Year 14 college student - Derry)

Schools and Colleges perceptions of when best to deliver career guidance

In response to the same question “**Which is the best time for students/pupils to receive career guidance from the DfE’s Careers Service**” the majority indicated in **Year 12 and 10** are the most popular which reflects the responses to the same question provided by most parents and young people.

- 83% (n=123) indicated a preference for year 12 while Year 10 was chosen by 54% (n=81) of respondents.

“Needs to be term 1 as many post-16 options open in January of the school year.” (Head of Careers Larne)

“Completion of face-to-face interviews with all Year 12s BEFORE they make their post-16 choices.” (Careers Co-ordinator, North Eastern Area)

“The loss of in-person career guidance interviews last year and this year has been a huge issue for us. Only about 1/6 of our Year 12s involve in email/phone interviews last year. It’s a huge gap in our careers provision - the alternatives to in-person interviews just aren’t popular whereas the face-to-face ones are attended by >90% of the year group year on year.” (Subject Teacher, North East)

Parents’ viewpoints

- 66% (n=484) of parents/carers stated that the best time for providing careers guidance and advice to their children is in year 12.
- 64% (n=466) opted for year 10.

Many parents welcomed having an opportunity to have better informed career conversations with their child(ren) from an early age but felt ill-equipped to do so. A new analysis of progress on gender equality and women’s rights shows girls and women remain disproportionately affected by the socioeconomic fallout from the pandemic, struggling with disproportionately high job and livelihood losses, education disruptions and increased burdens of unpaid care work (UN Women, 2021).³⁹

4.5 Survey responses of adults in Northern Ireland

“Careers guidance should be tailored to the individual and linked to skills shortage and potential job opportunities. University is not for everyone, and schools should be encouraged to look at other opportunities for school leavers.” (50+ year old employed, Lurgan)

A total of 215 responses were received from adults ranging from age 18 – 50 + as shown in the table below. This illustrates the majority of responses 34% (n=72) and 34% (n=72) were from the 36-50 year old and 31% (n=66) were in the 50+ year old age groups. 63% (n= 95) were female and 35% (n=52) were male and 2% (n=3) preferred not to say. (Note: 65 respondents skipped this question)

Table 6: Ages of adult respondents

Age range	% (number of responses)
18-24 years old	18% (n=38)
25-35 years old	15% (n=33)
36 – 50 years old	34% (n=72)
50+ years old	31% (n=66)
Prefer not say	2% (n=6)

From this, 79% (n=168) of respondents are employed; 9% (n=19) are unemployed 7% (n=18) are either in Further or Higher Education; 2 others are in apprenticeships; 1 is self-employed; 1 is an employer and 3 are retired. The chart below indicates that the responses received were spread across Northern Ireland with most 22% (n=46) from Belfast and 20% (n=42) from L'Derry.

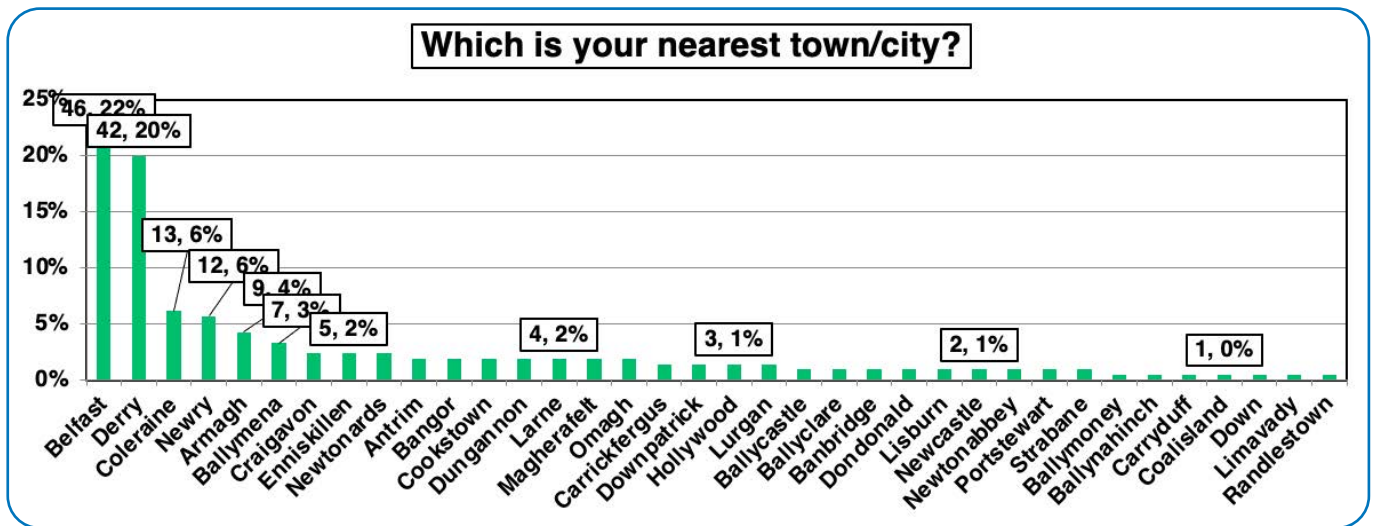


Figure 13: Geographic location of adult respondents

Adults' perceptions of the DfE's Careers Service

- 36% (n=77) of respondents said they had talked to someone from the DfE's Careers Service in the past 5 years, while 59% (n=125) said "No" and 5% (n=11) could not remember.
- 70% (n=150) knew where to go to get careers advice and/or guidance.

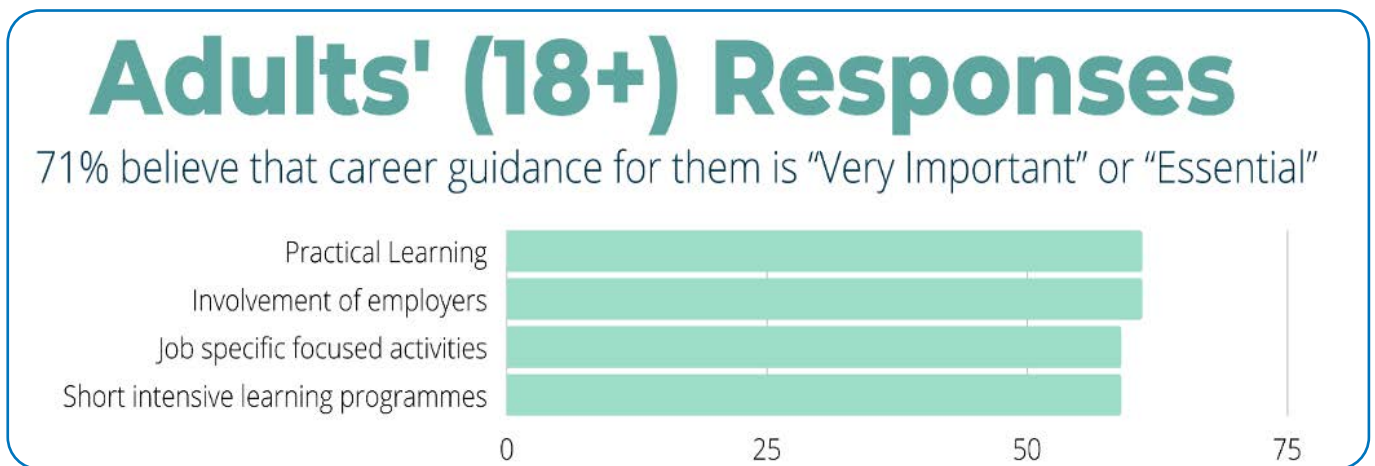


Figure 14: Adults' (18+) responses

71% (n=151) indicated that career guidance is at least Very Important or Essential” and a further 20% (n=43) said career guidance is important. The types of activities they expressed a preference are centred around training and developing new skills to help them. e.g., 58% (n=94) chose short intensive learning programmes on employability and skills; 58% (n=93) job specific focused activities such as CV writing or preparing job applications, 60% (n=97) help from employers and 61% (n=99) identified practical learning such as hands on experience In the workplace or practical workshops.

4.5.2 Communication with the DfE’s Careers Service

Publicity and Accessibility

13 mentions (of 109 comments received) re improving accessibility (12%) and better promotion, publicity and advertising or lack of visibility to adults (12%)

“I’m aware of the Careers Service as I work in education, but I think that most adults are not aware that it exists.” 30-50 year old employed, Belfast

“Have a mixture of information points some online and some face-to-face. Not everyone like or has access to technology. Place to go and get information.” 50+ year old employed, Craigavon

“Better advertised & easily accessible and where they are available locally.” 50+ year old employed, Craigavon

There was a call from adults for better communication with the Service such as: better promotion, make it more accessible and take into consideration those for whom technology is either inaccessible or they lack confidence using technology.

“It seems very school focused - as an employed adult it is less visible.” (30-50 year old employed, L’Derry)

“Make the service more available to people at times that are more suitable to those out working.” (36-50 year old employed, Armagh)

“More knowledge and awareness of the services they provide is needed.” (36-50 year old employed, Newry)

“I think the service needs to be better advertised. Need to have an office that people can visit.” (50+ year old employed, Ballymena)

Website

Most adults indicated the current Careers Service website does not meet their needs or expectations

"More modern digital platforms & tools. More of a personal touch to careers advisers as the government site is very bland & governmental" 30-50 year old employed, Belfast

"Improved online presence/access to information." 30-50 year old employed, Lurgan

"Maybe an app? more use of distance contact because of Covid? More time for follow up?" 60+ year old employed, Belfast

4.5.3 Method of service delivery

Type of Service Provision

There was a call for a common language for careers that adults, particularly those most vulnerable, and those working in the careers eco-system can easily understand and value to help improve social inclusion and social mobility

"Better advertised & easily accessible and where they are available locally." 50+ year old employed, Craigavon

"Careers advice / development advice for worker to improve skillset and not just qualifications." 36-50 year old employed, Newry

"More recognition and provision for adults who may have unusual circumstances - for example, perhaps they had to leave work to care for a family member and are now ready to return having completed study but without access to the experience necessary to secure a job." 38-50 year old unemployed, Magherafelt

Other comments called for local employer engagement, staff more focused on working with adults and recruiting volunteers from the world of work to support and mentor those unemployed and/or vulnerable groups:

"Pathways to show how to work towards a specific career or role, with guidance from those working in those jobs." (18-24 year old unemployed, Larne)

"Would be good to see more interaction with local business rather than multi-nationals." (30-50 year old employer, Belfast)

"Have staff whose job is mostly adult guidance so they can develop expertise and effective networks." (50+ year old employed, Bangor)

4.6 Employers, employer and professional bodies and enterprise organisations

The respondents cited there was no joined up collaboration between and across government departments. In most cases, the reality of an all-age Careers Service was alien to them, as most felt this work only took place in schools and FE colleges. They were highly positive about forging closer working links, particularly contributing their knowledge and experience of industry and sector specific developments, mentoring, labour market information, work taster or experiential learning opportunities and teacher and Careers Adviser industry days insights. Most felt, the post-primary school careers education was inadequate in its current form, with some citing a concern that careers teachers generally had no formal training in careers work. In all cases, they indicated career-related learning should begin early in primary schools and continue throughout schooling and beyond.

The Royal Academy for Engineering (RAE) is currently working on an innovative STEM hubs initiative funded by the DfE. This involves 50 schools across Northern Ireland working together in the next 1.5 years to build up expertise in STEM issues. There is scope to connect this more fully with DfE Careers Service and other enterprise and employability hub activities. A major concern is the current DfE Careers Service website which is not attractive or user-friendly. This needs to be freed up from restricted DfE guidelines to enable a new all-age careers portal to flourish with the support of partner organisations.

The Construction Employers Federation representatives were keen and enthusiastic to work more closely with the Careers Service to feed into a “more modern all-age careers portal”. They highlighted the importance of the Careers Service connecting more closely with the Further Education and Higher Education Careers Services with whom they have good working links. They also mentioned the importance of government supporting Women in Tech and STEM initiatives.

Some other NI employers indicated:

“I didn’t know it existed!” “The careers support in schools has not changed in 20 years – very depressing!”

“Careers Advisers offer a good service, but many adults don’t really know how to use this, particularly those in work. More motivational upskilling and reskilling conversations are essential to help develop our workforce. Employers would welcome a single port of entry to connect with schools, colleges, universities and employability initiatives, etc”

“Parental engagement is seriously lacking yet they/we know our children need really good career guidance throughout their schooling.”

“Employers are willing to second their employees to the universities for part-time lecturing, to DfE and to schools but this requires funding.”

“Careers teachers are given this title as an extra duty with no formal training or continuous CPD.”

“Young people aren’t guided early enough in the NI schooling system.”

“NI could be world-class in career guidance and career development – we really could, if leaders came together to create a shared vision and action plan. We can do this!”

The Federation of Small Businesses recommended the Careers Service considers its branding, adopts behavioural science practice, performance data should be displayed on its website, outcomes and destinations data should be readily available to schools and colleges, mystery shopping should be introduced, and careers advisers should have specialist expertise rather than generic only. It suggested a major revamp of the current delivery model.

Other enterprise specialists suggested an urgent need to simplify and synchronise the myriad of hubs that currently exists funded by DfE. It was recommended that DfE should link the apprenticeship model to quality assurance in information, advice and guidance and provide apprentices with access to career tasters, virtual reality experiences, video clips and live streaming opportunities for skills and career enhancement activities so that they know where to gain support if their earlier plans and employer expectations do not materialise.

4.7 Community and voluntary sector organisations and private careers and apprenticeship organisations

There was evidence of growing concern about increased poverty and inter-generational unemployment in many local areas.

“My careers teacher was also my Maths teacher and my football coach. They just handed me a booklet on the Army and told me to read it fill it in. Then he just forwarded me towards the Army. We used to get support through the local youth club but we’re too old for that now. They would talk to you and see what you needed and help you with anything. They were trying to get me to go back to school. If I wasn’t here (at GEMS) I would probably be in jail. We get help with skills like how to talk with people and building confidence.” (Young male referred to GEMS NI by the Youth Justice System)

“We know school doesn’t work for a lot of young people but if when leaving school, they were told where to access training in the community for essential skills this would really help them. We’re picking them up 6 months or a year after leaving school so there’s no continuity for them.” (Support worker)

The pandemic has resulted in many young people and adults 18+, particularly those with learning disabilities or special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) feeling isolated and at a distance from the world of work. It was reported there has been a gradual return to community and multi-agency centres, though interviewees highlighted many young people and adults are suffering from a lack of confidence, mental health and wellbeing issues.

TREE Training Centre provide targeted recruitment, work experience and training for education leavers, and for people 25 years old or over and unemployed for 12 months and people under 25 years old and unemployed for 6 months. They focus on outreach and work with the Youth Justice Agency, Educational Authority and BVNI. They have a good reputation in the community and most referrals or applicants come from word of mouth. We interviewed Graham and 5 male young people currently training in plastering and tiling at TREE. All 5 young people reported that their schools didn't do a good job of preparing them for the world of work.

“Because of Covid, we didn't get to do work experience at school.” ... “When you're in school your work experience would be in B&M's or in a shop or something doing a job, you wouldn't want to be doing. You wouldn't be in a place like this (the TREE workshop) doing work experience of things you actually want to be doing.” ... “In school they'll either explain it (Careers) too much to a point where you don't have a clue what they're talking about because they've just said so many different things or they'll just tell you as little about it as possible. Here (at TREE) you're doing it for yourself but they're talking you through it and explaining the job to you, so you know what you're doing.”

“An app would keep people our age more interested. Everyone's on their phones so an app on your phone would be good. For example, an app that would give you advice on careers stuff and help looking for jobs, where to find jobs, pointing you in the right direction. And gives you the basics of how to start with finding a job” “YouTube shorts are good. They will tune in to a quick 2 to 5 min video. Short and snappy and tailored is what young people with short attention spans need.” “Social media and websites are good... you're always seeing posts about people looking for jobs”

“We use ‘Joined Up’ to get sent different shift work. You go on and set your availability for the whole week and they just e-mail you shifts. We do it for Royal Mail but there's loads of companies on there. It's really easy.”

There were some excellent examples identified of multi-agency working between third sector organisations with Health Trusts, Rehabilitation Wards, Further Education Colleges, Social Services, GPs and Jobs and Benefits Offices. For example, the Clanrye Group in Downpatrick highlighted the importance of making good use of multi-agency arrangements already established in local communities. In some cases, the Careers Service was involved in multi-agency working, but in general respondents reported the formal strategic partnership had weakened over the last two years. There was a strong appetite to reignite or begin closer working in a public sector and/or public, private sector partnership.

The Compass Advocacy Network (CAN) with its headquarters in Ballymoney supports adults 18+ with learning disabilities, Autism and mental health issues to be able to realise their potential in work, social and community activities – in every aspect of their lives. It offers a range of support services including CAN BASE which is a social and leisure opportunity service for adults with learning disabilities, Autism and mental health issues, and is delivered in partnership with the [NHSCT's Day Opportunities Programme](#). BASE is exclusively through referral by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's Learning Disability Team. Staff are highly knowledgeable and experienced and well-trained in working with marginalised individuals and groups. It was reported individuals with special educational needs and/or disabilities are not being given sufficient access to learning and work opportunities. For many they fall into 'a black hole'. CAN provides a positive learning environment for them with job coaches and advice and training. There was concern expressed about all young people and adults not getting enough careers education and career guidance support whilst at school. *"For many they don't know enough of the Careers Service!" "Any new DfE careers portal needs to be inclusive and take account of the needs of young people, parents and employers." "We would welcome Careers Adviser support within our multi-agency way of working."*

EOTAS in Magherafelt, Ballymena and Cookstown makes educational provision for children with social, emotional behavioural, medical or other issues who, without its provision, cannot access suitable education. The service supports children who have been expelled from, suspended from, or have otherwise disengaged from, their registered school to participate in education until they achieve a new school place, are prepared for re-entry to an existing school place or to maintain their education until compulsory school leaving age. *"During Covid many young people 16-21 were stuck in their bedrooms and their lives were on hold. For some they are caught in the dilemma of housing and state benefits and inter-generational unemployment is a big challenge that needs to be tackled. "We have good relations with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, Police, Housing, Mental Health Services and the Careers Service. Young people need a place to go for support locally – a coffee and chat - as well as role models, videos and most importantly success stories. Children and young people in Children's Homes and Care Leavers need intensive support. The best way to do this is through multi-agency working."*

The Learning North West (Engage) project, led by the Derry Youth and Community Workshop, aims to identify, engage and mentor participants with learning disabilities who are experiencing barriers to learning and work. This project is part funded through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2014-2020 and the Department for the Economy. It is aimed at people aged 16 to 65 who are experiencing one of the following disabilities, which is preventing them progressing towards and into employment: autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia, Asperger syndrome. Learning North West is available in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area. "We have a good DfE Career Adviser who comes into meet with us and programme participants once per month, offers advice and agrees training plans. "The Careers Service office is not in the middle of town. There's no visible sign and people associate this with the dole office. Also, men in Shantallow tend not to go into the city centre." Support in local communities is what's really needed – pop up centres, multi-agency working, skills assessments, confidence building, etc. I think the Careers Service needs to learn to share more information, be less bureaucratic and engage in professional training with community providers.

Include Youth is a regional rights-based charity for young people in or leaving care, from disadvantaged communities or whose rights are not being met to improve their employability and personal development. “We work with children and young people between the ages of 14-24. The young people we work with and for includes those from socially disadvantaged areas, those who have had poor educational experiences, those from a care background, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs or alcohol, undertaking unsafe sexual behaviour or other harmful activities, or of being harmed themselves.

- Three mentors/support workers from Include Youth.
- Four care experienced young adults, taking part in Include Youth’s ‘Give & Take’ programme for 16 to 21-year-olds.

Include Youth Mentor: “Before Covid hit we had a great relationship with an advisor from the Careers Service. He would come in regularly to meet with our young people to give information sessions and talk about opportunities. We had work placement tours. We were set up for mock interviews, etc for preparing young people for jobs. It seems like things are trying to get back to normal so we’re hoping we’ll soon get back to being able to give this support to our young people.”

Include Youth Mentor: “In my experience none of the young people I’ve worked with have received any careers support from their schools so when they come to us it’s all new to them.” “The Careers Service have done some Zooms with our young people. They’ve been able to offer good support and guidance.”

The young people shared their ideas on digital and websites:

- “The Indeed Job App is quite useful. It helps with CVs, Interviews and finding a job.”
- “We wouldn’t watch video shorts offering help with careers support.”
- “My Universal Job Coach helped me with the NI Direct website. I found it useful. The CV layouts on there are helpful.”
- Include Youth Mentor: “The Indeed Job App is really useful. It’s so easy to use and to apply for jobs. They have loads of resources and they do online Zooms for career support.”

Young people wanted: “More opportunities for young people like interviews, work experience, getting to try out jobs.”

- *“I was doing work experience for 6 months and getting paid for it so it’s helped me with experience and something to put on my CV. I was working in a shop, and I now know I don’t want to work on the shop floor.”*
- *“I worked in a Cancer Research charity shop. It helped me know what I might enjoy in the future.”*
- *“When I was in school, they didn’t care so long as you did the work. I left school at 15. This is the first I’ve heard of any careers support through schools. There needs to be more advertisement of how to get support. I didn’t know the Careers Service existed. There needs to be a mix of different advertising like social media, posters, websites, adverts.”*

Include Youth Mentor: “It would be good to bring back more training opportunities for young people.” “It would be good if some jobs were ringfenced for our young people to try. They need a set amount of time in placements to trial a variety of jobs. There needs to be a wide variety of different placements in different sectors.”

Some examples of good/interesting careers and apprenticeship providers offering lively careers and employer engagement activities include:

- 4C UR Future who are piloting and building an engaging interactive careers portal with a range of features including gamification, volunteer mentors, challenge competitions, free transport to careers events. The target audience is Year 9 teachers in secondary and grammar schools.

“We are keen to work with the DfE’s Careers Service. A one-size fits all approach to careers does not work, we are collaborators and are keen to explore partnership options.”
(Rosemary Stalker, CEO).

- WorkPlus specialises in apprenticeships and recently launched its 2022 apprenticeship and employer support programme.

“We need an integration of the education and skills system in NI which makes it clearer to citizens what the best options are, reduces duplication and is easier for businesses to get involved in. This will require less funding than the way we are spending today on separate systems and will help our society and economy flourish as people take the next step on their journey.” (Richard Kirk, CEO).

4.8 Group sessions with young people

“Careers Support can’t be one size fits all. Our big strength is 1:1 mentoring available whenever they need it. Also, a key strength is our knowledge of what’s available. There’s a great deal of opportunities for young people to access but they don’t know about them.”

Young people who participated in group sessions or communicated via scribes reported the DfE should do more to support the Living Wage rather than Minimum Wage. They wanted good signposting to employment opportunities, including Green Jobs, and greater investment in digital technology including career stories, destinations, gaming, experiential learning, virtual work experience, social media content, tik tok, etc. Fundamentally, they asked for significant improvements in the careers curriculum in schools/colleges.

“If a young person is academic, the Careers Service can guide them on their path and help them choose the right GCSEs. If they’re not academic they just guide them towards the armed forces or shop work. They’re not aware of the training and support available for these young people to get them on a career path that’s right for them.”

“It’s funny, we spend all this time in school doing stuff that’s not useful when we could have been doing all this stuff (learning essential skills). We learn about these subjects that in the end don’t benefit us. You come out of school and there’s all this pressure to get a job and I don’t know how.”

“It’s essential for young people to learn about workplace behaviours, regulations, health and safety. We train them in customer service skills, having the right attitude, not using their phones, etc. We had a young person come to us after losing his job for leaving the production line to have a cigarette. We were able to help him see why he can’t just have a cigarette break whenever he feels like it when he’s in the workplace.”

“I went to a place called Include Youth and they gave me careers advice, help with my CV...I got some career support through the Prince’s Trust.”

“Our funding only allows us to work with young people who are NEET. If school brought us in during the final year of school to give a presentation on what’s available to them, then if they leave school without qualifications, they can come straight to us. How it works now is they leave school and do nothing for a year. That year is very important as they get into bad habits and get into things they shouldn’t get into.”

“From the start of secondary school the focus is all on getting GCSEs. Some kids know at 12 they’re not going to get a GCSE. They then just switch off to school. If they were given the opportunity at school to get a qualification in Essential Skills then this would benefit them greatly.”

“Young people need opportunities to have a go at a range of different jobs. Not just one work experience placement. If they had 2 hour taster sessions in a variety of different jobs and sectors this would help them find out what they’re interested in and put them on a career path.”

I am an Employment Mentor supporting people with access to the labour market, training, personal development, careers information advice and guidance and employability development. Every school needs a dedicated careers adviser to back up the careers service. School career teachers are doubling up as they are a full-time teacher on their own subject, and they are a career teacher on top of that, so they don’t specialise in careers. They often don’t want the job and it changes every year so there’s no consistency.

From the start of secondary school, the focus is all on getting GCSEs. Some kids know at 12 they’re not going to get a GCSE. They then just switch off to school. We know school doesn’t work for a lot of young people but if they were given the opportunity at school to get a qualification in Essential Skills then this would benefit them greatly. Alternatively, if when leaving school they were told where to access training in the community for essential skills this would really help them. Our funding only allows us to work with young people who are NEET. If school brought us in during the final year of school to give a presentation on what’s available to them, then if they leave school without qualifications, they can come straight to us. How it works now is they leave school and do nothing for a year. That year is very important as they get into bad habits and get into things they shouldn’t get into.

Careers Support can't be one size fits all. Our big strength is 1;1 mentoring available whenever they need it. We do a barriers assessment for each young person and then address those barriers with them. If there's something going on in the young person's life like drugs, alcohol, homelessness, then we work on that first and help them to address those issues. When we signpost them to another organisation, we don't just leave them, we stick with them. We build up a rapport with the young people and they trust us to put them onto the right course or opportunity. Sometimes it can be a very slow process getting the young people from A to B. We work with some young people for a long time, months or even a year before they're ready to go on to a training programme or job opportunity.

4.9 Call for evidence

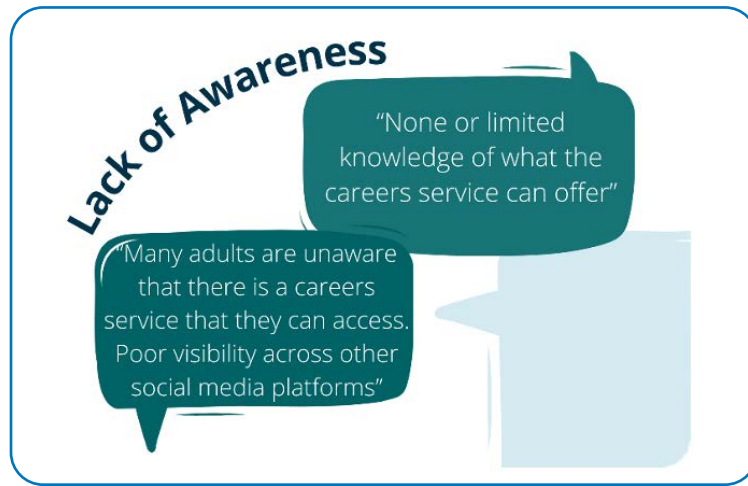
The top 3 barriers identified by stakeholders and employers who responded were **“Lack of qualifications and experience, training and skills”** also **“Lack of confidence”** and **“Limited opportunities for adults in sectors where they do not have direct experience.”**



“There are a lot of people out of work who could be contributing to society.... Many will have the skills that can address the skills shortages being faced across all industries. Many can also be trained to acquire those skills.” (Employer)

In comments received from the respondents to this question several key themes were identified:

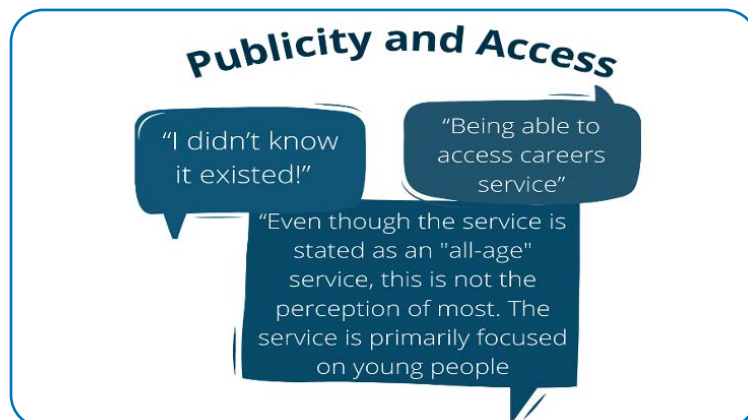
- Many adults are unaware that there is a careers service that they can access. Poor visibility across other social media platforms (Note: This was the most frequent comment);
- None or limited knowledge of what the careers service can offer; and
- Most adults are unaware of the DfE’s careers service or they perceive it as a service exclusively for young people which echoes the points raised by adults.



“Even though the service is stated as an “all age” service, this is not the perception of most. The service is primarily focussed on young people/school/college students. I feel the service do not “reach out” to other provisions to either learn about or direct its service users, it is very much a one way street.” (Community and Voluntary sector provider)

- Being able to access careers service.
- Not an attractive service to engage with.
- Regional imbalance - Limited opportunity in geographical areas (e.g., West of the Bann).
- Many respondents indicated their concerns that unemployed young people and adults often report it is more lucrative to be on state benefits.

Employers who submitted written and/or verbal evidence are calling for more engagement with the DfE Careers Service.



“There has been an increasing decline in work experience supported by the schools.”
 (Charitable, not-for-profit learning provider)

“Listen to their (businesses) needs and act accordingly - know the businesses in the area, create relationships with key businesses who are continually recruiting.” Employer



For young people there is a recognised need to provide greater exposure to and experiences of the world of work and information about career opportunities. Respondents to the Call for Evidence called for the careers service to engage with employers more regularly regarding vacancies and Labour market Information (LMI).

- Early years provision in schools.
- Information and LMI to teachers in school.
- Improved parental engagement.



“Career teachers have no time or resources provided to help them keep abreast of industry marketplace. Therefore, pupils have to do their own research and that depends on their motivation, capability or strength of their parents’ networks.

The current system is in favour of those with the most, rather than supporting those most in need.” (Employer)

The **Call for Evidence** survey then asked respondents to identify the top three priorities identified for policy development:



Career guidance performs a key role in supporting individuals to build and articulate their career identity and personal story narrative (inter alia., Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011⁴⁰; Mc Mahon, 2017⁴¹; and Meijers & Lengelle, 2012⁴²).

The DfE Careers Service knowledge and expertise embedded more fully within Local Councils e.g., City Deals, local Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs), and local community employability and entrepreneurial initiatives can raise the profile of the 10X Economy and benefits of lifelong guidance. This approach should make the Careers Service more visible and impactful working in the best interest of young people, adults and employers. This is particularly important given the low rate of economic activity in Northern Ireland⁶.

6 e.g., Sep-Nov 2021 Labour Force Survey data shows 70% of NI is economically active compared to 76% in England.

5. Targeting of Career Guidance in Local Communities

In this section, we discuss the targeting of the services and identify gaps in service provision. It is hoped this provide stimuli to help inform future developments and strategic priorities over the coming year(s). The Department for Economy is interested in concrete, operational ideas that might emerge from good practice, which can then be adapted to the local context and tested for feasibility. In some areas, Northern Ireland reflects good practice, indeed exceeding some of its neighbour countries. For instance, regarding level of professionalism of career guidance practitioners and the universal approach. In other areas, Northern Ireland practice reflects a less modern approach to guidance, with less support prior to age 14, less use of groupwork, and less use of technology, triage or specialist practice compared to the most innovative approaches in other countries.

5.1 Over the coming year(s) there is likely to be further demand for careers support services as individuals strive to adapt and prosper. Technology is becoming even more ubiquitous. Digital growth, increased automation and artificial intelligence (AI) require people to be committed lifelong learners – thinking about their transferable skills, upgrading their skills or switching from at risk sectors to remain in employment (Cedefop, 2021)⁴³.

5.2 Northern Ireland had the “largest digital divide in the UK” during the pandemic, according to research by Rogue Media (May 2021).⁴⁴ This found that more than 174,000 adults were either lapsed internet users or non-users last year in the north, with Mid Ulster the worst-affected area. Despite the coronavirus crisis prompting more communication and vital services to move online, research found 11.8 percent of adults over the age of 16 in Northern Ireland lived offline in the first three months of 2020. This means many people were left unable to access important online services or benefit from communication apps during the first lockdown last year.

“The digital divide is greatest in Mid-Ulster, with 17.8 percent of local residents (21,000 adults) either lapsed or internet non-users during 2020.” (op.cit)

Many are missing out on opportunities to find work, learn skills, save money, and access important services due to this digital divide. Many individuals are already coping with issues such as loneliness, poverty or unemployment. The pandemic has altered the design and delivery of all human-centred services and increased the risks associated with digital exclusion. A major challenge and opportunity for careers advisers and community partners is to advocate on behalf of individuals who are digitally excluded. Simultaneously, practitioners must increase their own digital competence and connectivity to structural changes in education and labour markets. In a career guidance context, a blended service delivery model enables practitioners to offer more targeted and tailored support to those most in need.

5.3 Evidence shows that three particular inequalities are likely to have risen because of the crisis: income inequalities between richer and poorer households, socio-economic inequalities in education and skills, and intergenerational inequalities between older and younger people (Blundell et al, 2021)⁴⁵. A survey of 37 countries indicates that 3 in 4 households suffered declining income since the start of the pandemic, with 82% of poorer households affected (WEF, 2020)⁴⁶. In these unprecedented times, careers advisers need to rapidly respond to the diverse needs of specific groups, particularly those most at risk of being left behind (Akkök, 2021)⁴⁷. Parents are key influence and international exemplars of good/interesting careers policies merit greater attention in NI (Barnes et al, 2020)⁴⁸.

5.4 There is a growing need to redouble efforts and avoid negative economic and social consequences, in relation to people, jobs, productivity and growth. Evidence shows health and well-being outcomes generally worsen with greater socio-economic disadvantage (WG, 2021)⁴⁹. For those displaced from key sectors most affected by the pandemic and new entrants to volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous labour markets, having easy access to trustworthy careers information, advice and guidance.

5.5 Based on our research findings, we propose the DfE with its strategic education partners, begin a new chapter in Northern Ireland post-primary schools with a move away from 'blanket interviewing', particularly in Year 12 when many choices and decisions have already been made, towards more enhanced targeted career guidance activities starting earlier in schools/colleges. This can include: more groupwork, raising awareness of and providing increased access to skills assessment tools, 1:1 career guidance, where appropriate, virtual reality, experiential learning, and high-quality 24:7 integrated self-help careers resources within a new rebranded all-age careers portal.

Comparison with good practice in other jurisdictions also suggests taking a more strategic approach to adult and community provision, with multi-agency services underpinned by the all-age careers portal and advisers building local networks of employers and specialisms. These two changes in approach are illustrated in the diagrams overleaf, describing how current provision might be transformed by taking on some of the ideas outlined in this section.

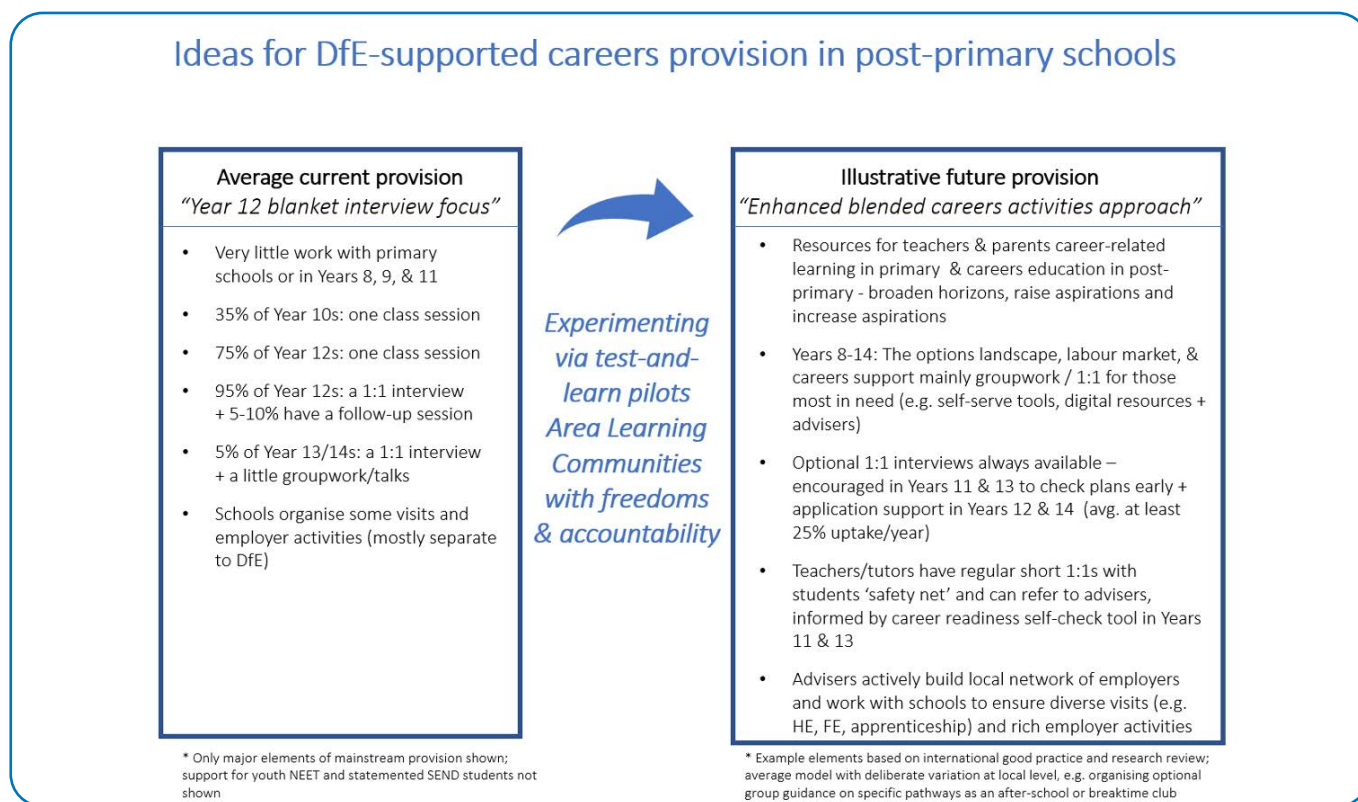


Figure 15: Ideas for DfE - supported careers provision in post-primary schools

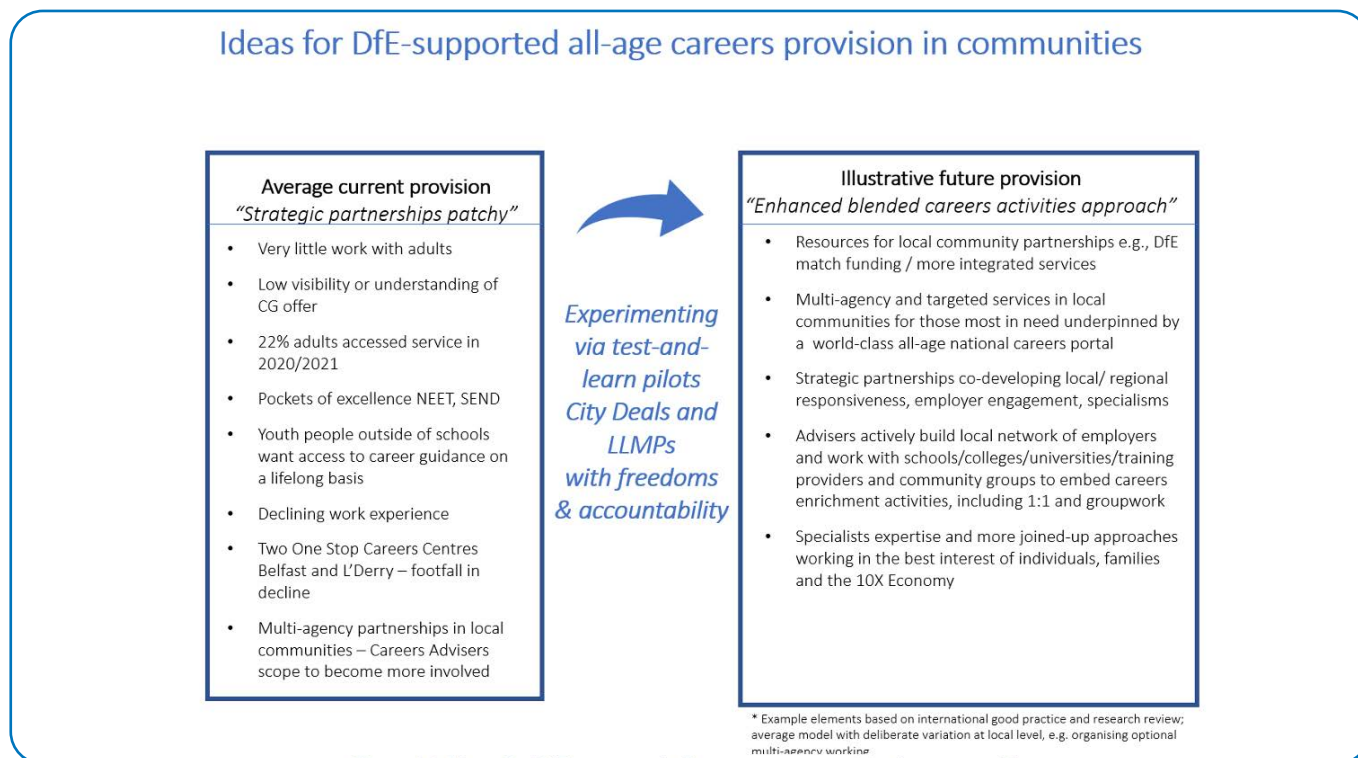


Figure 16: Ideas for DfE-supported all-age careers provision in communities

5.5 DfE, DE and the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) should formally agree setting up and closely monitoring the performance of new ‘test and learn’ career guidance pilots in selected Area Learning Communities. These should be designed to deliver ‘an enhanced career guidance offer’ embedded within the curriculum, new freedoms for utilising Careers Adviser expertise, alongside simplifying and synchronising working links between post-primary schools, STEM, employability, and enterprise hubs to avoid duplication of effort and maximise impact of resources. Embrace new delivery methods in post-primary schools/ALCs with local employer, enterprise, and professional body strategic partners to include career competitions and out of school/college careers activities and publish findings mapped across the key sectors in the 10X Economy.

Support and strengthen thematic career guidance pilots, including employer and enterprise links, the 10X Economy, the Skills Barometer 2021, young people and parental engagement, leadership, and best practice in inclusive careers education and CIAG. Address the deficit in not including career guidance in post-primary schools’ formal inspections.

For the pilots, all aspects of careers education and career guidance should be within an agreed set of common quality standards, training, monitoring and accountability framework. This should include: the responsibilities of the DfE, DE, ETI, EA, post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities (ALCs), including the allocation of DfE resources, with short, medium, and longer-term jointly agreed priorities and goals.

Increase joint investment for local career guidance support for adults, including a focus on re-engaging on skills assessment and job search activity.

There is an urgent need to increase investment in career guidance for adults in NI. The DfE, DfC, City and Growth Deals, Local Councils should explore joint opportunities for match-funding arrangements to target specific adult and youth priority groups working in strong partnership with community agencies to achieve increased employer and enterprise engagement linked to the ambitions of the 10X Economy. Also, jointly create an explicit ‘career guidance offer, particularly for adults. Career guidance needs to be made available for people in work as well as those in education. Link this campaign to TV, radio, and social media channels. Lessons can be learned from Working Wales #ChangeYourStory and other successful initiatives.

5.6 For those working in post-primary schools, a useful starting point for discussion with key strategic partners within the careers support ecosystem is the practical OECD framework below designed for helping post-primary schools and Careers Advisers to prepare young people for the world of work. For further details, including careers resources: visit - [Career Readiness - OECD](#) The OECD 2021 indicators provide a practical framework for designing and developing a ‘career readiness’ framework that can be applied to career education in a range of settings specifically targeted at supporting young people’s career decision making. Covacevich et al (OECD, 2021)⁵⁰ explored 14 possible indicators of career readiness, determining 11 as confirmed indicators of ‘*career readiness*’, using as a criterion that there must be evidence of an association with positive labour outcomes in at least three countries. Falling into three broad categories, these indicators are:

Table 7: 11 confirmed indicators of ‘career readiness’

Exploring the future	Experiencing the future	Thinking about the future
Career conversations	Part-time work	Career certainty
Engaging with people in work through career talks or job fairs	Volunteering	Career ambition
Workplace visits or job shadowing (virtual and non-virtual)		Career alignment
Application and interview skills development activities		Instrumental motivation towards school
Occupationally focused short programmes		

One-on-one careers guidance is not an explicit indicator but would be a key channel through which the “thinking about the future” indicators are achieved, as well as an opportunity for integrating these diverse activities and attitudes into higher quality choice making and execution.

5.6 Millard et al (2019)⁵¹ undertake a series of expert focus groups in the UK to specify principles that are important throughout a young person’s careers education (defined broadly to encompass all career relevant activities):

- **Universality:** all children and young people should access a careers education, regardless of their background, prior knowledge about possible pathways, or pre-existing aspirations.
- **Authenticity:** all pupils should experience work that reflects the realities of day-to-day employment.
- **Progression:** the different elements of careers education should build on prior learning and experiences, forming a coherent journey.
- **More is more:** a range of different interventions targeting different outcomes will increase the likelihood that all children and young people benefit.
- **Open-mindedness:** young people should engage with a range of ideas that open their horizons about a range of options.

This set of principles can guide how Careers Advisers might work in partnership with schools supporting young people as they make choices and career decisions, focusing on the overall package of activities and support that young people receive.

5.7 Several provocations for NI can be identified from principles and good practice, to be considered alongside insights from stakeholders and the broader external review evidence to identify possible recommendations to take forward:

Integration of CEIAG into a diverse set of activities mediated by and around school or college

The specific career-related activities are less important than the overall range and diversity of coverage, but might span curriculum, employer talks, work experience, HE/FE visits, role models, parents work, assessments, as well as traditional career information, advice and guidance. In practice, this approach implies seeing and measuring career guidance delivery as a combination of activities over which the Careers Service *only has partial control*. Such an approach better reflects the young person's perspective and the holistic nature of student support and choice-making. It may also position the Careers Service as custodian of good practice, with a role to encourage improvements in delivery across the school.

1. Start early

The New Zealand, Australia, England, and the US system recognises the value of career-related learning activities in primary school, noting that this builds the foundations for post-primary school CEIAG (Percy & Amegah, 2021)⁵². In Wales, the national Careers Service recognised the challenge of servicing the needs of primary schools on top of all other requirements. Wales developed an online adaptation of Minecraft gamification software called 'CareerCraft' for primary school teachers, children and parents to use as part of early independent career exploration.

2. Personalisation and personal agency

The potential for a base of universal provision is a strength to be maintained in Northern Ireland. Around such a base, it may be possible to provide additional opt-in careers activities and tailored programmes, including provision which tutors or teachers may urge well-suited individuals to participate in, drawing on appropriate technology and self-serve solutions where possible.

3. Volume of delivery

The volume of group work and individual guidance work in NI schools appears to be lower than various benchmarks, such as the minimum levels set in Gatsby (2014)⁵³, which in turn have been criticised for being too light relative to the ambitions of good quality guidance. Although increases in volume of delivery have cost implications, this may be offset – or at least more evenly distributed across organisations – as a result of the preceding three provocations.

4. Triage approaches and diagnostic screening. Globally, most career guidance systems adopt a triage approach to give greater support to those most in need of careers support. However, triage systems need to build up from some universal level of provision and need to introduce tiered support carefully, to avoid stigmatisation, reduced motivation to engage, and negative outcomes. At the same time, universal provision can lead to negative consequences, where one-size-fits-all activities are required of all participations at a certain stage of their education or career journey, regardless of whether it best suits their personal circumstances. There is scope to learn from best practice examples that already exist in Northern Ireland and to extend this further across all schools and colleges.

In Northern Ireland, two tools already in current usage might form part of a broader approach to triage: Xello (a skills-assessment tool for young people which also provides lesson plans for use in schools from year 8 to year 14) and Kudos (an adult self-assessment tool), both jointly funded by the DfE and DE. These two tools provide opportunities for exploring interests, personality and then providing careers/sectors that link with the results of their assessment. Both are currently being under-utilised.

Also, there may be additional skills assessment tools in the DfE careers website, FE and HE institutions that could be shared.

Barnes (2015)⁵⁴ concluded screening, profiling and targeting particular groups of jobseekers is considered useful for assessing individual needs to support a quicker return or transition to the labour market. Hughes (2018)⁵⁵ reviewed diagnostic assessment tools, on behalf of the Welsh Government, and concluded that there are different purposes for which diagnostic tools are developed and the methods used to assess skills/competence vary considerably. As a result, there is a marketplace of tools and digital methods available for Northern Ireland to consider drawing on as part of an expanded approach to triage.

Integration of CEIAG into a diverse set of activities deep within local communities

In addition to the above,

- *Employer-led skills, enterprise and talent programmes/initiatives.* Evidence shows employer engagement is a critical success factor in providing greater opportunities for young people and adults e.g. Mann et al, 2018⁵⁶, CIPD, 2022⁵⁷). The expertise of employers and career guidance professionals coming together with partner organisations in local communities is not only a useful resource to deliver careers support, but also an important channel to help shape and influence modern dimensions of career guidance. Employers and professional bodies interviewed for this review showed a willingness to support career guidance in these respects.
- *Integrated guidance provision.* The right balance must be achieved between face-to-face activities online and/or offline and more blended careers support arrangements e.g., embedded in the curriculum, community project-based or experiential learning, gamification, virtual work experience, careers fairs, internships, job shadowing, etc. Many countries are currently examining ways of delivering career guidance and employer encounters to students and outreach community partnerships.
- *Groupwork guidance.* In addition to a channel for providing guidance outcomes directly, group guidance can also be seen as a way of providing indirect support to one-to-one guidance and enhancing the impact of that guidance. Such supporting roles include using group guidance to assist with the preparation, follow-up, and understand of guidance, as well as in triage and timing, where individuals can have some influence over when the one-to-one session occurs. Watson and McMahon (2021)⁵⁸ argue that group career work provides individuals with the opportunity to learn from others and to support or be supported by others facing similar career development issues. Four or five sessions are often important in a group setting (typically referring to group sessions; see also Brown & Ryan Krane 2000)⁵⁹.
- *Remote guidance.* This was very rare in NI prior to the pandemic start in March 2020. Telephone and webchat guidance nonetheless took place with adults on some occasions prior to the pandemic. As such all advisers typically had some experience with a diversity of delivery approaches and client groups prior to the pandemic. Following the pandemic, remote guidance became the primary delivery method for large periods of time, as an operational requirement. This trend is evidenced within this expert collection of papers: Digital Lifelong Guidance: Rethinking careers practitioner professionalism – a CareersNet expert collection (Cedefop, 2021)⁶⁰.

The evidence base on remote versus face-to-face guidance remains limited and it is hard to be confident that pre-pandemic evidence will be valid for the future. Indicatively, there is some evidence that remote provision of guidance or therapy is similarly effective as face-to-face (Percy et al., 2021)⁶¹ on talks in primary schools; Irvine et al., 2020⁶² and Carolan et al., 2017⁶³ on teletherapy) or that it might be slightly less effective on some outcomes (OECD, 2020 on adult career guidance). From an operational perspective, there is likely only incremental efficiency savings from remote provision. The core activities of guidance require a similar amount of time to be delivered well, whether face-to-face or remote. Some small benefits may be gained from scheduling or time efficiency. The more compelling motivation for making remote guidance a part of provision is to better serve clients (some of whom will prefer it) and to suit practitioners (some of whom will value structured days for home working).

- Technology-focused provision. Technology, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are becoming even more ubiquitous and demographic changes will mean jobs emerge, evolve and disappear faster than ever before. The design of the DfE Careers Service in the coming year(s) must factor in inspiration features throughout such as virtual reality, videos, chatbots, the metaverse and significantly raise awareness of the all-age careers service on offer. See: NESTA CareerTech Challenge work with adults 18+⁶⁴.
- Place-/space- focused initiatives. The concept of local-networked, physical and/or virtual Careers Centres and/or Community Hubs can enable greater partnerships and access to all-age career guidance, including sector specific experiential or project-based learning focused on themes and specific challenges. For example, Finland has adopted a highly inclusive youth, health, education, training and employment one-stop arrangement. Whereas, New Brunswick (Canada) has adopted virtual partnerships that are specific to certain industries and sectors. England has established local-networked careers hubs and there is an expansion of physical Careers Hubs providing all-age career guidance in local areas of social deprivation, planned in Autumn 2022. All-age community based 'state of the art' Careers Centres are also prevalent in parts of Europe and Australia. The separate 'stand-alone' UK and international exemplar paper provides more details on these and other innovative careers policies and practices.

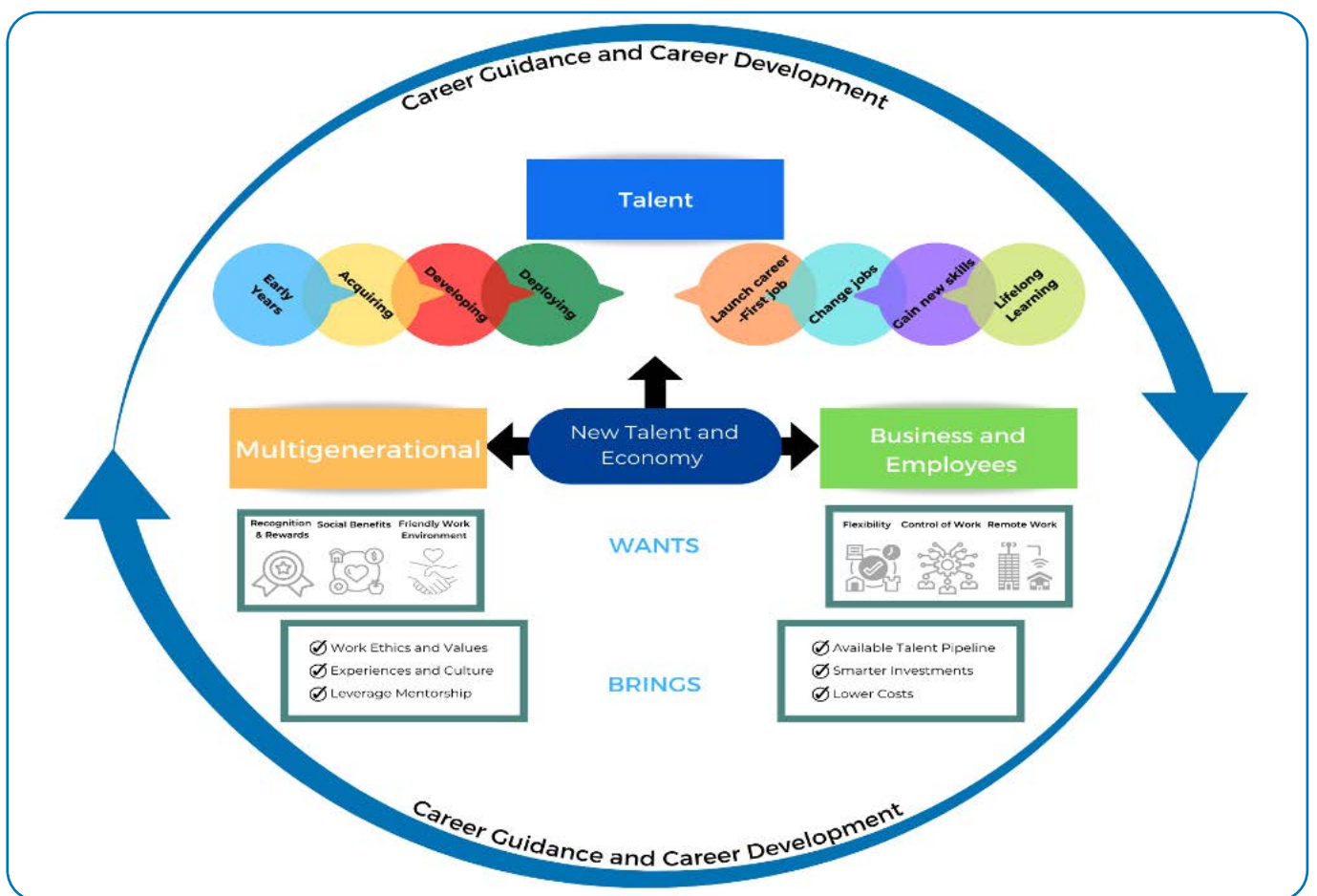
In conclusion, new approaches to careers support are required that focus on decent work opportunities, transferability of knowledge and skills, career adaptability and resilience (Hughes et al., 2019)⁶⁵. Also, new forms of multi-channel delivery (this spans several different channels, like social media, mobile phones, interactive websites and physical locations deep in local communities), curriculum learning, increased labour market intelligence (LMI), and targeted outreach with those most vulnerable, are critical success factors going forward.

For career guidance specialists and educationalists, the psychological, physical and mental impact of people having to adjust to a changing world of work requires significant understanding of what constitutes work or occupation in people's lives and that there are many differing forms. The closer alignment of career guidance and counselling to support mental health, and wellbeing alongside other talk therapies merits greater attention.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2018)⁶⁶ called for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

There is scope to consider new partnerships and structural arrangements now and in the future that could span from more intensive careers activities in education institutions and other community settings to an arms-length public/private/third sector rebranded Careers Service. The latter is outside the scope of this research. The DfE with its strategic partners has an exciting opportunity ahead to critique and consider the diverse options available for developing an innovative, modern all-age national careers service across Northern Ireland.

More career guidance and career development conversations are needed in local communities across Northern Ireland.



Adaptation from Soumyasanto Sen 2020

6. Financial Analysis and Statistical Comparisons (UK)

In this section, we set out a high-level statistical and financial comparison across UK regions which was agreed as in scope of this rapid review in order to support reflections on Northern Ireland's approach to career guidance.

This chapter shows that:

- NI has similar levels of need for career guidance compared to other UK regions, considering standard metrics for education and employment trajectories.
- Within this picture, the need in NI is slightly stronger for adults than those in secondary school, relative to the other nations. NI has slightly more young people completing school with at least a level 2 qualification and slightly lower youth NEET rates than other UK regions. For the adult population as a whole, however, NI has a lower employment rate than most other UK regions except the N. East of England.
- Central government spend on guidance is, however, significantly less per capita in Northern Ireland on both secondary education age services and working age services, around 2x-4x less than similar services in Scotland and Wales.
- Overall cost efficiency appears to be similar across the three nations, at around £100 per guidance interview including all delivery, coordination, and overhead costs, such that the lower investment in Northern Ireland translates into lower overall guidance provision.
- At NI's current unit cost estimates, it is highly likely that spend on guidance generates a net positive fiscal return, based on comparisons to similar activities addressed in detailed studies on adult guidance in Wales and secondary education guidance in England.

6.1 Indicative need for career guidance by region

Career guidance has the potential to support a wide range of outcomes, including improved education and employment trajectories that result in more balanced labour market supply and demand, social inclusion, and learning outcomes. Other outcomes include career fulfilment, wellbeing, and empowerment.

Several proxy statistics for education and employment trajectories can be used collectively to paint a picture of variations in need for career guidance across different UK regions (Tables 7 and 8). Such statistics are, however, inadequate for assessing the relative contribution of career guidance in the different systems to influencing positive outcomes, since too many other factors also influence those outcomes. Econometric analysis and special data collection is typically required to assess the impact of individual policies or interventions, such as career guidance, on macroeconomic indicators.

Table 8: High-level regional comparison

Region	% with level 2+ qualifications from sec'y education ⁷	% whole popn. employed, aged 16-64 ⁸	% econ. active unemployed, aged 16-64	% 16-24 NEET, 2018-2020 ⁹
N. Ireland	94%	70.0%	3.1%	12%
Scotland	91%	75.1%	3.6%	14%
Wales	90%	74.1%	3.4%	18%
England	91%	75.8%	4.2%	16%
England NE	91%	70.5%	5.7%	19%
England NW	91%	73.6%	4.7%	16%
England Y&H	91%	72.7%	3.8%	15%
England EM	92%	75.3%	3.5%	15%
England WM	88%	74.8%	4.7%	17%
England East	90%	79.4%	2.7%	16%
England London	90%	75.6%	5.4%	16%
England SE	93%	77.6%	4.2%	14%
England SW	91%	78.8%	3.0%	16%

Table 8 suggests that NI has slightly more young people completing school with at least a level 2 qualification and slightly lower youth NEET rates than other UK regions. For the adult population as a whole, however, NI has a lower employment rate than most other UK regions except the North East of England. The adult unemployment rate is slightly lower in NI, although this largely reflects a lower proportion of economically active individuals.

Table 9 provides a deeper look into highest qualification levels following the typical completion of undergraduate degrees as pursued directly from secondary education. Specifically, we examine the five year age band from age 23 to age 27, drawing on the three-year blended Annual Population Survey (2018-20), which has the largest sample size available in the UK for this type of analysis and builds on the Labour Force Survey as used for standard government labour market statistics.

7 Age 19 or 20 year olds, who have GCSE grades A*-C (or equivalent) or higher as their highest qualification. Data taken from the weighted three-year blended Annual Population Survey 2018-20, not seasonally adjusted. May include some individuals who moved region during or after secondary education.

8 Employment and unemployment rate data are seasonally adjusted for September to November 2021. Labour Force Survey data analysed by ONS. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/regionallabourmarket/january2022>

9 UK nations differ in their headline definitions and reporting of youth NEET data. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/august2021#related-links>. In order to have comparable data across regions, weighted data are drawn from the 2018-20 APS dataset. Definitions and time periods differ from other published sources. In particular, while appropriate for high-level comparisons between regions, these estimates are typically higher than headline national figures. Data are not seasonally adjusted, with very little difference in month or year of data collection between the four nations, although NI data are weighted slightly more to 2018 than 2020, and slightly more to June/July than August/September.

Table 9: Highest qualification levels across the UK (excl. don't know and non-responses, 2% of total)

	Degree Or equiv.	Higher Ed	A-levels Or equiv.	GCSE A*-C Or equiv.	Other	None
England NE	33%	6%	30%	19%	6%	6%
England NW	42%	5%	25%	18%	6%	5%
England Y&H	41%	5%	25%	16%	7%	6%
England EM	34%	7%	29%	18%	7%	5%
England WM	37%	5%	28%	17%	7%	7%
England East	39%	6%	26%	18%	8%	3%
England London	65%	4%	15%	8%	5%	3%
England SE	40%	7%	29%	16%	4%	4%
England SW	36%	6%	31%	18%	4%	4%
N. Ireland	41%	7%	25%	15%	6%	5%
Scotland	44%	15%	20%	11%	4%	5%
Wales	40%	6%	26%	18%	5%	5%

The qualification distribution suggests that Northern Ireland's early adulthood qualification profile is most similar to Yorkshire & Humber, the North West of England, or Wales. On average, qualification levels are in the middle of the UK regions, being higher than the North East, East Midlands, West Midlands, and the East of England. Taken together, this high-level statistical analysis suggests that NI in its current set-up faces similar structural needs for career guidance as the other UK nations, with need for a slightly greater relative focus on adults than school leavers.

6.2 Career guidance investment by region

This indicative picture of likely need for career guidance can be contrasted with the amounts of money invested by Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland in different aspects of career guidance, and the approximate unit costs of activity delivered with this investment. England is excluded from this comparison, since its marketised approach to career guidance is structurally different from the government delivery body approach chosen in the other nations.

These comparisons are indicative only as different types of activity are structured and funded in different ways in each nation. Nonetheless, the high-level differences provide a clear directional insight into relative levels of resource intensity. The NI central guidance spend is significantly less per capita on both secondary education age services and working age services, with approximate estimates suggesting per capita spend in NI 2x-4x less at age 11-18 and 3x-4x less at age 19-65.

Spend efficiency may also vary across the regions, such that NI's lower comparative investment nonetheless results in higher levels of impact. Output-level comparisons are particularly difficult, as the different organisations prioritise different mixtures of career guidance activity. However, detailed unit cost estimates for guidance activities have taken place for both Wales and Northern Ireland, which provide an initial basis for comparison.¹⁰ These estimates suggest that school-based guidance interviews have similar unit costs in both nations, at around £100 per interview. Adult-based guidance interviews are estimated with greater uncertainty, particularly as the service in Wales remains under development by the government and has been primarily in either start-up phase or pandemic delivery mode since launching. Nonetheless, estimates here are also similar at around £100-£140 per interview.

Table 10: Approximate annual per capita funding on guidance by central state delivery body

	NI	Scotland	Wales
Lead state-funded delivery body that covers guidance in secondary education	Department for the Economy's Career Service	Skills Development Scotland	Careers Wales
Example annual budget	£6m (FY 20-21)	£264m (2021-22, incl. apprenticeships)	£29m
Budget adjustments to better reflect IAG for those age 11-18 in education, and excluding central services that are outside the NI budget ¹¹	£4.6m (excl. in proportion to frontline delivery that serves adults in the labour market; no employer engagement provision)	£40m-£50m ¹² (mostly IAG delivery in schools/colleges and via dedicated careers centres; top end includes employability-related provision)	£12m-£16m ¹³ (excl. provision to adults; mostly IAG delivery in schools; top end includes leadership/CPD support and employer engagement)
Population aged 11-18 (inclusive)	190k	450k	280k
Approx. per capita investment 11-18	£25	£85-£115	£45-60
Ratio to NI spend for age 11-18	1x	3.4x-4.6x	1.8x-2.4x
Population aged 19-65	1.1m	n.a.	1.9m
Approx. budget spend on adult guidance	£1.4m	n.a.	£8.5m

10 The estimates for Northern Ireland are provided in full in Appendix 5.

11 Excluding overheads, defined for this comparison as staff and non-staff costs related to HR, premises, IT, and finance. Non-staff costs include such categories as insurance, utilities, rents, cleaning, depreciation, ICT equipment, and professional fees. Note that staff and non-staff costs related to the operational management hierarchy, admin, CPD, and events/marketing are all retained. Our analysis of financial accounts suggests this is typically a 15% reduction for guidance budgets.

12 Data analysed from Hooley, T., Percy, C., & Alexander, R. (2021). Exploring Scotland's career ecosystem: Evidence to support the Career Review. Edinburgh: Skills Development Scotland.

13 Data analysed from public available sources and discussed with management.

	NI	Scotland	Wales
Approx. per capita investment 19-65	£1.30	n.a.	£4.50
Ratio to NI spend for age 19-65	1x	n.a.	3.5x

Considering Scotland, Hooley et al.'s (2021)⁶⁷ review of SDS's youth provision suggests support is provided to around 230,000 young people per year. If about half of this corresponds to full guidance interviews, then its unit costs would also be similar to Wales and Northern Ireland, as calculated on a comparable basis. Estimates of unit costs for school-based guidance delivery in England are lower than the other nations (Percy, 2020)⁶⁸, but focus on direct activity costs rather than full organisational delivery models. In particular, this reflects the marketised approach of delivery in England, with the availability of term-time day-rate contractors. The unit costs allow time for CPD and on-costs, but assume high levels of efficiency, minimal central overheads, and focus on interview delivery only.

With frontline staff time being the primary driver of costs, similarly structured guidance sessions (e.g. number of minutes, need for preparation and follow-up), and similar beneficiaries, it is unsurprising that unit costs emerge as similar between regions. Overall, this suggests that the lower per capita investment by NI translates into lower volumes of guidance activity than Scotland and Wales, despite the need for guidance likely being similar. The small investment into adult guidance in Northern Ireland, relative to the likely greater need, is a key insight informing the recommendations in this review.

6.3 Directional assessment of fiscal return on investment

The unit cost estimations for Northern Ireland can be used as an indicative assessment of whether NI activities are likely to be net positive from a broad fiscal perspective, by comparing to studies of similar activities conducted in Wales and England.

Adult guidance in Wales has been estimated, via triangulation with US randomised control trials, to have a partial fiscal ROI of 1.6x, considering more rapid return to work by an average c. 3 weeks and 3% higher wages applied to a subset of clients, primarily those receiving over 1 hour of 1:1 guidance (Percy & Hughes, 2022 forthcoming). Since NI adult guidance appears to have a similar cost to the Welsh benchmark used in the ROI calculation and there is no evidence the service would be less effective, it is likely that NI adult guidance has a similar ROI and is likely to be (just) fiscally positive. This estimation assumes that the individual who got the job does not displace someone who would go onto unemployment.

In England, guidance interviews during secondary education are estimated to have a partial fiscal ROI of 4.4x, considering lifetime benefits in terms of reduced youth NEET, reduced drop-out from those who go onto higher education, and reduced early labour market churn, focusing on the subsets of students who initially have poor career planning or are at some risk of NEET (Percy, 2020). The England model considered (Gatsby Benchmark 8) is not identical to NI's current delivery model focused on Year 12 but is founded on the same underlying principle of one-to-one career guidance interviews being applied to most of the students in the cohort.

The England ROI is driven by a unit cost of guidance of £40. With NI guidance at c. £100 per interview, the equivalent ROI would be 1.8x. Considering that a number of benefits are not monetised, such as benefits on wellbeing and reduced health costs, this ROI is also likely to be fiscally net positive.

Both of the above estimates focus on a fiscal perspective, where estimates of total social benefit are typically higher. For instance, broader assessments of social ROI might consider wage gains and associated productivity and economic multiplier effects, being higher than the direct tax take, and with benefits for community cohesion through reduced unemployment and wellbeing through coaching support and better fit career pathways.

This approach assumes that guidance and its benefits might be expected to be broadly similar in NI as in England and Wales. Given the uncertainty introduced by this, and the ROI figures only being borderline positive, NI may wish to prioritise initiatives that increase its likely cost effectiveness. Reviewing the comparative investment figures and the broader insights from the external review, this may focus on ways to extend services such that the overall impact per pound is higher, rather than looking to reduce costs.

7. The Future of Career Guidance Delivery in NI

This section outlines six big challenges and 15 key recommendations for consideration by the Minister for the Economy and Careers Advisory Forum with strategic partners.

SIX BIG CHALLENGES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Transformations are taking place in learning and work which require more frequent and more complex choices from individuals than ever before. Northern Ireland's talent pipeline is severely weakened by many individuals being inadequately prepared as part of their formal schooling to develop career readiness, digital and life skills. Citizens are competing for jobs and career openings not just with each other but with people across the UK and much of the rest of the world. To succeed, they need to be prepared – and are entitled to that support. Labour market opportunities, education and training pathways, destinations are changing at a rapid pace.
2. There is a long-standing concern in NI on the academic and technical vocational education and training divide. Attitudes, misconceptions, and myths surround academic and vocational learning pathways. There are concerns that any change will weaken educational standards, yet too many people are dropping out of education system post-16 e.g., there is a serious decline in further education college entrants.
3. High levels of economic inactivity are resulting in widening and deep inequalities between the 'haves' and 'have nots'. For many vulnerable young people and adults, the pandemic has not only knocked their confidence and affected their motivation but has also created a distance between them and labour market opportunities. Skilled careers and employability professionals within multi-agencies working more closely together embedded deep in local communities are needed to address this.
4. Public awareness of and access to high-quality all-age career guidance is low. The current system is viewed by many as 'a schools only' careers service which means adults are not benefitting fully from the services available to them. The current DfE's careers portal is generally perceived as "insufficiently inspiring" despite its rich content. Its full potential is restricted by the DfE standardised website communications approach.
5. Many employers are frustrated with the current system of all-age careers support, particularly the schools approach. Many are unaware of the wider range of DfE Careers Services 'offer' to employers. Employers report they are often confused by the myriad of contacts they regularly receive. There are concerns about a 'brain drain' loss of individuals choosing to leave Northern Ireland to study and/or work in other parts of the UK (or further afield).
6. Northern Ireland has no formal training structure for careers education delivered by teachers, there is an immediate shortage of professionally trained and qualified careers advisers (with no postgraduate specialist career guidance pathways available in Northern Ireland) and shortfalls in continuous professional development (CPD) for those working with young people, adults, employers and parents in complementary education, careers, employability, and community development settings.

To address both challenges and opportunities, it is essential to achieve a culture change in all-age career guidance and careers education in post-primary schools, further and higher education, and in local communities. There should be a mutually agreed set of principles and priorities introduced offering universal support, with a strong emphasis on place-based approaches, complemented by online careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) supporting local people and local economies. Those working in the careers ecosystem should work together to agree how best to achieve this to support transitions, improve social inclusion and social mobility. **A strengthened Northern Ireland careers ecosystem, through a more strategic collaborative approach, should draw together experience and expertise from across the whole system to maximise the impact of its collective resources.**

We have identified inspiring and innovative UK and international exemplars of careers policies and practices for wider consideration outlined in a separate ‘stand-alone’ report. Based on stakeholder feedback from 4117+ individuals, easy-to-understand common language should be adopted by local, regional and national delivery agencies across Northern Ireland’s careers ecosystem, e.g.

- 1. Embed careers in the curriculum.**
- 2. Enrichment careers activities for all.**
- 3. Employability and skills development.**
- 4. Enterprise, self-employment, and entrepreneurship.**

Northern Ireland has a unique opportunity to change the current careers education and career guidance system radically for future generations. Largely all the component parts of the system sit within central government control. With agreement at a strategic, political and policy level – careers guidance can be placed closer to where people need it – in schools, FE, HE and in many other local community settings – supported by an all-age modernised world-class national careers portal.

2021 has been a year - not just a moment - of incredible change. Northern Ireland is now in a period of major transformation. By enabling people of all ages to access self-help, brief-assisted and professional expert careers support, when and where they need it, tailored to their specific needs and individual circumstances, this will help significantly improve education, social, wellbeing and economic outcomes. Those in the careers eco-system have a unique opportunity to take collective action based on these recommendations. A final remark from an employer:

“We’re a small and talented nation with people and skills as our biggest asset for economic recovery. I truly believe if we all come together collectively, we can position Northern Ireland as offering world-class careers support to young people and adults. Let the work begin and let’s all aim high!”

Theme	Recommendations	Priority ¹⁴	Key steps
<i>Primary school children, parents, and teachers</i>			
Start career-related learning early in primary schools.	<p>Career-related learning (CRL) needs to start early in Northern Ireland primary schools. A UK and international evidence-base indicates this helps broaden horizons, reduces gender stereotypes, and increases children’s aspirations and motivation to learn.</p> <p>Rec: 1 – The DfE should include high-quality CRL resources in a new rebranded all-age national careers portal supporting parents in career conversations with their child(ren).</p>	<i>High</i>	<p>It is noted this is primarily the responsibility of the Department of Education, therefore outside the remit of this commissioned research.</p> <p>Embed high quality CRL resources into a new world-class rebranded all-age national careers portal.</p>

14 High denotes to be actioned within 9-12 months, High-Medium denotes to be actioned within 18 months, Medium denotes to be actioned no later than 24 months.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>World-class digital and blended approaches to careers support services</i>			
<p>A new world-class rebranded all-age national careers portal with differing entry points for specific groups including young people, adults, parents, employers, apprentices and entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Employer and professional bodies, FE and HE providers have expressed a willingness to contribute and update programmes of study and/or opportunities for young people and adults.</p>	<p>Rec: 2 – The DfE with education, employers, and community strategic partners, should co-create the content of a new rebranded all-age national careers portal, led by the Careers Service. A partnership arrangement should set out plans for sustainability of the new national careers portal. Exemplars of good/interesting UK and international careers policies and practices should inform the commissioning and design principles.</p> <p>Clarify and agree within DfE Communications that a new all-age national careers portal must be freed up from the current nidirect portal which is generally perceived as “insufficiently inspiring” despite its rich content. Its full potential is restricted by the existing standardised website and constraints within the nidirect editorial style guide. There are some examples where this new approach has already been achieved in Northern Ireland in response to employer needs e.g. the Matrix website.</p>	<p><i>High</i></p>	<p>Involve employers, professional bodies, behavioural insights experts, trade unions and parent groups in the early planning and development of the modern all-age national careers portal with an expectation they will bring added value resources and experience to feed into the content and sustainability plan going forward. (Refer also to UK & International Exemplars Report).</p> <p>Set up DfE careers portal and digital technology team to horizon scan for digital innovations.</p> <p>Harness the expertise that exists in 6 further education colleges, 2 universities and the Department for Economy to make more accessible high-quality all-age career guidance resources, including professional expertise, quality assurance approaches, skills assessment toolkits, employer engagement, mentoring, virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI) and gamification of the world of work.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p><i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i></p>			
<p>Introduce greater flexibility and accountability within ALCs in meeting young people, parents, and employer needs within post-primary schools. This must be part of a wider education continuum that supports young people’s career readiness, digital, employability and enterprise skills.</p>	<p>Rec: 3 – The DfE, DE and the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) should formally agree setting up and closely monitoring the performance of new ‘test and learn’ career guidance pilots in selected Area Learning Communities. These should be designed to deliver ‘an enhanced career guidance offer’ embedded within the curriculum, new freedoms for utilising Careers Adviser expertise, alongside simplifying and synchronising working links between post-primary schools, STEM, employability, and enterprise hubs to avoid duplication of effort and maximise impact of resources.</p> <p>For the pilots, all aspects of careers education and career guidance should be within an agreed set of common quality standards, training, monitoring and accountability framework. This should include: the responsibilities of the DfE, DE, ETI, EA, post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities (ALCs), including the allocation of DfE resources, with short, medium, and longer-term jointly agreed priorities and goals.</p>	<p><i>High</i></p>	<p>Support and strengthen thematic career guidance pilots, including employer and enterprise links, the 10X Economy, the Skills Barometer 2021, young people and parental engagement, leadership, and best practice in inclusive careers education and CIAG.</p> <p>Embrace new delivery methods in post-primary schools/ALCs with local employer, enterprise, and professional body strategic partners to include career competitions and out of school/college careers activities and publish findings mapped across the key sectors in the 10X Economy.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p><i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i></p>			
<p>A new ‘blended’ career guidance delivery model and careers education (including face-to-face and online careers activities starting earlier in the curriculum) in post-primary schools.</p> <p>Parents and employers report they expect young people to have access to skills assessment tools from an early age.</p>	<p>Rec: 4 – The DfE, with its strategic partner the DE, should formally introduce a new blended career guidance delivery model in post-primary schools, to complement careers education (including face-to-face and online careers activities starting earlier in the curriculum) with an agreed action plan for critical steps forward by 1st June 2022.</p> <p>This should include all post-primary schools working in genuine partnership with the DfE, taking responsibility, and each playing their part in helping to identify those students who need most assistance (through a transparent triage system), and regularly introduce students and parents to the differing levels of local and national careers support available to them on a lifelong basis.</p> <p>The Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) should include the totality of career guidance as defined above within its inspection framework for post-primary schools. It should assess the extent to which all post primary schools offer young people and parents a ‘blended careers offer’ with a range of delivery methods including skills assessment tools, new digital technologies, and a published careers programme in a standard format, including access to Careers Advisers’ expertise. The inspection framework for schools and colleges should reflect this requirement, alongside the DfE’s approach making skills assessment available 24:7 to all young people (and adults).</p>	<p><i>High</i></p>	<p>Begin a new chapter in Northern Ireland’s post-primary schools with a move away from ‘blanket interviewing’ towards more enhanced targeted career guidance activities starting earlier in post-primary schools e.g. more groupwork, raising awareness of and providing increased access to skills assessment, 1:1 career guidance (where appropriate), virtual and experiential learning, and high-quality 24:7 integrated self-help careers resources within a new rebranded all-age national careers portal.</p> <p>Develop a robust triage system tailored to all young people’s unique circumstances. This should not stigmatise young people as being ‘at risk’ because they are not going to follow an academic route, instead it should be highly responsive to all young people’s circumstances which are likely to change over time.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i>			
Parents and employers report they expect young people to have access to skills assessment tools from an early age.	The Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) should include the totality of career guidance as defined above within its inspection framework for post-primary schools. It should assess the extent to which all post primary schools offer young people and parents a 'blended careers offer' with a range of delivery methods including skills assessment tools, new digital technologies, and a published careers programme in a standard format, including access to Careers Advisers' expertise. The inspection framework for schools and colleges should reflect this requirement, alongside the DfE's approach making skills assessment available 24:7 to all young people (and adults).	High	<p>Address the deficit in not including career guidance in post-primary schools' formal inspections.</p> <p>Make the current joint investment by DfE and the DE to provide every post-primary school with a high-quality skills assessment tool¹⁵ for teachers and students work to good effect. Currently this is only being used by 42% of post-primary schools.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i>			
	<p>Rec: 5 - The DfE, DE, Education Authority working with ALCs should co-publish data on annual trends in anonymised student occupational interests, young people's exposure to and experiences of the world of work and how this aligns to the realities of local labour markets and the 10X Economy.</p> <p>DE, the Education Authority and ALCs should agree at least a minimum work experience offer for students which includes exposure to growing and emerging sectors in NI.</p> <p>These developments should be made available in standard format that can be shared across the careers ecosystem.</p>	High-Medium	<p>Establish a new regional system for analysing trends linked to young people's career aspirations and how this aligns to the ambitions of the 10X Economy and make this type of anonymised data more readily available to those within the careers ecosystem.</p> <p>Explore options for career action plans and how these can be best applied with young people and adults.</p>

15 Xello is a free resource for students and teachers in schools/colleges, including lesson plans for teaching Year 8 – Year 12.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p>Adults and young people in communities e.g. FE, HE, vocational training, other community/third sector providers including City Deals and local Labour Market Partnerships</p>			
<p>Deliver careers guidance in the heart of the community – making it visible and aligned with local economic strengthening and enterprise initiatives.</p>	<p>Rec: 6 – The DfE Careers Service knowledge and expertise should be embedded more fully within Local Councils e.g. City Deals, local Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs), and local community employability and entrepreneurial initiatives. This should make the Careers Service more visible and impactful working in the best interest of local citizens and employers. This is particularly important given the low rate of economic activity in Northern Ireland¹⁶.</p> <p>Rec: 7 – The DfE with the DfC, Local Councils and local LMPs should explore opportunities for match-funding arrangements to target specific adult and youth priority groups working in strong partnership with community agencies to achieve increased employer and enterprise engagement linked to the ambitions of the 10X Economy.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Increase joint investment for local career guidance support for adults, including a focus on re-engaging on skills assessment and job search activity.</p> <p>Jointly create an explicit ‘career guidance offer, particularly for adults. Career guidance needs to be made available for people in work as well as those in education. Link this campaign to TV, radio, and social media channels. Lessons can be learned from Working Wales #ChangeYourStory and other successful initiatives.</p>
<p>Regional and local strategic partnerships in communities.</p> <p>Once graduates have left higher education it is unclear where career support should be accessed.</p>	<p>Rec: 8 – The DfE should develop core principles, expected outcomes and a blended career guidance delivery model defining what individuals in all DfE funded provision can expect. It should set and make explicit targets for local and regional community strategic partnerships with place-based approaches in local communities as this is what most young people and adults want and need, alongside an easy-to-use content-rich all-age national careers portal.</p> <p>The DfE, FE and HE providers should focus together on targeted campaigns for those most in need of careers support and agree a standard offer of ongoing careers support available to specific groups including sixth form, FE and HE students.</p>	<p>High-Medium</p>	<p>Acknowledge the pandemic has significantly weakened DfE Careers Service ties to community organisations and seek to strengthen its blended career guidance offer and visibility in working closely with local and national agencies, supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups.</p> <p>Set targets for strategic place-based partnerships and online support.</p> <p>Agree a series of targeted campaigns set within specific 2022 – 2025 timelines.</p>

16 E.g. Sep-Nov 2021 Labour Force Survey data shows 70% of NI is economically active compared to 76% in England.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p>Adults and young people in communities e.g. FE, HE, vocational training, other community/third sector providers including City Deals and local Labour Market Partnerships</p>			
<p>Careers and Occupational Information Unit, UUEPC Skills Barometer, labour market trends and digital horizon scanning expertise.</p>	<p>Rec: 9 – Build on the success of the DfE’s Careers and Occupational Information Unit (COIU), DfE economists, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC), FE Curriculum Hubs, and 10X Economy strategic partnerships (including other professional bodies that represent employer needs) to co-produce more excellent, economy driven careers information and LMI bulletins that can be accessed both online and within post-primary schools and other local community agencies.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Raise the profile of the COIU and 10X Economy strategic partnerships (including other professional bodies that represent employer needs) and further develop digital horizon scanning to strengthen young people and adults’ access to trustworthy CIAG.</p>
<p>Multi-agency one-stop centres, including new ‘State of the Art’ multi-agency places and online spaces for all-age career guidance.</p>	<p>Rec: 10 – The DfE should integrate specialist Careers Advisers within multi-agency one-stop shop arrangements working deep in local communities alongside Health and Social Care Trusts, other public, private and third sector organisations that have established close working links.</p> <p>The DfE and DfC should assess local delivery arrangements within City Deals, local LMPS and Economic Development plans to review existing capital spend projects and add a social value clause to ensure ‘State of the Art’ multi-agency places and online spaces for enhanced careers education, CIAG, employability and enterprise experiences made readily available in selected local towns and cities.</p> <p>The DfE should publish ‘success stories’ and ‘pockets of excellence’ where Careers Advisers and key community organisations have together made a positive impact on young people and adults’ lives, particularly those furthest away from the labour market to inspire more community partnerships.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Assess the efficacy of retaining the existing DfE Careers Centres in Belfast and L’Derry e.g. what is the likelihood of increase in footfall? are the premises fit for purpose to support multi-agency working? Is there duplication of resources at a local level?</p> <p>Draw inspiration from UK and international exemplars and set out a vision and new roadmap for world-class ‘State of the Art’ multi-agency ‘places and online spaces’ that make lifelong learning, career readiness, digital and employability skills fun, engaging and accessible for all, including career cafes, pods, skills and enterprise workshops, live events, coaching, mentoring, etc., co-designed by key stakeholders in local communities within the careers ecosystem.</p> <p>Explore options for connecting and engaging with Northern Ireland’s Youth Parliament so that the voices of young people can feed more regularly into a new DfE Careers Service design and delivery model.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Adults and young people in communities e.g. FE, HE, vocational training, other community/third sector providers including City Deals and local Labour Market Partnerships</i>			
Advocate and broker new work opportunities for under-represented groups in the labour market.	<p>Rec: 11 – DfE Careers Advisers should work in partnership with employers, enterprise hubs, the DfC and key community strategic partners to ensure that those with disabilities, health problems, caring responsibilities, people with low qualifications and older people are fully supported with professional career guidance to help achieve their full potential and contribute to NI economy.</p> <p>Employers should embrace the flexibility required to access these untapped labour reserves, in line with the Skills Barometer 2021 recommendations (p.51).</p>	<i>High</i>	<p>Actively promote career guidance support to all those looking to upskill to improve their chances of securing, retaining or progressing in employment. Supporting the working age population to develop skills in demand should be a key focus.</p> <p>Limit rises in long-term unemployment, by building on the Department for Communities' Work Ready Employment Services programme and fast tracking previously furloughed workers into DfE career guidance support.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Employers, professional bodies, trade unions and Careers Advisory Forum</i>			
Partners in the careers eco-system supporting the talent pipeline for micro-and small-medium-sized employers and entrepreneurs, as well as large companies.	<p>Rec: 12 – The Careers Advisory Forum, supported by DfE and its strategic partners should host an employers, education, professional bodies, and trade unions' formal event to jointly review and discuss UK and international exemplars of careers, employability, and enterprise initiatives.</p> <p>The Careers Advisory Forum should conduct an independent review of the implementation of the agreed priorities and actions by 1st June 2023, in line with the research recommendations.</p>	<i>High-Medium</i>	<p>Review and prioritise key thematic areas for further development within the careers ecosystem e.g. the New Brunswick, Canada Virtual 'Centres of Excellence' that focus on sector-specific online experiential learning, an all-age careers portal, virtual reality, AI and gaming, multi-agency one stop centres, CPD systems of support, etc.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Professionalisation within Northern Ireland's careers ecosystem</i>			
Careers Adviser 'specialisms' rather than 'generic'.	<p>Rec: 13 – The DfE should re-introduce specialist Careers Advisers bringing more focused expertise, specialist knowledge and agility to respond to the 10X Economy goals, employer, education, other local community provider and digital requirements. It should further upskill and train Careers Advisers in use of digital technology applied in careers practice e.g. the metaverse, virtual reality, gamification, chat bots, social media, etc.</p> <p>The DfE should examine closely with the UK Career Development Institute's (CDI) the Careers Adviser apprenticeship pathway and qualification to help attract new recruits to the Service i.e., recruit some apprentices who will bring diversity and social inclusion into the workforce.</p>	<i>Medium</i>	Strengthen the capacity and expertise of Careers Advisers and build in new channels for sharing specialist knowledge within DfE.
Careers education, career guidance and employability training, and quality standards are inconsistent between DfE, DE, EA, ETI, CCEA and DfC.	<p>Rec: 14 – DfE, DE supported by the CAF and key strategic partners should explore options for introducing a requirement for shared careers education, career guidance and employability continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, including the formation of a new NI Careers and Lifelong Learning Academy.</p>	<i>Medium</i>	<p>Include all CAF organisations, particularly community and voluntary agencies, to explore ways of breaking down existing barriers to joint CPD.</p> <p>Explore options for strengthening initial teacher training programmes in Northern Ireland's universities to include careers education and career guidance theory, research and best practice, similar to best practice in the North-East of England and further afield.</p> <p>Focus on careers innovation and more data driven approaches, including Masters' and PhD research scholarships similar to arrangements in Scotland, that inform and influence the strengthening of the careers eco-system.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Professionalisation within Northern Ireland's careers eco-system</i>			
A Careers Strategy and Career Guidance Framework.	Rec: 15 – Refresh the existing Careers Strategy and replace this with a Career Guidance Framework agreed between DfE as policy lead, DE and DfC which sets out the strategic aim, policy commitments, principles and expected outcomes of the all-age, future proof career guidance system to ensure the Northern Ireland Talent Economy and world-class all-age career guidance supports the national economy and creates a more hopeful and prosperous future for all citizens of Northern Ireland.	<i>High</i>	Examine all options as part of a strategic review for a new Career Guidance and Careers Education vision set beyond 2023 for the future positioning of careers education and career guidance each uniquely placed to support the nation's economic recovery and the people of Northern Ireland in being able to access an all-age world-class cost-effective resource.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Young people responses by school/college

School	Responses
Ashfield Boys High School	29
Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch	83
Ballycastle High School	1
Ballymena Academy	27
Banbridge Academy	28
Bangor Grammar School	90
Belfast Boys Model School	9
Belfast High School	1
Belfast Royal Academy	1
Castledearg High School	27
City of Armagh High School	39
Clounagh Junior High School	64
Coleraine Grammar School	237
Cookstown High School	48
De La Salle	1
Dominican College, Portstewart	123
Down High Grammar School, Downpatrick	227
Drumragh Integrated College	1
Edmund Rice College	1
Erne Integrated College	19
Fivemiletown College	23
Impact Training, Belfast	23
Larne Grammar School	152
Loreto Grammar School, Omagh	50
Lumen Christi College	87
Magherafelt High School	62
Malone Integrated College	46
Methodist College, Belfast	17
Mount Lourdes Grammar, Enniskillen	90

School	Responses
Newtownhamilton High School	12
Oakgrove Integrated College, Derry	14
Our Lady's Grammar School, Newry	76
Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim	3
Peoples First	4
Portadown College	11
Priory Intergrated College, Hollywood	4
Rainey Endowed Grammer School, Magherafelt	16
Regent House Grammar School, Newtownards	10
Royal School Dungannon	43
Rutledge	2
Saint Fanchea's	1
Southern Regional College	6
Sperrin Integrated College	38
St Cecilia's College, Derry	2
St Colm's High School, Belfast	4
St Dominic's, Belfast	4
St Genevieve's High School	3
St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore	1
St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen	95
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan	102
St Marys College, Derry	92
St Marys Grammar School, Magherafelt	38
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	41
St Patrick's High School, Keady	16
St Patrick's and St Brigid's College, Derry	3
St Patrick's College, Ballymena	1
St Patrick's College, Dungiven	4
Strabane EOTAS	3
Strathearn School	2
Wallace High School, Lisburn	45
Thornhill College, Derry	78

School	Responses
Ulidia Integrated College, Antrim	10
Victoria College, Belfast	1
Workforce Training Services	92
Did not answer	28

Appendix 2 - Respondents to call for evidence who provided their organisation details. A total of 57 formal submissions were received

Details of those who provided their organisation details out of a total of 57 formal submissions

- St Patrick's College
- Young Enterprise NI
- MENCAP
- NIPSA Careers Branch 32
- Start360
- Derry Youth & Community Workshop
- CAN
- Open College Network NI (OCN NI)
- 4C UR Future
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) Awarding Organisation
- The Controlled Schools' Support Council
- RNID
- Heron Bros
- Clanrye Group
- SPECDRUM LTD
- Dawson Engineering
- McGrath Engineering Ltd
- Banbridge Academy
- Food for Thought
- Down High School
- Wellington College Belfast

Appendix 3 - NI contributors: online meetings and/or focus group sessions

Name of organisation	Number of contributors
Almac Group – Frances Weldon, STEM Outreach Manager	1
Alternatives Restorative Justice Bangor – Sarah Reynolds	1
Banbridge Academy – Robin Mc Loughlin OBE, Principal	1
Belfast City Council – External Stakeholders and Youth Forum facilitated by Jonathan Twinem, Employability and Skills Officer and colleagues	32
CCEA – Margaret Carragher – Acting CEO	1
Clanrye Group – Ashleigh McCartan, Career Mentor, Downpatrick	1
Compass Advocacy Network NI (CAN) – Janet Schofield, CEO	1
Construction Employers Federation (People & Skills Task Force) – facilitated by Mark Spence, Managing Director and David Fry, Director of External Affairs	10
Department for Communities – Chris Smart, LMPs Team	1
Department of Education – Gareth Edge, 14–19 Policy Team	1
Derry Youth Community Workshop – Declan Doherty	1
DfE Careers Service NI – Staff consultation meetings x 3 – 79 staff attended + 43 responded to survey questionnaire + Trade Union representatives	78
Disability Action NI – Nuala Toman, Head of Policy	1
Education Authority – Patricia Cooney, Acting Director of Education	1
FE Careers Group – Fineen Bradley, Manager, North West Regional College Careers Academy and Grace Neville	2
Federation of Small Businesses NI – Roisin Mc Aliskey, Development Manager and Neil Hutchinson, Policy Manager	2
GEMS NI – Aileen Graham, Employment Consultant	1
HSCNI – Ellen Patterson, Senior Social Worker	1
Include Youth – John Mc Comb, Employability Manager, Niall Cooke, Community Support Worker	7
Lecale Learning Community Downpatrick – Stephen Glass/Lucy Hynds	2
LEDCOM – Ken Nelson CEO and Dr Norman Apsley OBE	2
National Education Union – Mark Langhammer – Regional Secretary + Alastair Donaghy – Regional officer	2
NIPSA – John Wallace + colleagues (Careers Committee)	7
NI Secondary Schools Support Council – Dr. Andrew Brown, Vice–Chair	1
Open College Network NI – Martin Flynn CEO	1

Name of organisation	Number of contributors
Queen's University Belfast – Professor David Jones, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Students)	1
Royal Academy of Engineering– Gillian Gregg, Senior Business Development Manager	1
SERC – Ken Webb, Chair of the Colleges' Principals Group	1
Southern Regional College – Brian Doran, Chief Executive	1
St Joseph's HS Crossmaglen – Paul Mulholland, SENCO Lead	1
St Mary's College, Derry – Carolyn Rogan, Head of Careers	1
TREE Training Centre – Graham Bowden, Training Co-ordinator	6
The Education and Training Inspectorate – Gearoid Rafferty	1
University of Ulster – Angela Scanlon, Director of Employability	1
Workforce Training Services – Paul Boyle, Deputy Manager	1
Workplus Advisory Board members chaired by Richard Kirk	7
Workplus Apprentices chaired by Lucy Marshall, Community Engagement Interns	5
4C UR Future, Rose Mary Stalker, Founder and Chair and Rachel Doherty, Managing Director	2

Appendix 4 – Financial analysis

Unit cost analysis for Northern Ireland

The purpose of this unit cost analysis is to understand the full fiscal costs to deliver particular services on a per beneficiary/attendee basis for the last three business years. The numbers in this document are based on initial discussions and analysis in December 2021 and January 2022.

Costs are attributed on the basis of top-down analysis, in which the total budget of the organisation is contrasted with the total volume of services actually delivered. As such, it reflects achieved unit costs, influenced by the challenges of the particular years (e.g. the pandemic from 20/21) and the difficulties in gaining access and driving demand for services to young people and adults.

Achieved unit costs are different from hypothetical unit costs, which might be estimated based on the time and resources required to deliver an example activity. Such bottom-up analyses of the ingredients of an activity can be particularly helpful for considering changes to a delivery model, but typically account less accurately for the total costs of delivering a service in a particular setting and hence are less useful for analysing fiscal return on investment, particularly where services delivered from a total budget are more homogenous.

Time frame analysed

Three years are analysed in this appendix, financial years 2018/19, 2019/20, and 2020/21, running from April to March of the respective years. The volume of IAG delivery is drawn directly from financial years for services, differentiating services delivered for the over 18s and under 18s. Some over 18 activities reflect services provided to young people in their final months of education (e.g. if they turn 18 earlier in the academic year), and is treated as guidance delivered in an education setting, to differentiate it from guidance delivered in a labour market setting, being the case for most employed and unemployed adults. The first financial year is fully pre-covid, the second is almost fully pre-covid, with some pandemic effects beginning in March 2020, and the third year corresponds to the first year of the pandemic.

Understanding total costs

The costs available cover the full budget of the DfE Careers Service, including all frontline staff, all managers/administrative staff, as well as general administrative expenditure, premises overheads, and training budgets. The main category of costs excluded is the rental value equivalent of premises used, since facilities are primarily government buildings whose cost is not assigned to individual departments. Contributing activity by schools is also excluded, such as premises/facilities' costs for guidance that takes place on school premises or the cost of school staff time in supporting guidance. Since the analysis focuses on fiscal costs, the opportunity cost to individuals of participating is not analysed. The summary budget figures are presented in Table A.1.

Table A.1. Total budget (GBP)

	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21
Staffing	4,947,691	5,465,462	5,526,527
GAE	167,284	179,229	73,940
Careers SBRI – Capital Grant	0	102,006	133,018
CIAG spend [Project related spend: contracts, advertising, CPD/Training]	237,791	129,094	236,199
Total	5,352,767	5,875,791	5,969,684

Understanding delivery volumes

The approach to unit cost estimate is to allocate the total budget of the organisation across all frontline activities delivered for each business year. In this approach, all supportive activities (e.g. management, administration, overheads) are understood as contributing indirectly to the frontline activities and are allocated according to some proportion. Given the vast majority of costs are for frontline IAG time, we allocate indirect costs in line with the estimated proportion of IAG time across different activities.

The allocation analysis considers the number of participants who benefit from different IAG interventions in total over each year (as a direct output from the Careers Service database). The number of beneficiaries as logged in the system is translated into staff time, with estimates from the senior team¹⁷ on the typical average number of beneficiaries per activity and number of minutes required to prepare for, deliver and follow-up on each activity. The end result of this analysis is shown in Table A.2.

17 Thanks to Christina Kelly, Claire O'Reilly, and Joanne McKinney for their support with these assumptions and review of the results.

Table A.2: High-level distribution of organisational activity (given demand for services), by estimated minutes of frontline staff time dedicated to that activity

	Activity structure and time (incl. time for prep+ follow-up)	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21 (in pandemic)
In education setting				
Guidance	1:1 sessions, absorbing an average of 45 mins each, as well as short sessions at job fairs (e.g. 30 mins each, allowing for some travel time to the event) or parent-teacher evenings (e.g. 10 mins each) NB. Time spent on admin for the under 18s ¹⁸ school staff meetings or support worker meetings to discuss pupils is treated as part of prep/follow-up to guidance work.	64%	60%	36%
I&A	1:1 interactions for information requested by web chat, email or other contacts (avg 15-20 mins), as well as brief interactions in passing (e.g. avg 8 mins)	2%	2%	35%
Groupwork	Avg 4-7 participants for groupwork in schools, colleges, or TFS, taking 60 minutes in total (NB. first time will take more prep time, but sessions typically repeat multiple times, like class talks)	1%	1%	0%
Class talks	Avg 45 minutes to prep, deliver and follow-up actions for class talks for avg 25 attendees (mostly take place in Year 12, some in Year 10, plus a handful of others)	2%	2%	1%

18 E.g. Phone calls/texts to confirm sessions, letters, training credit issuance. This also includes the large guidance emails sent to many pupils post-pandemic, setting out personalised options and ideas. The response to these emails varied widely, but some followed or led to guidance sessions.

	Activity structure and time <i>(incl. time for prep+ follow-up)</i>	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21 (in pandemic)
SEND support	e.g. 45 mins per SEND pupil for pre-annual review meetings, 75 mins per SEND pupil for annual review meetings, 30 mins for SENCO/Transition officer meetings per pupil discussions. Time for pre-annual review meetings and staff meetings is treated as an input or follow-up to the annual review meetings as the point where beneficiary impact is achieved.	10%	9%	4%
<i>In labour market setting</i>				
Guidance	60 mins for standard 1:1 sessions; 45 mins for 1:1 work delivered by webchat or email/phone	16%	20%	10%
I&A	1:1 interactions for information requested by web chat, email or other contacts, taking avg 15-20 minutes to serve.	1%	2%	10%
Groupwork	Avg. 4 attendees in group sessions for CV building, interview workshops or general groupwork (mostly for the unemployed, some employed participants)	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Misc activities *	n/a	4%	4%	4%

* Other activities might include the provision of online content which is accessible to anyone and might provide value outside of direct IAG provision and a small number of activities logged in the service database that do not categorise easily (e.g. presentations at events with unspecified audiences/beneficiaries, case conferences).

All non-delivery time by advisers, such as breaks, inefficiencies in scheduling, CPD or holiday periods, are similarly assumed to be allocated against the categories above using the same apportioning. One advantage of the NI model in having advisers serve both under 18 and over 18 populations is that advisers can schedule their time quite efficiently around the different availability of these groups. Managers also report that advisers can make good use of any time between sessions or as a result of no-shows to work on admin, CPD or preparation work, such that advisers are similarly efficient overall regardless of whether they are primarily supporting over 18s or under 18s in a particular week.

Prior to the pandemic, guidance in an education setting (c. 65% being Year 12 guidance interviews) accounted for 60%-65% of frontline delivery time, with a total of c. 10% on stated SEND pupils support and c. 5% spent on information and advice, groupwork and class talks. As a consequence of the pandemic and associated difficulties with accessing clients, there was a significant shift to in-education advice away from in-education guidance (and to a lesser extent other activities, such as SEND support). Such additional advisory activity took the form of long personalised emails sent to

individual pupils. Our estimates suggest that total frontline time was slightly higher during the pandemic than before, e.g. c. 10-15% more time spent, primarily as a result of advisers working hard to prepare the personalised emails and to provide support to clients in difficult circumstances. Reduced commuting time may also have been a factor for some advisers in increasing frontline work logged on the system during 2020/21 compared to the previous two years.

IAG for employed and unemployed adults in the labour market typically accounted for 15%-20% of frontline delivery time. 4% of the budget is assumed to be allocated to activities not otherwise captured, e.g. making digital resources and information freely available online, and to represent activities not well categorised elsewhere.

Allocating the organisation budget from Table A.1 in accordance with Table A.2 and contrasting this with the volumes of activity delivered and typical participations rates for group events, we identify unit costs per attendee beneficiary as set out in Table A.3 below.

Table A.3: Unit cost per beneficiary of an activity, based on output of frontline activities¹⁹ (GBP)

	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21
In education setting			(Covid affected)
Guidance (schools/other educ)	97	107	104
I&A (schools/other educ)	32	40	50
Group (schools/other educ)	20	22	20
Class Talks (schools/other educ)	4	4	4
SEND	184	198	165
In labour market setting			
Guidance (adult)	105	110	93
I&A (O18)	41	46	49
Group (adult)	40	39	30

* Greyed out where based on little delivery volume and estimates are both less reliable and less material to the overall budget

The unit costs vary from year to year, given the disruption from Covid and shift in uptake of services and both decreased demand and opportunity to deliver services. Overall, the results suggest c. £95-£110 per guidance intervention in schools/colleges or in a labour market setting. The annual review meetings for statemented SEND pupils are nearer £170-£200 per beneficiary, in part because of the pre-review meetings and staff meetings that often support or follow-up on the annual review work. Information and advice provision is lower cost per unit of information or advice provided, reflecting the reduced amount of time needed: £30-£50 per unit. In an education setting, the higher average cost of I&A provision during the pandemic reflects the long form personalised emails sent to pupils.

¹⁹ In a small number of cases, notably personalised IAG emails to pupils during the pandemic, it is often unknown whether the emails were received or found helpful. However, most of the group and individual IAG activity volumes are based on confirmed attendees participating/interacting in the activity.

There is a smaller amount of resource dedicated to groupwork activities and class talks making it harder to estimate unit costs via the top-down method. Nonetheless, the estimates available suggest that groupwork is about £20 per attendee in an education setting or £30-£40 in a labour market setting, reflecting average attendees of c.7 and c.4 respectively. Class talks, delivered to a typical group of 25, have much lower unit costs per attendee at around £4, particularly where we assume that talks are typically repeated for different groups or from year to year, such that the significant initial preparation time can be spread over multiple occasions.

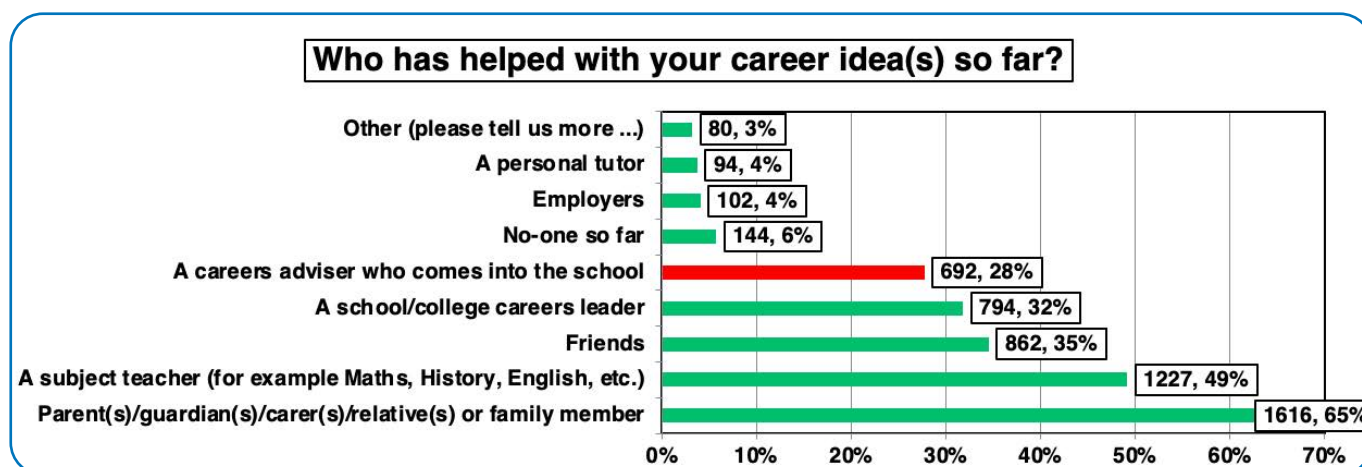
These unit costs all reflect a single beneficiary at a single activity. However, viewed from a participant perspective, there might be multiple activities that combine to generate a useful contribution to their pathway decision-making or action-taking. For instance, a class talk in Year 10, followed by a 1:1 guidance session in Year 12, with one or two follow-up queries by email that are dealt with as information provision, might all contribute to post-16 pathway success. An alternative view of unit costs that could be explored in the future is to consider the total support provided to an individual as part of a typical pathway stage (e.g. pre-16, 16-18, round of support to someone unemployed or facing redundancy).

Appendix 5 – Survey data

The following charts and data have been collated from the online surveys of young people, parent/carers, school/college heads/principals and teachers, adults and The Call for Evidence from employers and other stakeholders. This information has been adapted to be presented in the form of an infographic within section 4.0 of the main report.

A5.1 Feedback from survey of Young People – perceptions of the careers offer

Who has helped young people with career ideas so far?



Who has helped young people with career ideas so far? Nb. Personal Tutor refers to a teacher. Careers leader refers to a Careers teacher and/or co-ordinator.

- 84% (n=2088) of young people have talked to someone about their careers or subject choice.
- 28% (n=692) indicate they have spoken to a careers adviser who comes into the school (see chart Figure 8 above).
- Of the 692 students who had spoken to a DfE careers adviser - 42% (n=218) were in year 12; 29% (n=149) were in year 13 and 24% (n=125) were in year 14 indicating that the main focus of careers guidance is provided to these specific year groups. (Note: Some students did not specify their year group).
- 32% (n=794) have spoken to a school/college careers leader.
- 65% (n=1,616) of students mainly turn to parents or subject teachers 49% (n=1227).
- 79% (n=1,983) of students claimed they know where to go to get careers information and guidance.
- 70% (n=1,760) think that careers advice is either very important or essential.
- 61% (n=1,184) who answered the question said they believed they were receiving enough careers activities and guidance. (578 skipped the question)

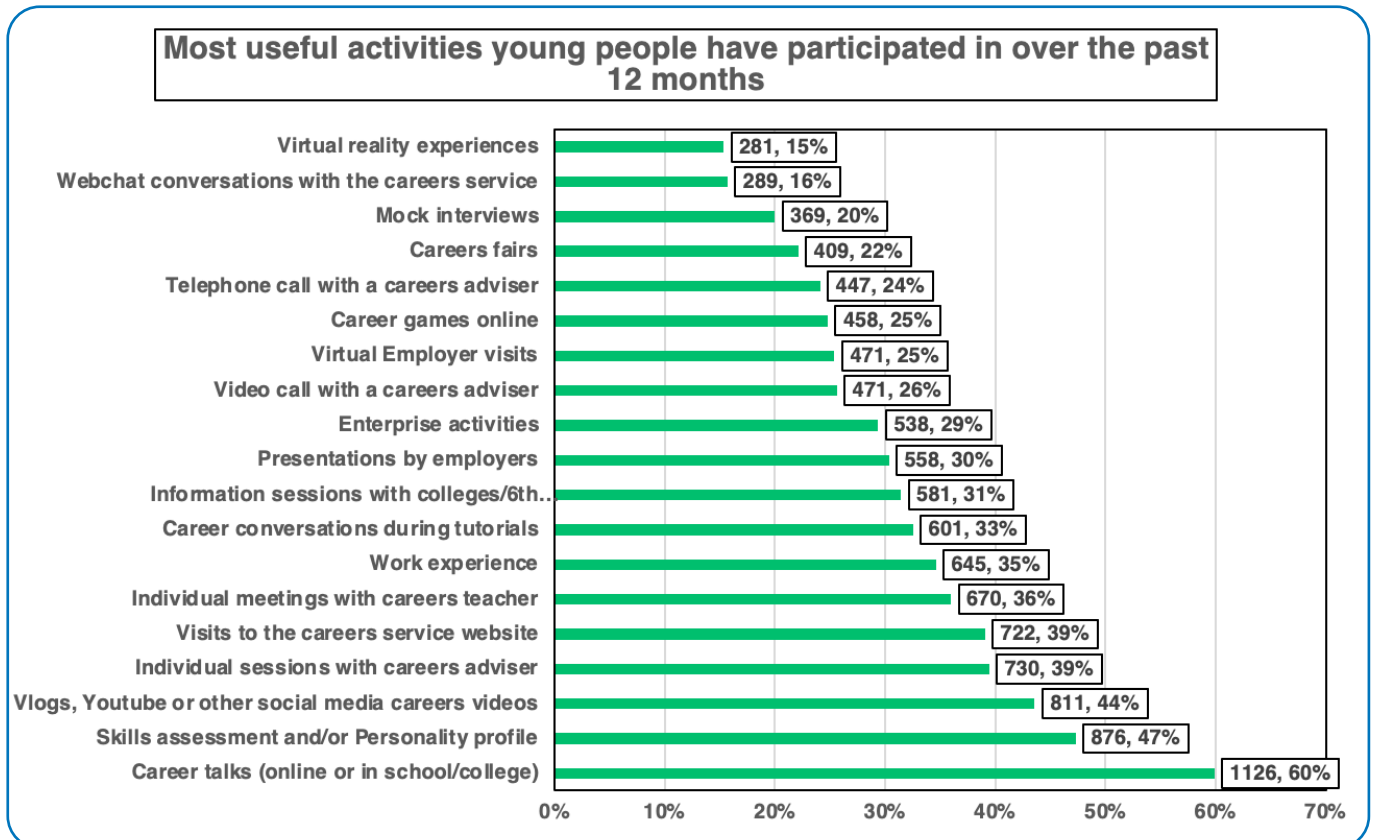
Young people’s preferred method of delivery

The chart below illustrates the main activities which young people state they have participated in and found most useful over the previous 12-month period. The most frequently reported activities were **Career Talks** reported by 60% (n=1126) followed by **Skills Assessment** 47% (n=876) and **Careers Videos** 44% (n=811).

The activity that young people participated in the least was “**Webchat conversation with the Careers Service**” and **Virtual Reality Experiences**, with 79% (n=1,452) of respondents who answered the question reporting they did not do these activities.

It is unsurprising that activities such as Careers Fairs would have been rated low as a direct consequence of Covid restrictions.

- 81% (n=1558) of those who answered the question. said they would like to have learned more about careers whilst at school or college. This somewhat contradicts an earlier question posed to the students in which 61% (n=1164) claimed that had received enough careers activities and guidance while at school.
- 68% (n=1303) said they would be prepared to learn more about careers in their own time. (NB 1909 answered this question)
- **68% (n=1322) of young people recognised that having good exam results along with good careers advice were of equal importance.**
- 79% (n=1545) claimed that their subject choices were influenced by their potential career interests.



Main careers activities that young people participated in over last 12 months

When asked the question “How would you want to learn about careers and the world of work?” students were asked to rank activities in order of most useful/importance to them. The responses in the chart figure below illustrate the top 3 activities identified by the young people are:

- **More individual careers meetings with a careers adviser** ranked at 3.84 out of 5 by 1211 students.
- **More individual careers meetings with a careers leader** in the school/college ranked at 3.71 by 968 students.
- **Virtual work experiences** ranked at 3.51 by 915 students.
- **More group work sessions with a careers adviser** rated at 3.18 by 983 students.
- **A skills assessment** tool rated at 3.08 by 978 students.

It should be noted that the majority of students responding to this survey are in years 12 and 13 and therefore individual careers meetings and group work sessions will have been very relevant to those young people at an important time in their school careers – refer to Table 1 page 42.



This contrasts with the responses to the earlier question in which students identified the most useful activities to them over the previous 12-month period where **Careers Talks, Skills Assessments** and **Career Videos** were cited as being most useful. Clearly, a blended approach is needed to optimise careers delivery.

A5.2 Schools and Colleges

School and college perceptions

60% (n=86) of respondents rated **as good or excellent** - **“How do you rate the career guidance support to your school or college from the Department for Economy’s Careers Service?”**

70% (n=106) agree that the Careers Guidance provided by the Department for Economy’s Careers Service for students in their school or college is a high priority.

The **“Need to prepare students for fast changing world of work”** is cited as the main reason for providing careers guidance in schools and colleges by 92% (n=137) of respondents.

90%(n=133) state that careers is embedded into their curriculum delivery plan.

77% (n=115) stated the main activity delivered by the DfE’s Careers Service is independent careers interviews for students. This was followed by 48% (n=72) and 44% (n=67) telephone/email correspondence with students or video calls with students. 25% (n=37) conduct group/tutorial sessions.

Comments are mixed. Some examples include:

“All students are interviewed by the Careers Service but the majority of our students are committed to completing A Levels. Careers Service provide very valuable information to students wishing not to continue with A Levels but most of the advice students require, regarding A Levels and universities is provided by the school.”

(Careers Co-ordinator, South Eastern region)

“It is important for students to receive external guidance in this area...we can only do so much within school and they listen to an outsider as it is a different face!”

(Careers co-ordinator, Western region)

“The information shared from the careers service and online support materials are incorporated into a taught programme of work. The additional guidance and support supplement the provision already available in school and the relevant expertise in relation to the range of provision available for students requiring transition plan advice is valued. The face-to-face guidance meeting provided a focal point of engagement for Year 12 students and offered individual time to consider future pathways.”

(Careers Co-ordinator, Southern region)

“We greatly value the one-to-one career guidance interviews offered to all Year 12 pupils and to sixth formers on request by the Careers Service.”

(Careers Co-ordinator, North Eastern region)

“I have never heard of it or been contacted by Careers department in this college.”

(Subject teacher, Integrated college, Southern region)

“I believe it is very poor. There is little information provided to the pupils and indeed their parents. We receive little to no communication from the Careers service as far as I am aware as a form teacher of a year 14 class.”

(Subject teacher, Western region)

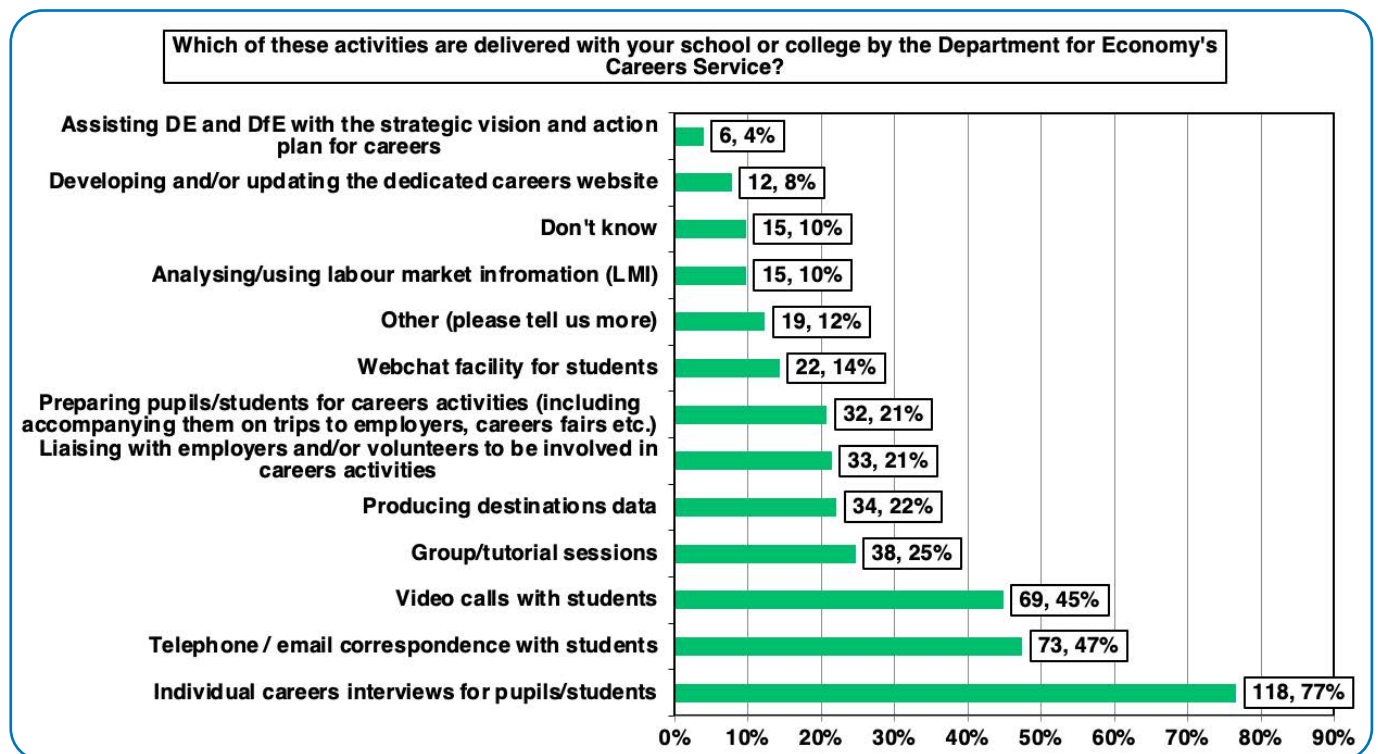
“I don’t believe it is recognised or valued as a meaningful conversation as it is targeted at the wrong group of pupils. The action plans are not sent to parents, and it requires authentication to access which prevents parents from seeing this. Therefore, a waste of time.”

(Careers Co-ordinator, Western region)

The impact of Covid has reduced young people’s exposure to and experiences of the world of work. In summary, careers education to designed in schools and colleges to prepare students for the rapidly changing world of work and to manage their transitions smoothly. While this is embedded into the curriculum, experiences and expectations of the role of subject teachers, careers co-ordinators and DfE careers advisers differ significantly. For college students this is less problematic given careers and employability in built into programme design, delivery and quality assurance.

Schools and colleges – preferred method of delivery

The figure below indicates the most frequent careers activities, identified by school and college teachers and principals, that are delivered to them by the Department for Economy’s Careers Service. 77% (n=118) stating that, currently, **Individual careers interviews with students** and 47% (n=73) **Telephone interviews with students** are the most frequently delivered activities.



Activities delivered in schools by the Department for Economy’s Careers Service

When asked to provide examples of where careers advice in their school/college had a significant impact:

- 27% (n=41) school heads/principals and teachers reported that help to specific year groups was seen as more impactful e.g., years 10,12,13 and 14.
- 18% (n=27) of teachers/head teachers/principals indicated that helping students with **options and choices**, either in subject choices in year 10 or 12 or in career paths post 18, had an impact.
- 13% (n=20) identified that providing students information about the different “Pathways” open to them was impactful. This included information about apprenticeships and training.

Employer engagement enriches career guidance. When people in work cooperate with schools and other providers, better understanding can be expected of the working world in all its varieties. Mann (2021) argues:

“It allows access to useful experiences and to new and trustworthy information which broaden and deepen career aspirations. First-hand encounters are powerful learning opportunities. Direct experience of workplaces helps individuals to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to access available work.” (Dr Anthony Mann, Senior Policy Adviser, OECD)⁶⁹

Employer engagement within career guidance is a very effective means of helping employers to signal demand for labour. Given the impact of Covid in the jobs market, it is especially important for guidance to be enriched through first-hand access to people in work. Employers and their employees are well placed to advise future job seekers of how their workplaces and occupational skill requirements are changing. This practice is clearly visible in both further and higher education settings.

Selected other comments include:

- Pupils understanding that they have multiple options and pathways at post-18 beyond university or employment e.g., travel, enterprise and/or volunteering
- Helping pupils who are unsure of a career path
- Providing pupils with information on alternative routes to A level
- Helping with SEN pupils post-16
- Workshops on options for further study
- Leavers’ destinations
- Past pupils coming back into the school or college to share their destinations and lessons learned
- Working with pupils who are undecided in Year 14
- Our career adviser has exceptional labour market information and passes this on to our students to help with their decision-making process
- Career Fairs held providing pupils with information on what is on offer
- Increased Pupil awareness of LMI and using this information when considering A level choices
- Keeping careers staff updated with trends and opportunities for students, e.g., apprenticeships and up to date information on changes to training courses

In summary, schools and colleges value the support of the DfE Careers Service, but mainly for one-to-one interviews with students at key stages in their career decision making. From the list above, there are other means of providing support such as the provision of LMI and course information, destination data, workshops and careers fairs. Clearly there needs to be a level of support to those in need of most in need.

“Individual Guided interviews with Year 14 students who were unsure of destination. Really helped them decide on pathway.”

“One-to-one interviews (both from in-house staff and NI Careers Advisors) have generated positive and fruitful conversations and decisions made by pupils about the best pathway for them.”

A5.3 Parents’ perceptions

Many of the year 12 pupils have still to be interviewed when survey was completed. In response to the question “My child(ren) has/have been receiving career guidance through their school or college during Covid (the period since March 2020)” parents were divided in their answers with 44% (n=320) in agreement with the statement and 33% (n=237) stating they disagree and while a further 24% (n=172) did not know. (263 did not answer the question)

- 75% (n=548) of those who answered the question believed their child(ren) **had some ideas about their future.**
- 73% (n=529) claimed their child(ren) **are very serious and proactive about planning for their future career** options.
- 71% (n=517) **do not know who is the careers adviser in their child(ren)’s** school or college.
- 44% (n=323) of parents **did not know the DfE’s Careers Service help the school/college to support their child(ren)** well to develop ideas about linking subjects to future career opportunities; a further **23% (n=169) disagreed with the statement** with only 33%(n=239) registering any level of agreement.
- 52% (n=383) believe their children know how to link their subjects to career opportunities; 27% (n=197) disagree with this and 21% (n=151) did not know.
- 50% (n=368) say their child(ren) are collecting useful information about their achievements and employability skills; while 33% (n=239) disagree with this and 17% (n=124) do not know.

The box below shows areas for discussion, particularly in relation to parents’ perceptions of the DfE’s work with employers and the promotion of the Career Service website.

- 30% (n=217) agree that the school brings employers/employees from the world of work into the classroom. *(nb. 262 parent/carers did not answer this question)*
- 19% (n=136) agree that their child(ren) have taken part in external work-related activities in the classroom pre-Covid lockdown in 2020 and 15% (n=108) post Covid. *(nb. 261 did not answer the question)*
- 27% (n=200) agree that DfE’s Careers Service provides valuable information on opportunities for their child(ren) to make informed career decisions. *(nb. 260 did not answer this question)*

- 23% (n=165) of parent/carers agreed that the DfE Careers Service works with the school/college to encourage me to broaden my child(ren)'s horizons. (nb. 264 did not answer this question)
- 21% (n=152) of parents/carers who answered the question agreed that the DfE's Careers Service is supportive in enabling your child(ren) to make informed decisions about their next step and about their overall career plans. (nb.262 respondents did not answer the question)
- 17% (n=120) state they have visited the DfE's Careers Service nidirect website – <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/>

The reason for some of the above responses may be due to shortfalls in communication between schools and parent/carers due to the impact of Covid with schools having other pressing priorities at this time. In some cases, their child(ren) is/are in the earlier years of secondary school, years 8 and 9, and at this stage of their child(ren)'s development many they do not consider career guidance applicable.

"I take a keen interest in my son's future but haven't heard of DfE career service or any career service through the school." (Parent of Year 10 student, Grammar school)

"My eldest child was at BGS so aware that he was given slot of advice plus careers evenings were excellent. There were also lots of emails re opportunities, etc. For year 9 my other son probably feels this is a long way off so has no idea what he wants to do nor feels it's relevant." (Parent of current Year 9 and ex-student Grammar school)

A total of 92 parents volunteered comments summarised as follows:

Some were positive about the career guidance their child(ren) received in school or college:

"My daughter in year 12 has had a career interview and is now very focussed on her future which is fantastic as the last 2 years have been such a worry. The career adviser she spoke to was fantastic, took time to explain everything and to answer all her questions. The summary she/we received was excellent with several links to follow up." (Parent, School Student)

"Excellent support from career advisor" (Parent of 18-year-old.)

"Really engaged with ideas from employability module in year 8. The information was relevant and really exciting for her." (Parent of Year 8 College Student)

In stark contrast,

"My child felt her careers class was not informative enough. She decided herself to start a list of names of pass pupils who went onto do certain careers and ask if they would mind being contacted for advice." (Parent of a 16-year-old, School Student)

“Any research has been completed by parents, no help from the school.”
(Parent of 16 year old Grammar School)

“Some ideas generated through discussion at home. Career guidance at school has been nil.”
(Parent of 16-year-old Grammar School)

“Was unsure of career choice in year 12. Needed more guidance from careers teacher. Not really helpful. Have asked numerous times for her to call me to discuss career options. Has never contacted me. Spoke to child in school and having decided on midwifery she was not forthcoming on helpful choices of A levels needed.” (Parent of Year 12 School Student)

Many stated that their child(ren) is/are still too young or immature to make decisions about their future; In contrast to the statistic above, some stated their child(ren) had little or no idea. Some stated that they had conducted their own research or sought independent advice:

“Career aspirations have been developed independently and through own research. No appointment with a DfE Careers adviser has occurred. In fact, it is my understanding that the DfE Careers Service has not had any contact with my child to date, despite having signed up within the school.” (Parent of Year 12 College Student)

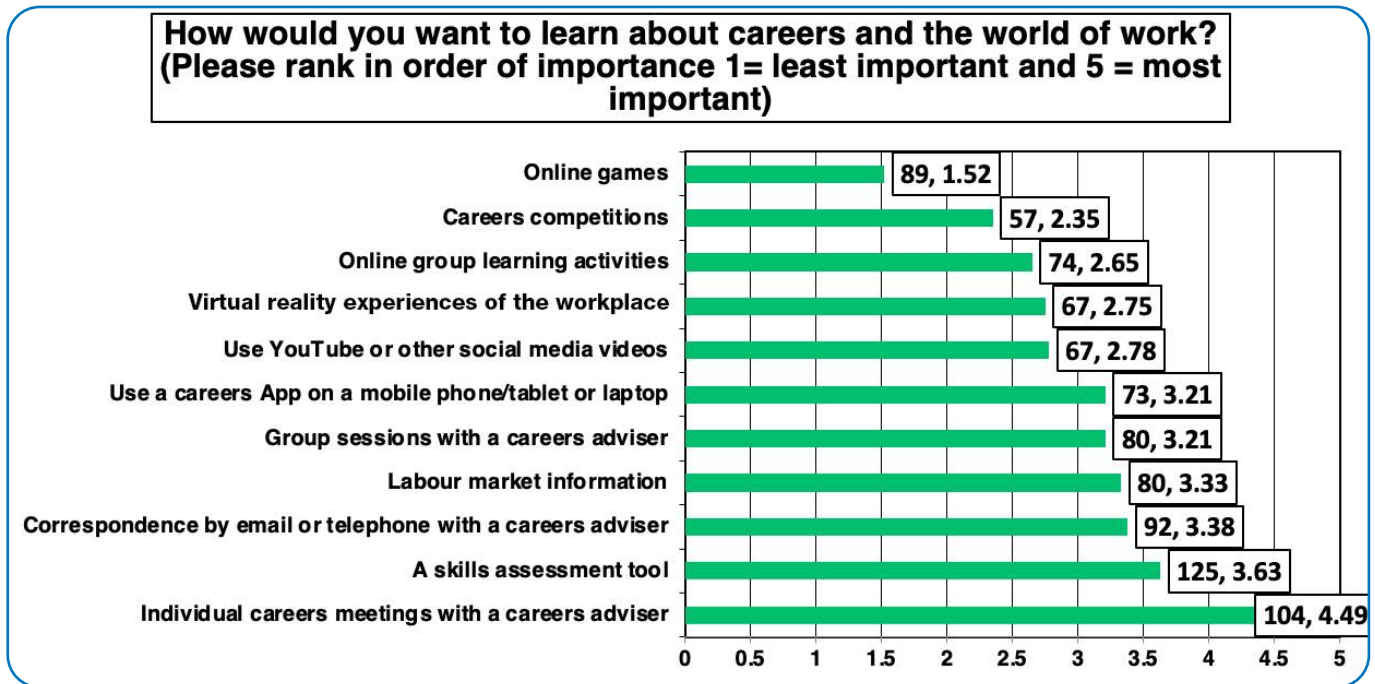
“Any guidance came from her class teachers rather than careers advisors” Parent of 6th Form (Grammar School Student)

“Because careers advice is so poor and there has been little opportunity for in person careers events my daughter is not sure what to do!” (Parent of 6th Form Student, College)

Parents have differing interpretations of the careers guidance offer and believe their child(ren) needs are not being met. There appears to be a lack of distinction between the role of the careers teacher and careers adviser. This has implications for a continuing positive relationship outside of school. Also, the results in the distinctive features of the Careers Advisers all-age and impartial work not being fully understood in relation to services available beyond formal schooling. The fact that so few have visited the website indicates that communication about and promotion of this service needs to improve.

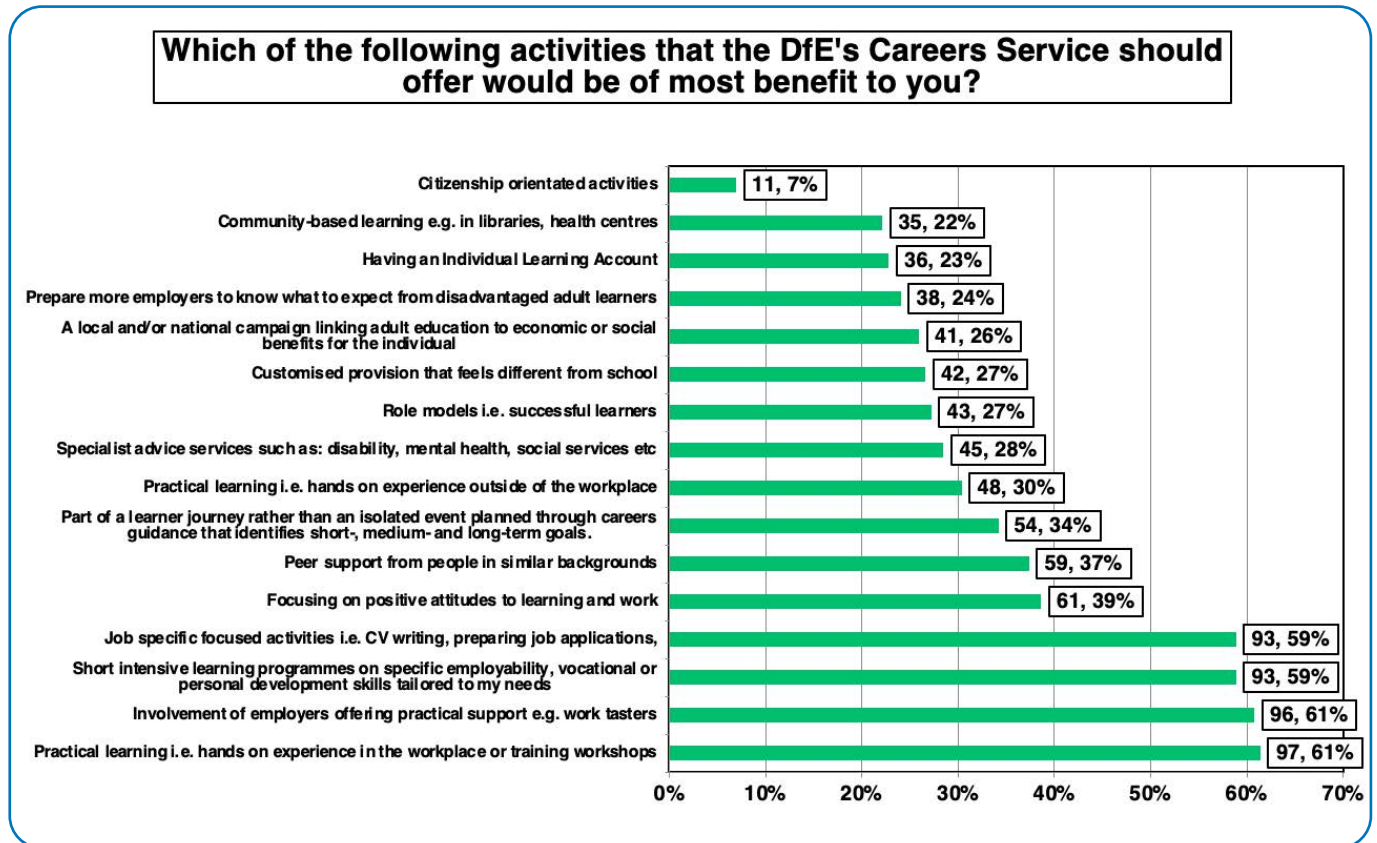
Parent/Carers – Preferences for method of delivery

The chart below indicates which careers activities adults rated by importance for learning about careers and the world of work. **Individual meetings with a careers adviser ranked highest at 4.49 out of 5.**



How adults want to learn about careers and the world of work

Adults were then asked to indicate from a list which activities that the DfE’s Careers Service should offer which would be of most benefit to them. The findings are illustrated in the chart below.



Activities that adults believe the DfE’s Careers Service should offer to be of most benefit

The chart shows that: **“Practical Learning”** and **“Involvement of employers”** **“Job specific focused activities”** were ranked most important by 61% (n=97 and 96) of respondents. **“Job specific focused activities”** and **“Short intensive learning programmes on specific employability, vocational or personal development skills tailored to my needs”** was also ranked important by 59% (n=93) of respondents.

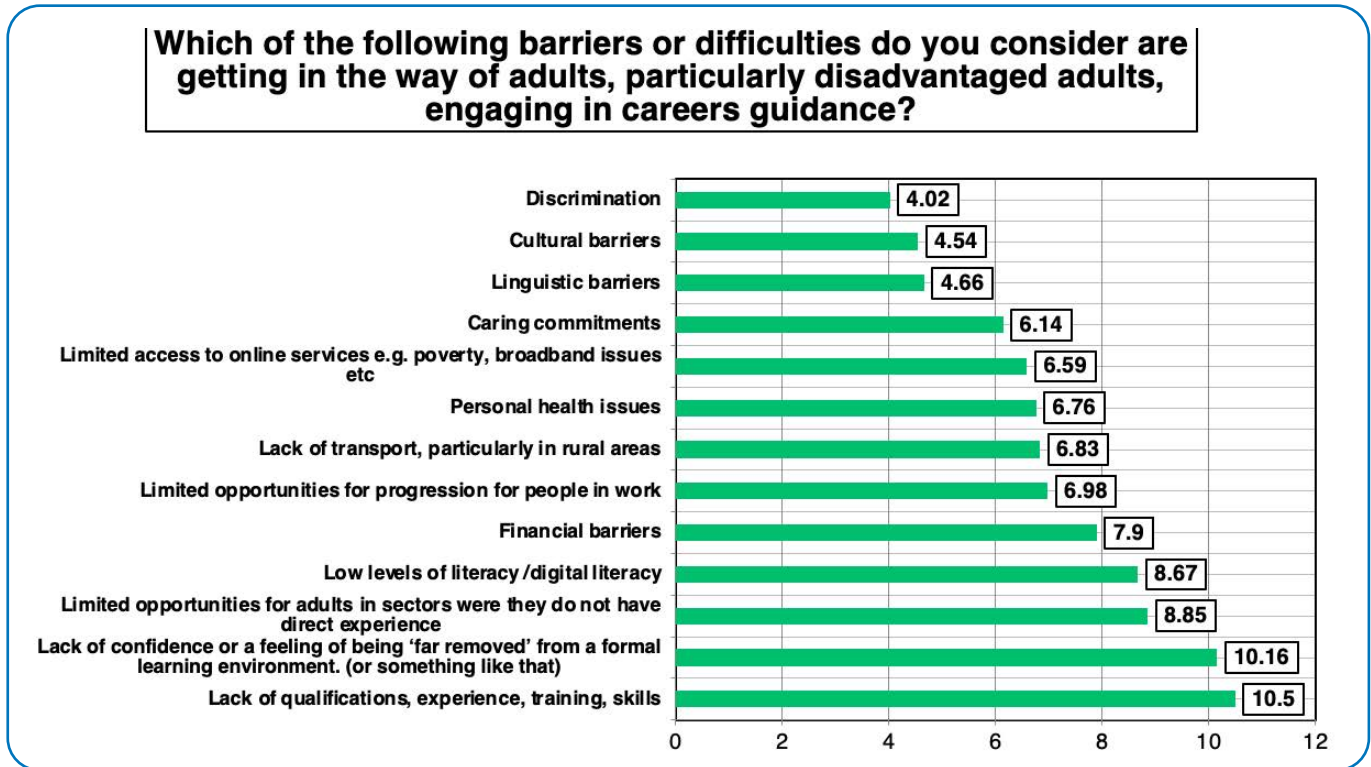
“Career coaching and mentoring services needed. Access to up-to-date labour market information. Advice about funding options for retraining adults.”
(50+ year old employed, Newcastle)

Adults were also asked if they had undertaken any online exercises/ tests. 53% (n=85) said they had conducted online tests to see what jobs or future careers would best suit them. 67% (n=107) had completed exercises to identify their skills and/or personality.

A5.4 Call for Evidence

Respondents were asked to identify what they considered to be barriers preventing adults from engaging with the DfE’s Careers Service and to rank these in order of importance. They were also asked to identify from a list “**What are your top three priorities for policy development in order to further improve the Department for Economy’s Careers Service over the next 5-10 years?**”

Responses to both questions are illustrated in the charts below.



What are your top three priorities for policy development to further improve the Department for the Economy's Careers Service over the next 5- 10 years?

1. **Flexibility and access:** widening access to increase the availability of career guidance
2. **Supply and take-up:** significantly increasing the supply of high-quality adult learning provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills and increasing take up through effective outreach, career guidance and motivational strategies aimed at specific target groups, particularly those most vulnerable.
3. **Governance:** ensuring the coherence of career guidance with other policy areas.

Other identified priorities included:

1. **Quality:** improving quality assurance (including monitoring and impact assessment); improving opportunities for young people and adults; and data collation and analytics to effectively target and design provision
2. **All-age guidance services:** noting young people and adults are likely to experience longer working lives; multiple changes in career; more people will need to top up their pensions; and will feel the impact of new technologies in their everyday lives.
3. **Digital world:** making better use of digital media to provide careers guidance, information, coaching and learning.
4. **Closer connectivity:** particularly between adults, the Careers Service and local government.
5. **A new regulatory framework:** strengthening careers guidance.
6. **Funding:** using the apprenticeship levy to support the training and personal development of older workers and simplification of government loan schemes.
7. **Working with providers:** improving literacy, numeracy and digital skills of older adults underpinned by local community career guidance.

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